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***Gebrochts: Halakhah, Kabbalah, and the
History of Hasidism***

The Hasidic custom on Passover is to avoid *gebrochts* – that is, *matsah* that has come in contact with water. This article explores the practice as a case study for the adoption, popularization, and spread of Hasidic customs. The acceptance of the custom is linked to the approach of the nascent Hasidic movement towards Lurianic mystical lore and the quest to encourage the Jewish laity to embrace practices grounded in this tradition. This process contributed to the coalescence of Hasidic identity.

A vector of this research explores the legal writings from the *Beit Midrash* of Hasidism as they pertain to the *gebrochts* custom. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady was the first Hasidic jurist to relate to the custom. In an undated responsum he advocated the adoption of the practice, though he did not mention the custom in his code of law. The two sources provide freeze frames of the process of a custom germinating in an emerging community. This is a rare opportunity to pinpoint such a process.

The case of *gebrochts* in the Hasidic milieu is significant from an additional perspective. Customs that took root during Hasidism's formative years were observed in communal spaces: Prayer rites and venues, white clothing, slaughter knives, the communal festive meal, and others. *Gebrochts* is an early case of Hasidic values entering the privacy of the home. As families sat down for the traditional Passover *seder*, Hasidism – in the form of the *gebrochts* stricture – was present at the festivities.