

"Chilzonim" and "Anti-Chilzonim": A New Look at the *Tekhelet* Controversy at the End of the Nineteenth Century

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The disputes that stirred the rabbinic world in Eastern Europe during the last quarter of the 19th century were a key expression of the establishment of Jewish Orthodoxy during that era. Alongside debates between traditionalist circles and Maskilim (the most famous being the controversy over religious reforms), there were also internal Orthodox disputes. The most notable among these, which have been discussed in scholarly research, include the controversy over Corfu etrogim and the Shemitah debate. These disputes reflected the prominent status of Jewish Orthodoxy as a cultural phenomenon that influenced all layers of traditional Jewish society.¹

One such internal Orthodox controversy was the debate over the initiative to restore the mitzvah of *Tekhelet* by the Hasidic leader Gershon Henoch Leiner of Radzyn (1839–1891; hereafter, Leiner)². The Radzyn Hasidic dynasty was an offshoot of the Pshischa-Kotzk Hasidic tradition.

¹ *The article originated from two lectures. The first was delivered at the conference "*The Study of Polish Jewry and Its Culture: New Trends*," held at Bar-Ilan University on December 17, 2012, and the second was given at the Open University on December 11, 2013. I thank the attendees of these lectures for their questions and comments. I am also grateful to David Assaf, Uriel Gelman, and Shmuel Tefilinsky. Each contributed in their own way, whether through reading, advice, or pointing me to sources I had overlooked.

For the processes of the formation of Jewish Orthodoxy in 19th-century Eastern Europe, see for example: Yosef Salmon, "*Im Ta'iru ve'Im Te'or'ru: Orthodoxy in the Straits of Nationalism*," Jerusalem, 2006; Mordechai Zalkin, "*'Artadachsi Ha'Ir'? On the Question of the Existence of Orthodoxy in 19th-Century Lithuania*," in Yosef Salmon, Aviezer Ravitzky, and Adam Ferziger (eds.), *Jewish Orthodoxy: New Perspectives*, Jerusalem, 2006, pp. 427–446; Yehuda Friedlander, "*Halacha in Its Correction or Judaism at Risk? The Controversy of Moshe Leib Lilienblum, Yehiel Michel Pines, and Rabbi Yosef Zecharia Stern*," *Identities*, 1 (2012), pp. 21–39.

² In recent years, the figure of Leiner has received increasing attention from scholars who have also highlighted the centrality of the *Tekhelet* controversy:

- Shaul Magid, "*A Thread of Blue: Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner of Radzyń and his Search for Continuity in Response to Modernity*," *Polin*, 11 (1998), pp. 31–52.
- Idem., *Hasidism on the Margin: Reconciliation, Antinomianism, and Messianism*, Madison, 2003.
- Shimon Fogel, "*The Literary Activity of Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner of Radzyń*," *Da'at*, 68–69 (2010), pp. 149–185.

Leiner's grandfather, Rav Mordechai Yosef (1800–1854), was a student of Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk but broke away in 1839 to establish a new court in Izbica, which later moved to Radzyn. In the late 1880s, Leiner surprised many in Eastern European Jewish society by announcing that he had succeeded in restoring the Torah commandment (Bamidbar 15:37–40) to include a “thread of *Tekhelet*” in the tzitzis. This mitzvah had not been practiced in its original form for centuries, during which time Jews wore white strings exclusively due to the inability to meet the Talmudic requirement (Tosefta Menachos 9:6) of deriving the *Tekhelet* dye from a marine organism referred to as the *Chilazon*. Leiner claimed to have rediscovered the *Chilazon*, which had long been considered lost, and succeeded in extracting the desired *Tekhelet* dye from it.

Leiner's initiative to restore the mitzvah of *Tekhelet*, as one of the most prominent Hasidic leaders of the last third of the 19th century, was an exceptional event in Orthodox Judaism of the time, which emphasized avoiding innovations. This initiative also marked the first step in a long-term project to restore the mitzvah of *Tekhelet* within Orthodox Judaism—a restoration that only gained momentum in the second half of the 20th century, particularly from the 1980s onward, accompanied by extensive writings on the topic.³ Although Leiner pioneered a project that can be said to have ultimately succeeded, in his time, the renewal of *Tekhelet* provoked opposition and led to a controversy between supporters of the innovation and its detractors.

The halachic aspects of this debate have been extensively discussed, both in the context of writings on the Izbica-Radzyn Hasidic dynasty and in the broader literature on *Tekhelet*, which

Beyond these studies, the writing about Leiner has relied on Orthodox sources with a leaning toward Hasidism, especially:

- Yehuda Leib Levin, *The Admorim of Izhbitza*, Jerusalem, 1969.
- Shlomo Zalman Shraga'i, *On the Paths of Izhbitza-Radzyń Hasidism: Chapters on the Teachings of the Izhbitza-Radzyń Beit Midrash*, Vols. I–II, Jerusalem, 1972–1974.

Memoirs about his character:

- Yechiel Yeshaya Trunk, *Poland: Memories and Images* [Vol. I], Hebrew trans. Ezra Fleischer, Merhaviva, 1962, pp. 61–66.

³ For writing on *Tekhelet* in the 20th and 21st centuries, see:

- Gadi Sagiv, “Deep Blue: Notes on the Jewish Chilazon Fight,” *Contemporary Jewry*, 35 (2015), pp. 285–313.

A prominent example of writing on *Tekhelet* within the context of Orthodox attempts to renew the mitzvah:

- Baruch Stermann (with Judy Taubes-Stermann), *The Rarest Blue: The Remarkable Story of an Ancient Color Lost to History and Rediscovered*, translated by Tzur Ehrlich, Tel Aviv, 2014.

For a critique of this book:

- Gadi Sagiv, *Haaretz Books*, March 28, 2014, pp. 10–11.

accompanies efforts to restore the mitzvah. Various writers—scholars, Hasidim, and religious enthusiasts of *Tekhelet*—have noted the sharpness of the controversy.⁴ However, even those who wrote about *Tekhelet* and highlighted the intensity of the dispute primarily focused on its halachic dimensions, often presenting them as ahistorical summaries of various rabbinic positions regarding Radzyn's *Tekhelet*⁵, while neglecting its historical and social aspects. Furthermore, the limited writings on the *Tekhelet* controversy are largely based on a few halachic responsa, Leiner's own writings (mainly his book *Eyn HaTekhelet*), and two Hasidic biographies (by Shragai and Levin), which themselves heavily rely on Leiner's writings. Sources from outside the Orthodox camp—especially reports on the matter in contemporary newspapers—have not been studied.

This article, therefore, focuses on the historical-social dimensions of the *Tekhelet* controversy. It turns out that while the debate began within the framework of halachic discourse, it expanded beyond the confines of this elite framework into the "Jewish street," meaning daily conflicts within communities in the Lublin region. These conflicts are described in contemporary Hebrew press but have not yet been examined. Additionally, similar events occurred in Jerusalem, but they too have not been studied. Previously unexplored sources enable a reinterpretation of existing materials concerning the halachic aspects, allowing for a richer picture of the controversy and new insights into its significance. Among these insights, I argue that the *Tekhelet* controversy held meanings that went beyond the halachic debate and the typical power struggles between different Hasidic factions of the 19th century. *Tekhelet* symbolized religious authenticity and social defiance for those who felt marginalized by the dominant majority.

Beyond the new sources and the fresh perspective I aim to provide on this controversy, it also offers insights into broader issues regarding Jewish society at the end of the 19th century: the functioning of Jewish Orthodoxy, internal Hasidic politics, and the role of the Jewish press. Moreover, understanding the 19th-century *Tekhelet* controversy helps shed light on the *Tekhelet*

⁴ In Orthodox writing on the Radzyn Hasidic dynasty, see:

- Shragai (cited above, note 2), vol. II, pp. 107, 120–123.
- Levin (cited above, note 2), p. 77.

In Orthodox writing on *Tekhelet*, see:

- Serman (cited above, note 3), pp. 115–116.

In academic research on Leiner, see:

- Magid 1998 (cited above, note 2), pp. 45–46.
- Fogel (cited above, note 2), pp. 153, 156, 161.

In memoir literature:

- Trunk, *Poland* (cited above, note 2), pp. 63–64.

⁵ See, for example: Menachem Burstein, *HaTekhelet*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 182–196.

movement within Jewish Orthodoxy in the second half of the 20th century and the disputes that arose within its framework.

1. The Initiative to Renew *Tekhelet* and the Emergence of the Controversy

The story of the *Tekhelet* initiative begins in 1887 when Rav Gershon Henoch Leiner published a work titled *Sefunei Temunei Chol*, in which he argued that the marine creature known as the "diunon harokachim" (*Sepia officinalis*, often referred to in Hebrew as the "ink fish") met all the halachic criteria attributed to the *Chilazon*. He announced his intent to renew the mitzvah of *Tekhelet* using pigment extracted from this species.⁶ In 1888, Leiner released a second book on the subject, *Psil Techeiles*, where he detailed how he had identified the *Chilazon* during a visit to Italy, acquired its secretions, and conducted initial experiments in dye production. This work also responded to some early criticisms leveled against his efforts.⁷ In 1891, shortly before his passing, Leiner's third book on *Tekhelet*, *Eyn HaTekhelet*, was published. In this work, he described further progress, including the move toward mass production and distribution of tzitzis dyed with *Tekhelet*. The central focus of this book, however, was a sharp polemic against his critics.⁸

Leiner's initiative to restore *Tekhelet* must be understood within broader Jewish and non-Jewish contexts of the 19th century. On the non-Jewish side, the period saw increasing scientific discussions about colors, advancements in dye manufacturing, and expanding knowledge of marine organisms used for pigmentation. Within the Jewish world, there was growing discourse on the revival of Temple services—which required the use of *Tekhelet*—often linked to proto-nationalist movements. While this article does not focus on the renewal of *Tekhelet* itself, but rather the controversy it sparked, it is noteworthy that Leiner's initiative lacked any overt nationalist or proto-nationalist motivations. This stands in contrast to many 20th-century proponents of *Tekhelet*, for whom its renewal became part of a broader religious-nationalist-messianic vision. Although Leiner framed *Tekhelet* as a symbol of redemption and one of the prerequisites for the arrival of Moshiach, this aspect did not seem central to his agenda, nor did the Land of Israel play a prominent role as the source of *Tekhelet* or as a focal point for its restoration. This lack of nationalist underpinnings is also reflected in the *Tekhelet* debates of his time, which showed no evidence of disputes based on differing stances toward nationalism.

Alongside these general contexts for the renewal of *Tekhelet*, it is important to briefly examine Leiner's personality and other controversies in which he was involved. An amateur

⁶ Gershon Henoch Leiner, *Ma'amar Shufuni Temunei Chol*, Warsaw 1887. The book was printed twice in the same year. The purpose of the book is stated on the title page of both editions. The references below are according to the New York 1952 edition, which is a photolithographic reprint of the Lublin 1904 edition. The title of the book is based on Moses' blessing to the tribe of Zebulun (*Deuteronomy* 33:19), according to various traditions—within the sands of its shores lies the *Chilazon*.

⁷ Gershon Henoch Leiner, *Ma'amar Psil Techeiles*, Warsaw 1888. The references below are according to the New York 1952 edition, which is a photolithographic reprint of the Lublin 1904 edition. The purpose of the work is described there, p. 3.

⁸ Gershon Henoch Leiner, *Ma'amar Eyn HaTekhelet*, Warsaw 1892, pp. 30–31.

psychological profile of Leiner is found in the memoirs of Yiddish author Yechiel Yeshaya Trunk (1887–1961), whose father had a close personal acquaintance with Leiner.⁹ Trunk described Leiner's defining traits as follows:

"Rav Gershon Henoah was a revolutionary out of step with his time, whose temperament found no proper outlet. Consequently—a psychological principle!—his revolutionary tendencies turned into exaggerated ambitions, albeit marked by naivete and amateurishness. The bitter frustration stemming from his unfulfilled sense of greatness manifested in his deeds, words, and writings. Without a doubt, Rav Gershon Henoah was extraordinarily talented—perhaps even a genius. However, his ambition overpowered everything else. His undertakings, fundamentally amateurish, aimed at creating an external impression, elevating him above his peers, and, above all, emulating his grandfather. He meticulously sought to ensure that all his actions were distinct, original, and groundbreaking—especially provocative—so as to demonstrate his superiority over all the rabbanim and rebbes in Poland. Above all, his goal was to astonish and captivate. When he provoked his fiercest opponents, it only fueled his ambitions, as their hatred served as oil for the fire of his aspirations."¹⁰

While Trunk's assessment is based on one person's later impressions, it is undeniable that Leiner was an innovator who sparked opposition and did not shy away from controversy. An earlier example of his innovation combined with controversy can be seen in his work *Seder Taharos*, a compilation of Talmudic passages on the Order of Taharos, accompanied by commentaries from the Rishonim. The first part of this work, dealing with Maseches Keilim, was published in 1873 and provoked controversy within Orthodox Jewish circles in Eastern Europe due to its external format, which resembled a Talmudic tractate. As a result, some rabbanim who had endorsed the first volume refused to give approbations for the second part, dealing with Maseches Ohalos, which was only printed in 1903 after Leiner's passing.¹¹ The controversy surrounding *Seder Taharos* highlighted Leiner's polemical temperament, which, as will be shown, played an indirect but significant role in the *Tekhelet* controversy.

Another polemical context relevant to our discussion is the conflicts between the Radzyn Hasidic dynasty and other Hasidic groups. Long-standing hostility existed between the Kotzk and Izhbitza-Radzyn Hasidic dynasties, stemming from Rabbi Mordechai Yosef, the grandfather of Rabbi Gershon Henoah Leiner, leaving the Kotzk court. This act was perceived as an unforgivable betrayal or rebellion. In contrast to Izhbitza-Radzyn, the founder of the Ger Hasidic dynasty, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter—who was also a disciple of the Kotzker Rebbe—established his court only after his teacher's passing. Therefore, Ger was not seen as a competitor to Kotzk but rather as its successor, and it, too, was considered a rival to Radzyn.

⁹ Trunk's father was the grandson of Rabbi Yisrael Yehoshua Trunk of Kutno, who had connections with Leiner. The father told his son, Yechiel Yeshaya, about his close acquaintance with the tzaddik.

¹⁰ Trunk, *Poland* (see note 2 above), pp. 61-62.

¹¹ Shragai (see note 2 above), vol. I, pp. 153-155; vol. II, pp. 141-145; Chaim Karlinsky, *The First of the Brisk Dynasty: The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik zt"l*, Jerusalem Institute Edition, Jerusalem 2004, pp. 253-264.

To this social tension, one must add possible differences in ethos and style between Radzyn Hasidism and other Polish Hasidic groups. Some scholars describe the teachings of Radzyn's leaders as expressing an antinomian ethos (or more precisely, a hypernomian ethos, characterized by excessive stringency in halachic observance) that sets them apart from the ethos of surrounding Hasidic groups.¹² In contrast to this tendency, another view identifies significant similarities between Radzyn and the Hasidic groups from which it branched.^{13,14} In any case, it is clear that there was deep hostility between Radzyn Hasidim and the Hasidim of Kotzk and Ger—a hostility that manifested in disputes between Hasidim in various communities¹⁵ and became entangled in the conflicts over the *Tekhelet*.

Leiner, while an Orthodox leader, was also interested in science and secular knowledge,¹⁶ as reflected in his writings on *Tekhelet*. For example, in the introduction to *Psil Techeiles*, Leiner summarized what scientists and historians knew about dyeing with marine creatures, referencing the histories of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome.¹⁷ While it is unclear whether he directly read these sources or relied on intermediary popular articles published in newspapers such as *HaTzefirah*, it is evident that Leiner harnessed historical and scientific knowledge to advance the revival of a religious ritual.

Additionally, Leiner was a wealthy individual who owned a liquor distillery in Izbica and Radzyn, traded in wines, etrogim, and timber, and, as will be discussed, incorporated a commercial aspect into the *Tekhelet* renewal. His financial stability enabled him to embark on journeys and publish his books without limitations. Though Leiner and his biographers presented his travels to Italy as a quest to locate the *Chilazon*, it is worth noting that his family regularly traveled to Italy to purchase etrogim. Thus, his visit to Naples may have been part of his routine etrog acquisitions rather than solely a *Chilazon* expedition.

Early critiques of Leiner's *Tekhelet* initiative appeared following the publication of *Sefunei Temunei Chol*, as noted in his responses in *Psil Techeiles*. Leiner's approach exemplified his willingness to engage in halachic, scientific, and communal disputes, reinforcing his role as a polarizing yet influential figure within Orthodox Judaism.

The longstanding hostility between Kotzk and Izbica-Radzyn Hasidic groups stemmed from Rav Mordechai Yosef, the grandfather of Rav Gershon Henschel Leiner, breaking away from the Kotzk court. This act was viewed as an unforgivable betrayal or rebellion. Unlike Izbica-Radzyn, the founder of the Ger Hasidic dynasty, Rav Yitzchak Meir Alter, who was also a student of the Kotzker Rebbe, established his court only after the Kotzker Rebbe's passing. Consequently, Ger

¹² Magid 2003 (see note 2 above), pp. 205-248. On the connection between antinomianism and hypernomianism in Izhbitza Hasidism and in Jewish mysticism in general, see *ibid.*, pp. 352-353.

¹³ Morris M. Fairstein, "Kotzk-Izbica dispute: Theological or Personal?" *Kabbalah* 17 (2008): 75-79

¹⁴ On the connection between antinomianism and hypernomianism in Izhbitza Hasidism and Jewish mysticism in general, see: Magid 2003 (cited in note 2 above), pp. 207-225, 352-353.

¹⁵ See, for example: *HaMelitz*, July 22, 1879, p. 590.

¹⁶ Magid 1998 (see note 2 above), p. 42.

¹⁷ For Leiner's testimony about things he read: *Psil Techeiles* (see note 7 above), pp. 6-7. On the connections in the *Tekhelet* controversy between science, religion, and colors, see: Sagiv (see note 3 above).

was not seen as a competitor to Kotzk but rather as its continuation, while it too became a rival of Radzyn.

Adding to this social tension were potential differences in ethos and style between Radzyn and other Polish Hasidic courts. Some researchers describe the teachings of Radzyn's leaders as reflecting an antinomian ethos—or more precisely, a hypernomian one—striving for extreme halachic stringency. This differentiated them from other Hasidic groups in their social and cultural environment. However, other perspectives highlight similarities between Radzyn and the Hasidic courts from which it emerged. Regardless of these interpretations, there was clearly deep hostility between Radzyn Hasidim and those of Kotzk and Ger, which often manifested in communal disputes, some of which became intertwined with the controversies over *Tekhelet*.

Although Leiner was an Orthodox leader, he showed a keen interest in science and secular knowledge. This interest is evident in his writings on *Tekhelet*. For example, in the introduction to *Psil Techeiles*, Leiner sought to summarize what scientists and historians had discovered about dyeing with marine creatures, referencing ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome. However, due to the lack of precise citations, it is unclear whether he directly read these works or relied on intermediary sources such as popular scientific articles published regularly in *HaTzefirah*, a newspaper familiar to Leiner and his followers. Even with this caveat, it is evident that Leiner utilized historical and scientific knowledge to advance the revival of this religious ritual.

Leiner was also a wealthy man. He leased the *propinacja* (liquor distillation rights) in Izbica and Radzyn, traded in wines, etrogim,¹⁸ timber, and transportation.¹⁹ As will become clear later, the renewal of *Tekhelet* also had a commercial aspect. It is important to highlight his favorable financial situation because his wealth enabled him to realize his innovative ventures. Regarding *Tekhelet*: it allowed him to embark on his journeys and print his books quickly and without constraints on scope.

Moreover, Leiner himself and his biographers portrayed his journey to Italy as one intended to find the *Chilazon*.²⁰ Leiner's physical journey thus became a metaphor for the broader journey—both physical and spiritual—towards realizing the halachic vision of renewing *Tekhelet*. This also amplified Leiner's image as unique among Orthodox rabbis, who generally did not travel abroad like tourists to discover innovations.

Without dismissing Leiner's strong desire to find the *Chilazon* for *Tekhelet*, it should be noted that the press reported that Leiner traveled to Italy annually to purchase *etrogim*.²¹ Therefore, it is possible that the journey to Naples was part of his family's routine activity in acquiring *etrogim* for the Radzyn dynasty.

¹⁸ *HaMelitz*, June 10, 1879, p. 453.

¹⁹ *HaMelitz*, July 8, 1879, pp. 538–539.

²⁰ According to Leiner: *Psil Techeiles* (see note 7 above), p. 3. For an example from chroniclers of the episode: Sterman (see note 3 above), p. 113.

²¹ *HaMelitz*, June 10, 1879, p. 453.

The first critiques of Leiner's *Tekhelet* initiative emerged after the publication of his first work, *Sefunei Temunei Chol*. Leiner addressed these criticisms in *Psil Techeiles*, dedicating a chapter, "Sha'ar HaTeshuvah," to his responses.²² Additionally, two polemical works were published in 1888 specifically targeting Leiner's first two books.

The first critiques of Leiner's *Tekhelet* initiative were presented to him after the publication of his first work on the subject, *Sefunei Temunei Chol*. This can be learned from Leiner's own words in his second work, *Psil Techeiles*, where he dedicated a chapter — *Sha'ar HaTeshuva (The Gate of Response)* — to answering his critics. Additionally, two works can be identified that were printed as early as 1888 (*Teremach*) and were dedicated to polemicizing against Leiner's first two works.

The work likely written first is *Bittul HaRishon LeMa'amar*, authored by a resident of Radzyn named Yosef Eliezer Buchhalter.²³ In his introduction, he indeed opened with deferential remarks towards Leiner and emphasized that he did not intend to provoke. However, it becomes clear that he knew Leiner personally and feared being pursued by him, as Leiner had pursued his other opponents.²⁴ Buchhalter also acknowledged his inferiority compared to Leiner's knowledge of the natural world, which was made possible by Leiner's wealth.²⁵ Yet, despite this, he decided to oppose him (and it is not unlikely that more powerful opponents of the Radzyn Hasidic movement stood behind him).

In general, Buchhalter did not present a fundamental argument against Leiner but instead addressed specific claims made in *Sefunei Temunei Chol* regarding the identification of the *Chilazon* and the feasibility of renewing the mitzvah of *Tekhelet* in tzitzit. Only towards the end of the work does it become clear that the reason for his writing was not the halachic arguments themselves but their social implications. While, in Buchhalter's view, Leiner's *Sidrei Taharot* often included "nonsense interpretations," this work was primarily literary and scholarly. In contrast, *Sefunei Temunei Chol* represented the first step in the practical project of renewing the mitzvah of *Tekhelet*, with the ultimate goal being for all of Israel to fulfill this mitzvah together. Buchhalter believed this mitzvah should not be observed because Leiner erred in his claims,

²² Leiner, *Psil Techeiles* (see note 7 above), pp. 119-166.

²³ Yosef Eliezer [Buchhalter], *Bittul HaRishon LeMa'amar*, Warsaw 1888. Information about his family name and his status as the son-in-law of R. Menachem Mendel, Av Beit Din of Radzyn, can be learned from the title page and the approbation given to his second work, *Sovaḥ Simchot*, Warsaw 1898, p. 4.

²⁴ "This author wrote in his work that he is 'pursued without respite,' yet he is not pursued but rather a pursuer, and not a pursuer of the mitzvah of *Tekhelet*, as can be seen from his words, but one who causes damage in everything (*leshadi tikla bekulei*), and blessed is the One who did not deliver me as prey to his teeth" (*Bittul HaRishon LeMa'amar*, introduction).

Leiner's statement that he is 'pursued without respite' appears in *Sefunei Temunei Chol* (see note 6 above), p. 3.

²⁵ "For indeed, I do not possess knowledge of the natural sciences like the author of *Sefunei Temunei Chol*, for he roams to the ends of the earth, as there is no limit to the treasures he constantly spends to investigate the natural world" (*Bittul HaRishon LeMa'amar* [see note 14 above], p. 19).

and he may have even hinted at the view that renewing *Tekhelet* constitutes a premature attempt to hasten the Messianic redemption (*dechikat haketz*).²⁶

Another polemical work from the year 1888 was the essay *Tekhelet Mei'ei Elisha*, published in the literary anthology *Otzar HaSifrut*. This piece was described as “a critique and strong protest against the *Tekhelet* project of the esteemed Rav and innovator from Radzyn in general, and against his two works on the matter, *Sefunei Temunei Chol* and *Psil Techeiles*, in particular.”²⁷ The essay was authored by Rav Mordechai Rabinowitz, a scholar from the town of Skidel in White Russia. Rabinowitz occasionally wrote for *HaTzefirah* and was acquainted with its editor, Chaim Zelig Slonimsky. He later became the secretary of Agudas Yisroel in Frankfurt, which may hint at his affiliation with the Ger Hasidic dynasty, known for its hostility toward Radzyn).²⁸

In the introduction to his critique, Rabinowitz wrote that Leiner's *Tekhelet* is not a revival of an ancient tradition of *Tekhelet* from the Land of Israel but rather a new *Tekhelet* originating from Italy. In doing so, Leiner invented a new commandment, basing his claims on a distorted interpretation of the words of Chazal. However, like Buchhalter, the immediate reason for Rabinowitz's critique, which he presented at the beginning of his work, was not focused on the halachic arguments themselves, that is, not on the specifics of the innovation, but on how the innovation was presented—namely, the liberty Leiner took upon himself to rule on halacha and proceed to practical implementation without obtaining the approval of the leading Torah authorities of his generation. According to him, this demonstrated that Leiner was not genuinely interested in the renewal of halacha, and from this, Rabinowitz concluded that the *Tekhelet* initiative was nothing more than “*da'at yachid* (a lone opinion) and a matter of *private commerce*, nothing more!”²⁹ Rabinowitz continued to criticize the *Tekhelet* initiative on various points, and towards the conclusion, he summarized the discussion:

“How astonishing is the rabbi, the author, who innovates with his *Tekhelet* initiative, as I have explained in the previous chapters. Surely, he must have seen and realized in his heart that the matter of *Tekhelet* is far beyond him, and that it is exceedingly difficult to render a just ruling on such a subject, especially since in every direction he turned, he encountered nothing but opposition to his endeavor! After all, the Talmud explicitly states that the *Chilazon* is found only in the Land of Israel, in the portion of Zebulun; according to the *Zohar*, its location is in the Sea of Galilee; and according to the Rambam, its place is in the Dead Sea. Yet, the innovating author validates it even from the Isles of Elisha

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 39. It is possible to understand his concluding remarks not merely as a ceremonious ending, but as an allusion that the mitzvah of *Tekhelet* is destined to be renewed only after the rebuilding of the Temple, and one should not attempt to introduce it out of order before its construction: ‘May it be the will of our Father in Heaven to establish our Holy Temple speedily in our days, and may all the goodness, commandments, and statutes return to their proper place as in the beginning’ (*ibid.*, p. 40).”

²⁷ Mordechai Rabinowitz, “*Tekhelet Mei'ei Elisha*,” *Otzar HaSifrut*, II (1888), Critiques, pp. 1–26. The title of the work is based on the verse fragment, “*Tekhelet va'Argaman mei'ei Elisha*” (*Ezekiel* 27:7). In Targum Yonasan, “*Elisha*” is rendered as “*Italia*”, indeed the place where Leiner encountered the squid.

²⁸ On Mordechai Rabinowitz of Skidel: Nachum Sokolow, *Sefer Zikaron le-Sofrei Yisrael ha-Chayim Itanu ha-Yom*, Warsaw 1889, pp. 201–202; Moshe Shalom Stol, *Darkei Shalom*, Riga 1930, pp. 252–282. An example of his dialogue with the editor of *HaTzefira*: *HaTzefira*, May 17, 1881, p. 143.

²⁹ *Tekhelet Mei'eyei Elisha* (see note 18 above), p. 2. The emphases appear in the original.

(Italy)! Consequently, he is forced to reject and oppose the opinions of the Talmud, the *Zohar*, and the Rambam, or at the very least, reinterpret them in a manner that effectively nullifies their straightforward meaning!

Regarding the dyeing process of *Tekhelet*, as is well known, it should result in a *b'lah* color (*blue*), but his process yielded a *black* appearance! Furthermore, the testing of the *Tekhelet* also failed him. For, according to the beauty and durability of the *Tekhelet* color as understood by Chazal, and according to his own admission, his *Tekhelet* entirely loses its color when exposed to the tests of *borit* (*alkaline solution*) and *sa'ad* (*acid solution*), and even under sunlight! In truth, we are not experts in the ingredients required for the *Tekhelet* dye, nor in the testing process, as both the Rambam and the *Tiferet Yisrael* have written. Yet, the innovating author toiled and concluded that the appearance of *Tekhelet* should be *black*, and that he is more knowledgeable about testing and ingredients than the Rambam and the *Tiferet Yisrael*!

However, as seems apparent from the end of his words, the innovating author became aware of all this and feared for his commercial interests lest they suffer harm as a result. Despite his immense efforts and fiery zeal to validate even the *Tekhelet* from the Isles of Elisha and to establish it as *Tekhelet de'oraita* (*biblically mandated Tekhelet*), he approached us indirectly (in his second treatise) and, to dispel the doubts of those hesitating, issued a stringent ruling of his own accord, basing it on the principle of *safek de'oraita lechumra* (*a biblical doubt requires stringency by Torah law*)!"³⁰

Rabinowitz's main argument is that Leiner himself implicitly admits that the *Tekhelet* he produced does not meet the basic halachic criteria, and therefore he expands or softens the interpretation of those requirements. He also criticizes Leiner's assertion that even if the *Tekhelet* is not authentic, it is still valid. According to Rabinowitz, the fact that Leiner remains open to two contradictory possibilities—first, that the dyed thread is *Tekhelet*, and second, that it is merely considered white—proves that Leiner's goal is not the revival of the mitzvah of *Tekhelet*, but rather the validation of his *Tekhelet* at any cost, so that he can profit from its trade.

The early critiques of Leiner's *Tekhelet* initiative, as reflected in his second book, *Psil Techeiles*, and in the works of Buchhalter and Rabinowitz, can be summarized into four primary arguments against the renewal of *Tekhelet*:

1. Disagreement over the identification of the *Chilazon*, given the contradictory descriptions of its location and physical characteristics in traditional sources.
2. Debate over the feasibility or legitimacy of restoring the mitzvah in light of traditions asserting that *Tekhelet* would remain hidden until the coming of Mashiach.
3. Criticism of the practical results of the dyeing process, including the black hue of the dye (rather than blue) and its lack of durability, failing to meet Chazal's criteria for *Tekhelet*.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 22-23

4. Concerns about societal division (*lo sisgodedu*), fearing that adopting divergent practices would lead to communal fragmentation.³¹
5. Objection to the lack of consultation with the leading rabbinic authorities of the generation regarding such a significant halachic innovation.

The stated purpose of Leiner's third work, *Eyn HaTekhelet*, published at the end of 1891, was to address all the questions and objections raised against him regarding *Tekhelet*. In this work, Leiner presented many of the criticisms directed at him and attempted to refute them. *Eyn HaTekhelet* is a comprehensive composition that includes fundamental discussions on *Tekhelet*, most of which are halachic and a minority of which are kabbalistic. A detailed analysis of this work falls beyond the scope of the present discussion, so here we will limit ourselves to a few observations regarding the book's introduction, where Leiner focuses less on halachic arguments and expands on the polemical dynamics.

The rhetoric and style of *Eyn HaTekhelet* reflect Leiner's polemical temperament and considerable self-confidence. At the outset of the introduction, he writes that his task is easier than he had anticipated since the arguments of his critics are simple to refute.³² Leiner derives his confidence, among other things, from his experience in the controversy over *Seder Taharos*, in which his opponents failed to defeat him.³³ He portrays his critics as being motivated by jealousy: jealousy of what he has written and personal jealousy of him, "because I have been elevated above them."³⁴ Leiner notes that he refrains from mentioning the names of those who addressed him, both questioners and objectors alike,³⁵ and for this reason, he does not explicitly identify the targets of his polemic. Nonetheless, it seems possible to discern two main groups: Hasidic leaders (*tzaddikim*) and non-Hasidic rabbinic authorities.

Regarding the *tzaddikim*, Leiner appears to allude to them in the following passage:

"I shall not speak of those with scant Torah knowledge who don garments of wool³⁶ and divide into various sects to glorify themselves, claiming that there is only one person in the generation who is worthy of the crown, and each one arrogantly presents himself as the man of the spirit, claiming that only he alone sees and knows the truth, and no one else. Only he knows beforehand all that occurs, and his followers alone hit the mark and align with the goal. How could any innovation occur in the world without first coming to him? If he admits the truth, he would lose his presumed righteousness. How could I expect him to withstand such a great test

³¹ On "*Lo Titgodedu*" in the history of Halakha: Yitzhak D. Gilat, *Chapters in the Development of Halakha*, Ramat Gan, 1992, pp. 161-180.

³² Leiner, *Eyn HaTekhelet* (see note 8 above), p. 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ It is possible that the reference is to the Hasidic *shtreimel*, but it is also possible that Leiner employed a common polemical expression aimed at the pretentiousness and hypocrisy associated with wearing a garment that signifies righteousness where such righteousness is absent. See Zechariah 13:4 and Rashi's commentary on the verse.

of admitting the truth, as it would diminish his honor and the splendor in the eyes of his Hasidim and admirers?"³⁷

If Leiner indeed intended this passage to refer to Hasidic *tzaddikim*, he highlighted their lack of Torah scholarship and their focus on leading their followers, who attribute to them abilities of mystical insight. Toward the end of the introduction, Leiner attacks those he calls "the holders of false honor," whom he describes with the following characteristics: they enrich themselves at the expense of simple people while claiming that all they take is solely for the sake of heaven; they control communities through their "holy instruments"; they receive economic privileges from the communities; and they are supported by laypeople. These critiques, reminiscent of Haskalah-era criticisms of the royal court-like behaviors of certain Hasidic leaders in the 19th century, reinforce the impression that Leiner was targeting contemporary Hasidic *tzaddikim*. This impression is further supported by Yechiel Yeshaya Trunk's account, where he notes that his father often heard Leiner express contempt for the *tzaddikim* of his time, even as Leiner refused to rely on the mechanisms of a Hasidic court.³⁸ Yet, despite his sharp criticism of the *tzaddikim*, it is important to note that Leiner stated his intention not to address them directly. Indeed, Leiner refrains from mentioning by name any *tzaddikim* who opposed him.

Leiner, while a Hasidic *tzaddik* who led followers and viewed himself as part of the Hasidic movement,³⁹ acted in the *Tekhelet* controversy as someone pursuing halachic rulings. While he cannot be strictly classified as a "posek-Admor,"⁴⁰ he may have seen himself as deserving inclusion among the poskim. Against this duality in his character—as both a rabbi focused on halachah and a Hasidic leader—his criticism was aimed not only at Hasidic *tzaddikim* but also at non-Hasidic rabbinic figures.

In practice, Leiner directed the bulk of his polemical energy toward rabbanim who, in his view, had formed an opinion on the renewal of *Tekhelet* but, for various reasons, refrained from openly presenting their reasoning. Among these, he specifically names three of the "greats of our time": Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik of Brisk (1820–1892), Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor of Kovno (1817–1896), and Rav Yisrael Yehoshua Trunk of Kutno (1821–1893).

³⁷ *Eyn HaTekhelet*, p. 5.

³⁸ Trunk, *Poland* (see note 2 above), pp. 65–66.

³⁹ An expression of this can be found in his attempt to refute the tradition that the Maggid of Kozhnitz said that in our time, the obligation of *Tekhelet* is nullified. Among his arguments, Leiner presented the words of Elimelech of Lizhensk, the teacher and mentor of the Maggid of Kozhnitz, who stated: "*In every generation, there is a root to rectify a particular mitzvah more than other mitzvot, and in our generation, there is a root to rectify the mitzvah of tzitzis more than other mitzvot*" (*Eyn HaTekhelet*, pp. 261–262, where he refers to *Noam Elimelech*, Parashat Noach).

⁴⁰ On Hasidic Rebbes as Halachic Decisors, see: Iris Brown, *Rabbi Chaim of Sanz: His Halachic Rulings Against the Backdrop of His Ideological World and the Challenges of His Time*, Doctoral Dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2004; Tamir Granot, *The Revival of Hasidism in the Land of Israel After the Holocaust: The Ideological, Halachic, and Social Teachings of Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam of Sanz-Klausenburg*, Doctoral Dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2008; Levi Cooper, *The Rebbe of Munkatch, Rabbi Chaim Eliezer Shapira: The Hasidic Halachic Decisor – Character and Method*, Doctoral Dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 2011.

It is noteworthy that Leiner published his first two works without seeking the support of the *gedolei hador* for his innovation. He later justified this by claiming that the matter was straightforward and did not require their endorsement.⁴¹ However, in light of the controversies that arose regarding *Tekhelet*, it seems that he decided to change his approach and attempted to elicit the responses of these three prominent rabbanim.

Rav Soloveitchik articulated a principled position regarding the conditions necessary for the renewal of *Tekhelet* to be considered valid. Since these conditions were not met in practice, one can infer that he opposed the innovation.⁴² In contrast, Spektor and Trunk avoided taking any definitive stance—either in favor or against—and actively sought to stay out of the controversy. Nevertheless, Leiner attempted to draw both of them into the discussion.

We will explore this matter further, but before delving into the rabbinic debates, we turn to the communal conflicts that emerged as a result of the *Tekhelet* controversy.

2. The Emergence of the Disputes in the Press

On August 10, 1888, the newspaper *HaTzefira* published a critical review of *Psil Techeiles*, authored by the paper's editor, Chaim Zelig Slonimsky (ChZ"Sh). A few days later, he reiterated its main points.⁴³ Most of the review consisted of a summary of Leiner's two books, *Sefunei Temunei Chol* and *Psil Techeiles*. Slonimsky expressed admiration for Leiner's sharp intellect and broad knowledge in both revealed and esoteric Torah but subtly criticized his verbose and overly pilpulistic style. He argued that there was essentially no novelty in Leiner's project, as the identification of the *Chilazon* with the *Sepia officinalis* (commonly referred to as the cuttlefish) had already been suggested by Jewish and non-Jewish researchers in the past. Furthermore, he noted, there was no need to travel to Italy to examine the cuttlefish, as it was described in scientific literature and could be found in zoos in major cities. Most importantly, Slonimsky questioned the fundamental logic of Leiner's endeavor:

"But the main question here is: What benefit has the esteemed author provided us with this discovery? Let us assume, as many have speculated and as linguistic scholars have hinted without much elaboration, that the *Sepia* from the sea is indeed the *Chilazon* of the ancients, and from its blood they dyed *Tekhelet*. But has the esteemed rabbi been able to use its blood to dye *Tekhelet* in the manner practiced during Talmudic times? We know that the blood of the *Sepia* is dark, leaning toward black, and remains highly prized among painters to this day. This aligns with the Rambam's view regarding the color of *Tekhelet* and with references in the Bavli and Yerushalmi. In their time, when they dyed with the blood of the *Chilazon*, the result was black, as it is today and as painters use it. But it was not the blue color that the esteemed rabbi claims is *B'loah* [a bluish hue]. And if the

⁴¹ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (referenced above, note 8), p. 29.

⁴² *Eyn HaTekhelet* (referenced above, note 8), pp. 13-14. Compare: Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, *Shiurim LeZecher Abba Mari Z"l*, Jerusalem 2003, vol. 1, p. 249.

⁴³ *HaTzefira*, August 10, 1888, pp. 3-4; August 13, 1888, p. 3 ("Publisher's Note").

rabbi intends to prepare the *Chilazon*'s blood using mixtures of additives and foreign substances to make its appearance bluish rather than black, who can assure us that this color precisely matches the one used by the ancients? No amount of pilpul or conjectures can prove this."⁴⁴

Slonimsky's critique must be understood in the context of his prominent role as a popularizer of scientific knowledge among the Jewish public.⁴⁵ He achieved this both through books dedicated to various scientific topics and through numerous articles in *HaTzefira* on science and technology, including innovations in dyes.⁴⁶ His review was therefore written from the perspective of someone who considered himself an authority on science, particularly regarding colors. Slonimsky directed his criticism toward someone he viewed as an amateur in this field who failed to recognize that his "innovations" were not truly innovative. In other words, Slonimsky accused Leiner of presenting a well-known matter as a groundbreaking discovery.

More significantly, Slonimsky argued that Leiner's project contained inherent contradictions. Leiner's insistence on producing a blue dye was perplexing given that the secretion of the *Sepia* is black, as confirmed by rabbinic sources that describe *Tekhelet* as black. Moreover, Leiner's attempt to add external substances to the *Sepia*'s secretion to alter its color undermined the goal of recreating the ancient *Tekhelet* exclusively from the *Chilazon*. It is worth noting that Slonimsky's disagreement with Leiner over the color was not merely about the specifics of the mitzvah but stemmed from fundamentally different approaches to the relationship between religion and science.

Leiner's insistence on a blue hue prioritized the Talmudic tradition over the empirical reality of the *Sepia*'s secretion and sought to reinterpret the scientific findings accordingly. In contrast, Slonimsky adopted the opposite stance, viewing scientific findings as an objective baseline for correctly interpreting religious discussions. Thus, in the case of *Tekhelet*, he argued that the

⁴⁴ *HaTzefira*, August 10, 1888, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ Yaakov Shavit and Yehuda Reinharz, *"The Scientific God": Popular Science in Hebrew in Eastern Europe in the Second Half of the 19th Century: Between Knowledge and a New Image of the Universe*, Tel Aviv 2011, pp. 112-122. For references to studies on his character and activities, see *ibid.*, p. 112, note 34. To the studies mentioned there, also add: Mordechai Zalkin, "Scientific Literature and Cultural Transformation in Nineteenth-Century East European Jewish Society," *Aleph* 5 (2005), pp. 262-264; Oren Sofer, *"No Room for Debate!": The Newspaper HaTzefira and the Modernization of Social-Political Discourse*, Jerusalem 2007.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the *"List of Articles I Wrote in HaTzefira"* compiled by Ch.Z.S.: *HaTzefira*, May 6, 1887, Supplement. Among the articles he authored dealing with colors, notable ones include those discussing the properties of colors (*"The Properties of Black Lines Seen in the Colors of Light," HaTzefira*, March 27, 1862, pp. 60-61; *ibid.*, April 3, 1862, pp. 67-70), human perception of color (*"The Perception of Colors in Human History," HaTzefira*, August 26, 1874, pp. 61-62), and color blindness and similar auditory limitations (*"Abnormal Functions in Sight and Hearing," HaTzefira*, April 12, 1881, pp. 110-111).

The last two articles reference the mid-19th-century scholarly debate about the naming of colors, which revealed the cultural relativity of color perception and the insight that colors are not an unequivocal phenomenon (on this debate, see, for example: Guy Deutscher, *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*, Tel Aviv, 2011). A similar insight into the ambiguity of color perception was also presented by Leiner in his attempts to determine the precise shade of *Tekhelet*.

scientific evidence that its color is black should be accepted, and the religious interpretations should align with this empirical reality.⁴⁷

Three days after Slonimsky's review was published, *HaTzefirah* featured another piece on *Tekhelet* by a writer identifying only as "Tz," who described himself as a *misnaged* (non-Hasidic opponent). This writer expressed great admiration for Leiner, praising his broad knowledge of Torah and general disciplines, his *Seder Taharos* project—which he argued faced opposition out of jealousy—and his unique originality among both *tzaddikim* and rabbinic figures. According to the writer, these qualities made Radzyn the Hasidic group most subjected to opposition, while Radzyn Hasidim were distinguished by their uncompromising loyalty to their rebbe.

The writer recounted the *Tekhelet* project and the controversies sparked in the rabbinic world by Leiner's two books. However, he emphasized that the storm in the rabbinic world was minor compared to the storm that would ensue when Leiner implemented *Tekhelet* practically by distributing *tzitzis* dyed with the blue he had produced. In other words, the writer predicted that just as *Tekhelet* had moved from theoretical halachic discourse to practical application, the controversy surrounding it would also shift from theoretical arguments to social conflict. Beyond the usual hostility toward Leiner and the debate over his identification of the *Chilazon*, the writer noted a new reason for contention: the gap, as highlighted by Slonimsky, between the halachic understanding that *Tekhelet* should be dark blue (*dunkelblau*) and the practical result, which was closer to a dark, blackish shade.⁴⁸

The prediction that the distribution of dyed *tzitzis* would provoke controversy proved accurate. Reports of social tensions caused by the renewal of *Tekhelet* first appeared in the feuilleton (newspaper supplement or op-ed) sections of *HaTzefirah*, written by staff contributors and widely read as accessible, popular, and influential content.⁴⁹ Warsaw-based feuilletonist Naftali Hertz Nimnowitz, writing under the pseudonym "HaNetz,"⁵⁰ addressed the *Tekhelet* issue several times in his popular column *Berosh Homiyos* in *HaTzefirah*. On August 17, 1888, a week after Slonimsky's review, HaNetz wrote about the disputes surrounding *Tekhelet*.⁵¹ He remarked that it was difficult to withhold mockery of the zealots supporting *Tekhelet*, whose fervor seemed disproportionate given the more significant challenges facing Jewish society at the time.

HaNetz noted that the uproar was not primarily instigated by rabbis or Torah scholars but by individuals of lower standing. He referred to these "admirers of the *Chilazon*," who sent him notes filled with insults against their opponents. Such zealotry, he argued, contradicted the true

⁴⁷ On Ch.Z.S.'s position regarding the relationship between religion and science, see: Oren Sofer, *"Ein Lefalpel!": The Newspaper HaTzefira and the Modernization of Social-Political Discourse*, Jerusalem, 2007, pp. 78-84.

⁴⁸ *HaTzefira*, August 13, 1888, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁹ Tzvi Karniel, *The Hebrew Feuilleton: The Development of the Feuilleton in Hebrew Literature*, Tel Aviv, 1982; Yemima Idelson, "'From Shabbat to Shabbat': Feuilletons in the Service of Zionism in *HaTzefira* under Nachum Sokolow," *Gilad*, 23 (2013), pp. 63-66.

⁵⁰ On "HaNetz" and his feuilletons: Karniel (see note 38 above), pp. 87-92.

⁵¹ HaNetz, *"Berosh Homiyot."*

spirit of Judaism. About a year later, he revisited the *Tekhelet* disputes in another feuilleton,⁵² again expressing dissatisfaction with the priorities of traditional Jews. He criticized the tendency to become embroiled in petty disputes, such as conflicts over synagogue honors, while neglecting greater challenges. The *Tekhelet* controversies, he argued, were a contemporary manifestation of such trivial disputes, which he saw as alienating many Jews from traditional Judaism and accelerating their abandonment of it. The small size of the *Chilazon* symbolized, in his view, the marginal importance the controversy deserved.

Another feuilletonist for *HaTzefirah*, Mordechai Menachem Litavski (writing under the pseudonym "Balashon Ben Gedi"⁵³), also voiced complaints about the *Tekhelet* disputes, arguing that the intensity of these conflicts was inversely proportional to their significance.

Reports in the press about the *Tekhelet* disputes did not merely serve as material for general satire by feuilletonists but included concrete descriptions of conflicts. Some of these accounts were provided by the aforementioned feuilletonists, Nimnowitz and Litavski. For example, Nimnowitz dedicated an entire column to the *Tekhelet* disputes, published on February 14, 1890.⁵⁴ He began by describing a telegram he received from the town of Rejowiec, near Chełm, signed "*Pesul Techeiles*" (a wordplay on the Ashkenazic pronunciation of *Psil Techeiles*, rendering it as "non-kosher *Tekhelet*"). The telegram briefly stated, "Contentious individuals have risen against the rabbi, and the cause of the dispute is: *Chilazon! Chilazon! Chilazon!*"

Seeking more details, Nimnowitz reached out to a friend in Chełm, "Shil"R the Chełmite," who was "close to the scene." This friend reported that "anti-*Chilazon*" individuals had threatened to inform the authorities about the rabbi, though he did not elaborate on the precise background of the events. The friend vividly described how the *Chilazon*, brought from abroad (Leiner first encountered the cuttlefish in Italy), had spread like an epidemic to neighboring towns, including Rejowiec.⁵⁵ According to the Chełmite, these disputes, which intensified particularly when they involved "sacred objects," had divided the community into two factions: "*Chilazonim*" (pro-*Tekhelet*) and "anti-*Chilazonim*."⁵⁶

In light of these reports, Nimnowitz invited two Hasidim to his home, one a "*Chilazon*" supporter and the other an "anti-*Chilazon*" opponent. He expressed his concern that "the *Chilazon* dispute is spreading throughout our land" and, viewing the *Tekhelet* controversy as "one of the questions central to the essence of Torah," suggested moving the polemic back to its rightful place—rabbinic discourse, where it had begun. He proposed using *HaTzefirah* as a platform for

⁵² HaNatz, "*Berosh Homiyot*," *HaTzefirah*, June 21, 1889, p. 516; June 28, 1889, p. 540.

⁵³ Balashon Ben Gadi, "Miknaf Haaretz," *HaTzfira*, January 22, 1890, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁴ *HaTzfira*, February 14, 1890, p. 122.

⁵⁵ In addition to Reyvitz, "Shil"R HaChalmi" reported on a burial conflict in Chełm and another conflict "in the small town of Sv., near our city," likely referring to Svirzh, which was not far from Chełm. The conflict in Chełm will be mentioned in the next section alongside other burial disputes, while the conflict erupted between Radzyn Hasidim and a slaughterer (shochet) who was also from Radzyn but refused to wear *Tekhelet* so as not to provoke the anger of those who did not wear it (*HaTzfira*, February 14, 1890, p. 122). The informant, "Shil"R HaChalmi," was Shlomo Yehuda Lederer from Chełm. An obituary about him appeared in *HaTzfira* on May 24, 1897, p. 554.

⁵⁶ *HaTzfira*, February 14, 1890, pp. 122–123.

such a debate, but the "*Chilazon*" supporter objected, claiming, "It is neither fitting nor appropriate for the righteous of our generation to engage with newspapers."⁵⁷ Meanwhile, a secularly inclined friend visited Nimnowitz, stating that he had long since stopped wearing *tzitzis* and had sent them to his father, "who lives in a small town."⁵⁸ This remark underscored the friend's view that such disputes held no relevance for an educated Jew living in the city, aligning with Nimnowitz's perspective that the *Tekhelet* controversies were a manifestation of the petty conflicts among zealous Jews.

Descriptions of community conflicts were also sent to *HaTzefirah* and *HaMelitz* by correspondents—essentially "field reporters"—who wrote about events in their localities. These correspondents were typically not professional writers like the feuilletonists.⁵⁹ Chaim Lipschitz, a correspondent from Rejowiec, added details in two reports he sent to *HaMelitz*. In the first, he described a violent conflict (which was even brought to the attention of the district officer in Chełm) between Radzyn Hasidim in the town and Trisk Hasidim, who opposed *Tekhelet*.⁶⁰ In the second report, published a few days later, Lipschitz detailed another conflict in Rejowiec, the same one involving the town's rabbi that Nimnowitz had mentioned in his column. According to the correspondent, the rabbi, a Radzyn Hasid, regularly wore a *tallis* with *Tekhelet*. For this, he and his family suffered harassment and hostilities from *Tekhelet* opponents. The rabbi lodged complaints with the district officer about these hostilities, but to his disappointment, the official refused to intervene.⁶¹

A correspondent from Zamość attempted to provide a broader overview of the issue and offer more general insights. He began by describing a "plague" of new intra-community conflicts spreading "in many towns of the Polish state," explicitly mentioning nine locations, including Rejowiec, all in southeastern Poland where Radzyn Hasidim were present.⁶² He then explained the nature of "this plague, which has the appearance of *Tekhelet*":

"From the day the rabbi of Radzyn created the *Chilazon* and produced *Tekhelet* to the joy of his Hasidim and admirers, chaos has spread through Jewish towns. It is not enough for Radzyn Hasidim to observe the mitzvah themselves according to its halachah; they aspire to impose it on all of Israel, saying: 'We will act before we hear what our rabbis and sages of the generation—whose guidance we rely upon in

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 123.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ On correspondences in the Hebrew press: Irit Nachmani, "A Terrible Incident That Happened in Our City: Correspondence in the Hebrew Press in Europe in the 19th Century," *Kesher*, 32 (2002), pp. 100–106; David Tal, "Bring Fodder! Gather Straw" – Field Reports in the 19th-Century Hebrew Press, *Kesher*, 38 (2009), pp. 91–99; Nurit Orchan, *Leaving the Private Sphere: Women Writing in the Yiddish Press in the Russian Empire*, Jerusalem 2013, Chapter 1, pp. 41–69; Dror Segev, *The Social Role of the Hebrew Press in the Russian Empire during the Reign of Alexander III (1881–1894)*, PhD Dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 2015.

⁶⁰ *HaMelitz*, March 16, 1890, p. 3 (At the top of the correspondence, the town is noted as "Reinitz," but in the following report, a correction appears).

⁶¹ *HaMelitz*, March 27, 1890, pp. 1–2.

⁶² "And as was the case in Minsk-Hadash, Lublin, Chelm, Reyavitz, Volodovka, Tishovitz, Loshtsiv, and Sharvashin, so too has it happened and reached our city" (*HaMelitz*, p. 4).

matters of faith and religion—have to say.’ What they cannot achieve through force and coercion, they pursue with all their hearts and means to influence the gullible, whoever they may be: woodcutters and water carriers, wound dressers, carriage drivers, and porters. Like missionaries from London,⁶³ they distribute *Tekhelet* strings for free to anyone unable to afford them, even though a set costs one ruble. This has stirred envy and animosity not only among Hasidim opposed to their leader but also among the laymen of our communities. When an ignorant porter or coachman enters a synagogue that holds thousands, wrapped in a *tallis* with *Tekhelet*, flaunting his piety and provoking the onlookers—those who guard the Torah and mitzvos—it arouses resentment. Moreover, they commonly proclaim that anyone who does not wear ‘*Tekhelet* Mordechai’ [the name of the Rebbe] is a ‘goy’ (as they literally put it), and that his prayers are an abomination. Furthermore, they insist on extending their kindness to the dead, adorning the deceased with *Tekhelet* strings, even though the dead are free of mitzvos. They disturb the peace of the deceased, unearthing graves to adorn those who have passed with *Tekhelet*. Can such things be believed? Has such a thing ever been heard?”⁶⁴

The correspondent expressed no particular sympathy for Leiner’s renewal of *Tekhelet*. He argued that the disputes spreading through various communities stemmed from the Radzyn Hasidim’s refusal to limit their observance of *Tekhelet* to themselves and their efforts to spread it to the broader Jewish society, both among the living and the dead. To propagate *Tekhelet*, Radzyn Hasidim distributed strings for free to those who could not afford them, leading to a situation where the poor were the primary wearers of *Tekhelet*. The correspondent contended that this sparked class-based resentment, with *Tekhelet* seen as an act of ostentation, perhaps due to the heightened religiosity it projected. He also doubted the legitimacy of Leiner’s *Tekhelet* innovation, criticizing its lack of consultation with the rabbinic authorities of the time. Comparing Radzyn’s distribution practices to missionary activities, he underscored the divisiveness of the *Tekhelet* movement, which labeled those who did not wear it as outsiders.

In the continuation of his report (not cited here), the correspondent addressed the aforementioned conflict involving the rabbi of Rejowiec. According to the account, the rabbi persuaded several members of the town’s *Chevras Tehillim* who were tailors to adopt *Tekhelet*, which they did despite the opposition of other members, including cobblers and tailors, who viewed it as divisive and a violation of *lo sisgodedu* (prohibition against forming sects). The conflict escalated into acts of vandalism, including tearing the *Tekhelet*-adorned garments and other violent incidents against the tailors and the rabbi.⁶⁵

The descriptions above suggest that, beyond ideological disagreements and class-based tensions, the *Tekhelet* disputes must also be understood in the context of the tendency for differentiation among various Hasidic groups. In the 19th century, as most conflicts between

⁶³ This refers to English missionaries from the *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*, who operated in Eastern Europe during the 19th century.

⁶⁴ *HaMelitz*, March 27, 1890, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁵ *HaMelitz*, April 4, 1890, p. 5.

Hasidim and *Misnagdim* subsided, a noticeable trend emerged within Hasidism itself: internal fragmentation. Different Hasidic groups began adopting distinctive practices to set themselves apart from one another. Often, these were minor changes in customs, not necessarily grounded in principled considerations but aimed at fostering group cohesion and a sense of uniqueness compared to other Hasidic groups.⁶⁶ These differences in customs were a frequent source of disputes among Hasidim from different groups, particularly in synagogues where these varying practices became visibly and prominently evident. The sharpness of these synagogue disputes likely reflected the great importance Hasidim placed on prayer and their meticulous adherence to the details of prayer customs, which often led to tensions between members of different Hasidic groups or between Hasidim and non-Hasidim.

The adoption of *Tekhelet* can thus be seen as an effort by Radzyn Hasidim to establish a distinctive characteristic for themselves in contrast to other Hasidic groups. The harsh language used by some Radzyn followers toward those who did not adopt *Tekhelet*—calling their prayers “abominations” or referring to them as “goyim”—can be understood as an expression of the special sensitivity Hasidim attached to prayer customs.

From the reports, it is evident that the non-Jewish residents of these towns, particularly government officials, were aware of the *Tekhelet* disputes. Among all the internal Jewish conflicts, the *Tekhelet* controversy was the easiest to observe and identify; to determine the group affiliation of any Jewish resident, one simply needed to ask them to reveal their *tzitzis*. In one report from Zamość, it was mentioned that the quarrelsome rabbi of Rejowiec was summoned by the district official in Chełm, who examined the rabbi's *tzitzis* and asked why they differed from those worn by the Jews of Chełm. When the rabbi did not provide an answer, he was warned not to stir up further disputes. Despite this, tensions remained high, and even after the district official personally visited Rejowiec to mediate, the quarrels continued. According to the report, the rabbi was eventually removed from his position after one of the *anti-Tekhelet* agitators told the district official that the Radzyn Rebbe sought to rebuild the Temple and become king.⁶⁷ If this report is accurate, it shows that the opponents of *Tekhelet* exploited its messianic connotations—as one of the colors used in the future Temple service—to accuse its supporters of subversion, a charge the authorities could not ignore.

The press was not merely a historical source documenting the disputes;⁶⁸ it also served as an active participant in the events themselves. It played a key role in publicizing the conflicts and perhaps even in amplifying them. From Nimnowitz's columns, it appears he viewed the *Tekhelet* disputes as a somewhat amusing peripheral curiosity that stirred the traditional Jewish communities in small towns. At the same time, he saw these disputes as serious, contributing to the fragmentation of Jewish society. By bringing the issue to his feuilleton, Nimnowitz sought to present a topic that had stirred certain communities to a broader readership. He even made

⁶⁶ See: Gadi Sagiv, *The Dynasty: The House of Chernobyl and Its Place in the History of Hasidism*, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 162–165, 331.

⁶⁷ *HaMelitz*, April 4, 1890, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Yisrael Bartal, “*Mevaser U'Modiah Le'Ish Yehudi*”: *Haltanut HaYehudit Ke'Apik Shel Chidush* (“Herald and Informer to the Jewish Man: The Jewish Press as a Channel of Innovation”), *Katedra*, pp. 156–164.

efforts to gather additional reliable details about the matter. However, the appearance of the topic in a popular feuilleton heightened interest in the controversy beyond what any scholarly or polemical work—limited to a rabbinic or intellectual elite—could achieve. By featuring the topic in *HaTzefirah*, the geographic awareness of the issue also expanded beyond the areas where the events themselves occurred.

It is unclear to what extent press reports intensified the disputes or broadened their scope, and it is evident that “HaNetz” failed to bring the feuding parties to resolve their arguments through *HaTzefirah*. However, one correspondence provides explicit evidence of the press's influence on the conflicts: the authorities prohibited Leiner from settling in Lublin after local Jews brought the *Tekhelet* disputes to their attention through articles in the newspapers.⁶⁹

From the accounts of correspondents and memoirs, it is apparent that the disputes were exacerbated when key institutions in a town—such as the rabbinate, the slaughterhouse, or the *Chevra Kadisha*—were controlled by either *Tekhelet* supporters or opponents. In this context, the most intense disputes revolved around burial practices. These conflicts, which extended beyond the social and communal spheres to touch on fundamental rabbinic positions, will be discussed in the next section.

3. The Burial Disputes Over *Psil Techeiles*

According to the *Shulchan Aruch*: “The deceased should only be buried in a *tallis* that has *tzitzis*,” and the *Rema* adds in his glosses: “It is customary to bury him with a *tallis*, but the *tzitzis* are first invalidated, or one corner is tied up.”⁷⁰ Since deceased individuals were wrapped in their own *tallis*, the *Tekhelet* controversies raised the question of whether a deceased person could be buried in a *tallis* with *Tekhelet* strings. There were instances where non-Radzyn Hasidim refused to handle the burial of someone in a *tallis* with *Tekhelet*, resulting in delays to the burial. Conversely, there were cases where Radzyn Hasidim attempted to persuade those nearing death to wear a *tallis* with *Tekhelet*. In one case, a ruling was issued that only Radzyn Hasidim would handle the burial of someone with *Tekhelet*.⁷¹

The most prominent communal dispute occurred in Zamość, as reported by a correspondent who identified as “one who was once a Hasid” and published his account in both *HaMelitz* and *HaTzefirah*.⁷² This is the story: At the end of March 1890, a man passed away in a suburb of Zamość, and he had *tzitzis* with *Tekhelet*. Radzyn Hasidim who attended to the deceased wished to bury him with *Tekhelet*, but the gravediggers sought permission from the members of

⁶⁹ HaMelitz, May 21, 1890, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah, Siman 358 and the glosses of the Rema there.

⁷¹ On the burial dispute in Chelm: “Balsan Ben Gadi” [Mordechai Menachem Litvitsky], HaTzefira, January 22, 1890, p. 36-37.

On disputes in Tomaszów Lubelski: HaMeleitz, October 28, 1890, p. 5; Sh. Leviah, “Pnei Yekaret: Kollel Tuldot Halr Tomaszów D'Lublin Yehudit MiYom Hossedah V'ad Churbanah,” New York, 1968, p. 108. The “great one” who ruled that “they should bury him in the talit he wore in his life” may have been Isaac Elchanan Spector (see below).

⁷² HaMeleitz, April 4, 1890, p. 4-5; HaTzefira, April 15, 1890, p. 311-312.

the *Chevra Kadisha* and the town's wealthy elite. These, with the support of Ger Hasidim—enemies of the Radzyn Hasidim—decided to forbid it. A group of townspeople, described in one source as a “mob,” sought to bury the deceased despite the prohibition. The wealthy residents appealed to the authorities, who sent police to the cemetery, expelled all the Jews, and placed guards on the site.

To resolve the issue (as the deceased had still not been buried), the divided townspeople agreed to consult two prominent rabbis, sending telegrams to Rabbi Yisrael Yehoshua Trunk of Kutno and Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor of Kovno. According to the newspaper report, Trunk replied that he was unwilling to intervene, while Spektor responded that the deceased should be buried in the *tallis* he had worn during his lifetime (i.e., with *Tekhelet*). However, there was a dispute over the interpretation of Spektor's response, as it seems there was an error in the telegraph, and initially, the response received stated that the deceased should be buried in a *tallis* “that we wear” (i.e., with white *tzitzis* only). Ultimately, the ruling was made by the authorities, who decided that in Poland, the rabbi of Kovno's opinion held no legal weight, and therefore, the deceased should be buried according to the old custom—with a *tallis* with white strings.

On the margins of the story, it becomes clear that the burial dispute in Zamość also reflected class tensions: *Tekhelet* was embraced there primarily by the lower classes, while the Zamość *Chevra Kadisha* was officially a society of the wealthy. According to its regulations, membership required a minimum income, and the wealthier a member was, the greater their privileges.⁷³ This case was not unusual, as burial societies in Eastern Europe were typically associated with affluence.⁷⁴

The burial dispute in Zamość was particularly significant because it compelled Spektor and Trunk to express their opinions on this matter beyond the specific response they gave via telegraph. In *Eyn HaTekhelet*, Leiner recounts that following the events in Zamość, two rabbis from the town approached Trunk and Spektor, seeking their halachic opinions on the question of burial with *Tekhelet*. Leiner noted that the petitioners were his own followers, but they disguised themselves as opponents of *Tekhelet* to secure a response. This disguise may have been motivated by concern that identifying as Radzyn Hasidim would result in their questions being dismissed.

In a letter dated the 10th of Nisan 5650 (March 31, 1890), Spektor reaffirmed the stance he had conveyed in his earlier telegram during the Zamość events: a person should be buried in the *tallis* they wore during their lifetime. He emphasized that he had nothing further to add on the subject and lacked the strength to engage with “the essence of the matter of *Tekhelet*.”⁷⁵ Three days later, Leiner sent a lengthy letter to Spektor, in which he detailed the history of his *Tekhelet*

⁷³ Efraim Kupfer, “Penkas Hevra Kadisha ve-Gemach be-Zamosc,” Moshe Tamari (ed.), *Zamosc BeGaonah u-BeSheverah*, Tel Aviv 1953, pp. 299-302; “Takkanot,” *ibid.*, pp. 305-319.

⁷⁴ See for example: François Guesnet, “A Tuml in the Shtetl: Khayim Betsalel Grinberg's *Di Khevre-Kedishe Sude*,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, 16: Jewish Popular Culture and Its Afterlife (2003): 93–106.

⁷⁵ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (above note 8), p. 36.

project and the halachic reasoning behind it.⁷⁶ The letter opened with Leiner describing himself as a pursuer of peace, perhaps alluding to the ongoing communal disputes, which he referenced later in the letter.⁷⁷ He also mentioned Spektor's refusal to express an opinion due to frailty,⁷⁸ but he expressed frustration that Spektor had not hesitated to weigh in on issues that Leiner considered less important. Leiner concluded that frailty could not be the reason for Spektor's silence and demanded that he state his opinion openly.⁷⁹ It appears that Spektor did not respond to this letter.

Some time after sending the letter, Leiner dispatched his son and brother-in-law to Spektor, bringing with them the manuscript of *Eyn HaTekhelet* and an essay on the *shemittah* year, in an effort to persuade him to address the issue of *Tekhelet*. Regarding this meeting, which likely occurred in the second half of 1890 (after the Zamość events and before Leiner's death), Yakov Lipschitz, Spektor's secretary, wrote the following:

"Our master, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, ztz"l, did not acquiesce to them in any way. Later, the 'Rebbe,' Rabbi Gershon Henoch, ztz"l, sent very strongly worded letters, which, had our rabbi been strict, would have angered him. But our master ztz"l acted as though he neither heard nor knew of them...

While they were in Landwarów [Ляндварово], they implored me greatly to influence our rabbi, Maran ztz"l, to incline his heart to their request. But I always refrained from involving myself in matters of halacha between the great rabbis of Israel. On the contrary, I discouraged their attempts to burden our rabbi, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan ztz"l, with an issue in which he did not wish to involve himself, nor to innovate something that the majority of the sages of the generation did not agree with the 'Rebbe' on this matter."⁸⁰

The Radzyn version of this meeting seeks to provide more details about Spektor's position. According to Leiner's son and brother-in-law, Spektor said the following:

"I have already supported the issue of *Tekhelet* significantly. I sent a telegram to the Zamość community stating that one who wore *Tekhelet* during their lifetime must be buried in it. I reiterated this in a detailed letter sent through the post. By doing so, I clearly expressed my opinion that this mitzvah should be upheld. Were I not to consider *Tekhelet* a mitzvah, I would not have involved myself at all. However, I personally face external constraints that prevent me from fulfilling the mitzvah. I know that many modern-minded individuals would oppose me and view me with disdain. While one should not fear mockery in matters of mitzvah observance, I am currently involved in a great mitzvah relating to the preservation of Jewish life. To achieve my goals, I must maintain a friendly and approachable demeanor toward all factions, so that my words are heard, and no obstacles stand in my way. Regarding

⁷⁶ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (above note 8), pp. 23-34.

⁷⁷ "... and in some places, the dispute and desecration of God's name increased" (*Eyn HaTekhelet*, p. 31).

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 32

⁸⁰ Yaakov Lipschitz, *Zikaron Yaakov*, Vol. 2, Kaunas, 1927, p. 176.

this matter I am involved in, even chillul Shabbos would not stand in my way, and certainly not the neglect of a positive commandment."⁸¹

Leiner's son and brother-in-law could not deny that Spektor refused to publicly state his position on the matter of *Tekhelet*. However, they asserted that he did, in fact, support the fulfillment of the mitzvah, citing his telegram and letter during the Zamość episode as evidence of his backing. Spektor explained his refusal to issue another public statement as stemming from his desire to avoid controversy during a sensitive period when he was engaged in critical matters requiring broad consensus.⁸² If the phrase "those aligned with the spirit of the times" refers to individuals with modernist or possibly secular inclinations, it seems likely that Spektor feared that supporting a traditionalist initiative like *Tekhelet* would provoke their anger.

Regarding Trunk, Leiner wrote that he sent him a letter almost identical to the one he had sent to Spektor. According to Leiner, following the approach of the people of Zamość and his own letter, Trunk understood that he could no longer avoid addressing the issue:

"The great rabbi of Kutno, may he live long, after receiving my letter and realizing that his silence was neither appropriate nor fitting for his stature, emerged somewhat from his concealment. Although he did not address me directly in his response, he did reply to a questioner who disguised himself as one of my opponents. However, as he truly had no substantive response, he adopted a sleight-of-hand approach, straddling the fence without committing to a clear stance. In truth, nothing definitive can be discerned from his words to determine his actual opinion, as can be seen from the copy of his response in this essay. My detailed response to his reply also makes clear that Rabbi Trunk of Kutno acted wisely by not presenting this response directly to me, as he would have lacked the confidence to do so. He had no idea that his reply would reach me because he was unaware that the questioner was one of my followers, not one of my opponents. Besides my response, the rabbi has already been sufficiently answered by the students in our study hall."⁸³

Leiner recounted that one of his followers in Zamość posed a question to Trunk, thereby prompting the rabbi to express an opinion despite his reluctance. Trunk's response, which would eventually be published years later in his collection of responsa *Yeshuos Melcho*, was first

⁸¹ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (above, note 8), p. 35.

⁸² It is unclear what the matter refers to, and Lipshitz does not provide further details. However, during the summer of 1890, Elchanan Spektor was involved in an international coordination campaign among Jewish Orthodoxy to prevent the expulsion of Jews from Moscow, which he saw as the peak of anti-Jewish trends in Russia at the time, and even worse than the expulsion from Spain. This political campaign was also the apex of his efforts on behalf of Russian Jewry as a whole. For more on this, see: Ephraim Shimoff, *Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor: Life and Letters*, New York 1959, pp. 65-70.

⁸³ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (above footnote 8), p. 36.

printed in *Eyn HaTekhelet*.⁸⁴ After revealing to Trunk that the questioner was a Radzyn follower, Leiner invited Trunk to add further remarks, promising to publish the full halachic discussion between them.⁸⁵

Leiner included Trunk's response, in which Trunk declined to express an opinion due to the controversy and stated that for the same reason, he himself would not wear *tzitzis* with *Tekhelet*.⁸⁶ Leiner then provided a detailed critique of Trunk's response to the people of Zamość, criticizing the rabbi and even including pointed remarks.⁸⁷

Regarding the personal relationship between Leiner and Trunk, Trunk's great-grandson wrote the following:

"The sole rabbinic authority whom Rabbi Gershon Henoch acknowledged as superior and from whom he swallowed no small number of bitter pills was Yeshua'le Kotner. From Rabbi Yeshua'le, he accepted everything—the good and the bad. He would often visit Rabbi Yeshua'le in Kutno with respect and reverence. Rabbi Yeshua'le regarded the Radzyner with a touch of goodwill, treating him as a talented dilettante."⁸⁸

While it is unsurprising that Trunk's great-grandson portrays his ancestor as an object of Leiner's admiration, this respect is also evident in Leiner's writings and in his tireless efforts to gain legitimacy for his *Tekhelet* project from Trunk.

Trunk's response to the people of Zamość is one of four responsa on the subject of *Tekhelet* published in *Yeshuos Malcho*. Common to all four is the position that the renewal of *Tekhelet* is merely a "conceptual supposition" (*svara b'alma*) that is not obligatory. His words imply that he did not believe Leiner's *Tekhelet* to be the authentic *Tekhelet*, which is why he refrained from wearing it. However, precisely because it is considered a *svara*, the new *Tekhelet* cannot be definitively rejected either. Of the four responsa, the fourth, written about a year after the Zamość events and dealing with burial in *Tekhelet*, is particularly noteworthy. In this response, Trunk maintained his cautious but non-committal stance, stating that while he was not in favor of

⁸⁴ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (above footnote 8), pp. 222-224; Israel Yehoshua Trunk, *Yeshuot Malko*, New York 1958 [First Edition: Piotrków 1927], Orach Chaim, Siman B, p. 1.

⁸⁵ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (above footnote 8), p. 37.

⁸⁶ *Eyn HaTekhelet* (above footnote 8), pp. 37-38. For additional information regarding Lainer's request for Trunk to wear *Tekhelet* himself: Moshe Gordon, "The Rebbes of Tomaszów," in: *Sefer Zikaron of Tomaszów-Lub*, Jerusalem 1972, p. 124.

⁸⁷ For example: "Indeed, the words are very puzzling that someone of his stature would be caught in such a tangled error" (*ibid*, p. 226).

⁸⁸ Trunk, Poland (above note 2), p. 65.

burial with *Tekhelet*, a person's request to be buried with it should be honored if explicitly expressed.⁸⁹

A more extensive discussion on burial with *Tekhelet* was presented by Rabbi Akiva Yosef Schlesinger (1837–1922), one of the prominent figures in ultra-Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe during the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, who was also involved in controversies during the 1870s.⁹⁰ In a responsum addressing burial with *Tekhelet*, he recounted being asked a question in light of the burial disputes, referred to Spektor's aforementioned response, and wrote that he initially did not wish to involve himself in the matter⁹¹ but ultimately could not refrain from expressing his opinion:

"In our times, when we lack definitive clarity as to whether this is indeed the *Tekhelet*, relying instead on signs and doubt—as the esteemed Rabbi Gershon Henoch, of blessed memory, wrote in his book *Psil Techeiles*, and as he testified in a letter to me that I will present below, stating that there are sixteen non-kosher types of *Tekhelet*, with only one being valid, and even the valid one is questionable whether it was made with proper intent—who can guarantee that one should proceed with this in the World of Truth? Therefore, in this world, where mitzvos are observed even amid doubt, like the *Tefillin* of Rabbeinu Tam that are treated stringently, one may discreetly wear *Tekhelet*. However, to enter the King's palace with doubts—'Do not exalt yourself before the great.' Hence, we do not practice wearing *Tekhelet* publicly, except discreetly on a *tallis katan*, due to the concern of 'Do not create divisions' (*lo tisgodedu*), to avoid causing disputes."⁹²

In contemporary discourse about *Tekhelet* in Jewish Orthodoxy, Schlesinger is often portrayed as one of the prominent supporters of Leiner's *Tekhelet*, and he indeed faced persecution in Jerusalem for this, as will be discussed later. However, this responsum, published only in the early 21st century, demonstrates that the distinction between *Tekhelet* supporters and opponents is not as clear-cut as it might seem. While Schlesinger supported the renewal of *Tekhelet*, his support was not accompanied by a firm conviction that this was definitively the authentic *Tekhelet*. His decision was therefore to wear *Tekhelet* in this world, where mitzvos are observed even amid doubt, but to do so discreetly to avoid conflict—a conflict that may already have arisen. Furthermore, he believed that while doubtful mitzvos might be observed in this world, they should not be carried into the next world, and for this reason, he opposed burial with *Tekhelet*.

⁸⁹ Yeshuot Malko (above note 73), YD, Siman 76, p. 57. It is interesting to note that Trunk refrains from stating that this is valid *Tekhelet*, but rather mentions that it is *Tekhelet* "according to the opinion of the Rabbi z"l," likely referring to *Tekhelet* according to Lainer's approach, who passed away a few months prior.

⁹⁰ For information about Akiva Yosef Schlesinger, see: Michael K. Silver, "P'ami Lev Ha'Ivri b'Eretz Ha'Ger," *Katedra*, 73 (1995), pp. 84–105.

⁹¹ Questions and Answers of Rabbi Akiva Yosef [Schlesinger], Part Orach Chaim, Jerusalem 2009, pp. 258–259.

⁹² *ibid*, p. 264.

It is noteworthy that neither Trunk nor Schlesinger presented arguments that could be interpreted as specifically Hasidic or anti-Hasidic. This suggests that the renewal of *Tekhelet* was not seen as inherently rooted in a Hasidic ideological framework. However, both invoked the principle of *lo tisgodedu*, possibly hinting at the Hasidic disputes that had already emerged and expressing a desire to mitigate them. Thus, it can be said that the social context of the Hasidic world provided fertile ground for the emergence of the *Tekhelet* controversies.

4. Hillel Moshe Meishel Gelbstein and His Persecution of *Tekhelet* Wearers in Jerusalem

The *Tekhelet* controversy did not remain confined to Eastern Europe but quickly extended to Jerusalem, where its most fervent opponent emerged: Rabbi and Kabbalist Hillel Moshe Meishel Gelbstein (1834–1907). Gelbstein's campaign against the revival of *Tekhelet* encompassed both halachic polemics against Leiner's *Tekhelet* writings and social opposition to those wearing *Tekhelet* in Jerusalem.

Gelbstein was born in Bialystok and, in his youth, became a follower of Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. Later, he also aligned with the Chabad and Gur Hasidic movements, noting the animosity between Kotzk/Gur Hasidim and Izbica-Radzyn Hasidim. In 1866, Gelbstein immigrated to Eretz Yisrael, and by 1869, he had settled in Jerusalem, where he lived until his passing. In Jerusalem, Gelbstein maintained connections with both the Sephardic and Ashkenazic rabbinic leadership of the Yishuv HaYashan (the old Yishuv), the Kabbalistic yeshivot, and the Chabad community in Hebron.⁹³

Like Leiner, Gelbstein's involvement in the *Tekhelet* controversy was just one of several religious-social initiatives he pursued during his lifetime. Gelbstein was particularly known for advocating the renewal of guarding the Temple (*Mishmarot*) as practiced during its existence. He called for the establishment of watches outside the Temple Mount and organized guard duties at the Tomb of Shimon HaTzaddik. These initiatives are reflected in his writings, which combine halachic analysis with Kabbalistic elements, particularly based on the teachings of the Arizal.⁹⁴

Gelbstein's campaign against *Tekhelet* is best understood through his work *Psil (the letter sav being replaced by a samech) Techeiles*, named intentionally to echo the title of Leiner's second book, but likely meant to hint at the phrase "Pasul *Tekhelet*" (non-kosher *Tekhelet*), as he referred to the threads produced in Radzyn. This work was published incrementally between

⁹³ On the Hasidic settlement in Israel in the 19th century: Uriel Galman, "The Hasidim in Jerusalem in the 19th Century," in: Reuven Gafni, Yochai Ben-Gedalia, A. Galman (Eds.), *Gavohah Mi'aleh Gavohah: The Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue and the Hasidic Community in Jerusalem*, Jerusalem 2016, pp. 11-30.

⁹⁴ On Gelbstein: Betzalel Landoy, "From Kotzk to Jerusalem," *Niv HaMidrashia*, Spring 1970, pp. 259-270; *Mishkenot Le'Avir Yaakov: Innovations and Explanations in Tractate Tamid, and Studies on the Laws, Responses, and Rulings Regarding the Commandment of Preserving the Temple and the Western Wall in Our Times*, 2nd edition, Jerusalem 1972, "Notes on His Life." A report on his death noting his campaign against *Tekhelet*: *HaChavatza*, November 20, 1907, p. 62.

1890 and 1897, as Gelbstein lacked the financial means to fund its printing outright.⁹⁵ It is also possible that his opposition to *Tekhelet* was received with some indifference, as will be discussed later.

Gelbstein's *Psil Techeiles* presents numerous bibliographic challenges because it was written and published in fragments, with some sections reprinted multiple times. However, this very quality renders the work a living text that reacts to unfolding events.⁹⁶ It contains numerous reports of Gelbstein's actions and related incidents, often accompanied by dates, effectively serving as a journal of the controversy from his perspective.

A comprehensive examination of Gelbstein's work, with its full range of halachic and Kabbalistic arguments, exceeds the scope of this discussion. The following will focus on the social dimensions of Gelbstein's opposition to *Tekhelet*, based on an attempt to reconstruct the events as far as possible, given the fragmented nature of his writings.

Gelbstein's introduction to the *Tekhelet* controversy was coincidental. On Shavuot of 1889, he learned about Leiner's first two *Tekhelet* books. About a month later, he received *Sefunei Temunei Chol*, began reading it, and started researching the topics of *Tekhelet* and *tzitzis*. Initially, he did not outright reject the *Tekhelet* and even entertained the hope that the messianic era might have arrived.⁹⁷ Whether this hope was genuine or merely a rhetorical gesture to appear impartial, Gelbstein eventually concluded, "A voice knocked in my heart, declaring that this *Tekhelet* is non-kosher."⁹⁸ Seeing that *Tekhelet* was gaining adherents in Jerusalem, he decided to write on the subject.⁹⁹ He denied accusations that his opposition to Radzyn Hasidim stemmed from personal animosity as a Kotzk Hasid:

"I have gone to great lengths to dispel the claim of certain fools who say that I opposed the author [Leiner] because of some hatred stemming from the fact that the author's grandfather [Mordechai Leiner of Izbica] had initially been one of the esteemed rabbinic students of my teacher, the holy Rebbe [Menachem Mendel of Kotzk], but later, for reasons unknown to me or due to slander, he became a Rebbe

⁹⁵ Hillel Moshe Ma'ashil Gelbstein, *Mishkenot Le'Aviv Yaakov – Psil Techeiles*, Jerusalem 1890-1897. Regarding "the lack of printing expenses" as a reason why "it is impossible to print the entire book at once, only pamphlets": *ibid.*, p. 1b (first pagination).

⁹⁶ Parts of this work were occasionally printed independently and sometimes as part of two other works by Gelbstein: the first is *Mishkenot Le'Aviv Yaakov*, which was printed in segments between 1881-1900; the second is *Or Le'Yisharim*, printed in segments between 1889-1891. The work is characterized by many editorial issues that are not the focus here. However, despite these editorial issues, one can point to a single version of the work, and it can be determined that its first part (the introduction and sections A-B) was printed in pamphlets between 1890-1891, while the second part (sections C-J) was printed only in 1897. References to Gelbstein's book will be made to the version in *Mishkenot Le'Aviv Yaakov*, and the citation method will include the part (chapters, introduction, and 'signs,' which form the body of the work), the section within the part (e.g., 'Exegesis of the Zohar's Introduction' in the introduction), the section number within the part, the page, and the column, with the section number sometimes specified (as the book has three systems of pagination).

⁹⁷ Gelbstein (above, note 84), introduction, p. 2a, paragraph 2.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, introduction, 3a, paragraph 2."

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, section D, 3a.

himself during my teacher's lifetime. And therefore, they claim, I wrote *Psil Techeiles* to disprove the non-kosher *Tekhelet* of the author. These claims are lies."¹⁰⁰

Gelbstein's campaign against *Tekhelet* can be divided into three stages, corresponding to the three phases of publication for his book, *Psil Techeiles*.

The First Stage: Halachic Polemic Against the *Tekhelet* Revival in Europe (1889–1890)

The first part of Gelbstein's *Psil Techeiles* to be printed—chapters 1 and 2—opens with a letter addressed to Rabbi Yeshua Trunk of Kutno, from whom Gelbstein sought a response and guidance regarding *Tekhelet*. The letter also includes a request for “all wise-hearted scholars” to share their opinions. Dated 19 Kislev 5650 (December 1889), this letter predates the eruption of *Tekhelet*-related disputes in Polish communities. Gelbstein's discussion in this section is theoretical and halachic, resembling earlier critiques of *Tekhelet* that had been raised and discussed previously.

Later, it became clear that Gelbstein sent these initial printed sections to Leiner that same winter:

"Last year, in the winter, when the first two prints from section A were published, I sent the aforementioned author a respectful letter in the manner of scholars who promote peace, along with two printed pages, and I asked him if he had any response to notify me, and also to send me his book *Sefunei Temunei Chol* and *Ma'amar Psil Techeiles* to examine. He has not responded to me until now [...] However, it is clear to me that if it is the will of God that Torah should be renewed in this manner, 'place it for him,' 'the spreading of Moshe Rabbeinu in every generation.'¹⁰¹ It is imperative that the man be a little bit like Moshe Rabbeinu, humble and lowly, etc., and according to the way of Torah, he himself, if he wants to teach in Jerusalem, should have first sent a hundred books to Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias, and letters asking the rabbis if they have any response, and he sent only one book to a member of his group (and the *Tekhelet* he sent to see if it is good, but not to sell to people). And it is impossible to acquire his book orally, like the true Chilazon. Similarly, he should have sent it to all the cities of Israel in the four corners of the land, of course, to all men of truth. Not to make two teachings. And certainly, if I asked him as above and he did not respond, it is an excessive chutzpah if he received [the letter]. And on this basis, I have relied that it is non-kosher and forbidden as mentioned. And indeed, I have sinned, as I should have judged it favorably, perhaps it got lost in the mail and he did not receive it. Therefore, I wrote him another letter to give it within the book, if my previous letter reached him. He did not respond, certainly it is non-kosher and forbidden, and this is known to the One who tests hearts."¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Same, section C, 3a (third pagination).

¹⁰¹ These expressions indicate the legitimacy of renewal in every generation.

¹⁰² Gelbstain (see footnote 93), Explanation of the Zohar Introduction, pages 9a-9b.

Gelbstein accused Leiner of failing to present his *Tekhelet* initiative for review by leading Torah scholars and declared this omission an act of arrogance. This accusation echoed earlier critiques, such as those in *Tekhelet Mei'ei Elisha*. Interestingly, Gelbstein faced similar challenges himself. Just as Leiner sought feedback from leading rabbis and was ignored, Gelbstein also sought responses—including from Leiner—and was met with silence. Gelbstein interpreted Leiner's refusal to subject his innovation to halachic scrutiny as evidence that his *Tekhelet* was non-kosher and prohibited.

Gelbstein attempted to disseminate his writings in Poland,¹⁰³ but faced resistance. He recounted these challenges:

"In the summer of the year 1890, I sent my book *Psil Techeiles* to the great city of Warsaw with the book's title page. And it is written there [on the title page] that as long as the halacha has not been clarified by the majority of the scholars of the generation, the author is obligated to remove the *Tekhelet* thread from his garment due to 'Lo Titgodedu' [Do not make divisions] even if he claims that it is valid. I also requested from my friends there to try to sell the books, and the response was that the booksellers were not willing to make an effort, and even a prominent person I asked did not want to help because of the dispute with the aforementioned group [the Radzyn Hasidim]. I was amazed—what does a dispute have to do with this? Surely their intentions are for the sake of Heaven. They should make the effort so that the halacha will be clarified, etc. And it seems that among the holy community of that group, some people were mixed with other Hasidic groups, some sinners involved in evil plots to slander the righteous and uphold the words of the above-mentioned rabbi strongly against the Torah's view that it should be clarified by the majority of the scholars of the generation."¹⁰⁴

Gelbstein encountered refusal to sell his book in Warsaw in the summer, "due to a dispute with the aforementioned group." He wrote that he did not understand the reason for the refusal, and it seems that he was unaware of the *Tekhelet* disputes that had broken out in Poland shortly before, which likely stood behind the refusal.

While in the early sections of his book, Gelbstein's discussion was halachically focused, attempting to clarify the kashrut of *Tekhelet* in tzitzit, in the book's preface, which essentially contains a short introduction, arguments emerge relating to the social context of the *Tekhelet* renewal. In addition to reiterating his complaint that Leiner did not consult with the great Torah scholars of the generation, he presents the argument of 'Lo Titgodedu' (Do not make divisions), as he understood that Leiner instructed his followers to wear *Tekhelet* tzitzit.¹⁰⁵ Gelbstein also criticized the price of the new *Tekhelet*, stating that:

¹⁰³ See: Ibid, page 4a (third numbering).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, Explanation of the Zohar's Introduction, page 11a (first numbering).

¹⁰⁵ See: there, Second Preface.

"Anyone in Israel can buy an exceedingly beautiful *tzitzis* for thirty Polish groszy, while *tzitzis* with the non-kosher *Tekhelet* costs one ruble."¹⁰⁶

The Second Stage: Campaign Against *Tekhelet* Wearers in Jerusalem (1890–1891)

The second stage of Gelbstein's campaign against *Tekhelet* is reflected in the preface to his book *Psil Techeiles*, written after sections A and B. In the months of Cheshvan or Kislev 5651 (late 1890), Gelbstein realized that *Tekhelet* had gained supporters in the Land of Israel, including Akiva Yosef Schlesinger of Jerusalem. Schlesinger even convinced the Chabad rabbi Shimon Menashe Chaikin, considered the leader of Chabad in Hebron, to support it. Although Gelbstein respected Schlesinger for his scholarship and religious zeal, and had collaborated with him in earlier years,¹⁰⁷ he feared that Schlesinger would spread *Tekhelet* in Jerusalem. This concern was well-founded, as in the previous summer of 1890, Leiner had sent Schlesinger "thirty bundles of *Tekhelet*" to distribute among its supporters.¹⁰⁸

Gelbstein decided to escalate his efforts, moving from a principled halachic dispute against Leiner to a social campaign targeting *Tekhelet* supporters in Jerusalem. He admitted that he felt personally responsible, as he had been the one to introduce Schlesinger to Leiner's work, hoping Schlesinger would join the opposition. Instead, Schlesinger became a supporter and promoter of *Tekhelet* in Jerusalem.

In urgency, Gelbstein approached Rabbis Yehudah Leib Diskin and Shmuel Salant, the leaders of the Yishuv HaYashan, asking them to issue a statement. However, like Specter and Trunk, they refused to intervene due to concerns over igniting conflict. It also emerged that the echoes of the *Tekhelet* controversy from Poland had reached Jerusalem, as the Jerusalem rabbis noted they had been instructed by the rabbis of Vilna not to engage with this matter. Nevertheless, according to Gelbstein, despite their public refusal, Diskin and Salant privately expressed their opposition to *Tekhelet* and advised him to issue a halachic ruling himself against it, directing the undecided to consult with them as leaders of the community.¹⁰⁹

Following this rabbinic guidance, Gelbstein composed a halachic ruling intended to be "copied and disseminated to all synagogues and study halls throughout the cities of Israel." Whether the ruling was widely distributed or not, it was included in his book.¹¹⁰ This ruling declared the Radzyn *Tekhelet* non-kosher, this time not based on theoretical halachic arguments presented in the earlier sections of his book, but on his direct observations of two Radzyn *Tekhelet* threads. According to Gelbstein, the threads did not resemble the color of the heavens, and their hue darkened over time. He emphasized that even if the *Tekhelet* color matched the sky in

¹⁰⁶ See: there, Second Preface.

¹⁰⁷ On the collaboration between Gelbstein and Schlesinger: Landau (see footnote 92 above), p. 258.

¹⁰⁸ Schlesinger (see footnote 89 above), p. 258.

¹⁰⁹ Gelbstein (see footnote 93 above), Explanation of the Introduction to the Zohar, pages 8b-9a (second pagination).

¹¹⁰ Same source, Explanation of the Introduction to the Zohar, Section 10, page 10b.

Poland (which he implied was closer to gray-black), the decisive criterion was the color of the sky in Jerusalem, the "City of Truth and True Firmament."

At this stage of his struggle against *Tekhelet*, Gelbstein intensified the polemical tone, which manifests in several ways: One expression of this is the growing emphasis on the impurity of the Radzyn *Tekhelet*. Gelbstein claimed that because the Chilazon Leiner found is impure, and even resembles a mouse (according to one of Gelbstein's acquaintances in Poland),¹¹¹ it is impossible to make a religious item from it.¹¹² Gelbstein also suggested that the Radzyn squid might have its origins in the "Sitra Achra" (the other side).¹¹³ In other words, the custom of wearing *Tekhelet* is identified with idol worship and the Sitra Achra.

A second expression of the heightened polemical tone is the demonization of the Radzyn *Tekhelet*, which is evident not only in presenting the Chilazon as a symbol of the Sitra Achra but also in Gelbstein's discussions on the status of 'Kla Ilan.' The Talmudic term 'Kla Ilan' refers to a blue pigment not derived from a Chilazon, which indeed cannot serve as *Tekhelet*. However, if it is not declared as *Tekhelet*, there is no prohibition to use it. Gelbstein did not accept the halakhic legitimacy of Kla Ilan, and following the ruling of the Lurianic kabbalist Yaakov Tzemach, Gelbstein determined that the contrast between *Tekhelet* and Kla Ilan is a contrast between the transmission of divine abundance and that from the Sitra Achra. The demonization of non-kosher *Tekhelet* leads to halakhic extremism: Unlike the permission to use a defective etrog for the sake of remembering the commandment, using non-kosher *Tekhelet* stirs evil forces (*Sitra Achra*), and therefore it must be prohibited.

Within the polemical rhetoric, in several places Gelbstein attributes to wearing *Tekhelet* several troubles that befell the Jewish community in Jerusalem at the time, such as the child mortality¹¹⁴ and drought.¹¹⁵

A third expression of the intensified polemical tone is Gelbstein's presentation of Leiner's *Tekhelet* project as a transgression within the messianic realm. As mentioned, Gelbstein was among the enthusiastic supporters of renewing the Temple guards at the Western Wall, associating this renewal with messianic implications. According to him, the renewal of the guards is 'At'aratat D'Ietta' (a lower-level awakening), which will be followed by 'At'aratat D'ila' (a higher-level awakening) in the form of the revelation of the Chilazon for the necessary *Tekhelet* for the Temple service, which will also be used for *Tekhelet* in tzitzit.¹¹⁶ In other words, the revelation of the Chilazon is supposed to occur only after the renewal of the guards. Furthermore, since Gelbstein believed that the renewal of the Davidic monarchy must precede

¹¹¹ Same source, Section 2, page 1a (third numbering).

¹¹² Same source, introduction, section B, page 2b (first numbering).

¹¹³ 'And 'this against that God made' (Ecclesiastes 7:14), as found in the kind of impure fish from the side of the Sitra Achra [the Other Side], also a Chilazon that resembles all the signs of the pure Chilazon fish but does not have scales and was not made fit for Tekhelet [only] the pure Chilazon fish." (Same source, section 5, page 8a [third numbering]).

¹¹⁴ Gelbstein (above note 93), Commentary on the Introduction of the Zohar, Section 9, page 10b.

¹¹⁵ Gelbstein (above note 93), Commentary on the Introduction of the Zohar, Section 2, page 1a (third pagination).

¹¹⁶ There, Explanation of the Introduction to the Zohar, 14a-14b (second pagination).

the rebuilding of the Temple, the validation of Radzyn *Tekhelet* would open the door to the preparation of non-kosher paroches (curtains) and priestly garments. This, he argued, presents a significant danger that goes beyond the private sins of those who wear *Tekhelet*.¹¹⁷ In other words, earthly actions to renew *Tekhelet* in tzitzit disrupt the correct order of the messianic events.

Gelbstein did not stop fighting against *Tekhelet* even after learning that Leiner passed away in the winter of 1891, and he even claimed that it was then that the forces of evil gained even more strength.¹¹⁸ The battle escalated to violence, which can be demonstrated by one case that also illustrates the extent to which the struggle against *Tekhelet* was accepted in Jerusalem: Gelbstein recounted how a Radzyn Hasid came to Jerusalem in the winter of 1891, prayed at the 'Kollel Warsaw' prayer house wearing *Tekhelet* in his tzitzit, and was not expelled from the prayer house. After someone tore the *Tekhelet* tzitzit off his garment, the family members of the one who claimed to be the guardian of the prayer hall threatened the assailant with violence. They refused to heed Gelbstein's reprimands that they should expel the Radzyn Hasid from the prayer house, and did not change their stance even after he threatened to reach out to communities in Poland to stop donating to 'Kollel Warsaw.' Gelbstein admitted that not only were his reprimands ignored, but the Radzyn Hasid was legitimized and honored in the prayer house, even boasting that even if they continued to harass him, he would not give up his *Tekhelet* practice. All Gelbstein managed to do was burn the *Tekhelet* tzitzit of the Radzyn Hasid after it was brought to him.¹¹⁹ Following this, Gelbstein dedicated an entire chapter of his work to a halakhic ruling stating that anyone who sees a person wearing *Tekhelet* tzitzit, as if seeing a mixture of linen and wool (shatnez), according to the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch – 'should jump and tear it off him.' He declared that one is obligated to burn this tzitzit, and the exemption of not embarrassing the wearer unknowingly does not apply. Gelbstein sharpened his argument by claiming that non-kosher *Tekhelet* leads to desecration of the Sabbath, as wearing it in a public domain is prohibited, providing another justification for tearing it off those who wear it.¹²⁰ He wrote that he had done this himself once and hoped others would follow his example, and even heard that Rabbi Diskin supported his actions, but aside from the case he mentioned, he did not mention any other instances.¹²¹ It appears that Gelbstein did not succeed in rallying the residents of Jerusalem to join the struggle against *Tekhelet*. The escalation of the polemical tone in his work may indicate the indifference and silence he encountered.

As with the first printing of parts of his book, it seems that the second, expanded printing in the year 1891 was not well-received. Gelbstein himself wrote that he sent this printing to Rabbi

¹¹⁷ Gelbstein (above note), Section 7, 11a.

¹¹⁸ Gelbstein (above note 84), Section B, 1a (third pagination).

¹¹⁹ Gelbstein (above note 84), Section B, 1a-1b (third pagination).

¹²⁰ For example: "And those traitors who hold the false opinion of the teacher (Leiner) that the tzitzit are valid, certainly can go out with them on Shabbat to the public domain. Therefore, even before we see that they go out with them on Shabbat, it is certain they have gone out with them on Shabbat, and therefore, the law is clear as 'kilayim' of Torah, and more severe than any Torah prohibition of Shabbat" (there, Section G, 1a-1b [third pagination]). For the prohibition of going out "not properly tied" see, for example, Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 134b; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, Section 13.

¹²¹ There, Section G, 1a-2a (third pagination).

Isaac Elchanan Spektor of Kovno, asking him for his opinion. However, aside from the praise for the 'deep pilpul' in the book, just as he had done a year earlier regarding Leiner's positions, Spektor refused to address Gelbstein's book, both due to his weakness and to avoid controversy.¹²² In contrast, to demonstrate that there was demand for his views, Gelbstein mentioned that a Torah scholar from Europe had asked him how to disqualify those who wear *Tekhelet* from giving testimony (Pasul L'Eidus).¹²³

The Third Stage: Personal Struggle Against Akiva Yosef Schlesinger (1892–1897)

In the third stage, reflected in sections G–K of his work and spanning the years 1892–1897, Gelbstein continued his campaign against *Tekhelet* wearers but also launched a personal battle against Akiva Yosef Schlesinger. This phase began in 1892 when Gelbstein became aware of Leiner's third book, *Ein HaTecheiles*, published the previous year. Gelbstein was shocked by the book, struggling to accept the possibility suggested therein that Trunk and Spector, whom he had corresponded with in earlier years, had not unequivocally rejected *Tekhelet*.¹²⁴ What really upset Gelbstein and pushed him to take action was a letter printed in *Eyn HaTekhelet*, which was sent to Leiner by Akiva Yosef Shlesinger, against whom Gelbstein had already been fighting:

"Hashem brought before me a pamphlet *Sefunei Temunei Chol* for a few hours, and I was happy with the holy idea, and afterwards they sent me a printed pamphlet in comparison to this,¹²⁵ and I responded to it. And now here he comes, asking me for two of his precious pamphlets and also to praise my Creator through his works, and I was happy because some things I intended from the writing in the pamphlet *Psil Techeiles* are not found in the Talmud without renewal, with Hashem's help. However, the main thing is for the majority of the actions to be for the benefit of the public, with Hashem's help. I said to inform the holy ear of my Rabbi (may he live), I spoke about the matter with the great ones of Jerusalem, the Gaon of Brisk and the Gaon of Salant, and they agreed with me on the law according to the Rambam, that there is no room for doubt to exempt one from the obligation to perform the mitzvah, for even without this thread, it is valid. However, after Shavuot, when the pamphlets came here, I spoke with the Gaon of Brisk, may he live, about the matter, and he told me that he could no longer get involved because he had received a letter from the rabbinic authorities in Vilna, warning him not to respond on this matter at all. I told him I do not understand such a thing, 'I will speak of Your testimonies...' (Tehillim 119:46), there is no personal bias in the matter of halachic rulings, and then I dealt with the

¹²² Gelbstein, Section 9, 20b (third pagination).

¹²³ *ibid*.

¹²⁴ Regarding the letter from Trunk that Leiner published in *Eyn HaTekhelet*, Gelbstein wrote that one cannot infer from it his support for Tekhelet. Regarding the statements attributed to Spector, Gelbstein responded in a letter he later wrote to Spector, in which he stated, among other things, that "he could not believe such things were said by the esteemed Rabbi [Rav M'aleh Kevod Torato]" and asked him to clarify to the public whether the statements of support for Tekhelet attributed to him by Leiner were true (Gelbstein, Section 9, 20b-21b [third pagination]).

¹²⁵ Gelbstein understood this expression as a reference to his own book, titled *Psil Techeiles*, which shares the same name as Leiner's second book (see below).

matter with the sages of Spain, the so-called *Kahal Chassidim* of Beit El, who are the Kabbalists,¹²⁶ and I learn with them several times together, and I spoke with them, and they saw, and they agreed with me."¹²⁷

In this letter, Shlesinger explains his view of *Tekhelet*: First, he received *Sefunei Temunei Chol* on loan, and later, probably from Gelbstein, he received Leiner's first two books and the actual *Tekhelet* thread ('his handiwork to be proud of'). Shlesinger says he brought the *Tekhelet* matter to the rabbis Diskin and Salant. Although, according to him, they supported *Tekhelet* in principle, Diskin refused to engage with it practically (perhaps he refused to wear it himself) and stated that he had received instructions from the rabbis of Vilna not to get involved in the issue at all. In contrast, the Kabbalists of Beit El agreed with him, though Shlesinger doesn't specify whether they actually began wearing *Tekhelet*.

Both Leiner and Gelbstein attached great importance to this letter, each in their own way. Leiner brought it not only as evidence of the agreement of two greats in his opinion – Schlesinger and Diskin – but also as a sign of the wickedness and falsehood of the Vilna rabbis, who, though they did not reach the stature of Diskin, still dared to command him to remain silent.¹²⁸ Gelbstein also quoted part of the letter in his work and claimed that Schlesinger lied:

"This is the meaning of his letter mentioned above: 'And they sent me afterward a printed pamphlet 'this vs. that' – meaning that it was printed as another pamphlet from my work *Psil Techeiles* above. And what he concluded with, 'and I responded against it,' are false words. Because when I heard that he wrote new insights on this, I begged him to show me the manuscript of what he had innovated, perhaps he was right. But he refused. Until he responded with chutzpah, asking who am I that he needs to show me his innovations?!"¹²⁹

Gelbstein clarified that the pamphlet "this vs. that" was his own work against *Tekhelet*, *Psil Techeiles*, which shares the same title as Leiner's work. He argued that Schlesinger dismissed him and refused to address his claims, and went further to insult him when they debated the positions of the Ari, at which point Schlesinger said, "The words of the Ari are clearer to him than to me."¹³⁰

The letter raised questions about the positions of the Yishuv HaYashan leaders, Diskin and Salant. Gelbstein approached them again to verify Schlesinger's claims, asserting that they denied supporting *Tekhelet* and explained that they had been advised (perhaps by Vilna rabbis) to avoid the matter, as Leiner's goal was allegedly financial gain.¹³¹ Gelbstein also claimed that

¹²⁶ The reference is to the Kabbalist yeshiva "Beit El," with which Shlesinger had connections. The abbreviation "Sh"MSH" refers to Rabbi Shalom Mizrahi Sharabi.

¹²⁷ *Eyn HaTekhelet*, p. 39. For a discussion of several halachic aspects of this letter: Shlomo Kushlevsky, "Explanation of the Words of the Author of 'HaLev Halvri' Regarding the Number of Threads of Tekhelet in Tzitzit," *Veheyatem LeTzitzit: A Treatise on the Matter of Tekhelet*, D (2010), pp. 12-14.

¹²⁸ *Eyn HaTekhelet*, pp. 39-40.

¹²⁹ Gelbstein (see above footnote 84), Siman D, 3a (third numbering). For a more concise description of the matter, see: *ibid.*, Biyar Hakedemat HaZohar, 9a (second numbering).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, Biur Hakedemat HaZohar, 9b.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Siman D, 3b (third pagination).

two scholars from Beit El denied endorsing Radzyn *Tekhelet*.¹³² Furthermore, he alleged that Rabbi Diskin ruled that the introduction to *Ein HaTecheiles* should be burned, specifically the section containing Schlesinger's letter. Gelbstein considered this informal statement a halachic ruling to burn the book.¹³³ From this point onward, he referred to the letter as the "Letter of Falsehood" and viewed Schlesinger's dissemination of false testimony as causing the spread of *Tekhelet*. Consequently, in the mid-1890s, Gelbstein began advocating to disqualify *Tekhelet* wearers as witnesses.

Although Gelbstein aimed to disqualify all *Tekhelet* wearers, his primary target was Schlesinger, the author of the "Letter of Falsehood." He sought to remove Schlesinger from his position as a mikvah supervisor in Jerusalem.¹³⁴ Gelbstein recounted his efforts to convince the person in charge of the mikvah near the "Tiferet Yisrael" synagogue (a mikvah that was popular because it was heated) not to allow Schlesinger to supervise the mikvah, hinting that if he continued to do so, he would work to disqualify the mikvah. In his demand to disqualify Schlesinger as a supervisor of the mikvahs, Gelbstein added a theological-Kabbalistic argument, claiming that damage to the lower mikvah would harm the upper mikvah (symbolizing the sefirah of Malchut, which is the Shechina). Furthermore, according to Gelbstein, the current situation meant that those immersing in the mikvah were essentially not pure. He used this argument to promote his temple project: this impurity prevents the renewal of the Temple guards and also strengthens his stance, which he had expressed years earlier, against others, that no one should place their hands on the Western Wall due to its impurity.¹³⁵

In the overall picture, Gelbstein remained isolated in this campaign. His further attempts to enlist spiritual leaders were unsuccessful, and it seems that Schlesinger's position was too firmly established to be subjected to a drastic sanction like disqualification for testimony.¹³⁶ It is unclear what transpired in Gelbstein's campaign after 1896, as this is the last year mentioned in his work. In the year 1900, several articles discussing the halachic clarifications of *Tekhelet* were published in the Orthodox journal *Tel Telpiyot* that was published in Hungary. The series of articles was opened by Akiva Yosef Schlesinger, and several rabbis, as well as the assistant to the Radzyn Rebbe (son of Rabbi Gershon Henoch), and the journal's editor, responded.¹³⁷ In the article that began the discussion, Schlesinger presented a brief history of *Tekhelet*. He highlighted the sharp disagreement that arose following Lainer's initiative, which grew as more people adopted *Tekhelet*, and even Israel's great leaders who had agreed with it eventually reversed their opinions. According to Schlesinger, while the dispute was active, he chose not to engage with it, but now, in the year 1900, as the dispute had calmed, it was possible to engage

¹³² Ibid., Siman D, 4a (third pagination).

¹³³ Ibid., Siman He, 5a.

¹³⁴ The second half of his book, Simanim 5-8, was dedicated to this campaign.

¹³⁵ Gelbstein (see footnote 84), Section 5, 8b-9a.

¹³⁶ On the refusal of the Boyaner Rebbe, the president of the "Kollel Volhyn" to support Gelbstein's requests: *ibid.*, 4b-6b (third numbering).

On the refusal of Shmuel Slat to invalidate the testimony of Schlesinger: *ibid.*, Section 6, 10a.

On the refusal of Zalman Paredkin: *ibid.*, Section 9, 22b.

¹³⁷ *Tel Talpiot*, Issue 8 (1900), pages 36-37, 61-62, 104-107; 124-125; 135-138, 159-161; 165-168; 182-183, 210-211.

in a more relaxed discussion about *Tekhelet*.¹³⁸ Indeed, the discussion initiated by Shlesinger led to the presentation of opposing views, but the debaters presented their objections with moderation, and even those who disagreed with Shlesinger were careful to respect him. In any case, Shlesinger's remarks and the ensuing discussion indicate that even if Gelbstein continued his battle against those wearing *Tekhelet* in Jerusalem, the social controversy surrounding *Tekhelet* gradually dissipated after 1896, and by the year 1900, it had returned to a more theoretical halachic discussion.

5. The Orthodox Context

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that, in contrast to the intensity of the communal conflict, the fundamental halachic debate did not gain significant momentum. On the contrary, the leaders of Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe and the Yishuv HaYashan in Jerusalem refrained from taking a decisive position on the issue of *Tekhelet*—whether for or against, to permit or to forbid. Instead, they allowed each individual to act as they saw fit. Trunk and Spector avoided expressing a definitive stance on the matter, doing so only in response to the specific request from the Zamozhch community (and it is possible that when Leiner sent his followers to seek the opinions of these authorities, he assumed they would not refrain from assisting a community in a specific predicament).¹³⁹ Diskin and Salant also refrained from expressing a position after receiving explicit instructions from the rabbis of Vilna not to engage in *Tekhelet*-related matters.

What were the reasons for this widespread avoidance of taking a clear stance? Leiner argued that this avoidance was due to respect, meaning that acknowledging his correctness would seemingly be an acknowledgment of his halakhic superiority. However, from the words of the poskim themselves, it can be deduced that the reasons were different.

One reason was the conflicts that broke out within communities. Beyond the general desire to avoid disagreements, in the specific case of the renewal of *Tekhelet*, which was clearly associated with the Radzin Chassidim, taking a halachic stance would have meant taking a position in the internal Chassidic politics. Supporting the Radzin Chassidus, known as a small and even marginal group, could have endangered relations with the larger and more influential Chassidic groups that opposed Radzin – such as Gur and Alexander. On the other hand, opposing *Tekhelet* would have complicated matters with Leiner himself, who was known for his relentless polemics and disregard for the honor of the "Gedolim." These fears, both of general conflict and of entering Chassidic politics, not only caused the rabbis to explicitly refrain from engaging in the issue but also led to the avoidance of printing polemical statements (at least in the case of Gelbstein).

Another reason, presented by Spector, was that there were more pressing contemporary struggles. As mentioned, Spector was attributed with the statement that he did not intend to engage in the issue because he was focused on important matters concerning all of Israel. It is

¹³⁸ Tel Talpiot, *ibid*, pages 36-37.

¹³⁹ It is interesting to note that the ban he imposed on the Corfu etrogim in 1875 was intended only for that year and for the community of Kovno, and was not meant to be a general and binding halachic ruling.

not clear which urgent issues he was dealing with, but it can be assumed that the issue of *Tekhelet* was not considered as such by him. The decision whether to wear *Tekhelet* was seen as a personal one for each Jew, and thus Spector's guidance was that everyone should be buried in the tallit they wore in life. The issue was also not as serious from a halakhic standpoint (unlike, for example, *chilul Shabbat*), because one could wear *tzitzit* with dyed threads.

Furthermore, the reactions of Spector and Trunk (and perhaps even the silence of other rabbis) should be understood against the background of other polemics that were stirring the rabbinic world in Eastern Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century. Spector and Trunk were among those who agreed with the first edition of 'Sidrei Taharot.' In contrast, Rabbi and dayan Bezalel Katz Cohen of Vilna, who had initially not opposed and may have even supported the 'Sidrei Taharot' initiative, changed his mind and became one of the opponents of the book, with other rabbis from Lithuania joining him. The controversy over 'Sidrei Taharot' was also linked in several ways to the long-standing polemic about the kashrut of the Corfu etrogim, which flared up again between 1875-1891. Spector and Trunk were involved in the Corfu etrog controversy, opposing the Corfu etrogim, while Bezalel Katz supported them.¹⁴⁰ When the latter criticized Spector for opposing the Corfu etrogim, he subtly criticized his support for 'Sidrei Taharot.'¹⁴¹ Leiner himself was also involved in the etrog controversy, and his family even traded in Corfu etrogim. Although Leiner's position in the early stages of the controversy in the 1870s is not known, it appears that when he approached Spector to gain his agreement for 'Sidrei Taharot,' he also discussed the Corfu etrogim with him.¹⁴² In 1887, Leiner's support for the Corfu etrogim was published, possibly based on economic considerations related to his family business.¹⁴³ In 1888, Jewish Orthodoxy entered a new controversy, called the 'Shemita Controversy.' This controversy concerned the legitimacy of selling land to non-Jews before the Shemita year (1890), to prevent the cessation of farming and thus avoid serious harm to settlement. Spector, Trunk, and Leiner were also involved in this controversy.¹⁴⁴ Leiner opposed the sale

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion on the etrog controversy: Dan Porat, "The Controversy over the Etrogim of Eretz Yisrael in 1875-1889: A Chapter in the Eastern European Orthodox Community's Relationship with the Land of Israel," Master's thesis, Jerusalem 1994; Yosef Shalmon, "The Corfu Etrog Controversy and Its Historical Background," *AJS Review*, 25 (2000-2001), pp. 1-24; idem, "The Controversy over the Corfu Etrogim and the Eretz Yisrael Etrogim – 1875-1891," *Tzion* 57 (2000), pp. 75-106. On the connection between the "Sidrei Taharot" controversy and the etrog controversy: *ibid.*, pp. 87-90. This second article was also published in his book (see note 1), pp. 92-127.

¹⁴¹ Translation:

"And certainly for anyone who comes after the signing of the holy Gemara to add new Gemarot from his own heart, heaven forbid, this is truly like uprooting Torah!" (Permission ruling on Corfu etrogim for this year, Vilna 1876, p. 18).

¹⁴² Translation:

According to one version, Leiner promised Spector that he would try "to spread the prohibition of Corfu etrogim in his region" in exchange for receiving Spector's support for 'Seder Taharot' (Zikaron Yaakov, vol. 2 [see footnote 69], p. 176). For an objection to this version, see Karlinksy (see footnote 11), pp. 261-262, note 390.

¹⁴³ Leiner's position on Corfu etrogim was published in *HaMeleitz* by his brother-in-law, Nachum Feigenbaum, who was a merchant of Corfu etrogim (*HaMeleitz*, September 30, 1887, pp. 2204-2206). In the same issue, a disclaimer was published, hinting that his words were taken from the teachings of the Tzaddik of Gur (*ibid.*, p. 2206).

¹⁴⁴ The idea of the *heter mekhira* (sale permit) was apparently raised by Trunk, and it was supported by several rabbis from Eastern Europe, while rabbis from the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem, such as Shmuel

arrangements, although he did not publish his position publicly, sending it privately to Spector and Trunk. The fact that Leiner sought their opinion on *Tekhelet*, conveyed his views in favor of the renewal of *Tekhelet*, and against the permissibility of the sale for Shemita, and complained that Spector expressed opinions on issues that Leiner felt were less important than *Tekhelet*, may hint at the positions they held in the Shemita controversy. Finally, it is possible that, in addition to halakhic considerations, there were also economic factors, such as the desire to promote the family's business in Corfu etrogim, which would have flourished if there had been no crop of etrogim from Eretz Yisrael.

It appears, therefore, that the rabbis who stood out in the *Tekhelet* controversy, especially Trunk and Spector (but also Diskin and Salant in Jerusalem), were also prominent in other polemics. Therefore, it is likely that their positions on *Tekhelet* were formulated with consideration of their positions in other controversies, and of the potential impacts of presenting a stance on one issue on other issues. In other words, addressing each controversy in isolation is too narrow; they should be seen as part of a social-cultural system, in which the connections between different issues are just as important as the individual components. These connections determined which issues were critical enough to warrant taking a stance and risking conflict, and which issues did not require taking a position, and where doing so could even be damaging. The Shemita and etrog controversies were of the first type, while *Tekhelet* was a second type of issue. Therefore, within what could be called the "economy of Orthodox polemics," the issue of *Tekhelet* was not considered important enough in the eyes of the Gedolim for them to express their views openly.

Whatever the reasons for the avoidance of a firm decision on *Tekhelet*, it can be said that it was the leaders of Orthodoxy, not Leiner, who presented a pluralistic stance on *Tekhelet* by allowing everyone to act as they saw fit. It was Leiner and Gelbstein – each in their own way – who did not settle for the Orthodox leadership's pluralistic stance and demanded that these leaders take a definitive position from which practical guidance would be derived. Both of them also wrote that these leaders supported their views (whether in favor or against) when speaking with them privately but refused to publish their opinions publicly.

It is possible that the renewal of *Tekhelet* should be understood as an innovative response to the challenges of modernity, as suggested by Shaul Magid.¹⁴⁵ However, the innovation in the

Salant and Yehuda Leib Diskin (who would later express opinions on the topic of *Tekhelet*, as will be explained in the next section), completely opposed the cultivation of the land. The supporters of the *heter mekhira* sought to enlist the support of Yitzhak Elchanan Spector. Initially, he decided not to go against the rabbis of the Old Yishuv, but eventually an arrangement was reached that was acceptable to him.

On the *Shmita* controversy:

Menahem Friedman, "On the Social Significance of the *Shmita* Controversy (1889-1900)," *Shalem*, 1 (1974), pp. 455-479; Avraham Sheriber, "The *Heter Mekhira* – The *Shmita* Controversy of 1889," *Mayim Madliyu* (1993), pp. 59-80; Benjamin Brown, "The Sanctity of the Land of Israel in the Context of the *Shmita* Controversy," in: Aviezer Ravitzky (Ed.), *Land of Israel in Jewish Thought in the Twentieth Century*, Jerusalem, 2005, pp. 71-103 (and see note 12 on p. 73 for additional literature references).

¹⁴⁵ Magid 1998 (above footnote 2).

renewal of *Tekhelet* can also be seen as hyper-conservatism, a return to an even older future than the tradition of the absence of *Tekhelet*. Furthermore, Michael Silver argued that the ultra-Orthodox in the 19th century adopted strategies of "invention of traditions" in order to solidify their strict approach to halakhic innovations. They adopted traditions from the realm of aggadah and Kabbalah, which were considered to have secondary authoritative validity, and presented them as exclusive and authoritative.¹⁴⁶ It can be said that both Leiner and Gelbstein adopted similar approaches, each to solidify their position. Leiner relied on Midrashic sources to identify the squid as the "chilazon," while Gelbstein relied on Kabbalistic sources to present it as a symbol of the impure "Sitra Achra." In their approaches, one can identify the ultra-Orthodox decisiveness in inventing a tradition to solidify a categorical stance, whether to establish the tradition of the chilazon or to invalidate it.

Summary

While proponents of *Tekhelet* and chroniclers of the Izbica-Radzin Hasidic movement tended to attribute significant importance to the renewal of *Tekhelet* and describe the controversy as intense, an examination of the various sources cited above reveals a clear gap. This gap lies between the great importance attributed to the issue of *Tekhelet* by Leiner and Gelbstein (with their opposing views) and the lesser importance ascribed to it by Eastern European Orthodox rabbis. For the Orthodox rabbis of the time, the issue of renewing *Tekhelet* was not deemed significant enough to warrant engaging in a fundamental halachic debate. However, the conflicts that erupted between Hasidim in several towns in Poland (possibly with some instigation by Leiner himself) forced the rabbis to intervene reluctantly. Similarly, in Jerusalem, an analogous process unfolded: a staunch opponent of *Tekhelet*, Rabbi Hillel Moshe Meisels Gelbstein, engaged in conflicts against *Tekhelet* supporters in the city while attempting to compel the Yishuv HaYashan rabbis to take a principled stand, which they sought to avoid based on recommendations from European rabbis.

Correspondingly, a discrepancy is evident between the significant importance attributed to the *Tekhelet* controversy by the Hasidim themselves, as evidenced by community altercations, and the minimal importance assigned to it by the editor and columnists of *Ha-Tzefira*. Reports in the press highlight tensions regarding *Tekhelet* in several towns in the Lublin region, where Radzin Hasidim faced opposition from those opposed to *Tekhelet*, often belonging to Hasidic groups hostile to Radzin. These tensions manifested in physical violence, such as the tearing of *Tekhelet* threads from the garments of Radzin Hasidim by their opponents, and escalated when key community institutions (rabbinate, ritual slaughterhouses, or burial societies) were controlled by supporters or opponents of *Tekhelet*. However, much like the Orthodox rabbis, the contributors to *Ha-Tzefira* also viewed the *Tekhelet* controversy as far from the most pressing issue facing Jews. According to Nimenovitz, the columnist who extensively covered the *Tekhelet* disputes, the following issues were deemed more central at the time: "the questions of education (*chederim*), America and Argentina together, the etrog dispute, and the pivotal

¹⁴⁶ Michaël K. Silver, "The Beginnings of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of Tradition," in: Yosef Shalom, Aviezer Ravitzky, and Adam Przeździecki (eds.), *Jewish Orthodoxy: New Aspects*, Jerusalem 2006, pp. 297-344, especially pp. 325-328.

question of the *Chilazon*.¹⁴⁷ These represented issues of Jewish education, emigration, and the renewal of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. Moreover, when these disputes were brought to the attention of non-Jewish authorities, they often refused to intervene, recognizing them as internal Jewish matters.

It is possible that all sides felt this was an internal Hasidic dispute that was being given dimensions beyond its actual importance in their eyes. Conflicts within communities between Hasidim from rival Hasidic groups were a common phenomenon in Jewish society in Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century. Many of these conflicts revolved around differences in specific customs between the various Hasidic groups, while others centered on social control over appointments to religious positions (Klei Kodesh).¹⁴⁸ From the Hasidim's perspective, these differences were not always based on principled reasons, whether halachic or ideological, but rather could be seen as a way of expressing the identity of a particular Hasidic group, and sharpening the group's identity in contrast to other Hasidic groups.

Undoubtedly, both Leiner and Gelbstein were of polemical temperament, which led them to provoke disputes (one for and the other against *Tekhelet*) even when those around them believed such controversies could have been avoided. Furthermore, it is undeniable that the issue of *Tekhelet* did not carry critical halachic significance for Jewish society that necessitated a sweeping decision for or against its renewal (as halachically, wearing dyed garments was permissible). Likewise, the *Tekhelet* disputes were particularly intensified by internal Hasidic rivalries. Nevertheless, the *Tekhelet* issue possesses unique characteristics compared to other Hasidic disputes, imbuing it with broader implications.

Among these unique traits, some of which were raised only by opponents of the initiative, are the following: (a) the visual prominence of *Tekhelet*, evident in both the appearance of the *Tekhelet* threads worn by supporters and the violent act of tearing them by opponents; (b) the constant presence of *Tekhelet* in Jewish life—it was not confined to prayer but was an almost omnipresent feature in the daily and even posthumous lives of Jews; (c) the perception of *pietism*—adopting *Tekhelet* was seen as striving for a more complete fulfillment of the commandments, which was perceived as religious pretentiousness by those of lower status; (d) a sense of halachic and ideological depth reflected in Leiner's extensive writings on the subject, in contrast to many Hasidic disputes, which often revolved around clerical appointments or changes in prayer rites without substantive justification.

The expression of identity by *Tekhelet* wearers thus had a constant and visible presence, and the *pietism* it involved made it a display of superiority. It is unsurprising, then, that those who adopted this practice were often those who felt relatively marginalized: primarily, Radzin Hasidim, who were on the periphery of the Hasidic world at the time, seen as dissidents from the Kotzk dynasty with a radical religious ethos. However, as reported in the press, it also

¹⁴⁷ Ha-Netz, "Boreh Homiyut," *Ha-Tsefirah*, August 17, 1888, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ See for example: Gadi Sagiv, *The Dynasty: The Chernobyl Family and Its Place in the History of Hasidism*, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 162-171.

represented a demonstration of independence or uniqueness by the community's impoverished, expressing pride or defiance toward dominant groups.

As noted above, Leiner has been described as a revolutionary or innovator. His innovations—*Sidrei Taharot* and *Tekhelet*—which he framed as necessary supplements to tradition, were perceived by others as revolutionary and, by some opponents of Radzin Hasidim, as bordering on transgression. Even if, from a religious studies perspective, Leiner's religious tendencies should be characterized more precisely than mere antinomianism (e.g., as hyper nomianism, as suggested by Shaul Magid), in the social realm, wearing *Tekhelet* was seen by some opponents of Radzin Hasidim as antinomian in every sense. Thus, Radzin Hasidism was perceived as antinomian by its detractors, who did not require fine theoretical distinctions.

Additionally, the 19th-century *Tekhelet* controversy was unique among other polemics in that it was the initial stage of a discourse that continued into the 20th century. Many of the distinctive features of the 19th-century controversy resurfaced about a century later in the polemics of the 1990s. Both in the 19th and 20th centuries, it became evident that *Tekhelet* was not merely a halachic debate. Rather, wearing it was an act of group identity assertion by Radzin Hasidim and, simultaneously, an act of subversion against hegemonic or dominant groups within Jewish Orthodox society—both other Hasidic groups and non-Hasidic Orthodox factions.