

of the mystic was to redeem the sparks of holiness from the "shells" into which they had been thrust and to unify the sparks through acts of *tikkun*, or cosmic restoration. Isaac Luria of Safed (1534–1574), who formulated this teaching, was said to have held the key to the structure of the cosmos and to have effected such acts of *tikkun*.

Thus, two strategies were added to the arsenal of Jewish responses to catastrophe: the embrace of historical chronicles as a source of consolation and a new messianic scheme in which the mystic became the hero of history. Both were to have a profound impact on the new center of world Jewry—eastern Europe.

29 The Epistle on Martyrdom

MOSES MAIMONIDES

Maimonides is here exploiting his medical know-how in a metaphoric vein.

Realizing this amazing matter that hurts the eyes, I undertook to gather pharmaceuticals and roots from the books of the ancients, of which I intend to prepare medicine and salve helpful for this sickness, and heal it with the help of God.^o

I think it right to divide what I have to say on this subject into five themes: 1. the class of the laws related to the time of forced conversion; 2. definitions of the desecration of God's name and the punishment; 3. the ranks of those who die a martyr's death, and those who are forcibly converted in a persecution; 4. how this persecution differs from others, and what is to be done in relation to it; and 5. a discussion of how advisable it is for one to be careful in this persecution, may God soon put an end to it. Amen.

Theme one, the distribution of the precepts during a time of duress, is divided into three classes: A. One class of precepts, those concerning idolatry, incest, and bloodshed, requires that whenever a person is forced to violate any of them, he is at all times, everywhere, and under all circumstances obliged to die rather than transgress. *At all times* means in a time of persecution or otherwise; *everywhere* means privately or publicly; *under all circumstances* means whether the tyrant intends to have him act against his faith or not; in these situations he is obliged to die rather than transgress. B. All the other commandments, any of which an oppressor may compel him to transgress, he is to judge. If the tyrant does it for his personal satisfaction, be it a time of persecution or not, privately or publicly, he may violate the Torah and escape death. Support of this procedure is found in the chapter on the wayward son:¹ "But the case of Esther was public! Yes, but she was always passive." ² Rava maintained: "If it is for his personal satisfaction it makes a difference; otherwise how do we allow ourselves to give them the censers and the coal-containers?" ³ Clearly, it is because it makes a difference when it is for their personal satisfaction. In the case of Esther the similar difference exists: It is for their personal satisfaction. Rava is following his own reasoning, for he rules that if a non-Jew orders a Jew to cut the alfalfa on a Sabbath day and throw it before his beasts or he will kill him, he is to cut it and not have himself killed. But if he orders him to cast it into the river, he is to prefer death to obeying him, since he wants him to commit a sin. It is our principle to follow Rava's decision. It is clear that as long as the oppressor is doing it for his personal satisfaction he is to transgress and to shun death, even if it is in public and in the course of a persecution. ⁴ C. If it is the aim of the oppressor to have him transgress, it is for him to deliberate. If it is a time of persecution he is to surrender his life and not transgress, whether in private or in public, but if it is not, he should choose to transgress and not die if it is in private, and to die if it is in public.^o This is how the sages formulate it: When Rabbi Dimi arrived he ruled in the name of Rabbi Johanan that even if it is not a time of persecution, he may transgress rather than die only in private; in public he may not violate even a minor rabbinic precept.

¹ B. Sanhedrin 74a–b.

² In the Talmud, Esther is cleared of her guilt for marrying a gentile king since she submitted to him passively.

³ During the Sassanian rule in Persia (226–651 C.E.), the Jews were required to heat the Persian places of worship; the authorities did this strictly for their own benefit.

⁴ If the oppressor is not intent on conversion, the individual should yield under all circumstances and

thus save his life. Since he is not serving as an example to others, he may yield to the oppressor.

11.
22.
10.

Deut. 15:22-23.

1 Kings 12:20-33. He is notorious as the man "who sinned and he led many to sin." Julianus and Pappus; 12:15.

Death by the sword, stoning, strangulation, burning, premature death, divinely caused death and lashes.

B. Pesahim 25b.

Maimonides is discriminating between a forced convert who is still guilty of profaning God's name and a deliberate sinner. On Lev. 10, in the section dealing with the people who dedicate their offspring to Molech.

even changing the manner of tying the shoes. *In public* is defined as a body of ten, all Israelites. . . .

Theme three is about the gradation of those who are martyrs for God's name and those whom persecution forces to convert. You have to realize that wherever the sages rule that one is to surrender his life and not transgress, one who was executed has sanctified God's name. If ten Israelites witnessed his death he has sanctified His name publicly. It includes Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah,⁹ Daniel, the ten martyrs by government order,¹⁰ the seven children of Hannah,¹¹ and all the other victims of Israel, may God avenge their blood in the near future. It is to them that the verse refers: *Bring in My devotees, who made a covenant with Me over sacrifice* [Ps. 50:5]. To the rabbis this verse seemed appropriate: *I adjure you O maidens of Jerusalem, by gazelles or by hinds of the field* (Song of Songs 2:7) which means—I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem, the persecuted generations; by gazelles, those who did for Me what I desired, so I did what they desired; by hinds of the field, those who shed their blood for Me like the blood of the gazelles and the hinds.¹² To them this verse also refers: *It is for Your sake that we are slain all day long* [Ps. 44:23].

A person to whom God grants the privilege of ascending to this high rank, in other words, to suffer a martyr's death, even if he is as sinful as Jeroboam ben Nebat and his associates,¹³ is surely one of the members of the world-to-come, although he may not be learned. The rabbis infer this from the tradition that no creature is qualified to attain the status of the martyrs by government order: "Is it Rabbi Akiba and his colleagues? But of course not! They are beneficiaries of learning and good deeds. No, it is the martyrs of Lydda."¹⁴ *Drawing keen distinctions*

Now, if he did not surrender himself to death but transgressed under duress and did not die, he did not act properly, and under compulsion he profaned God's name. However, he is not to be punished by any of the seven means of retribution.¹⁵ Not a single instance is found in the Torah in which a forced individual is sentenced to any of the punishments, whether the transgression was light or grave. Only he who acts voluntarily is subject, as Scripture directs: *But the person . . . who acts defiantly . . . that soul shall be cut off* [Num. 15:30], but not of one who was forced. The Talmud often says: The Torah rules that the forced individual is not culpable, for this case is like that of a man attacking another and murdering him [Deut. 22:26], and frequently the ruling is repeated: a forced individual is excused by the Torah.¹⁶ He is not dubbed a transgressor, nor a wicked man, nor is he disqualified from giving testimony, unless he committed a sin that disqualifies him from serving as a witness. He simply did not fulfill the commandment of sanctifying God's name, but he can under no circumstance be named a deliberate profaner of God's name.

Therefore, anyone who claims or thinks that a person who transgressed is to be condemned to death, because the sages established the principle that one must surrender himself to death and not transgress, is absolutely wrong. It simply is not so, as I shall explain. True, it is upon him to surrender to death, but if he does not he is not guilty.¹⁷ Even if he worships idols under duress his soul will not be cut off, and he is certainly not executed by court order. This principle is clearly stated in the Sifra:¹⁸ The divine Torah rules regarding one who gives of his seed to Molech: *I Myself will set My face against that man* [Lev. 20:5], not if he was forced, nor if it was unwittingly, nor if he was taught wrong. Plainly then, if he was forced or was

the "Rabbi"

The second half of the verse is the result of the first.

The rabbi who wrote the response to the convert.

Despite his insistence that these converts can continue to live as Jews, Maimonides is cautious enough to advise secrecy, lest the authorities not tolerate their public behavior as Jews. The Moslems and their rulers.

Muhammad.

Maimonides' own departure from Spain, and later from Fez, may have resulted from his fear that he was in danger of being recognized as a Jew.

taught wrong his soul will not be cut off, although it will be if he does it presumptuously and voluntarily. It is even plainer that if he was forced to commit sins that, if presumptuously and voluntarily committed, are punished by forty lashes, he is not at all subject to this punishment. The law against profanation is stated prohibitively in the declaration of God, blessed be He: *You shall not profane My holy name* [Lev. 22:32].

Now it is known that a false oath is profanation, as we read in the Torah: *You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord* [Lev. 19:12].¹⁹ Yet the text of the Mishnah reads: "Men may vow to murderers, robbers, and tax-gatherers that what they have is heave-offering. . . ." The school of Shammai qualifies that they may confirm this with a vow; the school of Hillel broadens it to include even an oath. This is explicitly written. These matters are clear and in no need of supportive argument of any kind, for how can anyone suggest that the law with respect to a person who acted under duress and one who acted voluntarily is the same? And our sages ruled: "Let him transgress and surrender his life." So you see, this man²⁰ is of higher status than the sages, and more punctilious about the Law. By word of mouth and the use of his tongue, he surrenders himself to death and claims to have sanctified God's name. But by his actions he is a sinner and rebellious, and he makes himself guilty against his life, because God, exalted be He, established by the pursuit of which man shall live [Lev. 18:5], and not die.

Theme four deals with the difference between this persecution and others, and what a person should do. Remember that in all the difficulties that occurred in the time of the sages, they were compelled to violate commandments and to perform sinful acts. The Talmud lists the prohibitions, that they may not study Torah, that they may not circumcise their sons, and that they have intercourse with their wives when they are ritually unclean. But in this persecution they are not required to do anything but say something, so that if a man wishes to fulfill the 613 commandments secretly²¹ he can do so. He incurs no blame for it, unless he set himself without compulsion to desecrate the Sabbath, although no one forced him. This compulsion imposes no action, only speech. They²² know very well that we do not mean what we say, and that what we say is only to escape the ruler's punishment and to satisfy him with this simple confession. Anyone who suffered martyrdom in order not to acknowledge the apostleship of "that man,"²³ the only thing that can be said of him is that he has done what is good and proper, and that God holds great reward in store for him. His position is very high, for he has given his life for the sanctity of God, be He exalted and blessed. But if anyone comes to ask me whether to surrender his life or acknowledge, I tell him to confess and not choose death. However, he should not continue to live in the domain of that ruler.²⁴ He should stay home and not go out, and if he is dependent on his work let him be the Jew in private. There has never yet been a persecution as remarkable as this one, where the only coercion is to say something. When our rabbis ruled that a person is to surrender himself to death and not transgress, it does not seem likely that they had in mind speech that did not involve action. He is to suffer martyrdom only when it is demanded of him to perform a deed, or something that he is forbidden to do.

A victim of this persecution should follow this counsel: Let him set it as his objective to observe as much of the Law as he can. If it happens that he has sinned

speech vs. action

There are detailed rabbinic prohibitions against moving things back and forth from a home to a public area on the Sabbath.

When a person is guilty of a grievous sin or crime and incurs severe punishment, he must not be chastised for a minor offense.

1 Kings 12:28-33.

Cf. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 26.

Based on B. Ketubbot 110b.

much, or that he has desecrated the Sabbath, he should still not carry what it is not allowed to carry.^o He must not think that what he has already violated is far more grievous than what he observes;^o let him be as careful about observance as possible. Remember, a person must learn this fundamental principle. Jeroboam ben Nebat^o is chastised for making the calves, and for disregarding the regulations regarding the Sabbath that comes immediately after a holiday, or the like. None can claim that he was guilty of a more serious sin. This principle is applicable only in man-made laws in this world. God inflicts punishment for grievous sins and for minor ones, and He rewards people for everything they do. Hence it is important to bear in mind that one is punished for every sin committed and is rewarded for every precept fulfilled. Any other view of this is wrong.

What I counsel myself, and what I should like to suggest to all my friends and everyone that consults me, is to leave these places and go to where he can practice religion and fulfill the Law without compulsion or fear. Let him leave his family and his home and all he has, because the divine Law that He bequeathed to us is more valuable than the ephemeral, worthless incidentals that the intellectuals scorn; they are transient, whereas the fear of God is eternal. Moreover, when two Jewish cities are at one's elbow, one superior to the other in its actions and behavior, more observant and more concerned with the precepts, the God-fearing individual is obliged to depart from the town where the actions are not at their best, and move to the better township. We are guided by the admonition of the rabbis not to dwell in a city in which there are fewer than ten righteous residents.^o They derive this from a dialogue between God and Abraham, which concludes the account of Sodom. *What if ten righteous people should be found there? And He answered: "I will not destroy, for the sake of the ten"* [Gen. 18:32]. This is the proper thing to do when both cities are Jewish. But if the place is gentile, the Jew who resides there must by all means leave it and go to a more suitable location. He must make every effort to do so although he may expose himself to danger, so that he can get away from this bad spot where he cannot practice his religion properly, and strive to reach a comfortable place. Indeed, the prophets have spelled out that a person who resides among nonbelievers is one of them,^o and so King David complained: *For they have driven me out today, so that I cannot have a share in the Lord's possession, but am told, "Go and worship other gods"* [1 Sam. 26:19]; he equated his dwelling among the gentiles with the worship of other gods. The pious and the God-fearing are required to despise evil and its doers, for so David declared; *O Lord, You know I hate those who hate You, and loathe Your adversaries* [Ps. 139:21]. He also announced: *I am a companion to all who fear You, to those who keep Your precepts* [Ps. 119:63]. Likewise, our father Abraham, we find, despised his family and his home and ran for his life to escape from the doctrines of the heretics.

This is the effort he must make to separate himself from the heretics when they do not coerce him to do as they do; he should leave them. But if he is compelled to violate even one precept it is forbidden to stay there. He must leave everything he has, travel day and night until he finds a spot where he can practice his religion. The world is sufficiently large and extensive. The appeal of the person who pleads his duties to his family and his household is really no excuse. *A brother cannot redeem a man, or pay his ransom to God* [Ps. 49:8]. I do not think it is right to make this plea in order to avoid the obligation and not flee to a reasonable place. He

Maimonides does not concede the right to transgress and make peace with the idea of continuing to live on enemy turf.

Maimonides applies Job's personal confession to the fate of the entire Jewish people. B. Ketubbot 36.

must under no circumstance continue to reside in the land of persecution. If he does, he is a transgressor, profanes God's name, and is almost a presumptuous sinner.

Those who delude themselves to think that they will remain where they are until the king Messiah appears in the Maghreb, and they will then leave for Jerusalem—I simply do not know how they will rid themselves of the present difficulties. They are transgressors, and they lead others to sin. The prophet Jeremiah's criticism: *They offer healing offhand for the wounds of My people, saying, "all is well, all is well," when nothing is well* [Jer. 6:14 and 8:11], fits them and others like them very well. There is no set time for the arrival of the Messiah that they can count on and decide that it is close or distant. The incumbency of the commandments does not depend on the appearance of the Messiah. We are required to apply ourselves to study and to the fulfillment of the precepts, and we must strive for perfection in both. If we do what we have to, we or our children or grandchildren may be privileged by God to witness the coming of the Messiah, and life will be more pleasant. If he does not come we have not lost anything; on the contrary we have gained by doing what we had to do. But it is wicked and hopeless and a renunciation of the faith for anyone to stay on in these places and see the study of Torah cease, the Jewish population perishing after some time, he himself unable to live as a Jew, but continue to say: "I will stay here until the Messiah appears and then I shall be relieved of the situation I am in."

Theme five is concerned with how a person should regard himself in this persecution. Anyone who cannot leave because of his attachments, or because of the dangers of a sea voyage, and stays where he is, must look upon himself as one who profanes God's name, not exactly willingly, but almost so. At the same time he must bear in mind that if he fulfills a precept, God will reward him doubly, because he acted so for God only, and not to show off or be accepted as an observant individual. The reward is much greater for a person who fulfills the Law and knows that if he is caught, he and all he has will perish. It is he who is meant in God's qualification: *If only you seek Him with all your heart and soul* [Deut. 4:29]. Nevertheless, no one should stop to plan to leave the provinces that God is wrath with, and to exert every effort to achieve it.^o

It is not right to alienate, scorn, and hate people who desecrate the Sabbath. It is our duty to befriend them, and encourage them to fulfill the commandments. The rabbis regulate explicitly that when an evildoer who sinned by choice comes to the synagogue, he is to be welcomed and not insulted. In this ruling they relied on Solomon's counsel: *A thief should not be despised for stealing to appease his hunger* [Prov. 6:30]. It means do not despise the evildoer in Israel when he comes secretly to "steal" some observance.

Ever since we were exiled from our land persecution is our unending lot, because from our youth it has grown with us like a father and from our mother's womb it has directed us [Job 31:18].^o But we frequently find in the Talmud, "a persecution is likely to pass."^o May God put an end to this one, and may the prediction be realized. *In those days and at that time—declares the Lord—the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, and there shall be none; the sins of Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon those I allow to survive* [Jer. 50:20]. May it be His will. Amen.

∴ It was preordained
∴ No guilt

35 The Abyss of Despair

NATHAN NATA HANOVER

Author's Introduction

Lam. 3:1 (4).

"I am the man that hath seen the affliction by the rod of His wrath,"^o when God smote His people Israel, His first-born. From heaven unto earth He cast down the beautiful and glorious land of Poland, "oh fair in situation, the joy of the whole earth."^{oo} "The Lord hath swallowed up unsparingly the habitations of Jacob,"^{oo} the lot of His inheritance,^o and hath not remembered His footstool in the day of His anger.^o

Ps. 48:3.
Lam. 2:2.
Deut. 32:9.
Lam. 2:1.

Greek Orthodox.
ZOT = 408 =
1648 (each letter
of the Hebrew
alphabet has a
numerical value).

All this was foreseen by King David (peace be unto him), when he prophesied the joining of the Tartars and the Greeks^o to destroy His chosen Israel, in the year zot^o of the era of creation. The "Greeks," in their typical manner, offered the following ultimatum to the Jews: He that wishes to remain alive must change his faith and publicly renounce Israel and his God. The Jews, however, heeded not their words, but stretched out their necks to be slaughtered for the sanctification of His Holy Name. Among them were the land's leading scholars as well as the men, women and children; the whole community. May the God of vengeance avenge them and return us to His land.

Ps. 32:6.

This tragedy was forewarned by King David (peace be unto him), in Psalm 32, where it is said: "For this (al "zot") let everyone that is godly pray unto Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found." (l'et m'tso) etc.,^o so that no evil may come to pass. The letters of the words l'et m'tso (in a time when Thou mayest be found), have the same numerical value as those of yavan v'kedav yahdav hubaru ("Greek" and Tartar joined together). The dog and the cat made an alliance to uproot the people of Israel, which is likened to a straying lamb. This occurred in the year (408) of the era of creation (zot) omitting the first numeral. Psalm 69 also speaks of this tragic event.

Ps. 69:3.

There it is said: "Save me O God, for the waters are come in even unto the soul, I am sunk in deep mire where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters and the flood overwhelmed me . . . etc."^{oo} Tav'ati b'yeven m'tsulah (I am sunk in the deep mire), is of the same numerical value as hmiel v'kedav b'yavan yahdav hubaru (hmiel^o and the Tartars joined together with the "Greeks"), the combined virus of a scorpion and a wasp. "Shibboleth" (the flood) is numerically equal to Chmielecki, hayavan v'kedav (Chmielecki,^o the "Greeks" and the Tartars). Shetafatni shetef (anger and wrath overwhelmed me), for in the Polish language the name Chmielecki is associated with nobility,^o while the Russians referred to him as Chmiel.

I.e., Chmielecki.

Should be
Chmielecki.

He was made a
member of the
Polish nobility.

Rabbi Jechiel Michael, chief of the Jewish community, and head of the academy of the holy congregation of Nemirow, whose soul departed in purity, for the glorification of His Name, referred to the name Chmiel, as representing the first letters of the phrase Hfele Mashiah yavi l'olam (he will usher in the pangs of the Messiah).^o And after him will come the feet of the messenger.

The trials and
tribulations that
portend the
Messiah's coming.

I named my book Yeven m'tsulah (The Deep Mire), because the words of the

Psalmist allude to these terrible events, and speak of the oppressors, the Tartars and the Ukrainians as well as of the arch-enemy, Chmiel, may his name be blotted out, may God send a curse upon him. This book may thus be a chronicle to serve future generations.

I dwell at length on the causes which led to this great catastrophe, when the Ukrainians and the Tartars united to revolt against Poland, although the two had always been enemies. I recorded all the major and minor encounters, as well as the evil decrees and persecutions; also the days on which those cruelties occurred, so that everyone might be able to calculate the day on which his kin died, and observe the memorial properly. In addition, I have also described the customs and practices of Polish Jewry which followed the path of goodness and righteousness. All this I did with a deep reverence for God. I based these upon the six pillars which support the world.^o I have written it in a lucid and intelligible style, and printed it on smooth and clear paper.

Therefore, buy ye this book at once. Do not spare your money, so that I may be enabled to publish the book 'Neta Sha'ashuim' (Plant of Delights), containing homilies on the Pentateuch which I have authored. For this benevolence the Almighty God will keep you from all evil and distress, and will hasten the coming of the Messiah. Amen, so may it be the will of Him Who dwelleth in splendor.

These are the words of the author Nathan Nata the son of the martyred Rabbi Moses Hanover Ashkenazi (may the memory of the righteous be a blessing, may God avenge his blood) who dwelled in the holy community of Zaslaw, near the holy community of Ostrog in the province of Volhynia, in the land of Russia.

36 The Massacres of the Holy Community of Nemirow

NATHAN NATA HANOVER

June 10, 1648;
the twentieth of
Sivan was also the
anniversary of the
massacre at Blois
in 1171; later
adopted by Polish
Jews to
commemorate the
Cossack uprising.

The Oppressor Chmiel, may his name be blotted out, heard that many Jews had gathered in the holy community of Nemirow, and that they had a great deal of silver and gold with them. He knew that the holy community of Nemirow was distinguished for its great riches. It had been a great and important community replete with scholars and scribes, a city full of justice, the abode of righteousness, (but now they have been murdered).

Accordingly, Chmiel sent a leader, an enemy of the Jews, and about six hundred swordsmen with him, to attack this noble community. In addition, he wrote to the city heads to help the band. The city leaders readily responded to aid them with all their might and main. This they did, not so much because of their love of the Cossacks but because of their hatred of the Jews.

And it came to pass on a Wednesday, the 20th of Sivan,^o that Cossacks ap-

proached the city of Nemirow. When the Jews saw the troops from afar, their hearts trembled from fright, though they were not certain, as yet, whether they were Polish or Cossack. Nevertheless all the Jews went with their wives, and infants, with their silver and gold, into the fortress, and locked and barred the doors, prepared to fight them. What did those evil-doers, the Cossacks do? They devised flags like those of the Poles, for there is no other way to distinguish between the Polish and the Cossack forces except through their banners. The people of the city were fully aware of this trickery, and nevertheless called to the Jews in the fortress: "Open the gate. This is a Polish army which has come to save you from the hands of your enemies, should they come." The Jews who were standing guard on the wall, seeing that the flags were like those of Poland, believed that the people of the city spoke the truth. Immediately they opened the gate. No sooner had the gate been opened than the Cossacks entered with drawn swords, and the townspeople too, armed with swords, spears and scythes, and some only with clubs, and they killed the Jews in large numbers. Women and young girls were ravished,⁹ but some of the women and maidens jumped into the moat surrounding the fortress in order that the uncircumcised should not defile them. They drowned in the waters. Many of them who were able to swim, jumped into water, believing they would escape the slaughter, but the Ukrainians swam after them with their swords and their scythes, and killed them in the water. Some of the enemy shot with their guns into the water, and killed them till the water became red with the blood of the slain.

Lam. 5:11.

The head of the rabbinical academy of Nemirow was also there. His name was, his excellency, our master and teacher, the rabbi; Rabbi Jechiel Michael, son of his excellency, our teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, of blessed memory. He knew the whole of Rabbinic writings by heart and was proficient in all the worldly sciences. On the Sabbath before the catastrophe he preached and admonished the people that if the enemy should come (God forbid) they should not change their faith, but rather be martyred for the sanctification of His Name. This the holy people did. He also jumped into the water believing that he would save himself by swimming when a Ukrainian seized him and wanted to slay him, but the scholar implored him not to kill him, for which he would compensate him with a great deal of gold and silver. The Ukrainian consented and he led him to the house, where his silver and gold were hidden, and the Cossack released him. The Rabbi then left that place with his mother, and the two hid in a certain house all that night till the morning dawn.

On the morrow, the 22nd of Sivan, the Ukrainians searched the houses, suspecting that Jews might be hidden there. The Rabbi and his mother then fled to the cemetery. Thus, should they be killed they would receive burial. But it so happened that when they came near the cemetery, a Ukrainian shoemaker, one of the townspeople, pursued the Rabbi with club in hand and inflicted on him wounds. The Rabbi's mother pleaded with the Ukrainian to kill her instead of the son but the latter paid no attention and proceeded to kill first the Rabbi and then the mother, may God avenge their blood. Three days after the massacre the Rabbi's wife buried him, for in the town where the slaughter took place the majority of the women were spared, except for the old and feeble who were killed.

It happened there that a beautiful maiden of a renowned and wealthy family, had been captured by a certain Cossack who forced her to be his wife. But, before

they lived together she told him with cunning that she possessed a certain magic and that no weapon could harm her. She said to him: "If you do not believe me, just test me. Shoot at me with a gun, and you will see that I will not be harmed." The Cossack, her husband, in his simplicity, thought she was telling the truth. He shot at her with his gun and she fell and died for the sanctification of the Name, to avoid being defiled by him, may God avenge her blood.

Another event occurred when a beautiful girl, about to be married to a Cossack, insisted that their marriage take place in a church which stood across the bridge. He granted her request, and with timbrels and flutes, attired in festive garb, led her to the marriage. As soon as they came to the bridge she jumped into the water and was drowned for the sanctification of the Name. May God avenge her blood.⁹ These, and many similar events took place, far too numerous to be recorded. The number of the slain and drowned in the holy community of Nemirow was about six thousand. They perished by all sorts of terrible deaths, as has already been described. May God avenge their blood. Those of the holy community of Nemirow who escaped the sword fled to the holy community of Tulczyn, for there, outside the city, was a very strong fortress.

1653

For similar motifs,
see 17.

37 The Martyrs of Pavlysh

(Shivḥei haBesht, tale 137)

In 1753 twenty-four Jews were charged with the murder of a four-year-old Christian boy. Twelve of the Jews were tortured and executed; the rest saved their lives by converting to Christianity. Besht is the acronym for the Ba'al Shem Tov.

There was a blood libel in the holy community of Pavlysh.⁹ The rabbi of the holy community of Korostyshev, whose name was Rabbi David, escaped. He wanted to flee as far as the provinces of Walachia. All the important people in the area around Pavlysh were afraid that a libel would be made against them as well. When Rabbi David arrived at the holy community of Medzhibozh, the Besht⁹ stopped him and told him several times that the people would be saved. But they were killed, and afterwards a letter reached Rabbi David telling him about the horrible and painful tortures that each of them had suffered. He brought this letter to the Besht who became grief-stricken. That day was Sabbath Eve, and the Besht went to the mikveh and cried bitterly. He prayed Minhah with great bitterness until his followers could not lift up their heads.

They said: "Perhaps when he will begin welcoming the Sabbath, he will do it joyfully."

But the Besht also prayed the Reception of the Sabbath prayer and the Maariv with a bitter heart. He sanctified the wine as he wept. He washed his hands, sat at the table, and then went to sleep. In his room he stretched himself out on the floor and lay there for a long time. The members of his household and the guests waited until the candles began to die out.