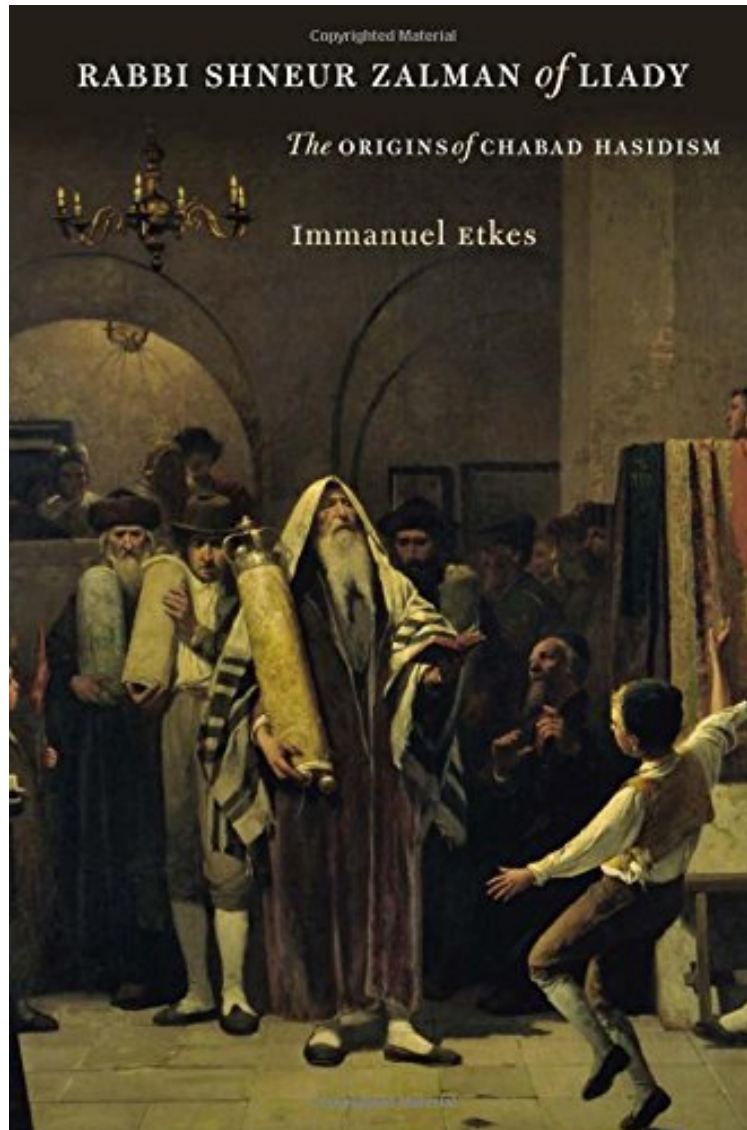


(Download free pdf) Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady: The Origins of Chabad Hasidism (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry)

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady: The Origins of Chabad Hasidism (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry)

Immanuel Etkes

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Immanuel Etkes : Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady: The Origins of Chabad Hasidism (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady: The Origins of Chabad Hasidism (The Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Masterful brilliant biography of the founder of the Chabad movement By Ben Rothke A recent search on Hasidic tales returned 231 books. These tales of righteous Hasidic leaders are meant to make a point, tell a story, inspire the listener, and much more. A problem is that some of these stories are conflicting and self-contradictory. When used as a biographical vehicle, these stories are often more hagiography than biography. In Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady: The Origins of Chabad Hasidism (Brandeis University Press, ISBN 1611686776), author Immanuel Etkes, Professor of Modern Jewish History at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, has written a masterful and brilliant biography of the founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic movement. The 9 chapters focus on R Shneur Zalmans adult life, with the narrative starting from his ascent as a Hasidic leader, ending with his death fleeing with the Russian Army from Napoleon: 1. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadys Rise to Leadership 2. A Leader of Hasidim 3. Between Center and Periphery 4. Sefer Shel Beinonim: The Book of Average Men 5. On the Front Line against the Mitnagdim: Excommunications and Prohibitions 6. At the Front versus the Mitnagdim: The First Imprisonment 7. At the Front against the Mitnagdim: The Second Arrest 8. Zaddikim as Human Beings: The Conflict with Rabbi Abraham of Kalisk 9. Between Napoleon and Alexander What makes this biography unique is that Etkes uses documents written by R Shneur Zalmans himself. This is in addition to other historical documents and letters related to him. Etkes is able to create a critical analysis, yet not lose focus of the human element. A man of legendary talents and one of the greatest Jewish minds of the last few hundred years, R Shneur Zalmans genius was matched by his leadership and organizational skills. This led to Chabad becoming the largest Hasidic group in Eastern Europe at the time. With these documents, Etkes is able to create an insightful biography, more of an empirical tale of a legendary rabbi, than simply a fanciful Hasidic tale. These letters have rich and detailed information, and in the hands of a scholar like Etkes, are an invaluable tool. Ironic as it is, Etkes conclusion and that of the storytellers are the same. The book details the struggles the nascent Hasidic movement faced. This was initially via protests from the opponents of Hasidism, known as Misnagdim. Once the Hasidic movement solidified, it found itself in a sort of identity crisis on how the movement should grow and continue. Etkes writes that contrary to common belief, the early Hasidic leaders didnt address the masses. Their intended audience were men with knowledge of rabbinic literature, especially those who attended yeshivas. The challenge of the leaders were to find a way to transmit their message to the less educated masses. This was a special challenge for R Shneur Zalman, given that Tanya, his magnum opus, contained significant amounts of kabalistic thought. Chapter 4 is the densest and most difficult chapter in the book, not coincidentally that it is about Tanya. To that, R Shneur Zalman was opposed by a number of his colleagues who felt that Tanya simply provided too much kabalistic information to the masses, who simply could not comprehend the profundities of the topic. But R Shneur Zalman was convinced that the basic ideas of Kabbalah were a vital foundation for a Jewish persons service of God. He also assumed that not all of the members of his community could master the book easily, to which he established groups for the study of Tanya. Chapter 5-7 detail R Shneur Zalmans dealings with the Misnagdim, the group opposed to the movement, who banned and persecuted them. This conflict with the Misnagdim landed him in Russian jails on two occasions, being accused of spying and misuse of public funds. He was interrogated numerous times in jail, and Etkes uses Russian transcripts to provide an insights into what transpired. It should be noted that Tanya, which was published in 1797, was the first Hasidic work that offered a detailed and comprehensive set of instructions in the ways of worshipping God. The book, unique in its day, served as a comprehensive and detailed guide to many Hasidim, not just those of Chabad. R Shneur Zalman wrote a letter to a Rabbi Moshe Meizeles while fleeing from the French army explaining his opposition to Napoleon. This illustrious letter is legendary within the Chabad movement. Etkes attempts to prove that the letter was not written R Shneur Zalman, but leave it as a question who the actual author was. This is an English translation of the original Hebrew version published in 2011. The English version is missing, for reasons not made clear, a number of chapters. Chapter 5 of the Hebrew edition is devoted to a discussion of R Shneur Zalmans view of the relation between mysticism and the normative patterns of the service of God. A topic of such importance would have been a valuable part of this book. Etkes has written a remarkable work that gives the reader a vivid presentation of the times, and understanding of this extraordinary man. He closes the book with the observation that R Shneur Zalmans influence continues to this very day primarily from his Hasidic ethos that he created and shared, an ethos embodied in this writings and in the living tradition that have come down among his Hasidim from generation to generation. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. scholarly yet not boring By Michael Lewyn This book surprised me, by showing that some of what I had believed about early Hasidim and their environment was not always true. For example, detractors of Hasidim portrayed Hasidic rebbes as wonder-working charismatic leaders. However, Zalman became a leader only because the Hasidic leaders of White Russia moved to Israel and urged him to lead in their place. Zalman denied that he had any prophetic or miracle-working abilities, and discouraged Hasidim from bothering him about earthly matters. He preferred to be left alone to write about the service of God (especially prayer). Zalmans major work, the Tanya, is highly abstract and focuses on mystical doctrines. I had also thought of early Hasidim as very decentralized, living in tiny communities and worshipping in tiny synagogues. But Zalman had over a thousand followers, enough that he had to ration their contacts with him: most Hasidim were allowed to meet him in private only once a year, and could visit his court only a few times a year. Because these Hasidim would come from far away, Zalman had to create a

bureaucracy to limit visits, provide alternative sources of guidance, and arrange for lodging for Hasidim who visited from other cities. In addition, he employed emissaries to communicate his wishes to local Hasidic congregations, and to evaluate the work of those congregations. To maintain his house/office and to fund these activities required considerable fundraising. Hasidic congregations provided a constant stream of income; in addition, Zalman received fees for mediating among merchants, and his wife ran her own businesses. Another stereotype is that Hasidim engaged in overly boisterous worship. However, Zalman encouraged slow, decorous prayer; in fact, he believed that a morning minyan should take more than an hour. (By contrast, today's minyans may last as little as 35 or 40 minutes when the Torah is not being read, in both Orthodox and Conservative congregations). The author also focuses on the imprisonment of Zalman; anti-Hasidic Jews accused him of being somehow subversive, and mystified Russian officials imprisoned him and a few of his followers while investigating the charges. The author uses Russian records to learn more about the imperial bureaucracy's point of view: Russian officials were instinctively suspicious of new religious movements, but could find nothing dangerous about Hasidim. When I think of Czarist Russia, I think of pogrom-promoting bullies; but the first decades of Russian rule over Eastern Europe were less malevolent than the last decades, and the bureaucrats profiled in this book seemed to be doing the best they could. However, language barriers slowed everything down: justice was delayed for weeks while government officials tried to find someone who could translate Zalman's written explanations into Russian. The discussion of Zalman's legal troubles in turn flows into the author's discussion of Zalman's role in the Napoleonic Wars. Chabad legend claims that Zalman supported Russia over France because he thought that Napoleonic rule would cause Jews to be prosperous yet assimilated. But based on the correspondence of Zalman's son, the author has a different view. He suggests that after being exonerated by the Czarist regime, Zalman in fact viewed the Czar quite favorably, and thought that supporting the Czar would lead to additional improvements in Jewish life. By contrast, Zalman thought of Napoleon as an aggressor; it is not clear that he had any real sense of how Jews were treated in France. The author also notes that the pro-Napoleon puppet regime in Poland was much less pro-Jewish than Napoleonic France. Many scholarly books tell me what I already know but in a boring way. This book, by contrast, was actually interesting.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745-1812), in imperial Russia, was the founder and first rebbe of Chabad, a branch of Hasidic Judaism that flourishes to the present day. The Chabad-Lubavitch movement he founded in the region now known as Belarus played, and continues to play, an important part in the modernization processes and postwar revitalization of Orthodox Jewry. Drawing on historical source materials that include Shneur Zalman's own works and correspondence, as well as documents concerning his imprisonment and interrogation by the Russian authorities, Etkes focuses on Zalman's performance as a Hasidic leader, his unique personal qualities and achievements, and the role he played in the conflict between Hasidim and its opponents. In addition, Etkes draws a vivid picture of the entire generation that came under Rabbi Shneur Zalman's influence. This comprehensive biography will appeal to scholars and students of the history of Hasidism, East European Jewry, and Jewish spirituality.

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