The comparative analyses of Jewish and Russian mystical religious movements of XVII-XVIII centuries.

“Hasidism represents one of the most significant and most original phenomena not only in the history of Judaism, but also in the history of the development of religions in general.”

Simon Dubnow
(“History of Hasidism”)

“In Russia, there was originally an authentic "Russian spiritual tradition", "Russian religion" a very special spiritual tradition, which is clearly different from both Christianity and on the Slavic and Finno-Ugric Paganism.”

Avraham Shmulevich
("Russian Religion: the king of the spirits of the people and the leader of Zion").

Since the publication of the first complete work “History of Hasidism” by S. M. Dubnow the Hassidic movement became one of the most popular area of research among the scholars all over the world. There are numerous studies, in Hebrew, English and Russian, of the history, philosophy and mystic of Hassidism, individual masters and their teachings. History of Hassidism has often been told as a response to the physical and spiritual oppression, as the manifestation of the struggle between the Jewish folk spiritualism and the dry, formalistic rabbinism. Hassidism was and still being considered as a revival of Judaism. Within this understanding it might be difficult or even painful to imagine that Hassidism is not unique in some aspects. Hassidism plays the major role in modern spiritual life of Jewish nation. It has been traditionally treated as based on Jewish antecedents solely, notably on Kabala. That was a response to the internal Jewish condition, and that its values, concepts, beliefs and rituals were all specific Jewish developments.

However several efforts to analyze the external factors that influenced Hassidism such as proximity or “neighborhood” to other cultural and religious traditions. The idea that Judaism in general was affected by of other religions is no longer questioned. The impact of Hellenism or Islam on Judaism is extensively studied. [1,2] The question of similarities between Russian Orthodox sects and Hasidism was raised within the works of several scholars. One of the most known and radical attempt was made by Yaffa Eliach in the article “The Russian Dissenting Sects and Their Influence on Israel Baal Shem Tov, Founder of Hassidism”[3]. These studies were harshly dismissed by most of the scholars. Nevertheless the described similarities (such as
common rituals, dances, songs and religious submissions) raise the question of mutual influences in modern studies when the paradigm of isolated Jewish tradition has been changed.

Several studies on this topic have been made by Russian scholars. Among them Igor Turov “Early Hasidism: A History of Faith. Contacts with the Slavic environment.” and Andrey Berman “Sabbatian movement and Russian Khlystovshina. The problem of typology of Russian and Jewish apocalyptic messianism”.

Here an attempt to analyze the similarities and differences between Russian and Jewish religious movements of XVII – XVIII centuries is suggested. In order to do this it seems to be necessary to research some of the key events in the history of religious movements of Russian Empire during the previous periods in order to follow the historical process of their development and to study the possible reasons of remarkable affinity between Hassidism and Russian mystical sects. It is possible to assume that these religious streams did not directly influence each other, but developed under the common circumstances due to the shared geographical location and social environment. However the probability of mutual influence should not be rejected without a proof. In the following research we do not claim that we can prove that kind of influence by scientific evidences, this work is to be done in future. Our main goal is to analyze the similarities and to suggest possible reasons for their existence. In our research we will use both English and Russian sources.
1. Heresy of the Judaizers (Zhidovstvuyushchiye)

In order to analyze possible connections and mutual influences between Jewish and Russian mystical sects, we have to go back to the very beginning of the establishment of dissident Russian religious movements. It seems to be very logical to study the Heresy of Judaizers as it was one of the first sects appeared in Russian Empire and marked the beginning of a new era of heresy. The name of the heresy of Judaizers or Zhidovstvuyushchiye can be translated as “followers of Jews” or “imitators of Jews”, somebody who performs some amount of Jewish rituals, however that means that the followers do not become Jews, but incorporate some Jewish religious practices and ideas into Christianity.

The heresy of Judaizers is a broad and complex phenomenon, which has played an important role in the events of the end of XV the beginning XVI century. Originated in Novgorod, this Heresy, according to the opinion of Joseph Volotsky, penetrated to Moscow, to the court of the prince, “infected” Metropolitan Zosima and then spread to the trans-Volga monastic hermitages. [6] Despite the assurances of Joseph, though all heretics held the same views, it was not the case. The diversity of the social environment, captured by heresy, should have been cause considerable discrepancy in ideology. But, not being able to clarify the origin of these contradictions church historians have come to the most opposite conclusions about the nature of heresy. For example A. Archangelsky came to the conclusion that there was no heresy at all, and there were only individuals voicing critical views on various issues of church doctrine and governance. EE Golubinsky declared that "the heresy of the Judaizers is nothing but a complete and genuine Judaism or “Zhidovstvo”, with a total negation of Christianity." [7]

In order to try to analyze the heresy of Judaizers we must first evaluate the sources that tell us about the heresy. First of all we have at our disposal the message of Novgorod Archbishop Gennady, containing fragmentary data on the heresy and secondly, "Izvestiye" (The News) of Metropolitan Zosima of the cathedral in 1490 with a denunciation and a sentence to the heresy and thirdly, the work of Joseph Volotsky "Prosvetitel" (The Enlightener), entirely dedicated to the exposure of heresy. This last contains 16 words, exposing various errors of heretics, and as the preface gives the "Legend of the newly appeared heresy", as a small historical sketch of heresy.

Analyzing the historical background of the heresy and the available testimonies we can admit that during the second half of XV century the influx of foreigners in Russia growths, mainly in the centers of foreign trade - in Moscow and Novgorod. Novgorod had extensive trade flows with Lithuania, which were led by Jews. This was stimulated by the patronage, of Kazimieras and Vytautas towards Jews. On the other hand Novgorod has always been the center of violations against Church orders and repeatedly caused lengthy exhortation by metropolitans. Therefore there is no surprise that the Jews could indeed influence Russian religious thinkers in Novgorod.
The arguments of the heretics were supported with scientific knowledge and methods that the representatives of the feudal church were not used to and being accustomed to the old dogmatic methods found it to be difficult to fight with. Heretics have used all of those sources of cultural education, which provided a wide Novgorod trade, and not only knew these biblical books such as Genesis, Kings, Proverbs, Jesus son of Sirach, which were not known even to the Archbishop Gennady, but had a notion of the Church fathers such as Dionysius the Areopagite, were familiar with the logic and the medieval Jewish Kabbalah [8], astronomy and astrology. All this information gave Joseph Volotsky a possibility to find the root of all evil in “Zhidovinov named Skhariya ... the devil’s vessel, knowing all sorts of villainous acts, sorcery, and Black Arts, the knowledge of stars or astrology. Arrived in 1471 in Novgorod with three other Jews from Lithuania, who came after Skhariya. They deceived the first heretic priest Denis and Archpriest Alexei. The Jews had secretly ordered them to be Jews and to seem to be Christians on the outside and turned them into the most zealous promoters of the Judaizers”.

Paucity of information about Skhariya allowed the assumption that this legendary figure was made up by opponents of the Judaizers to discredit the movement. This version was widely used in Soviet historiography for example. However, except for “The Enlightener” by Joseph Volotsky, there are at least two independent sources that mention this name. First, there is a message from the monk Sava for Dmitriy Shein. This work contains a compilation of anti-Jewish polemic and mentions a famous monk “Zacharias Zhidovinov Skara” presented as a seducer into “a Jewish faith” of the Grand Ambassador. Second, the philosopher by the name Skhariya was discovered in the XVI century Psalter from the library of the Kiev Theological Academy, where philosophical terms used by the philosophers known to the copyist are put into two columns of Skhariya and Foma Greek. Professor Moshe Taube notes that the terms of Skhariya given in this Psalter coincides with the terms used in “Logic” of Judaizers, which indicates a possible connection between the philosopher Skhariya with the movement. [9]

There are at least two versions of the identification of Novgorod heretic. The first one claims that Skharia is the prince of Taman. We are not going to study this opinion because it does not concern our subject. We will focus on another hypothesis according to which Skharia is a real figure - Zacharia ben Ahron ha-Cohen, a scholar from Kiev brought to Novgorod by Mikhailo Olelkovich from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1470. Zacharia translated a number of Hebrew texts on astronomy, logic and philosophy. [10] As we mentioned earlier Novgorod Judaizers heretics were much more lettered that their conservative opponents. Distribution of Jewish Heresy was accompanied by translations from Hebrew into Russian of several biblical books and works of Jewish writers on Logic. Professor Moshe Taube in a series of articles proves that Zacharia ben Ahron ha-Cohen performed the translations of the main units of literature of Judaizers. Among them the work of Maimonides, known in Hebrew translation as “Millot ha-higayon” or “Ha-Shemot higayon” – “The words of logic” or “terms of logic”,
astrology and astronomy, “Shestokryl” – “Shesh knafaim” written by Immanuel ben Ya’akov Bonfisaand. The famous Arab pseudoepigraph “Secret of Secrets” or “Aristotelian Gate” was complemented by three medical treatises of Maimonides. Also the Cyrillic text book of the Hebrew language, which includes the book of Genesis, Isaiah and the Song of Songs is presumably belongs to the same type of translation. When archbishop Gennady of Novgorod, seeking to root out heresy, began the persecution of heretics he found the notebooks according to which heretics “prayed in Jewish manner” perhaps the Psalter of Fedor Zhidovinov, which was, in fact, the Russian translation Mahzor.[11] All of these not unfounded assumptions are summarized in the image of the probable Novgorod heretic. We can assume that Skhariya – an educated Jew from Kiev Zachary Ben Aharon ha-Cohen, who arrived in Kiev no later than 1454, probably from the Byzantine Empire, belonged to the circle of Provencal or Spanish scholars of the Jews and was a supporter of the rationalist trend in Judaism.

The controversy between the Judaizers and the Orthodox Church has enriched the spiritual life of Russia in the late XV century early XVI century. The main points of critic towards Orthodox Church were following:

1. **Deity of Jesus.** Judaizers perceived Jesus as a prophet like Moses, but not equal to God the Father, finding that impossible: "for God go down on earth and to be borne from virgin just like a man".

2. **Monkshood** is repulsive to evangelical and apostolic teachings, for neither Jesus nor the apostles were the monks.

3. **Iconoclasm** – usually not the destruction but the rejection of icons and cross. “That is the essence of human hands, having mouths but not speaking, and all that rely upon them will be the similar to them”. [12]

4. **Trinity.** God is one, and not the trinity, because in the story about the appearance of God to Abraham at the oak Mamre it is clear that there were two angels and God, not three Persons of the Trinity. In other words, the heretics were strict monotheists and denied all of the objects of worship, which at least indirectly reminded of polytheism – icons, relics, crosses, etc.

In the conclusion of this chapter we can see that the very beginning of the establishment of Russian religious dissident movement Jews very likely were able to influence Russian religious thinker. It was possible geographically and socially due to the close contacts between Russian and Jewish traders in the region. We have evidences of the spread of the literature translated from Hebrew and possible historical figure who could accomplish the translation. The main principles of heresy are very similar to the main argument in the disputes between Judaism and Christianity. All this of course does not prove the straight influence of Judaism on Russian religious streams. However explicitly shows that this kind of influence was clearly possible.
2. The development of Russian religious ideology until the period of Raskol – the Great Schism.

In the previous chapter we tried to show that the contacts between Jews and Russian religious thinker were very possible. We must accept that it is a complicated issue and it is very problematic to research the following contacts between Jewish and Russian religious movement. However we are able to analyze the further development of Russian dissident religious streams and if not to suggest mutual influence, but to see the historical development of religious paradigms later to be found within Hassidism as well.

As we sad previously the heresy of Judaizers marked the beginning of split within Russian Orthodox Church. But we must draw our attention to another religious stream, markedly close to the heresy. Joseph Volotsky in his work “The Enlightener” polemicized with spiritual leader of the "Non-possessors" (Nestiazhateli) Nil Sorsky, who was also involved in the Novgorod heresy affair. It appears that Sorsky and his closest associate Paisiy Yaroslavov were much more tolerant towards the heretics than Archbishop Gennady and Joseph Volotsky. This is just a small detail of how religious streams were connected to each other. What were remarkable within the teachings of Non-possessors are mystical and ascetical ideas. Paisiy Yaroslavov was the oldest representative of the "Trans-Volga elders" (Zavolzhskye Startsy). The general direction of their ideas was severely ascetic, but had much more internal nature, rather than it was understood by the majority of the Russian monasticism. The general background of their aspirations was the preponderance of the spiritual above the external and ritual. Monasticism, in the opinion of the elders, must be not corporeal, but spiritual, and requires no external mortification but the inner self-perfection, because the base monastic exploit is not flesh rather mind and heart. Much attention is paid to “smart” or “heart” prayer. There is no doubt that Nil Sorsky belongs to the mystical-contemplative direction in the Orthodox monastic life. The concept of “smart” prayer is closely connected with Hesychasm. [13]

The withdrawal from the world, charity, and ascetic exercises, such as fasting and prayer, not an end in itself: they are only the means to conquer over principal human passions. When these passions defeated and a person reaches a state of religious ecstasy, he feels “the incomprehensible things, not knowing if he was in the body or without body” - then the preliminary ascetic exercises become unnecessary: a person who has the “inner” or “smart”, prayer, does not need singing of psalms or long standing in the church, having achieved the religious ecstasy, man does not need an external fasting, as he is “eating only the vision of God”.

Trans-Volga Elders are being perceived as the founders Hesychasm practices, which are going to be restored in XVIII century by another prominent Starets Paisius Velichkovsky. The religious system of Trans-Volga elders was not a broad movement; it was a “lot” of the exalted
individuals and at the same time of educated people of XV-XVI centuries. After the death of Nil Sorsky only 12 elders were left in his monastery. Even thou the practices of Trans-Volga elders did not spread among the masses of parishioner, till now days Nil Sorsky remains to be the founder of Russian Elders. [14] It gained a certain social significance due to the situation of political struggle of XVI century that erupted around the issue of church property. This issue stayed prominent until the Great Schism or Raskol of XVII century led by Archpriests Avvakum. The tradition of Russian Elders remained within the monasteries of and was practiced by very few groups of minks until the great crisis of Russian Church of XVII century.

Here we are not going to focus our attention on the essence of the Church reforms of Patriarch Nikon in 1653. Main subject of the reforms concerned the correction of Liturgy, prayer books and some rituals in accordance with Greek prototype. However the results of Raskol are very remarkable.

There is no need not here to enumerate all the severe government acts for farmers which were published after the “Time of Troubles” (Smuta) they are quite well known. Enslaved by these acts peasants were ready to fertile ground for Raskol, which led to some very peculiar results. There is a tendency to separate between Schism of the Official Russian Church and peasant eschatological reformation. Disputes about the correctness or incorrectness of the old liturgical formulas were far beyond the interests of peasants, they did not understand the meaning of these formulas, and were not against them as a conservative professional clergy. But the coincidence of the reforms of Patriarch Nikon with the celestial and atmospheric phenomena at the same time gave the opportunity for people to link the rural celestial phenomena with the earth. "See, Orthodox, see the sign of anger of the Lord, because God had pored out the chalice of His fury upon us for our sins, and the gracious Creator, punishes Christians because many have gone in the footsteps of an enemy of God – Nikon the wolf."[15] The terrible pestilence of 1654 destroyed the entire population of some villages, there was no one to bury the corpses rotted in their homes and poisoned the air. This horrible year was followed by the years of cruel starvation of 1655-1656. Some preachers, as Elder Ephraim Kozheozersky preached that the famine will last for seven years, and the cause of it is that Antichrist was born and the name of Antichrist is Nikon. As disasters of 1654-1656 were the signs of the approach of Antichrist farmers began to prepare for the end of the world. “Antichrist ideology” was first formulated in a systematic manner by Archimandrite Spyridon Novospassky in 1659. He made a kind of image of the historical process as the series of successive departures from the true faith of the Church. Each departure separated from the following by the period of time divided to 10. Satan was constrained with the resurrection of Christ, when he, after this period, has been released, there was the first retreat - the Latin West separated from a single Church; after 600 years was the
second retreat - Western Russia departed from the true faith by participating in the Union; after 60 years Moscow departed from the true faith and adopted reforms of Nikon, six years later, in 1666 Antichrist will come. Peasants were covered by the general panic. They gave up their house and went into the forests and deserts.

When the year 1666 came and the prophecies did not fulfill peasant Raskol did not come to an end. Peasantry had to find a new revelation. By this period they disavowed the noble Church and develop a separate form of worship, an independent path. For all of them the state from which they departed was ruled by Antichrist, but not only in the eschatological meaning. Emigrants perceived themselves as true followers of the Christian faith and that is why, in their opinion, the state of Antichrist wanted to wipe them out.

Unfortunately, the official figures of the time hardly showed any interest in this aspect of the case, summarizing all the schismatic peasant ideology by the term of the “Old faith”. However, collecting and comparing those scraps of information we conclude that the peasant’s “Old faith” had little to do with the old faith, professional. Revelation among the peasants became spiritual and was obtained by means of “possession”, “walking around”, i.e. the ancient shamanistic rite was revived (but which actually never died) but now it has acquired a new force. In order to escape persecution by the Russian authorities, these groups moved close to the borderlands: to the White Sea, Siberia, the Urals, Crimea, Ukraine, and to the Western borders. Sometimes they crossed the borders to neighboring countries, such as Poland. For example, a sizeable Raskol community was established in Vetka, Poland. [16] The old tradition of Elders of the beginning of XVII century also was revived. Monks, that lost places in monasteries and moved with other followers to the hidden villages of Old faith followers, shared their practices with other people, who were extremely in need of spiritual guidance. Old practices, folk believes and new doctrine of the separation from the world of Evil combined together and created new religious streams.

By the middle of the XVIII century the four branches stood out from this tradition: Khristovovery (Khlysty), Saturdays (Sabbatarians), Doukhobors (Dukhobory) and Molokans (Milk-drinkers).
3. Apocalyptic messianism in the teaching of Khlysty and Sabbatai Zevi.

The initial form of religious sectarianism in Russia was the so-called Khristovovery, Khristovschina, “Christ-believers”, Khlysty or Khlistovschina. The reason for such a name was in the doctrine of the sect, according to which Christ was an ordinary man, filled with “the Spirit of God”. That understanding opened the possibility for every man to become like Christ. For the leaders of the sect, according to their “spiritual gifts” maintained the reputation of “Christ”s or “prophets” and if it was a woman - ”Mother of God”.

During the first century of its development “Khlistovschina” gave rise to two new forms of religious sectarianism. On the one hand, it was Skopchestvo (Skoptsy), which appeared in the early 60s of the XVIII century. On the other hand, it was so-called “Spiritual Christianity” which subdivisions in the late 60s of the XVIII century on Dukhobors and Molokans. Numerous sectarian formations arose during the last third of the XVIII century and most of them in one way or another connected with the Khlistovschina and Spiritual Christianity.

Despite the fact that in recent years, researchers have made several attempts to resolve the question of the origin of Khlistovschina, these attempts can not be considered satisfactory. Attempts to find the genetic roots of Khlistovschina in the Eastern Christian heresies were unsuccessful. The only result, which was reached by a genetic approach of such researchers as A. Panchenko has been the finding of common religious culture in the mystical sects and Orthodox monasticism which we also mentioned before. So far, in deciding of the origin of Khlistovschina comparative method hardly involved. We suggest an attempt to compare Khlysty with the Jewish Sabbatean movement, based on an article of Andrey Berman [5].

The comparison of Sabbatean movement and Khlystovschina seems to be appropriate due to the number of features that allow us to talk about the similarities between Sabbatians and Khlysty. The movement emerged in the Ottoman Empire, around the same time as the Russian sect of Khlysty. The history of the movement studied in sufficient detail G. Scholem [17]. Sabbatai Zevi was from the Byzantine Jews, since young age was under the influence of Isaac Luria Kabbalah. In 1665, Sabbatai Zevi has publicly declared himself as the Messiah. Interesting to admit, that Raskol and reforms of Patriarch Nikon took place exactly at the same years. After a short period of time Sabbatai Zevi became extremely popular and began to reform the Jewish religion. When the “King” Sabbatai entered Jerusalem with his 12 disciples, Sabbatai popularity has caused the concern of Ottoman authorities. Sultan called him and offered a choice of death or conversion to Islam. Sabbatai accepts Islam, which caused confusion among his followers. Part of his followers declared Sabbatai to be an apostate, but many continued to believe in him as the Messiah. Gradually, the broad movement was transformed into a secret sect, which was widely distributed throughout the Jewish Diaspora. Sabbatians formally belonged to Orthodox Judaism, but secretly professed a sectarian doctrine. Often Sabbatians performed the
conversion to Islam or Christianity, considering their apostasy as a kind of sacrifice, which brings the kingdom of the Messiah. Radical Sabbatians believed that the Sabbatai is not just Messiah, but the incarnation of God Himself. In fact, some followers believed that the soul of Sabbatai Zevi regularly “settles” in sectarian leaders. Gradually in Judaism Sabbatean movement becomes synonymous with the worst heresy, yet in the XVIII century the sect was quite widespread, including in the territory of Ukraine. Francism was the branch of Sabbatean movement. A follower of Sabbatai - Yaakov Frank proclaimed himself the Messiah and converted to Catholicism. According to Scholem, Frank maintained a close relationship with the Russian Old Believers, Lipovans who lived in Ukraine and Romania [18], had talks with Russian bishops about his conversion to Orthodoxy [19], but without success.

Of course, Sabbatian movement, which was based on an old tradition of symbolic interpretation of Torah was, so to speak, more intellectual and used current Kabbalistik terminology to express its concepts, while the Russian sect Khlysty was a movement of low-educated monks and peasants. Nevertheless, the general similarity of both movements is quite revealing.

1. **The division of the Torah to “external” and “internal”**: “The Torah de-Atzilut is to be fulfilled in secret, according to its secret nature (in the hymns of Denme “has given us Torah de-Atzilut, the abolition of the commandments”). As the Torah de-Vria should be abolished and overthrown by direct action”. [20] Among Klysty written Church doctrine opposed the own teachings of the sect, “our doctrine”, “the doctrine of God”, “heavenly secrets”, “divine science” [21].

2. Sabbatians believed their leaders Sabbatai Zevi, Jacob Frank and the other are messiahs, and even the incarnations of God: “God of Israel disappeared into the depths of the Initial Cause, and his place was taken by Sabbatai”, in the radical circles of Sephardic Sabbatians was developed doctrine that the soul of Sabbatai Zevi regularly enters into a man standing at the head of the sect [22]. Among Khlysty and Skoptsy was a deification of leaders. Kostroma Khlysty believed that the Lord Sabaoth came down to earth with the forces of heaven, and dwelled into body of a peasant Daniyl Filippovich. After his ascension Ivan Suslov became “Christ”. Skoptsy believed that Kondrati Selivanov was both “Christ” and the king.

3. Sabbatians practiced **ecstatic spiritual rituals.** Radeniye (religious frenzy) - stable element of religious practice of Khlistovschina.

4. In Sabbatian community religious ceremonies were sometimes accompanied by sexual excesses. According to Scholem, “Turkish Sabbatians Denme practiced 22nd of Adar “feast of the Sheep, “the nature of which was unknown until the young people of this sect informed us about some interesting details. It turned out that on that holiday the orgiastic rite takes place, called the "extinction of lights". [23] Similar practices existed among Russian Khlysty. The sources consistently report that the rites often ended in “svalny (group sex) sin”. For example,
Khlysty of Simbirsk shared negative attitude toward Church marriage, which they called “fornication, Satanic shackles” and were free to practice the cohabitation of men and women, something like a civil marriage, which they called “spiritual meal” [24].

4. Sabbatians formally remained adherents of Orthodox Judaism, or converted into Islam or Christianity, but continued to secretly follow their own beliefs and practices. “Very soon Sabbatians developed in their own environment certain psychology, typical for the spiritual sects. It was caused by the subsequent persecution of the rabbis and leaders of Jewish communities and by their own ideas. The secret that was revealed to them, they were obligated to keep carefully within the circle of “believers” [25]. In the same manner Khlysty and Skoptsy formally remained devoted to Orthodox Church but secretly practiced their own doctrines and secret rituals.

5. We are from seeing the origins of Sabbatean movement within the Russian Khlystovschina, although one of the first researchers of Khlystovschina - Dobrotvorsky noted that the movement could be brought by the Cossacks from Turkey. Procopius Lupkin, one of the leaders of the Moscow Khlystovschina in the early XVIII century served in army of Streltsy, and participated in campaigns against the Turks. However, the similarity of the two movements reveals the typological connection between these phenomena. This similarity makes it possible to raise the question of the reasons that could lead to the emergence of a Sabbatean movement and Khlystovschina.

Sabbatean movement appeared in a difficult period for the Jews. Throughout XVI - XVII centuries Judaism is undergoing a series of national crises. At the end of the XV - XVI centuries Jewish (Sephardic) community of Spain and Portugal is defeated. Thousands of Jews forced to flee their homeland and move to other countries, including the Ottoman Empire. In the middle of the XVII century Bohdan Khmelnytsky troops staged a massacre of Jews in Ukraine. In terms of national disaster logical question was raised “Why did it happen to people who made every effort to comply with the law of God?” In such circumstances, among the Jews of Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the apocalyptic and messianic mood began to dominate. A similar crisis during the XVII - XVIII centuries was experienced by Russian Church. In 1453 the Byzantine Empire finally fell, and Moscow kingdom started to perceive itself as a Guardian of the Faith, the Third Rome. “Times of Troubles” questioned these claims. Similar question was raised: “How did it happen that the only Orthodox kingdom had almost fallen and who is to be blamed? All of the most active religious forces recognized the need of change, therefore, the present state of Church life were perceived as unhealthy and spoiled. It is interesting also to note that most of the Russian hierarchy did not seem to share these feelings. Thus, as the causes of sectarian mystical movements in Judaism, and Orthodoxy should be considered in a deep religious crisis caused, initially, by social factors.

The development of both religious movements of Khlysty and of Sabbatians is also remarkably similar. Orthodox Judaism and Russian Orthodoxy answered to the challenges of Sabbatean movement and Khlystovschina by appearance of new religious streams. In Judaism, Hasidism has become such an answer, in Russian Orthodoxy – Elders or Starets, especially associated with the name of St. Seraphim of Sarov. Starets (elder or spiritual father) – charismatic spiritual leader whose wisdom stems from God as obtained from ascetic experience. All works and researches on the Russian Elders are agree on the fact that the founder of this tradition in modern period was Paisius Velichkovsky (1722-1794). His effort was centered on the spirituality of the hesychastic tradition and he became a leader of the renaissance in Orthodox monasticism. [37] Interesting detail is that great-grandfather of Paisius Velichkovsky was a man named Mundy who was a famous and wealthy Jewish merchant. The grandmother of Paisius – daughter of baptized Jew, lived in a monastery and later was an abbess of Pokrovsky monastery. This of course does not prove any sort of influence, but clearly shows that the contacts between Jews and Russian Orthodox were not rare and the Jewish origin was not a barrier for clerical career.

According to Scholem, “hardly a coincidence that the Hasidic movement originated in areas where Sabbatean movement put down the deepest roots in Podolia and Volhynia. Yisrael Baal Shem, founder of the movement, began to spread his ideas when Sabbatean movement was relentlessly pursued by rabbinical orthodoxy and more and nihilistic tendencies were intensified more and more. By the end of his life Sabbatean movement experienced terrible explosion of antinomianism, that ended up in Franco’s movement. Groups of Polish Jews before the Baal Shem called themselves Hasidim, among them were many sabbatians.” After a period of hesitation and ambivalence to these radicals, Hasidism managed to tame their spirits and gave them a definite place in its own world. What is common to Hassids and to Elders is that they managed to stay within the religious law. Hassidism did not reject Halacha and followed traditional religious practices. Elders stayed within the Church and did not develop any sorts of their own unique rituals. This helped both movements sooner or later to be accepted as the integral parts of Orthodoxy. However, until the end Hasidic movement did not succeed in overcoming of the temptation of mysticism deviant. So today, the followers of the Hasidic movement “Chabad” is considering the founder Lubavitch Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson to be the Messiah although it is not advertised and kept as a sort of a secret.

Numerous streams of “Elders” associated with the name of St. Seraphim of Sarov were also unable to overcome the temptation of Khlysty. Just like in a case of Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the main activity of Seraphim took place in the province that for a long time has been a former shelter for all sorts of orthodox religious dissidents. Some students of Seraphim, for example
Arina Lazarev, the mother superior of the monastery in Zelenogorsk in the Nizhny Novgorod region [26], Anna Andreeva and Daria Andreeva, founders of the movement "Besedniky" in the Middle Volga region [27] – were accused of belonging to a sect of Khlysty or were actually closely associated with Khlystovschina. The “Age of Seraphim” - a period of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great is famous by the persecution of monasteries. Seraphim's younger contemporary, almost his countryman was the famous Starets and a prophet of Arzamas Basil Radaev was convicted for the performance of ecstatic religious practices [28]. The central thesis of Serafims spirituality “Acquire inward peace and and a multitude of men around you will find their salvation” is very similar to the central position of Khlyst’s spirituality. It is based on the acquisition of the Holy Spirit with the "radeniye". No wonder, the canonization of St. Seraphim in 1903 took place with the passive resistance of the Synod. We also need to mention that the idea of one righteous person being responsible for the well being of many people is central for Hassidism in the concept of Zaddik.

The parallels between the figure of Starets and Zaddik were noticed by several scholars such as Raphael Patai. “Another parallel and quite striking one is that between the Tzaddik and the Starets in Russian Orthodox Church. The rise of the Tzaddik and Starets took place simultaneously. The Starets was a holy man usually a monk who commanded wide popular respect for his gift of spiritual guidance in Russian Church” [29]. There are several characteristics which we find to be common for Elders and for Hassids after Besht.

1. **Charismatic leadership.** Besht himself represented the type of Zaddik who is a spiritual leader and the mediator between mundane life and divine world. In this understanding Zaddik shall not separate himself from daily life, but needs to transform it into divine worship. Zaddik in Besht’s teaching is becoming a central figure of a community; he is personally responsible for the destiny and wellbeing of his community. Zaddik does not only care about his personal mystical experiences and his personal redemption, but about all of his followers. Zaddik is a sort of a conductor, who provides his community with the divine flows from the upper worlds and in reveres brings up prayers of other people to G-d. Very similar role played Starets. As we maintained above Starets believed that he is responsible for his followers and other people. The authority of Starets did not need any official prove he was recognized by the followers as being the man “of the Spirit”.

2. **Special connection with God** helped Zaddic to establish mystical connection with the Divine realms. “Thus the Zaddik binds himself with eternal life on the exalted speres above; even while in this world he attains the bliss of the supernal world which derives from eternal life”[30] Staterts gained his unique abilities through spiritual practices. As one who had already achieved this experience “of the future
kingdom of God”, he was the charismatic spiritual guide who could aid others in attaining spiritual progress and success. [31]

3. **Healing.** Besht started his career as a healer. “He traveled mostly to villages, healing the local Jewish excise men and lessees. Even members of the Polish gentry sometimes asked him to call on them for medical purposes.”[32] This is how he gained his first popularity among broad masses of people. Starets usually possesses the power to heal people through the prayer and mystical amulets (scapular). “Shaped by the encounter with God in solitude, the Starets is able to heal by his very presence.” [33] Nowadays in modern Russia Starets is still a popular source of help in case of serious illnesses.

4. **Mystical powers.** The Besht was, rather, a mystic and a spiritual leading light.[34] One of the core attributes of Zaddik is an ability to perform miracles. “Baalei Shem shares many of the characteristics of what Mircea Eliade dubbed “shaman” an ancient type of holy man.” [35] Hassidic teachers themselves did not deny their mystical powers, however stressed out that the source of this power is Divine. “From where does the Zaddik derive the ability to heal the sick through his prayers and to sustain him in continued life?... The answer is the Zaddik attaches himself to G-d, and his life is thus connected to the eternal and absolute life of G-d. The life of Zaddik, too thus becomes absolute and eternal because of this intimate attachment, like organs of the same body”. [36] In the folk popular consciousness of Russian peasants the image of Starets intermingled with the image of witch doctor. “At a time of spiritual decline the religious consciousness loses the need to those high forms (priest ministry) In their submissions on the elders, it reduces the role of Elder to the role of Witch Doctor or White Mage. From all this, the role of Elder spectrum sharply separated by its Christocentric nature and by the fact that the charisma and the power of elders is entirely rooted in the love of Christ which is manifested not in the magical actions or knowledge but in personal communication and communion with God.” [37]

5. **Followers.** In both cases of Zaddik and Starets the unique role of spiritual leader is defined by followers. “The religiously devout would choose themselves Starets and would then become completely subordinated to him. The believer became totally dependant on Starets; hi abdicated his own will entire and gave himself up to the Starets, who thus acquired great power and influence.” [38] Zaddik is not only influencing this world in general and his community but also individuals by uplifting of someone’s prayers. If the prayers of Zaddik are answered because of his mystical connection to G-d, he also is able to bring other peoples prayers to the higher realms. “When the Zaddik spiritually surrounds and covers that person in prayer, the limbs of that person become as one with the limbs of the Zaddik.” [39]
6. **Dvikut and Hesychasm.** Dvekut which literary means “adherence” was known already in rabbinic literature, as an aspiration towards G-d and in Hassidism it was transformed as sincere total devotion to G-d which must be the permanent state of Hassid. If in rabbinical literature and Mimonides this devotion meant first of all being as close as possible to Talmud scholars, in the teaching of Besht Dvekut is a an ecstatic state, determining his actions, even in everyday affairs. Dvekut can be seen as a path to Divine immanence through the overcoming of the illusions of distance between man and G-d. In the teaching of Besht Dvekut becomes from a practice that could be obtained only by person with rare virtue to the path available for any Jew. For him Dvekut is just an ability to worship G-d and it is not making a person any special. “Do not think that by worshiping with Dvekut you are grater than another. You are like any other creature (…) What makes you superior to a worm? The worm serves the Creator with all its mind and strength! ” [40] The concept of “smart prayer” or Hesychasm was restored by Paisius Velichkovsky and can be characterized as “worshiping of incomprehensible”, these are the practices through which the “feeling of presence of God” could be obtained. Of course Hesychasm is not the same as Dvekut, but the common idea which unites these practices is the ability of a person to reach the state of experience of Divine immanence.

These are just the basics of the common characteristics of Starets and Zaddik. Both groups provided spiritual and physical healing and acted as intermediaries between God and their followers. As the Russian Orthodox believed in the holiness of the startsy and came to them for blessings and magical healing, likewise, Jews felt awe before the zaddikim and flocked to their courts for spiritual and physical accommodation. The cults of the elders and the zaddikim cast a pietistic spell on the local population. The picture becomes particularly tempting for further research, as for example Igor Turov [4] garners proof from ethnographic studies discussing how Christians resorted to Jewish zaddikim in cases of need.

We need to stress out again that all of the assumptions given above are purely theoretical and any scholar could be able to find many differences between the Russian Orthodox Starets and the Hasidic Zaddik. However we must remember that if different religious streams in Russia and Poland influenced each other, that does not mean that described streams should be equal. We assume that the set of ideas contemporary to the given historical period was common to this entire region, but that does not mean that they must have created identical sects. On contrary common seeds fell on the soil of Judaism and Christianity and formed different streams, with different specific features.

Also we must not forget that when we compare the teachings of Hassids and Elders there were different historical stages of both movements. Thus the figure of Starets has certain
resemblances with the teaching of Old Hassids, the religious trend prior to the founder of Hassidism Baal Shem Tov. The popular movement of Sabbatai Zevi on one hand and kabbalistic teaching on the other hand influenced first Hassids, who practiced pious ascetic life based on fasting, prayers and repentance. These Hassids-Kabbalists stood out for their religiosity. Among them were single ascetics, spent their days in fasting and prayers, pending for the deliverance, as well as groups, whose fiery daily service consisted of prayers, teachings and fulfilling the commandments. Their prayer, being perpetrated on the new edition of Siddur, was filled with mystical meditation, accompanied by specific gestures, glee, joyful singing and dancing. On Saturdays, they were dressed in white robes. These first groups of Hassids were secluded elite circles and did not influence wide masses of people. Even though the members of these circles were respected and perceived as righteous, still they were not interested in common spreading of their practices, preferring exclusivity of scholars devoted to the sacred mystical knowledge. The same tendency can be traced in the conditions of Russian spiritual life of the XVI-XVIII century. However in the end of XVIII centuries Elders turned into the real religious movement and the role of Starets dramatically changed.

S. Horuzhy in his book “The phenomenon of Russian Eldership. Examples of the spiritual practice of Elders” proves that the teaching of Elders should be separated into two main stages: “Ancient eldership” and “Russian Eldership” referring to the periods of XV- XVI and XVIII-XIX centuries. “Russian elders - in fact, is the phenomenon of a different kind than the Ancient elders. Ancient elders are an internal institution of hesychast tradition. In contrast, the Russian elders are the institution that belongs to the sphere of relations between the traditions and the outside world or society. [37] According to Horuzhy the main difference between two types of Eldership is in “active integration with the world”. This integration was expressed in a broad communication with the simple laity, in the service to the world as a spiritual assistant, counselor and mentor, as a living example of true Christian life. The enormous fame and popularity, which quickly earned Optina (Optina and not only) Elders conclusively proves that the Russian elders created a new form of contact and interaction between the world of the ascetic tradition and the world of secular person. The same analyzes is true for the Old Hassids and the Hassids after the Besht.
To summarize everything sad above, we would like to conclude, that there are many aspects in which Russian and Jewish mystical movements could be compared. The similar historical process of the development, basic ideas and external factors of influence give us a right to suggest the mutual influence. The history of the relationship between Jews and Russians numbers several centuries. The living in close proximity in the neighboring areas could not remain without consequences. We see that the religious movements occur simultaneously in the within a decade, have similar social factors as basis (deterioration of financial situation, natural disasters, political conflicts) and have the common general trend of development (from the secluded asceticism to popular movements). In both cases, dissident movements opposed to the Orthodox Church or Judaism, and were a protest against their rigidity and disability to meet the demands of contemporary spirituality. In this situation, the assumption that the essentially similar trends separately spontaneously emerged in the same area at the same time becomes impossible. On one hand, we understand that it requires further study, confirming the contacts between representatives of different tendencies. On the other hand, it seems difficult to suppose that there were no such contacts. The fact of communication between representatives of different religious and cultural groups living in neighboring areas seems to be self-evident. Differences in particular features of the streams can not be a proof of their independent development, because the fact that the same idea can produce a variety of branches does not require proof.

We are optimistic about the future and are confident that during the deeper and specific research necessary material evidence of cross-fertilization of Jewish and Russian religious movements will be found. We believe that the studies, that demonstrate the historical unity between people of different religions, contribute to strengthening mutual understanding and help to rethink the age-old conflicts.
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