

ABSTRACT

R. BORUCH OF MEDZHYBIZH AND THE 'MEDZHYBIZH DYNASTY'

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R. Boruch of Medzhybizh served as a *tsaddik* (Hasidic leader) over a period of about thirty years. Although he was a grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, was active and a familiar figure in a wide range of Hasidic contexts, and is mentioned in a great many Hasidic works, no in-depth academic research has yet been devoted to his life and his teachings. There appear to be two main reasons for this: one is the unflattering portrayal of him in the Haskalah literature; the other is a brief article published in 5740 (1980), in which the writer, Avraham Shisha-Halevy, argues that the main anthology of Rabbi Boruch's teachings and the stories about him, *Butzina di-Nehora*, is a forgery.

This article sketches a portrait of Rabbi Boruch. I start by addressing the claim concerning *Butzina di-Nehora*, and show that there is no evidence that the work is not genuine. At the same time, I discuss the culture of Hasidic discourse, in which the rigid criteria of reliability and the concept of copyright are not applicable. The main portion of the article discusses a number of central concepts in the teachings and leadership style of R. Boruch: immanence and Divine service through corporeality; prayer and Torah study; the mystical-magical model; strict Divine justice, awe of God and distance from Him; the inner voice of the heart; innovation and creativity. Finally, I focus on R. Boruch as a link in the 'Medzhybizh Dynasty' – i.e., as a descendant of the Ba'al Shem Tov and an exponent of his teachings, and the question of the degree to which he influenced and was continued by R. Nachman of Braslav.