

The Founders of Chassidut:

1. Ha'Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer):

(1698 – 22 May 1760), known as the **Baal Shem Tov** or as the **Besht**, was a Jewish mystic and healer from Poland who is regarded as the founder of Hasidic Judaism. "Besht" is the acronym for **Baal Shem Tov**, which means "One with the Good Name" or "one with a good reputation".

The little biographical information about the Besht comes from oral traditions handed down by his students (Jacob Joseph of Polonne and others) and from the legendary tales about his life and behavior collected in *Shivhei ha-Besht (In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov)*; Kapust and Berdychiv, 1814–15).

A central tenet in the Baal Shem Tov's teaching is the direct connection with the divine, "dvekut", which is infused in every human activity and every waking hour. Prayer is of supreme importance, along with the mystical significance of Hebrew letters and words. His innovation lies in "encouraging worshipers to follow their distracting thoughts to their roots in the divine". Those who follow his teachings regard him as descended from the Davidic line that traces its lineage to the royal house of David.



2. Maggid of Mezeritch (Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch):

died December 1772, also known as the *Maggid of Mezeritch*, was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov and was chosen as his successor to lead the early movement. Dov Ber is regarded as the first systematic exponent of the mystical philosophy underlying the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, and through his teaching and leadership, the main architect of the movement. He established his base in Mezhrichi (in Volhynia), which moved the centre of Hasidism from Medzhybizh (in Podolia), where he focused his attention on raising a close circle of disciples to spread the movement. After his death the third generation of leadership took their different interpretations and disseminated across appointed regions of Eastern Europe, rapidly spreading Hasidism beyond Ukraine, to Poland, Galicia and Russia.

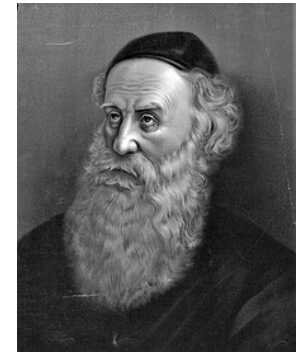
His teachings appear in *Magid Devarav L'Yaakov, Or Torah, Likutim Yekarim, Or Ha'emet, Kitvei Kodesh, Shemuah Tovah*, and in the works authored by his disciples. His inner circle of disciples, known as the *Chevraia Kadisha* ("Holy Brotherhood"), included Rabbis Avraham HaMalach (his son), Nachum of Czernobyl, Elimelech of Lizhensk, Zusha of Hanipol, Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, Boruch of Medzhybizh, Aharon (HaGadol) of Karlin, Chaim Chaykl of Amdur, Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Shmuel Shmelke of Nikolsburg, Shlomo Flam (the Lutzker Maggid) and Shneur Zalman of Liadi.



The First Students (Chevraya Kadishah “Holy Brotherhood”, not all):

1. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (Ba'al HaTanya):

September 4, 1745 – December 15, 1812, was an influential [rabbi](#) and the founder and first [Rebbe](#) of [Chabad](#), a branch of [Hasidic Judaism](#), then based in [Liadi](#) in the [Russian Empire](#). He was the author of many works, and is best known for [Shulchan Aruch HaRav](#), [Tanya](#), and his [Siddur Torah](#) Or compiled according to the [Nusach Ari](#). [Zalman](#) is a Yiddish variant of [Solomon](#) and Shneur (or Shne'or) is a Yiddish composite of the two Hebrew words "shnei oh" (שני אור "two lights").



2. Rabbi Aharon of Karlin:

Aaron ben Jacob Perlov of Karlin, known among the [Hasidim](#) as [Rabbi](#) Aaron the Great, or simply as the "Preacher" or "Censor", (born in 1736; died 1772) was one of the early rabbis of the sect who helped the rapid spread of [Hasidism](#) in Eastern Europe, and was distinguished for the fiery eloquence of his exhortations. He died one year before his master, Rabbi [Dov Ber of Mezeritch](#), and was succeeded by his disciple, Rabbi Shlomo of Karlin. Rabbi Shlomo was in turn succeeded by Rabbi Aharon's son, Asher. Perlov composed and wrote the famous Sabbath hymn [Yah Ekhsuf](#) (יה_אכסוף) which is still a part of the liturgy of the [Hasidim](#).

3. Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk:

(1717–March 11, 1787) was a [rabbi](#) and one of the great founding [Rebbes](#) of the [Hasidic movement](#). Rabbi Elimelech authored the classic [work](#) [Noam Elimelech](#). It developed the Hasidic theory of the [Tzaddik](#) into the full doctrine of "[Practical/Popular Tzaddikism](#)". This shaped the social role of [mystical leadership](#), characteristic of the "[Mainstream Hasidic](#)" path.



4. Rabbi Zusha of Hanipol:

(1718–1800), was an early Hasidic luminary and well-known [tzaddik](#). Rabbi Zusha was the brother of Rebbe [Elimelech of Lizhensk](#); Rabbi Elimelech was the elder by about 1 year. Rabbi Zusha was known for his deep emotional approach towards

prayer and his great piety. He was one of the two rabbis, together with Reb Leib HaKohen, with whom Rabbi [Shneur Zalman of Liadi](#) consulted with before printing the [Tanya](#) in 1797.

5. **Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev:**

(1740–1809), also known as the holy **Berdichever**, and the **Kedushas Levi**, was a [Hasidic](#) master and Jewish leader. Levi Yitzchok was known as the "defense attorney" for the Jewish people ("*Sneiguron Shel Yisroel*"), because he would intercede on their behalf before God. Known for his compassion for every Jew, he was one of the most beloved leaders of [Eastern European](#) Jewry. He is considered by some to be the founder of [Hasidism](#) in central Poland.^[2] And known for his fiery service of God. Today, there are several synagogues called Berditshev, of which the rabbis of some are called Berditshever *Rebbes*.



6. **Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak of Lublin (The Chozeh of Lublin):**

1745 - August 15, 1815) was a [Hasidic rebbe](#) from [Poland](#). A leading figure in the early Hasidic movement, he became known as the "seer" or "visionary" due to his purported ability to gaze across great distance by supernatural means. He was a disciple of the [Maggid of Mezritch](#). He continued his studies under [Shmelke](#) of [Nikolsburg](#) and [Elimelech of Lizhensk](#).