

of Eastern Europe, attracting a large following. His disciples, called Chasidim (pious ones), turned away from intense Torah study and instead worshiped God with exultant singing and dancing.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that Jewish religion was not controlled by a learned elite, but belonged to every Jew; the prayers of an ignorant goat herder and a learned rabbi were equal in God's eyes. Such teachings infuriated traditional rabbis who believed the Baal Shem Tov was undermining respect for Torah learning as well as their own elevated status. The battle which ensued tore families apart.

Chasidism continued to spread after the Baal Shem Tov's death, prompting the scholarly Gaon of Vilna to convene a rabbinic court and declare the excommunication of the Chasidic leader. Candles were lit in the synagogue and solemnly extinguished, the shofar was blown, and a prayer of anathema denouncing the Baal Shem was read aloud. Nevertheless, Chasidism expanded through much of Central and Eastern Europe.

Despite the dissension Chasidism caused and the increase in superstitious

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Peachy and Mark Levy are passionate about the future of Jewish youth. That is why they established the Peachy and Mark Levy Scholarship Fund and Festival of the Arts at Camp Newman and were instrumental in the creation of Camp Kalsman in the Pacific Northwest. "These Jewish immersion experiences transmit Jewish values and ideals while youth enjoy the camp experience," according to Mark.

The Levys' generosity has touched thousands of young lives and the many notes they have received from campers and their families express how much the scholarships and programs have meant to them. They know they are making a difference and strengthening our Jewish future.

The URJ is extremely grateful to Peachy and Mark Levy for their many contributions to the Reform Movement, and especially to our youth and our future. May they go from strength to strength.



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