Hasidic Last Words by DBL (haHistalkut)

Benjamin Mintz’ 1930 Hebrew Sefer haHistalkut gives accounts of 42 Hasidic Tsadikim between 1760 and 1904 depicting their departures in passing from olam ha-zeh to olam ha-bah. The whole Hebrew text can be found at www.daat.ac.il/daat/history/hasidut/sefer-2.htm. Mintz selection of 42 death bed departures of tzadikim is based on parasha Masei that recounts 42 departure points or way stations of the people Israel in the dessert until reaching the promised land in Israel. As an allegory this suggests that striving for the Edenic promised land is only finally possibly obtained depending on the merits of the soul in the afterlife where according to Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 8:2) the soul is rewarded directly proportional to its merit of attaining intellectual, moral, and spiritual virtue in olam hazeh i.e. according to Pirke Avot “this world is a vestibule to the world to come.”

To understand Hasiduth’s teachings on afterlife one must be familiar with related topics such as blessing, devekut, ethical wills, , hesed and reward for gemilut Hasidim in the next worlds, hitbonenut (meditation and contemplative trance) significance of prayer on keeping the soul of a goes In the world longer as rabbi Yehuda hanasi’s handmaid Kallah stopped others from praying in order to free the soul of her master from suffering, mystical timing of yahrzeit dates in the Hebrew calendar, etc. .

The example of the Hasidic master’s purified, refined, and noble approaches to the liminality being at the window of “death” gives a framework of meaning to come to grips with mortality. It reveals Hasiduth being infused with deep faith, joyfulness, and profound sense of divine immanence. The theurgic mystical aspects of a Tzadik’s passing on in ascent brings with it many souls awaiting repair (tikkunim). Last words and actions give closure and are not insignificant. The importance of last words traditionally the shema and vidui (confession) as Sanhedrin 6:2 notes “all who confess have a place in olam ha-bah” is noteworthy and provides a key for what is beyond human comprehension.

The last words of the Vidui are Hashem Hu haElokim, but much of Hasidic thought still affirms that death is a beginning and not absolute closure as the souls can be sent on a journeys to ascend i.e. samech lamed-kuf returning the soul in purity and preparation for heavenly rewards. The Baal HaTurim notes that the word “Hashkifah” in parasha Kis Savo, has gematria of 500, and there are 500 parasangs between each of the cosmic rakiot. The journey of the soul to these various rakiot, factoring in 7 heavens, is a calculus of theurgic significance for the Mikubalim, given that there are 7 heavens, partly where the Hechalot (or palaces) or Hashem are located where different angels of different ranks guard various doorways, given authority to determine if the soul is meritorious to gain entrance to various chambers where angels give celestial torah discourses, a big Yeshivah in shamayim. Rambam’s Moreh Nevukhim chapter 51 part II, forecasts the various ranks of elevated souls and their proximity in the Hechalot to the throne of Hashem, where according to Orchod Tzadikim, the souls of the completely
righteous are under the throne of G-d pure as snow. Of course it has been noted by Gershom Sholem in Jewish Gnosticism and Merkavah Mysticism, that this trope or allegory is found in the early Gnostic writings that may have influenced the Hechalot (offspins of Midrashic genre) of texts like Hechalot Rabbati and the Lesser Palaces. Rabbi Akiva in Hagigah 12b-14bb notes there is no falsehood before Hashem’s throne, by saying “al tamru mayim mayim.” (see creative essay by DBL on the Jewish arts library guide for clarification).

Some Hasidic tzadikim prepare their souls for departure by practicing kabbalist techniques of unifications or ideal states of being one with God in unio mystica, techniques transmitted by HaAri HaKodesh (Rabbi Isaac Luria). Texts frequently mediated on to cause “unifications” are the shema and the aserot ha-debrot, etc. The mystics of Safed like HaAri HaKodesh, Remak, Rabbi Chaim Vital, Rabbi Moshe Alschekh etc. practiced causing these cosmic unifications by learning Mishnah in Mishnah hevrrot but also by traveling to the close by kever of the Rashbi in Meron, and prostrating on his grave weeping, or learning Rashbi’s torah, “to cause the lips to move” and effect unifications in shamayim.

Tzadikim like R. Yechiel Michal of Glina before departure welcome his two teachers: Rabbis Ezekiel of Kahalov and Kalmish of Krakov to a chair next to his bed to ascend together to the Sanhedrin and yeshiva in heaven.

The Hasidic view that the death of a Tzadik atones for a generation is suggested by many Hasidic texts. In fact the passing of a Tzadik actually atone’s for the current generation possibly also.

Each Hasidic master signs his own departure, a life devoted to living to live beyond mortality, in a unique manner. For example Rabbi Levi Yitchok of Berdichtevo tells those around his bed that he is preparing his soul to depart and the journey is ready and that his kabbalistic technique will literally and symbolically cause the two clocks in his residence- one set on Berditchev time and one set on Jerusalem time- to stop. Thus Rabbi Levi of Berdichev is asserting his esoteric mystical understanding of all realms of time, even beyond devices of technology that measure time. The Tzadik is going to enter a realm with Hashem who sees the past, present, future, simultanteously and yet transcends time in an eternal realm beyond time . Much mystical activity is entering the time warp of Hashem’s dimensions of time, so that the state of the soul enters into what the modern artist Salvadore Dally represents as a picture in the desert where the clock is melted etc.

Rabbi Nachaman of Bratslav not only heals those near his death bed but prepares to heal those waiting in the world to come in his departure. Nonetheless the theme that a tzadik’s death atones for others runs throughout the legends. For example Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel, the Apter Rebbe, like Rabbi Nachman barter with the angel of death for the souls of other Jews atoning not only for his own life but for the lives of other yiddin who have come before in generations prior. The reader may ask if there is any correlation to the concept of vicarious atonement found in Christianity? The answer is the difference make all the difference. While Dante in the Divine Commedy represents the heavenly seating tables with the souls of the 12 apostles Judaism does not substitute for the wheels of Hashem’s holy merkvah. That is to say based on Zohar VaEtchanan, the question is raised who are the four wheels of G-d’s chariot. Resh Laikish proposes that in addition to the agreed upon 1st three wheels being Represented (1) by Avraham as an ideal man, (2) Yitchak by a Lion, and Yakov as a ox (shor), the fourth wheel is not Yosef, but rather Dovid HaMelech. Why? Because Dovid saw and understood “the whole” and was able to unify it, with a vision that was greater than that on eagle’s wings, a perspective beyond the aleph to the omega, a penetrating cognition beyond any human metaphor such as entering a
“clearing” after a long hike through a dark forest. The metaphor of the soul as a boat on the sea of life also does not do justice to Dovid’s eschatological understanding, that the messiah would be a scion from his Dynasty, a dynasty predicted in Megilat Ruth, originating with the birth of Peretz in Bereishit and prior even to that key moment of Tamar’s zekut.

Many tzadikim on their deathbeds make sure the holy heavenly court notes that "they have not benefitted in any way from the physical world " and their utter most poverty and contentment with simplicity (who is happy he who is happy with his lot (PA)) is seen as a merit on which their souls ascend even higher.

Rabbi Aaron of Zhitmir is shocked that his students are weeping at his deathbed and the Rashbi in his ascension refers to the great joys of Gan Eden that await as his soul is to marry the shekhinah there. This is a clear allusion to sefer HaZohar where the Rashbi on his deathbed ascension is an a state of xtc where he welcomes his disciples to join him later at their appointed times, in Gan Eden where he is preparing to unite with the Shekhinah.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk tells his people to stop blocking his view because G-d is standing above his bed and G0d, the Mikor hayim (the title of Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gabirol’s philosophic Magnus opus Fons Vital) is the Tzadik’s future not the corrupt world of olam hazeh.

Rabbi Zev of Zhitomir expresses the great hope in the Tzadikim who will enter when he exits, to prepare the way for mashiach. It is said when one door closes another opens and many Hasidim find significance on the emergence of souls into the physical world in birth and the dates of which righteous souls departed on that same date etc. As a rishon Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra in his book of Horoscopy notes that the important dates in a souls life journey are when it is brought down from heavenly realms at conception, the date at which the head emerges in the world at birth (when the mother is as the gemarah says “pursued by heaven”, and the dates of the birthdays of the soul in the Hebrew calendar. Particularly important is when the Hebrew date and secular date of the birth of a soul into the world reoccur after decades in the lie cycle of the soul’s residence in olam ha-zeh. There are Rabbi Akiva notes is the paradox: HAKol Tzephuei ve-reshut nitanah, raising the question of G-d’s providence and foreknowledge (yediah), hashgihah pratit, and free will or behirah. See power point on Akedat Yitchak on Parasha and Hagim library guide, given at lunch and learn session around 2006 at LCW by DBL).

Some Tzadikim on their deathbed cite particularly relevant pasukim referencing their names (i.e. Dovid Moshe, Eliyahu, pinchas etc) or other personal details about their souls encapsulated by biblical verses. . Thus Rabbi Zusha of Plotzk last words thus quotes, "I will arise at midnight to thank you (Ps 119:62) just before his soul departs in the ritual of tikkun hazot, a mystical serious of tefillot that are recited just at midnight, and its significance brought down in meseket Berachot.

Rabbi Dov Baer of mezritch expresses his gratitude of a Hasidic virtue of a joy filled heart rather than cold Mitnagdic intellectualism, that affirms his trust in G0d while similarly Rabbi Aaron of Staroselye dances and celebrates life until his final moments invoking a trance of ecstasy before departure. Rabbi Shmuelke of Sasov sings a exultant joy filled niggun as his last act mystica that set his soul on its eternal journey to the higher realms.

However not all Hasidic departures (HaHistalkut) are ecstatically filled with joy of simcha. Consider Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk who suffers from Cholera in Jerusalem who was so thin and wasted from
the plague yet nonetheless retained his intellectual lucidity to the very end, and gave thanks for being in
the holy city of Jerusalem, despite his terrible suffering, because his Aliyah to the Holy Land despite its
terrible tribulations, is the ultimate geulah where Jewish history will play out as he saw in visions.

Many Hasidic Tzadikim also give over brachot. This is based on the models of Moshe, Yosef, and Yakov in
the Tanakh. Blessing, based on the paradigm of Yakov Avinu and Moshe Rabbenu, confer brachot that
are said to have significance at the end of times. Thus does the Noam Elimelech who distributes to 4 of
his disciples (just as Rabbi Akiva had 4 disciples) specific blessings. To the Seer of Lublin he gave the light
and insight of the eyes and internal vision (ironically because the Seer was blind), to the maggid of
Koznitz the purity and strength of heart, to Rabbi Mendel of Prostik a supernal sekel tov, and to the Rav
of Apt great powers of derosh, a koach peh.

The last actions of the Baal HaTanya are also extremely significant. Rabbi Zalman of Liadi 's last words
were said to call over one of his grandsons to teach him gemarah. This is an affirmation of the masorah,
and chain of transmission, i.e. more than Jewish education, but what is encapsulated by the Term
Hinuck. Jews have loved Torah above all else and this is what preserves the Jewish people and thus is is
essential that even on one's deathbed one do things to ensure its continuity. See power point and
library guide on torah lishmah on Jewish Educaiton

The last words of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Teitelbaum were to pledge to plead in heaven to bring the
library guide and essay on torah lishmah on Jewish Educaiton

The last words of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Teitelbaum were to pledge to plead in heaven to bring the
time of ultimate geulah

The last words of Rabbi Zalman of Liadi 's last words
were said to call over one of his grandsons to teach him gemarah. This is an affirmation of the masorah,
and chain of transmission, i.e. more than Jewish education, but what is encapsulated by the Term
Hinuck. Jews have loved Torah above all else and this is what preserves the Jewish people and thus is is
essential that even on one's deathbed one do things to ensure its continuity. See power point and
library guide and essay on torah lishmah on Jewish Educaiton

The last words of Rabbi Zalman of Liadi 's last words
were said to call over one of his grandsons to teach him gemarah. This is an affirmation of the masorah,
and chain of transmission, i.e. more than Jewish education, but what is encapsulated by the Term
Hinuck. Jews have loved Torah above all else and this is what preserves the Jewish people and thus is is
essential that even on one's deathbed one do things to ensure its continuity. See power point and
library guide and essay on torah lishmah on Jewish Educaiton

The last words of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Teitelbaum were to pledge to plead in heaven to bring the
time of ultimate geulah

The last words of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Teitelbaum were to pledge to plead in heaven to bring the
time of ultimate geulah

The last words of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Teitelbaum were to pledge to plead in heaven to bring the
time of ultimate geulah

Great respect must be given this king as likewise this king respects and honors the Sanhedrin and sees to
their Wars of Sefer Shoftim of the MT, by noting a king will arise who wipes out Amalek.

The Rambam opens Kings and
their Wars of Sefer Shoftim of the MT, by noting a king will arise who wipes out Amalek.

Great respect must be given this king as likewise this king respects and honors the Sanhedrin and sees to
its restablishment.

This king will fulfill the commandament to write or commission a sefer torah and thus not be an
ignoramous but administer din and mishpahet.

This king will fulfill the commandament to write or commission a sefer torah and thus not be an
ignoramous but administer din and mishpahet.
This king will know the difference between the categories of war. Milchemet Mitzvah vs. milchemet Hoveh and milchemet reshet. See power point on King David and his wars.

Later the Rambam notes by noting that the agricultural laws off Shemitah and Yovel will be observed again in Israel (see Ramban on Shemita olamot). The Rambam lays a lucid forecast of objective criteria and condition to be met. This out clearly in sefer Shoftim in the Mishnah Torah were we note

The clarity of classification of Rambam’s 23 halakhic demarcation is brilliant:

1. Obligation to appoint king in Israel
2. Prohibition of appointing a ger as king
3. Prohibition of king marrying many wives
4. Prohibition against king accumulating many horses (i.e. military that is not needed except to defend borders and pick up the trash
5. Prohibition of king amassing to much silver and gold
6. Obligation against Canaanite nations
7. No remainder of amalek
8. Obligation to destroy descendents of amalek
9. Obligation to never forget i.e. remember what amalek did in utter ruthless cruelty
10. Prohibition against forgetting amalek’s evil deeds including ambush
11. Prohibition to dwell in egypt
12. Obligation to offer peace to inhabitants of a city besieged
13. Prohibition against offering peace to Ammon and Moab
14. Prohibition against destroyin fruit bearing trees during siege
15. Obligation to set up a latrine outside an army camp
16. Obligation to carry a spike with which to dig to cover what is offensive to hashem
17. Obligation to anoint a priest to speak to troops
18. Obligation for a bridegroom and those who have consecrated wives, built houses, and planted vineyards to rejoice in their new status for one year
19. Prohibition against asking those mentioned in previous category to perform these duties
20. Obligation not to be fightened in battle
21. Prohibitions and obligations regarding the yefat toar
22. Prohibition of abusing yefat toar and subjugating her etc
23. Recognize gerim tzadikim who fulfill commandments given to adam
   a. Prohibition against worship of false gods
   b. Prohibition of cursing God
   c. Prohibition against murder
   d. Prohibition against incest and adultery
   e. Prohibition against theft
   f. Command to establish laws and courts of justice with fair true verdicts and not miscarriages of justice based on for example circumstantial evidence and false witnesses
In chapter 11 Rambam notes in the future a messianic king will arise and renew the Davidic dynasty restoring it to initial sovereignty and bring down the beit HaMikdash and ingather those hutz li-aretz.

Intellectual virtue he notes that the occupation of intellectual matters above all and the attainment of knowledge and wisdom of the sages and of the Book of the Torah will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. As rambam cherishes sharei binah.

Statutues of halakhah based on biblical law will not be nullified and return to their previous state thus we will see korbanot, shemita, yovel, according to details of torah shebal peh on the torah.

To skip forward in the MT. Rambam in ch. 12 notes that Hazal teaches there will be no difference between the current age and the messianic era except emancipation from our subjugation to the enemies of Israel. The war of gag and magog may take place at the beginning of the messianic age when it dwawns but its setting will be in peace (see Ramban on the calculations of the 7 worlds each world lasting 7000 years, and the doctrine of grand yovel based on sefirat ha-omer ie in the year 50,000 is the sharei binah.

In the end the messianic era will have neither famine or war, envy (ayn ha-rah) or completion for good will will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. As rambam cherishes intellectual matters above all and the attainment of intellectual virtue he notes that the occupation of
the entire world will be solely to know G-d. Therefore the Jews will be great scholar sages and know the
hidden matters grasping the knowledge of their Creator according to the full extent of human potential
as Isaiah 11:9 states, “the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea”

מַהְווָה הַזְּמֵנות לֹא יִזְכֹּר לָא לְאָל מַלוּךְ. לֹא כִּקָּם וָתַחֲרֹת. שָׁחַחְתָּבָהוּ הָזֶה מְשַׁפְּעָתָוּ. לֹא הָזֶה עָשָׂה לָא נְאוֹלָה אֲלֵה לַעֲשָׂה הַזָּהְבָּה.
לְוִיפִּיךָ לֹא יְשַׁלְּאוּ חֲכָמִית דּוֹלִית וַיָּשֶׁר בָּרֹם
הַשׁוֹטְטוֹבוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּעָתָוּ הָזֶה כּוֹמִי לִי מִכְסָיו.

The way to this realized dream in thought is the study of Jewish law.

We thus conclude with the following Hasidic master at his moment of departure.

The elder of Ujhel Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum’s last words were to be granted to hear David's mystical
harp make music from the breeze (maseket Berachot; see power point on King David) but the heavenly
court honored the Tzadik with an angelic sermon that continues until the redeemer "mashiach ben
David" comes. Some of david’s last acts are to remember those who served as mighty soldiers in his
army and did good to the state

Yet these are not david’s last words of ethical will and testimony to his son Shlomo. We thus seek
instruction from King david’s last words. When we consider the significant last words of King David who
tells his son Solomon to take justified revenge as a real politique against his enemies unjust and cruel
acts, Shimi ben Gera and Yoab midah kineged midah, we find no invocation in “forgiveness and
reconciliation” but rather recognition that as David won the kingship as determined by Shmuel for
knowing how to wipe out Amalek, so to in death King David wins the kingship of heaven by knowing
when forgiveness and reconciliation for the good of the state of Israel cannot be have their limits if
there is to be true justice and ultimate peace. Memory and unforgetting the injustice done to us by our
enemies is the placeholder of moral accountability that affirms justice and responsibility. Yoab had
wronged David by murdering David’s general Avner. Yoab dropped his dagger as a decoy and Avner as a
decent trusting individual bent down to pick up the dagger. Thereupon Yoav treacherously grabbed
Abner by his beard and killed him with the dagger. Deception and worse making state of the Kingdom of
Israel berift of a great military leader like Avner whose security depended on his mightiness and
intelligence was something David could not forget. Thus we learn from the last words:

1 Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die;
and he charged Solomon his son, saying:

2 'I go the way of all the earth; be thou strong
therefore, and show thyself a man;

3 and keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to
walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His ordinances, and His testimo
nies, according to that which is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest,
and whithersoever thou turnest thyself;

4 that the LORD may establish His word which He spoke
concerning me, saying: If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee, said He, a man on the throne of Israel.

Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did unto me, even what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet.

1 Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.

7 But show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table; for so they drew nigh unto me when I fled from Absalom thy brother.

9 Now therefore hold him not guiltless, for thou art a wise man; and thou wilt know what thou oughtest to do unto him, and thou shalt bring his hoar head down to the grave with blood.

10 And David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.
10 he stood firm, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand did cleave unto the sword; and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to strip the slain. {S}

11 And after him was Shammah the son of Age the Ararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a plot of ground full of lentils; and the people fled from the Philistines.

12 But he stood in the midst of the plot, and defended it, and slew the Philistines; and the LORD wrought a great victory. {S}

13 And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam; and the troop of the Philistines were far from me, O LORD, that I should do this; shall I drink of the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?' therefore he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD.

14 And David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Beth-lehem.

15 And David longed, and said: 'Oh that one would give me water to drink of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate!' {S}

16 And the three mighty men broke through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that was by the gate, and brought it to David: but he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD.

17 And he said: 'Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this; shall I drink the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?' therefore he would not drink it. These things did the three mighty men. {S}

18 And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of the three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred and slew them, and had a name among the three.

19 He was most honourable of the three; therefore he was made their captain; howbeit he attained not unto the first three. {S}

20 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man of Kabzeel, who had done mighty deeds, he smote the two Edomites with an ox goad.

21 And he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow; and another time there was a wall fallen upon him; and he drew his spear, and went down into it; and therein he smote it through the wall with his spear, and brought it up again: therefore he was called Slaughter.

22 These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had a name among the three mighty men.

23 He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three. And David set him over his guard.