

The First Woman in Kefar Ḥasidim: Ḥannah Golda Hopstein's Memoir

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Résumé de l'article

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The First Woman in Kefar Ḥasidim: Hannah Golda Hopstein's Memoir

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Abstract

This paper presents an unusual Hasidic figure and sketches her compelling biography in broad outlines. Hannah Golda Hopstein (1886–1939), was a unique Hasidic woman, a Zionist pioneer and had a fascinating life story which ended in tragedy. She left Poland in 1924 for Mandatory Palestine, where she was one of the founders of the Hasidic-agricultural settlement Kefar Ḥasidim. She later returned to Europe to visit family and was killed by a German bomb during the invasion of Poland in September 1939. Hopstein's fourteen-page, Hebrew handwritten diary lies lost in the archives of Kefar Hasidism, Israel. It is entirely translated and published here for the first time with a biographical introduction. This short memoir can be a base for future extensive research, since it teaches us much about several key issues, such as the role of women in Hasidism, Hasidic attitudes towards Zionism, and female leadership among Hasidim.

Introduction

The unique and fascinating life story of Hannah Golda Hopstein (1886–1939; from hereon in Hannah) ended in tragedy. Raised in the home of a Zaddik (a leader of a Hasidic dynasty), she left Europe for Mandatory Palestine, where she was one of the founders of a Hasidic-agricultural settlement. She later returned to Europe to visit family and was killed by a German bomb during the invasion of Poland in September 1939.

Hannah was born in Kozhnitz (Kozienice) in 1886,¹ to the sixth Kozhnitzer Rebbe, Yerahmiel Moshe Hopstein (1860–1909), and to Brakha Tzipora Gitl nee Tversky, descendent of the Chernobyl dynasty (1846–1931).² Hannah was their firstborn, and her younger siblings all assumed leadership roles in the Hasidic world. The youngest, Rabbi Yisrael Elazar (1899–1966), known as the *Nasi* (i.e., president), founded the society *'Avodat Israel – Kefar Hasidism*; another brother was the mysterious Zaddik, Rabbi Aharon Yeḥiel, known as Reb Ahrele (1891–1942);³ and a further brother continued the Kozhnitz dynasty, Rabbi Asher Elimelekh (d. 1936). Her sisters were Raḥel Ḥaya Miriam (1889–1937), the wife of Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Zaddik of Piaseczno (1889–1943), another sister was the author Malka Shapira (1894–1971), wife of the Zaddik Rabbi Avraham Elimelekh Shapira of Grodzisk-Jerusalem (1894–1966), and her youngest sister,

Ḥava (1899–1977), was among the founders of Kefar Hasidism, wife of Rabbi Shalom Yosef Shapira (1895–1983), son of the Zaddik of Gwoździec.⁴

Hannah, like all her sisters, received a broad religious and general education. In her work *Medin leraḥamim*, Hannah's sister Malka Shapira described the unusual educational atmosphere in the Hopstein home, noting that their father, the leader of the Hasidic dynasty, hired for his daughters a bible tutor as well as language and literature teachers.⁵ Another sister Raḥel Ḥayyah Miriam, was renowned for her erudition and took an active role in the composition of her husband's books. She would review his drafts, proofread them and comment upon them. Rabbi Shapira mentions her in an annotation in his book *Mevo hashe 'arim*: "My spouse, the Rebbetzin, the righteous, Madame Raḥel Ḥayyah Miriam [...] read this [book], as she read several of my other writings, and made comments that spurred me to expand and clarify." (p. 21b)⁶ Hannah herself was depicted by her family as wise with extensive knowledge, beautiful, a professional seamstress, and a woman of good deeds who devoted her time to helping those around her.⁷ Hannah married Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel Twersky of Makarov.⁸ However, the marriage was not successful;⁹ apparently, they divorced quite soon after, before she reached the age of 19.¹⁰

Malka, Hannah's sister, offers a literary portrait of the Hasidic court of her father, Rabbi Yeraḥmiel Moshe of Kozhnitz, describing it as saturated with love of the Land of Israel. He likewise educated his children in this vein,¹¹ ordering them to buy plots in the Holy-Land.¹² Aged around sixteen years old, Ḥava, Hannah's youngest sister, established an organization for religious women that she named 'Ozrot ha 'arez (Helpers of the Land). Its members studied the Bible, Hebrew, and additional subjects, learning about the Land of Israel. Among Kozhnitz Hasidim, some objected to this organization, causing tension between the Zaddik's wife and her daughters:

All six generations that lived in this house were educated in a scholarly atmosphere, [learning about] Hasidism, charity, and love of one's fellow man as well as [love of] the Land of Israel. That was my education. When I [=Ḥava] was around three, I already studied with the best of teachers in Kozhnitz; when I was six my parents hired tutors to teach me Hebrew, bible, and the local vernacular [i.e., Polish]. My parents ignited within me the flame of the love of Israel, and it never went out. When I was around sixteen years old,¹³ I even founded an organization for religious girls for the sake of the Land of Israel named 'Ozrot ha 'arez, I recruited good friends to help me, we rented a room from an

enlightened Jew, and we organized lessons in Hebrew and the bible, and we gave presentations about biblical topics such as the story of the prophetess Deborah. Our activity widened and flourished until radical pious forces rose up against us. They “poured flame and sulphur” [i.e., they were very angry], claiming, “Have we ever heard of such a thing, that the Zaddik’s daughter turns our daughters away from the right path and teaches them the holy tongue and the bible?” ... These claims caused my mother great suffering...we were forced to give up our endeavour.¹⁴

In 1922, ‘*Ozrot ha’arez*’ sent Hannah, who was then 36 years old, as their emissary to an assembly of the *Mizraḥi* religious Zionist organization. Her sister Hava related an anecdote that took place during Hannah’s attendance:

We then sent an emissary to the convention – the Mizraḥi convention in 1922. The emissary was my oldest sister, Hannale. And these were the passionate words [spoken] during the speech of the Rabbi of Gombin [Gąbin], Rabbi Avidan [=Avida]:¹⁵ “Behold, here above in the hall stands the emissary sent to us from Kozhnitz from the organization founded by the daughter of the Zaddik of Kozhnitz. An organization of religious women on behalf of the homeland by the name of ‘*Ozrot ha’arez*. With God’s help she is the first among the women and thousands of women will follow her in this path. She will be a glorious example for all daughters of Israel.”¹⁶

It is common in research to separate between Kozhnitz Hasidism in the twentieth century and the Mizraḥi movement.¹⁷ However, the archival documents sighted above, show a different and a more complex picture, as far as we know, regarding women in the Kozhnitz Hasidic dynasty and their activity in the Mizraḥi movement.

The First Woman

Hannah immigrated to the Land of Israel alone, arriving in the port of Jaffa on Friday, November 7, 1924.¹⁸ We do not know what she did initially. However, after seven months, in June 1925, a group of Hasidim immigrated to the Land of Israel, led by Rabbi Yisrael Elazar Hopstein, Hannah’s younger brother, who was known by his followers as the *Nasi*. They established an agricultural settlement on a hill in the *Zevulun* Valley, naming it *Avodat Israel*, after the title of the book written by the founder of the dynasty, the Maggid of Kozhnitz.¹⁹ In 1927, after uniting with the neighbouring hill, Naḥalat Ya‘akov, which was established by Yablona (Jabłonna) Hasidim, they renamed the locale Kefar Ḥasidim.²⁰ Hannah was among the first to settle on the hill named *Avodat Israel*, the only woman in this small group. In her memoirs, Hannah wrote:

I arrived on the second day of the settlement of the hill named 'Avodat Israel. On top of the hill stood only one single tent made of boards [sic] and a hut without a ceiling or windows that the new citizens of the place had managed to erect in one day. The men slept in the tent and the hut was the storeroom for food and tools. In this hut, which was very narrow, we made room for my bed. I was the first woman in this new place.²¹

Around two months after the arrival of the first settlers, their wives and children, some of them infants – joined them.²² In the first years the Hasidic pioneers in Kefar Ḥasidim and their families suffered from many illnesses, among them malaria and eye diseases. Hannah, in consultation with the physician, Dr. Gutman (later Shafir), organized a mobile clinic, moving from hut to hut to help and watch over the sick members.²³

In the first weeks there was no medical help there... there were many sick people in need of treatment; therefore, the doctor appointed one of the female members to watch over the sick. There was no hut without two or three people sick with malaria. All the children of the settlement had eye diseases and needed to put drops in their eyes every three hours. And on more than one occasion this woman herself was sick with a fever of 39 [Celsius] degrees or more and had to go around all day between the sick, looking after them.²⁴

Ḥannah Hopstein's Memoir

Ḥannah's fourteen-page, Hebrew handwritten diary is found in the archive of Kefar Hasidism.²⁵ The manuscript was later typed on a typewriter by workers of the archive on eight pages, and a title was added to it: "Memoirs of Ḥannah Hopstein. Written in her hand, undated. (Based on the contents: c. 1930)."²⁶ The typed document is published and translated here for the first time.

According to the content, this is a description of and memoirs from life on the hill settlement *Avodat Israel* (and afterwards Kefar Ḥasidim) in the first five years of its existence, from 1925 to 1930. Hannah divided the diary into nine topics, each of which has a subtitle: 1) "The Central Hill" – a depiction of the structures on the hill and the life therein; 2) "Sabbaths and Festivals" – their character on the hill; 3) "Cultivation of the Crops" – a depiction of the agricultural fields and details about the various crops according to season; 4) "Ploughing in Preparation for Sowing" – a portrait of these tasks and their Hasidic character; 5) "The Harvest" – a depiction of the harvest after Passover; 6) "The

First Year of the Harvest”; 7) “Threshing”; 8) “Guard Duty”; 9) “First Days” – A personal description of the first days and her experiences while guarding against invaders.

Hasidism and Pioneering

The founders of the hill were, as was noted, Kozhnitz Hasidim who arrived from Poland and overnight became farmers. This unique combination is evident in the diary: “The plough goes back and forth from morning to evening, and a man walks beside it, directing his heart to heaven and asking that the Holy One, Blessed be He, bless the works of his hands;” “There was a time that my brother-in-law²⁷ and I organized between us an oral lesson during the ploughing, a tractate that we had studied previously or something else that we remembered.” The Sabbath was characterized by both personal study after the evening meal, “almost everyone reads a book,” and public/group learning of the Talmud on the Sabbath: “After the meal, almost everyone reads a book, each one according to his ability and what he can manage until the candles no longer burn... and we also arranged among ourselves a Talmud lesson that a few of us study each Sabbath afternoon.” The third meal was, according to Hasidic custom, a communal meal, including singing and Hasidic tales: “The people sit together for this meal in brotherly love and friendship, sing songs, share words of Torah, and tell tales of the Zaddikim.” The happiness and Hasidic fervour knew no bounds during the first harvest: “When we returned from the fields before candle lighting, the joy and spiritual elevation reached a peak. A tall, dark, and happy Jew, Reb Zadok is his name, led the group of harvesters, dancing and singing and with us following after him, dancing, and singing to a well-known Hasidic tune: ‘Happy are we and how good is our portion, that we have merited harvesting in joy what we sowed with tears.’”

Surprisingly, Ḥannah took part in the guard duty and sometimes even managed it: “More than once, when my brother was away from the moshav, I took his place.”²⁸ In winter nights, in the dark and the fog, Ḥannah describes the great and terrible fear that the guard felt. However, the Hasidic perception of an imminent God offered some relief: “and suddenly it is easier, you feel that you too are a guard of Israel and thus the Holy one, Blessed be He, is your partner in this guard duty and in this guard you place your hope. And ‘it shall be well with thee’ (Psalm 128:2).”

A Tragic End

In the early 1930s, Hannah moved to Jerusalem,²⁹ and in 1937 she returned to Europe, visiting her family in Warsaw. Hannah's younger sister, Raḥel Ḥaya Miriam,³⁰ wife of the Piaseczno Rebbe, invited her to join them in celebrating the wedding of their daughter, Reḥl Yehudit, which took place on February 2, 1937.³¹ For unknown reasons, Hannah extended her stay.³²

On September 25, 1939, Elimelekh Ben-Zion Shapira, the son of the Piaseczno rabbi, Hannah's nephew, was seriously injured by the German bombing that accompanied the beginning of the war. He was taken to the hospital by Piaseczno Hasidism and his family, among them Hannah.³³ The next day, when members of the family came to visit him, the hospital was bombed by the German air force. During this bombing, Elimelekh Ben Zion's wife, Gitl Shapira, and Hannah, his aunt, were killed.³⁴ They were buried in the Okopowa Steet Jewish cemetery in Warsaw side by side.³⁵



Figure 1. Hannah and Gitl's tombs side by side, Okopowa Steet Jewish cemetery, Warsaw, section 4b, row 21, tombs no. 7-8 (Photo: Marta Dudzik-Rudkowska)

The inscription on Hannah's tombstone reads as follows:

Here lies
The rabbanit, the woman of valor with good qualities
A holy woman from a line of the holy and pure people
Who lived in the holy Land for 13 years
The honourable Miss Hannah Golda
Daughter of the holy rabbi, our teacher and rabbi, Rabbi
Yerahmiel Moshe of Kozhnitz
Granddaughter of the holy rabbi the Maggid of Kozhnitz
The holy rabbi the Jew of Pshiskhe
The holy rabbi of Ropshitz, the holy rabbi of Medzhybizh
Author of the book *'Ohev Israel*
The holy rabbi of Chernobyl
The holy rabbi, our teacher Rabbi 'Aharon of Karlin
The holy rabbi of Lizensk and the holy BeSHT
And from more great and holy ones, may their memory be blessed
Killed during "a time of sorrow for Jacob"
She sent up her soul in purity
On 13 of the month of Tishrei 5700 [1939]
May her soul be bound up in the bond of life



Figure 2 left: Inscriptions on Ḥannah's tombstone. Figure 2 Right: completion of the covered part
(Photos: Marta Dudzik-Rudkowska)

Malka Shapira, Ḥannah's sister, dedicated her poem *Mitokh hase'ara* (From amid the Storm, 1943) “to the memory of my dear sister Ḥannah, of blessed memory, and the rest of the victims, our pure martyrs, who were the prey of the evil Nazi malice, in Poland.” In the introduction to this poem, she noted the tragedy that befell Ḥannah. A Zionist pioneer, a lover and settler of the Land of Israel, who met her death in the land that she left behind: “To lament our victims – I am unable / the source of tears has dried up, so great is the crisis of my people in the lands of Europe / and those that left the exile, why did they come to the valley of killing?”³⁶

Conclusion

Ḥannah Golda Hopstein, a unique Hasidic woman, took part in an extraordinary initiative of a group of Hasidic pioneers who left Eastern Europe and set out to settle and cultivate the Land of Israel. This enterprise was unusual in Hasidic history, and the “first woman” – as she called herself – to take part in it adds a flourish to the uniqueness of this story.

Hannah's memoir, which is presented below, constitutes an important chapter in the history of the Land of Israel, of Zionism,³⁷ of Hasidism in the twentieth century, and contributes as well to the study of the role of women in Hasidism,³⁸ all of which are subjects of long scholarly debates. Hannah's story can significantly contribute to our knowledge and enrich these fields in scholarly research.

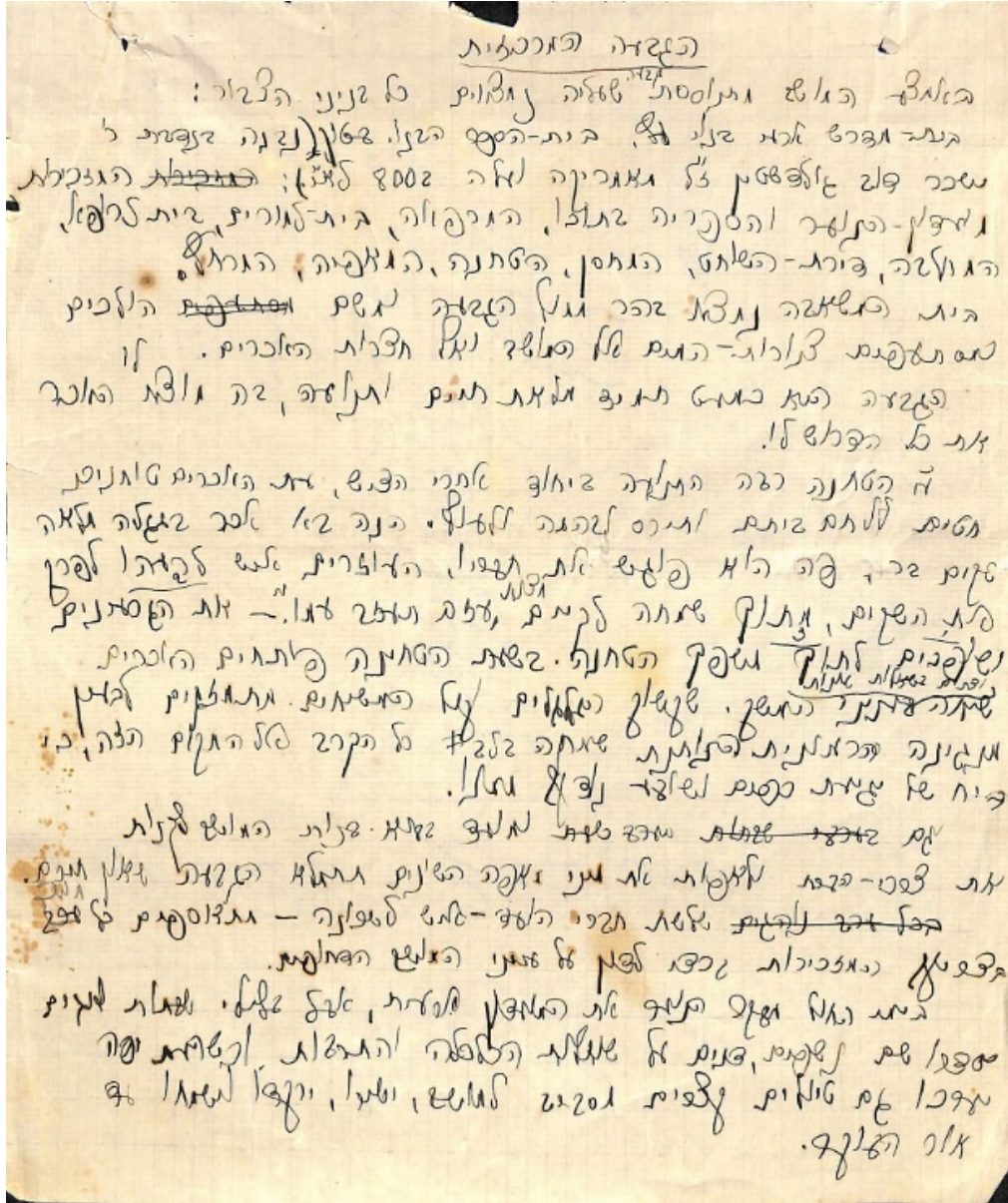


Figure 3. Kefar Hasidim Archive, box 130, file 22. Hannah Hopstein's Memoir in handwriting

זכרונות חנה הופשטיין. נרשם על ידה בלי תאריך. (מתוכו הכתוב: 1930.

הגבעה המרכזית.

באמצע המושב מתנוססת גבעה שעליה נמצאים כל בניני הצבור: בית מדרש ארעי בנוי מעץ. בית ספר הבנוי בטון (פבנה בנדבת ר' ישראל דוב גולדשטיין ז"ל מאמריקה ועלה 800 לא"י), מועדון הנוער והספריה בתוכו, המרפאה, בית למורים, בית קרופא, המחלבה, דירת השוחט, המחסן, הטחנה, המאפיה, בית המרחץ. בית המשאבה נמצא בהר מול הגבעה ומשם הולכים ומסתעפים צנוורות המים אל המושב ואל חצרות האכרים.

הגבעה היא כמעט תמיד מלאת חיים ותנועה, בא מוצא האכר את כל הדרוש לו. על יד הטחנה רבה התנועה ביחוד בימי הדיש, עת האכרים טוחנים הטים ללחם ביתם ותירס לבהמה ולעוף. הנה בא אכר עם עגלה מלאה שקים כר, פה הוא פוגש את חבריו העוזרים איש לרעהו לפרק את השקים מתוך שמחה לקיים מצוות "עזוב תעזוב עמו". את הגרעינים שופכים למשפך המחנה. בשעת המחינה פותחים האכרים ודנים בשאלות שונות ובעניני המשק. שקשוק הגלגלים וקול המשיחים מתמזגים לכעין מנגינה הרמונית הנותנת שמחה בלב כל הקרב למקום הזה כי ריח של יגיעת כפיים ושובע נודף ממנו. גם בערב שבת ומועד בבוא בנות המושב לקנות את צרכי השבת ולאפות את מיני המאפה השונים תתמלא הגבעה שאון חיים.

שלושת חברי הועד, איש לשכונה, מתאספים כל ערב בצריף המזכירות בכדי לדון על עניני המושב הדחופים.

בימי החול מבקר הנוער את המועדון ארעית אבל בלילי שבתות וחגים מסדרים שם נשפים, דנים על שאלות הכלכלה והחרבות וכשהעת יפה יערכו גם טיולים קצרים מסביב למושב, ישירו, ירקדו וישמחו עד אור הבוקר.

השבתות והחגים.

ביום ששי מקדימים האכרים לשוב הביתה מן השדה כעונה לפני שקיעת החמה. האכרה בבית משתדלת עד כמה שידה מגעת להכין בשביל השבת מאכלים נוספים. לפני בואו של האכר הביתה הכל כבר מוכן, מנוקה ומצוחצח; האשה והילדים מרוחצים ומלובשים בבגדים הכי טובים שיש להם וכשהאכר מתקרב אל הצריף שלו עולה באפו ריח של מאכלי שבת. הוא יורד מהעגלה, מתיר את הסוסים, מכניס אותם אל תוך האורווה, מאכיל ומשקה אותם. צוהלים הסוסים מטוב לב

Figure 3b. Kefar Hasidim Archive, box 130, file 22. Hannah Hopstein's Memoir typed.

Hannah Hopstein's Memoir

Written in her hand, undated. (Based on the contents: c. 1930)

The Central Hill

All the public buildings stand on a hill that rises up in the middle of the *moshav* [settlement, community]: the temporary *Beit Midrash*, made of wood, the school, built from concrete (built with the generosity of Rabbi Israel Dov Goldstein z"l from America; it cost 800 EI pounds), the youth club, with the library inside it, the clinic, a house for the teachers, a house for the doctor, the dairy, an apartment for the ritual slaughterer, a store room, the mill, the bakery, the bathhouse. The pump house is located on a mountain opposite the hill and from there pipes of water branch out to the *moshav* and the farmers' yards.

The hill is almost always full of life and movement, and a farmer finds there everything he needs. Next to the mill there is a great deal of movement, in particular at threshing time, when the farmers grind the wheat to make bread to eat and corn for the cows and chickens. A farmer arrives with a wagon packed with bags of grain, here he meets his friends, and they help one another empty the bags with the joy that one feels upon fulfilling the commandment "thou shalt surely release it [the burden] with him." [Exodus 23:5] They pour the kernels into the funnel of the mill. During the grinding, the farmers start to talk and discuss various questions and farming matters. The turning of the wheels and the noise of people talking join in a kind of harmonious melody that instils joy in the heart of anyone who approaches this place, because the smell of hard work and satisfaction radiates from it. The hill is also full of the noise of life on the eves of Sabbaths and festivals, when the women of the *moshav* come to buy what they need for the Sabbath and to bake all different kinds of baked goods.

The three committee members, each one representing a neighbourhood, gather every evening in the hut that houses the secretariat to discuss all urgent matters concerning the *moshav*.

On weekdays the youth visit the youth club in a spontaneous manner, but on the eves of Sabbaths and festivals dances are arranged there, [and they] discuss questions of economics and society, and when the weather is beautiful, they also go for short hikes around the moshav, singing, dancing, and rejoicing until dawn arrives.

Sabbaths and Festivals

On Fridays, the farmers return early from the fields to their homes, around an hour before sunset. The woman at home endeavours as far as possible, to prepare additional dishes for the Sabbath. Before the farmer arrives home, everything is ready, clean, and shining; the woman and children are bathed and dressed in their best clothes, and when the farmer approaches his hut, he smells the Sabbath foods. He goes down from the wagon, releases the horses, puts them in the stable, feeds and waters them. The horses rejoice with happiness because they feel that their day of rest is approaching. Afterwards, the farmer arranges his tools and goes home. He hurries to wash and dress and divest himself of the “weekday pollution.” Samples of the Sabbath foods are placed before him to taste—“Those who taste it will merit life” [Sabbath *mussaf* prayer service]—and also the herd comes home before the usual time so that the farmer's wife can milk the cows before lighting candles.

The sun continues to progress to the western edge and the blow of a shofar is heard in the *moshav*—three blows, the sign that it is time to stop work and light candles. Movement on the *moshav* ceases all at once, and the candles glow like spots of gold from the windows of all the huts. In some homes the housewife still has silver candlesticks that she brought with her from abroad and she adorns the Sabbath table with them. After candle lighting, it is time for prayers. For the most part the farmer stops the Sabbath meal between courses, stealing a short nap, yet nevertheless on Sabbath eve the *moshav* is filled with the singing of Sabbath hymns by the farmers, resounding in the world created by the Holy one, blessed be He, and the hearts fill with light and the joy created by the holiness of the Sabbath. The tiredness evaporates, the day-to-day worries disappear, the farmer is a free man on the

Sabbath. All week long he is active, working, indeed, he plays a role in the acts of creation, and so too he takes his fair share in the rest of the Holy One, blessed be He...

After the meal, almost everyone reads a book, each one according to his ability and what he can manage until the candles no longer burn. People step outside a little to breathe in the pure air and if the moon is full, they walk to the new bridge that crosses the Kishon River and to the grove of Eucalyptuses that the farmers planted with their own hands on both banks of the Kishon.

In the morning, people wake early, and each one in his own home reads through the weekly Torah portion. Whoever is able to do so studies chapters of *Mishnah* or *Talmud*; whoever cannot, he pours out his heart with chapters of Psalms. The prayers in the Synagogue conclude at 11 AM. Lunch continues for a longer time. After the meal, people fulfil the mitzvah of "Sleep on the Sabbath is delight" [Halachic expression]. However, summer and winter alike at 2 PM almost all the farmers are in the synagogue, learning again, each one according to his ability, and we also arranged among ourselves a Talmud lesson in which a few of us participate each Sabbath afternoon. Towards the evening, *Minḥa* [the afternoon prayer] is said together. The table is prepared for the Third Meal, each one brings to the Synagogue the leftovers from the previous meals, bread for the Third Meal is provided by the baker, because this was made a condition when the bakery was given to him. The people sit together for this meal in brotherly love and friendship, sing songs, share words of Torah, and tell tales of the Tzaddikim. In the evening, they pray the Evening Prayer, recite Havdalah, and again [return] to the weekly work.

Cultivation of the Crops

Each one of our members received 150 dunam of land for cultivation. From the total amount, 250 dunams were deducted for paths around the *moshav*, plots for professionals, and public buildings. Therefore, 147 dunams remained for each of us to cultivate: ten in a plot next to one's home and the remainder in various different places, for example: 45

dunams next to the village Majdal, 15 dunams next to Y'ajur, 22 dunams next to the village of Khartiya, and 55 dunams next to Kefar Ata.

Every year the cycle of seeds is decided by the guidance department. Summer and winter crops are sown. Individual farmers are not allowed to plant whatever they want were they want, but everyone plants, for example, winter crops on the lands of Y'ajur this year and next year in the same place summer crops – no change is allowed in order not to disrupt the guards.

Our winter crops: wheat, barley, vetch, and flax. Summer crops: corn for kernels and corn for cow fodder. The land improves from year to year, becoming increasingly easy to plough, and therefore the yield has grown greatly since we settled here. Five years ago, the land gave around 70 kg per dunam and now it gives up to 120.

There are special seasons for ploughing, sowing, harvesting, and threshing, yet during the sowing of the wheat it is also possible to plough the land for corn, during the harvest it is possible to plough for the winter crops, during the threshing one can till the corn and also collect it.

Ploughing in Preparation for Sowing

For the most part the famers plough the land for the winter crops before the first rains come. From harvest time they start plowing empty ground spots for vetch, and immediately after the first rains our land is ready to sow the winter crops.

We rise before dawn, and while it is still dark, we milk the cows and send them out to graze. We feed the calves that remain in the cowshed and the mules and take the milk to the dairy – there they measure it, record it, put it into milk cans, and take it by car to *Tenuva* [an Israeli food creation and marketing company] in Haifa. Back home, the farmers get ready to go out into the field. They load onto the wagon that stands in the yard: sacks of seeds for sowing, a plough, a harrow, water for drinking, and food for the mules. Sometimes also an empty barrel. Brief prayers are said in a quorum, and by sunrise the farmers are in the field. The horses are released from the wagon and hitched up to the

plough and they get into the “box.” The plough goes back and forth from morning to evening, and a man walks beside it, directing his heart to heaven and asking that the Holy One, Blessed be He, bless the works of his hands. There was a time that my brother-in-law and I organized between us an oral lesson during the ploughing, a tractate that we had studied previously or something else that we remembered. The breaks for breakfast and lunch are short: it is necessary to finish quickly, because a transparent grey scarf has covered the top of the [mount] Carmel – a sign of rain. The wind blows straight into our faces and makes it difficult to breathe, heavy clouds have already covered the entire Carmel, and soon it will begin to rain. The seeds have already been sown. They must still be covered – drip, drip – first, single drops, and a few moments later, the rain begins in earnest. The ground becomes soft and sticks to the plough – and you whip the beasts with all your might, to urge them onwards, and by the time you have finished your work you are wet to the bones. Feeling a special satisfaction, you hurry home. When the weather is good, work continues until sunset. The workers return home tired, men and mules alike. The afternoon prayers are said in the wagon, because by the time the farmers reach home, the time for saying this prayer has passed.

Before the laying of water pipes in the *moshav*, the farmers would take a detour to the central well during their journey home from the fields. During the rainy season, the well is sunk deep in mud, and it lies about half a kilometre from the *moshav*. There, towards evening, the farmers would take out numerous wagons loaded with barrels. Some had already filled their barrels with water, while those of others were still empty. The wagons stand around the well, the wheels sunk halfway in mud. The water is drawn out with a bucket attached to a long rope. Each one endeavours to be first, and in the meantime, as a result of the great haste, various things fall into the well: once the bucket, once a hat, and once something else belonging to those drawing the water. The shouts of their farmers at their mules can be heard in the heavens above, because it is not easy for the mules to pull the wagon bearing the full barrel out of the mud. A lot of the water spills, [sloshing] left and right, and whoever manages to extract himself from this trouble breathes freely and

thanks God for taking him out of this place of divine punishment. Then, everyone used to say: “Better two days of ploughing than half a day of drawing water from the well.” The wagon too would rot because of the water that poured over it day after day. Thus, the wagon needed regular and extensive repairs: a shaft or plank or wheel. However, since the KKL [Keren Kayemet le’Yisrael=Jewish National Fund] laid the water pipes in our *moshav*, we no longer have to deal with this difficulty of drawing water, and the well stands abandoned and lonely, no one visits it. When the farmers arrive home in the evening, they do the evening milking and take the milk to the dairy. In the dairy, all the farmers gather with their milk cans, pour the evening milk into the centrifuge: skimmed milk pours out from one side, cream from the other. In the evening, they also bring the eggs to the person responsible for collecting them. When they return from the dairy, they feed the beasts, say the evening prayer, and eat dinner. Then, if you are not on guard duty, you go to sleep. The next day, the farmer's partner goes out to the field: each one has only one mule and all the equipment is shared. So, the work continues until all the winter crops have been sown. For the most part, the farmers manage 10 dunams per day. On a day when they do not work in the field, the farmers work in the gardens next to their homes. These are winter gardens, because in the summer there is no water to irrigate them. In our garden [there is] cabbage and cauliflower, onions, garlic, radishes, and carrots etc. grew. After the planting of the winter crops is complete, the farmers wait for “blessed rains” in the right time [Ezekiel 35:26]. After each and every drop that falls, they feel a kind of spiritual joy that quenches the thirst of both the land and man. The most beautiful and pleasant season is the time between the rains, when a green carpet embroidered with graceful flowers of various colours spreads through the fields, and as the wind blows, the green vegetation moves, together with the range of colours. So too, young vegetation grows and protrudes from the bushes and rocks on the hills – our herd will eat it and be satisfied, and the cows will return home in the evening with udders full of milk.

When it rains heavily, the farmers set about making repairs: in the cowshed, storeroom, and chicken coup. Some leave corn to thresh, fix torn sacks, repair the ladders on the wagon, etc.

Sometime before the harvest, the farmers go out to tour the fields to distinguish between what is ready and what is not, between the fertilized and the not fertilized. The rains, whether heavy or light, do not damage the crops, and this only happens if there are other reasons for it, such as locusts or mice, which cause a lot of damage. Last year the mice made their mark on our fields; they did not leave anything. This year too, we see the mice coming in droves, and even though we used every possible means to destroy them, it is not certain that this will help. According to what I see, they have already eaten half of the produce, and only the Holy one, Blessed be He, can save us from this strife.

After the rains, the farmers prepare the land for corn, almost each one of us sows summer crops in one third of his lands. While ploughing, you find in various places wild hay, for example next to a *wadi* or a swamp, these areas were not included in the allocation of plots of land. This hay is harvested with a sickle, placed on the wagons, and taken home, and this is enough to feed the beasts for some time.

The sowed hay must not be harvested early, because if it is, half of the yield will be lost. The corn is sowed from before Purim until after Pesach. With a double plough, the farmers sow it in the following manner: they tie a funnel to the plough and the farmer makes a sowing sack from an apron. He follows the plough, placing kernel after kernel into the funnel. When the kernel falls into the funnel and then hits the ground, the plough immediately covers it with earth. If this is not done, the kernel remains on the surface, without moisture and unable to grow. The corn is a good and nutritious food for the beasts and poultry, also rather tasty for man. The corn increases the cows' milk supply and the chickens' egg-laying.

The Harvest

After Pesach, the hay harvest begins. Every six members share one grain harvester. According to the drawing of lots, they use the harvester. On the second day after the harvest, they collect the hay with a piler and put it in a field until the next day, afterwards they make it into bales. In the meantime, they harvest the barley with a harvester. Every seven members share one harvester. They also draw lots to use the harvester. When they finish the harvest, the farmers take the hay home and make from it a [temporary] threshing floor [*goren*] next to their home, afterwards they take the roller that is shared between ten farmers and make the hay into packages. Three people work the roller. One stands by the granary and puts it in, one presses the hay into the roller, and one ties the bundles with iron threads and arranges them. Once this is finished, they begin to bring the barley. They also make a [temporary] threshing floor from the barley next to the house, for the most part it is square. Then the wheat harvest begins. After the harvest, they load the produce onto a very tall wagon. On top sits a farmer with his son-helper and above their heads is a kind of black cloud – this is the mosquito known in our parts as the “mite.” They attack men and beasts and bite them without mercy, get into your eyes, ears, neck and nose, the agony is terrible, and it is impossible to fight off this tiny creature. The farmer suffers enormously. Only one medicine eases the sufferings a little: spreading oil mixed with kerosene on all the exposed parts of the body.

The First Year of the Harvest

I still remember the joy of the first harvest. We still did not have a harvester, and we harvested all the produce with scythes. When we returned from the fields before candle lighting, the joy and spiritual elevation reached a peak. A tall, dark, and happy Jew, Reb Zadok is his name, led the group of harvesters, dancing and singing and with us following after him, dancing, and singing to a well-known Hasidic tune: “Happy are we and how good is our portion, that we have merited harvesting in joy what we sowed with tears.” It is impossible to describe what we felt then and how happy we were. That entire Sabbath

we drank albeit little, but we were drunk with happiness and therefore we danced continuously until it was time to work again. We called this Sabbath “the harvest Sabbath.”

Threshing

The threshing is usually arranged as follows: each one arranges a threshing floor on his plot and the threshing machine goes from yard to yard according to street. Moving the machine takes five minutes. A group of five men gather, working one each one's crop until they finish all seven threshing floors. After the threshing, they drink wine and wish each other a good and blessed year. The tithes and heave offerings are collected, and each one gives the part that he is required to give happily and receives the collector's blessing. They also give the “tithe” to the government. Once the threshing is finished, they collect the straw and put it into the storehouse and then feel relieved. In the meantime, we managed also to thin out and till the corn, and now it is time to harvest the corn. The harvest is not the hardest, but it needs many working hands and therefore a farmer who does not have enough children of his own will hire girls and boys for a small fee to help him with the work, and in a few days the corn harvest is finished. The corncobs are placed in sacks and taken home, and the stalks remain in the field. The corn yields around 130 kg per dunam.

Guard Duty

The hardest and the most dangerous work is guard duty. When you need sleep after a day of hard work that exhausts the body, when “all your bones shall say,” [Psalm 35:10] your eyes are closing of their own accord, you must stand on your feet, go out, and remain awake all night. You must not let your attention waver for even a moment from your neighbours, who are always looking for an opportunity to steal the possessions that you bought with the sweat of your brow and also threaten you and your household.

Every night, two guards walk through each road each and every night, and a professional guard is also always present in the moshav. Once in three weeks, each member must perform guard duty, although in my street, because it is closest to the mountains, each member must perform guard duty every eight days. If the moon is out and the air is good

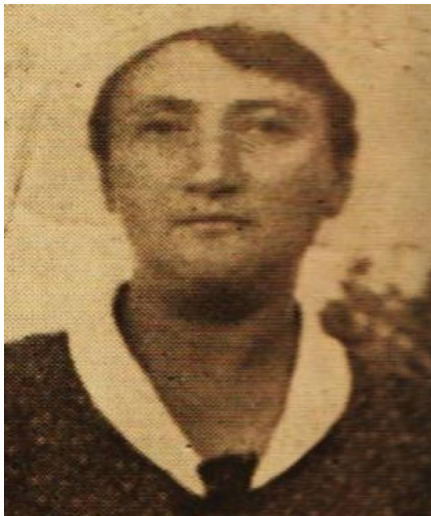
when it is your turn to guard, then even though you are tired, the danger and responsibility upon you are not so great. However, imagine the situation of the guard on a winter night: the skies are angry, the wind blows fiercely, and its whistling sounds like thousands of hungry wolves. The rain pours down heavily, wetting you to the last thread, you cannot see four cubits in front of you, and you are shaking with cold and fear, the trees around you stand before you like horrific angels, and you know that on a night like this especially the enemy is watching you. Every moment seems like an eternity, you are not sure that it will ever end, you feel a strong longing, in this moment of danger, for your family and loved ones, how much you would like to see them, at least once more... and suddenly it is easier, you feel that you too are a guard of Israel and thus the Holy one, Blessed be He, is your partner in this guard duty and in this guard you place your hope. And “it shall be well with thee” [Psalm 128:2] ... suddenly you hear the cock crowing, announcing that morning has arrived, another call and another call, the edges of the east turn grey – gradually growing paler and paler – you have been redeemed!

First Days

I arrived on the second day of the settlement of the hill named “Avodat Israel.” On top of the hill stood only one single tent made of boards [sic] and a hut without a ceiling or windows that the new citizens of the place had managed to erect in one day. The men slept in the tent and the hut was the storeroom for food and tools. In this hut, which was very narrow, we made room for my bed. I was the first woman in this new place. However, I did not bring with me the weakness of women. I always stood ready with the men to defend us and our property. The first nights of our settlement are still engraved on my memory, [it was] like being on a deserted island, we lived in a sea of emptiness: every day each one was busy with his work: erecting huts, drying swamps, bringing water etc., yet when night approached, and with it the dark, hell opened before us with all its terrors. Although we communicated with *Kevutzat Achva* (Yagur, a kibbutz), located three kilometres away from us, arranging that in the event of an attack we would blow the horn and they would come to our aid, and vice versa, it would be possible to destroy the entire settlement until the

pioneers of *Achva* could even reach us. At this time, the “president” was the commander of the watch, and every night before going to sleep he gave the members instructions regarding how to behave in the event of an attack. The guards were arranged two to each watch and he himself almost never slept at night. He took the responsibility for the watch upon himself, and every so often he would get up at night, going outside and whistling to the guards in order to check they were not asleep. More than once, when my brother was away from the moshav, I took his place.

In the first period, not one night passed without fear. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, the bell rang. I grab my clothes, dress in haste, take an iron tool in my hands, and run outside. Within two or three moments, all the members of the group have gathered in one place, each one with a tool in his hands: one a hammer, one a hoe, etc. Under the order of the commander, we spread out to all parts of the hill in order to find the reason for the panic. More than once, this was in vain, the eye of thane inexperienced guard caused him to err in the darkness of night, thinking that a tree was a man or that the footsteps of a jackal approaching the moshav were those of a man. But for the most part, it was the attempts of our Arab neighbours who came to rob us but did not succeed.



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¹ Page of testimony, Yad Vashem, catalog number 1453359. This page was completed by her sister Malka Shapira on February 9, 1958.

² On the Chernobyl dynasty see Gadi Sagiv, *Dynasty: The Chernobyl Hasidic Dynasty and Its Place in the History of Hasidism* (Jerusalem: Shazar Centre, 2014) [Hebrew].

³ Regarding him see Moshe Glazius, *Ha'ari bemistarim* (London: [n.p], 2009).

⁴ Concerning the family see Nehemia Polen, *The Rebbe's Daughter: Memoir of a Hasidic Childhood* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002).

⁵ Malka Shapira, *Medin leraḥamim: Sipurim meḥazrot ha'admorim* (Jerusalem: Rav Kook Institute, 1969), 17–18. Lately Dorit Peretz discussed the uniqueness of the education of woman in the Kozhnitz Hasidic court, see Dorit Peretz, "Malka Shapiro (1894-1971): Hebrew Writer and Hasidic Leader," (M.A. Thesis, The Open University of Israel, 2022), 44-70 [Hebrew].

⁶ About Raḥel Ḥayyah Miriam's education and knowledge see Daniel Reiser, "Sarah Our Rebbe: R. Kalonymus Kalman Shapira's Feminine Spiritual Leadership in the Warsaw Ghetto," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 38 (2021): 7–24; Also see Uziel Fuchs, "Miriam the Prophetess and the Rebbetzin: The Eulogy of Rebbe Kalonymos of Piacezna in Memory of Two Great Women," *Masekhet*, 3 (2005): 65–76 [Hebrew]. Nehemia Polen has pointed out that many women in R. Shapira's family were acknowledged as spiritually gifted. His maternal grandmother, Sarah Horowitz Sternfeld (the Chentshine Rebbetzin, 1838–1937) was a well-known figure in the Hasidic world of interbellum Poland. After the death of her husband in 1916, she conducted herself as a Rebbe for over twenty years and was

famed for her miraculous powers. Hasidim traveled to her with *kvittlekh* (notes bearing petitionary prayers and requests) and sought her blessings. She prayed with a minyan (a prayer quorum of men) three times a day and gave advice to path-seekers. Rabbi Shapira's great-grandmother Perl, the daughter of the Kozhnutz Maggid, was considered to have spiritual powers exceeding those of men. See Polen, "Miriam's Dance: Radical Egalitarianism in Hasidic Thought," *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 12, no. 1 (1992): 1–21; Moshe Feinkind, *Froyen-rebeyyim un berihmte perzenlikhkeiten in Poylen* (Warsaw: Grafja, 1937), 37–42, 56–61.

⁷ See Hava Shapira, "Afiyat hamaza hashmura beveit ha'Admor miKozhnutz," in Barukh Kaplinsky (ed.), *Sefer zikaron lekehilat Kozhnutz* (Tel Aviv: [n.p.], 1970), 125; Malka Shapira, "Lezekher aḥoti Hana Golda Hopstein z"lm," *Ibid.*, 130; Malka Shapira, *Medin leraḥamim*, 53, 110.

⁸ Avraham Yehudah Tikozky, *Hamufla bedoro* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Zekher Naftali, 1987), 69; Neil Rosenstein, *The Unbroken Chain: Biographical Sketches and Genealogy of Illustrious Jewish Families from the 15th-20th Century*, vol. 2 (2nd ed.; New York: CIS Publishers, 1990), 1198, 1221.

⁹ Page of testimony completed by her sister, note 1 above. See also Polen, *The Rebbe's Daughter*, 210 note 8.

¹⁰ Malka Shapira (born 1894) described in her book *Medin leraḥamim*, p. 44, her memories from the age of 11 about her sister Hannah (who was then 19 years old): "The thin sorrow that covers her face... which is very young, brings her to melancholy thoughts. She has already suffered greatly in her short life."

¹¹ Shapira, "Lezekher aḥoti," 130; Shapira, *Medin leraḥamim*, 53, 110

¹² Hava Shapira, "Aḥadot merishimotay harabot," Beit Fisher Archive, Kefar Ata (Kiryat Ata), file 4413, 1975 (estimated), p. 3.

¹³ However, see that Hava Shapira wrote in "Aḥadot merishimotay harabot," p. 1, that she was 20 years old.

¹⁴ *Sipuro shel Kefar Ḥasidim: Collection of Testimonies* (Kefar Ḥasidim Archive, 2000), 160–161.

¹⁵ Rabbi Yehuda Leib (Zlotnik) Avida was rabbi of Gaḥin, a Zionist activist and one of the leaders of the Mizraḥi movement in Poland. See Tidhar, *Entsiklopedya leḥalutsei hayishuv uvonav*, vol. 4 (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Rishonim, 1950), 1915–1916.

¹⁶ Hava Shapira, "Aḥadot merishimotay harabot," p. 1.

¹⁷ See for example Dorit Peretz "Malka Shapiro," 42–43. About Hasidism and Zionism see David Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 540–545. Biale claims that most of the Hasidic leaders had a passive concept of redemption, and thus opposed Zionism, and the Mizraḥi movement. He argues that the *Rebbes* who supported Zionism and the Mizraḥi were very few. Among the exceptional supporters of Zionism, Biale lists the Hasidic branches of the Ruzhin dynasty, but does not mention, in this regard, the Kozhnutz dynasty. Moreover, little attention has been paid in research to the positive attitude toward Zionism of the Kozhnutz branches (Kozhnutz, Grodzinsk, Drohobych and Piaseczno). However two important works, regarding this, were published lately, see Leore Sachs Shmueli, "Twentieth-Century Hasidic-Zionist Homiletics: The Case of Netivot Shalom by 'the Rebbe Painter', Avraham Ya'akov Shapira of Drohobych," *Religions* 14, 581 (2023; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050581>); Itzhak Micha Klayin, "From Idea to Initiative and Involvement: Rabbi Yishayahu Shapira and the Estate of Kfar Ata," (MA Thesis, Bar-Ilan University: Ramat Gan, 2022) [Hebrew].

¹⁸ Israel State Archives, records of immigrants of the Zionist administration in the Land of Israel, Jaffa Aliya office, 9 November 1924, The Central Zionist Archive, file no. S104/556. See Figure 5. Many thanks to Adv. Zechariah Shankolovsky who discovered this document and brought it to our attention.

¹⁹ Hava Shapira, collection of memories regarding the Shapira family, Kefar Ḥasidim archive, box 210, file 3, p. 9.

²⁰ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Second Edition, Vol. 12 (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 61.

²¹ Hannah Hopstein, manuscript of her memoirs, below.

²² *Davar* (Daly Newspaper), 13 July 1925, 3.

²³ Kaplinsky, *Sefer zikaron lekehilat Kozhnutz*, 122, 130.

²⁴ "Avodat Israel – interview," undated and without the identity of the interviewee. Kefar Ḥasidim Archive, box 210, file 2, p. 6.

²⁵ Kefar Ḥasidim Archive, box 130, file 22.

²⁶ Kefar Ḥasidim Archive, box 130, file 22. In the typewritten version there are a few improvements of language and syntax.

²⁷ Rabbi Shalom Shapira.

²⁸ According to Jewish Halakhic tradition, women do not take part in war or any act of organized defense. The Torah lists only man preparing for war. Moses is ordered to “Take a census of the whole Israelite company [of fighters] by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every *male*, head by head. You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years up, all those in Israel who are able to bear arms.” (Numbers 1: 2-3). The sages say: “It is the way of a man to wage war and it is not the way of a woman to wage war” (B. Talmud, Kidushim b2). The prominent Halakhic authority Rabbi Joseph Karo rules that women cannot bear arms, See Karo *Shulḥan 'arukh, Yoreh De'ah*, §182:2. It is not obvious if Hannah was armed or not, but even taking part in guard duty is not common in traditional circles and therefore surprising.

²⁹ Kaplinsky, *Sefer zikaron lekehilat Kozhnitz*, 130. A letter that she sent to Hevrat hakhsarat hayishuv from 1931 is signed “Jerusalem, 19 Iyar 1931,” Zionist Archive L18/3053. Many thanks to Itzhak Micha Klayin who brought this letter to our attention.

³⁰ See Polen, “Miriam's Dance”; Reiser, “Sarah Our Rebbe”.

³¹ See Chaim Frankel and David Zilberslag (eds.), *Zikaron kodesh leba'al 'esh kodesh* (Jerusalem: [n.p.], 1994), 42.

³² According to all the testimonies, Hannah traveled to Warsaw for a temporary visit, not to settle there. See for example Shapira, *Midin leraḥamim*, p. 271 in the note. Notably, her sister Raḥel became ill immediately following the wedding and died in the same year (10 Tammuz 1937). It is possible that Hannah remained in Warsaw to help her sister during her illness and after her death remained to help the family of the Piaseczno Rebbe.

³³ Lazar Kahan, “Der Piasestshner rebi hot farloren find fun zayn familiye in der milkhome,” *Forverts*, 30 March 1940; Kaplinsky, *Sefer zikaron lekehilat Kozhnitz*, 227.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, A number of days later, on 16 Tishrei 1939, Elimelekh Ben Zion died of his wounds. His father, the Piaseczno Rebbe, Rabbi Klonimus Kalmish Shapira, found himself saying kaddish for three members of his family, in addition to his wife. Three weeks later (7 Cheshvan, 20 October 1939), his elderly mother suffered a heart attack and died. On this see Daniel Reiser, *Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira: Sermons from the Years of Rage – A Critical and Annotated Edition* (Jerusalem: The World Union of Jewish Studies, the International Institute for Holocaust Studies, Yad Vashem and Herzog College, 2022), 21–22 [Hebrew].

³⁵ Hannah is buried in section 4b, row 21, tomb no. 8. Gitl's tomb is no. 7.

³⁶ Malka Shapira, *Metokh hase'ara* (Jerusalem: Reuben Mas, 1943), introduction. See <https://benyehuda.org/read/29480>.

³⁷ on Hasidic immigration to the land of Israel see Yitzhak Alfasi, *Haḥasidut veshivat tzion* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1986); *Idem.*, *Haḥasidut ve'ereẓ Yisrael: yaḥas haḥasidut ledoroteha la'aliya le'ereẓ Yisrael* (Jerusalem: Shem, 2010). On the Hasidic-Zionistic perception and activity of some of the Ruzhin branches see Yehuda Brandes, *In the Kingdom of Holiness: The World of Rabbi Yaakov Friedman: A Chasidic-Zionist Leader in Tel Aviv* (Alon Shevut: Tevunot Press, 2006) [Hebrew]. See more above note **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

³⁸ Regarding this debate see Ada Rapoport-Albert, “On Women in Hasidism: S.A. Horodecky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition,” in *eadem* and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Jewish History: Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky* (London: P. Halban, 1988), 495–525. Albert's conclusions were challenged by Polen, in “Miriam's Dance”, and Shaul Stampfer, in “The Impact of Hasidism on the Jewish Family in Eastern Europe: Towards a Re-Evaluation,” in David Assaf and Ada Rapoport-Albert (eds.), *Yashan mipenei ḥadash: Shai le'Imanu'el Etkes*, Vol 1 (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2009), 165–184 [Hebrew]. See also Naftali Loewenthal, “Women and the Dialectic of Spirituality in Hasidism,” in Immanuel Etkes et al. (eds.), *Bema'agelei ḥasidim: Kovets mehkarim lezikhro shel Profesor Mordekhai Vilensky* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2000), English section, 7–65. For a summary of diverse opinions, see Moshe Rosman, “On Women in Hasidism: Comments for Discussion,” in Assaf and Rapoport-Albert, *Yashan mipenei ḥadash*, Vol 1, 151–164 [Hebrew]. For recent research dealing with the status of women in Hasidism, see Marcin Wodziński, *Hasidism: Key Questions*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 43–52. For a totally different approach see Tsippi Kauffman, “Hasidic Women: Beyond Egalitarianist Discourse,” in Ariel E. Mayse and Arthur Green (eds.), *Be-Ron Yahad: Studies in Jewish Thought and Theology in Honor of Nehemia Polen* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 223–257; and Glenn Dynner, “Writing Hasidic Gender,” *Marginalia* (April 10, 2020), at: <https://themarginaliareview.com/hasidism-forum-a-new-history/>.

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