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'Arvei Nahal' –Popular Jewish Galician Homiletic Literature, its

Character and the Cultural Trends it reflects

Rabbi David Shlomo Eybeschuetz (1755-1813) was a halakhic figure, a kabbalist and a preacher who served as a rabbi in the communities of Chorostkow and Budzanow of eastern Galicia and in Soroca, Serbia; and then made his way to Safed, Israel, where he died and was buried. He is considered one of the more prominent *poskim* (halakhic decisors) of his time, and his book '*Levushei Serad*' became one of the most important and useful ones for the teaching of the halakhic rules of kosher slaughter, ritual salting of meat, the separation of meat and milk, libation wine, menstrual laws, usury and more. His method of *psika* is characterized by intellectual keenness and daring, and he does not hesitate to diverge from the opinions of earlier *poskim*. The '*Levushei Serad*' on additional topics was printed in Rabbi Yosef Karo's *Shulchan Arukh* after Rabbi Eybeschuetz's death, but many of his writings still remain in manuscript form.

Rabbi Eybeschuetz was also among the first leaders of the Hasidic movement. He brings many of the Hasidic founders' teachings in his sermons and makes extensive use of Kabbalistic literature in his work. Rabbi Eybeschuetz' '*Arvei Nahal*' became one of the most popular and best-selling books in Poland and Galicia in the 19th century. From its first printing in Sedilkov in 1825 until the beginning of the 20th century the book was printed about fifteen times, mainly in Galicia.

This book of homilies is composed of sermons in synagogue given by Rabbi Eybeschuetz, and would appear to reflect some of the prevalent philosophical and cultural thoughts of his time. The homilies contained in the book are, on the whole,

directed at a learned audience, capable of learning and conversant with the terminology and basic concepts of both halakha and Kabbalah. However, one can also find Kabbalistic teachings that are accompanied by explanations and parables, simple halakhic rulings and folkloristic material, obviously intended for additional strata of society.

The incorporation of fanciful stories and explanatory parables and the inclusion of messages intended to connect a simple, unsophisticated audience to ideas hitherto shared only by an elite, express the connection between the spiritual, learned elite and the simple Jew, and the influence exercised by the former over the latter. In addition, it is reasonable to presume that the wide circulation of the book was, in part, due to a popular adoration of Rabbi Eybeschuetz, who was a kind of cultural 'star' of his time. It is therefore apparent that Rabbi Eybeschuetz' image plays an important part in the understanding of the cultural makeup of Galicia's Jews, from a philosophical, cultural and social point of view, and that an examination of '*Arvei Nahal*' is therefore important for the study of the Galician Jewry of his time.