

TENSION REGARDING THE STATUS OF THE ZADDIK'S BODY:
THE STORIES ABOUT THE BA'AL 'AHAVAT ISRAEL' FROM VIZNITZ

Yakir Englander

One of the roles of the 'Zaddik's Stories' genre is to describe the life of the Zaddik for the Hasidim. The Hasid learns to know his teacher by the 'Gaze' at his body, since his soul is hidden from the Hasid's gaze. For this reason, it is important to examine how the editors of this genre describe the Tzaddik's body, descriptions which are the core of the stories. From the stories one can learn that the Zaddik exists simultaneously in two incompatible spaces. On the one hand, he leads his community and lives according to the way of life of the Hasidim. On the other hand, he lives in the sphere of Zaddikim, a way of life that does not follow conventional social structures or even the laws of nature.

The stories use the descriptions of the Zaddik's body in order to emphasize this gap between him and his Hasidim. However, the image of the Zaddik's body gives an opportunity for the Hasidim to touch his world, at least for a short while. From the stories we learn that the connection between the Hasidim and their Rebbe is material: the Zaddik's body and other physical objects that are connected to him (clothing, tobacco). Thus, Hasidic Judaism emphasizes that humans are first of all physical/corporeal beings.