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Soul Brothers: A Memoir

Shonna Husbands-Hankin

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Soul Brothers: A Memoir

Shonna Husbands-Hankin (bio)

In the world of Jewish learning, study buddies are known as *hevruta* partners, or friends. In the world of academic inquiry, we think of shared

ideas in terms of collaborators. And, in the world of spirit, soul brothers may be the best term to describe the merging of religion, culture, history, and musicology in a mutual spiritual exploration.

Such spiritual intimacy was the foundation of the partnership shared between the two luminaries and grandfathers of Jewish Renewal, Reb Shlomo Carlebach, z'l, and Reb Zalman Shachter-Shalomi, z'l. In thinking of one, we must now think of the other, for together they ushered forward the essence of a resurgence and renewal of Judaism after the Holocaust, lighting a spark of divine spirit wherever they went. Together, they created a new form of heartfelt, soulful Judaism. They spoke the language of the times, with their souls rooted in Jewish tradition and their energies soaring with new possibilities.

Like troubadours and traveling *maggidim*, storytellers and folk teachers of eras past, these two dynamic personalities were vagabond rabbis in the new age, bridging the old world and the new. Born in Europe and escaping to the United States, they were sent together to college campuses as outreach emissaries of the Lubavitcher rebbe beginning in 1949. There, they taught, listened, counseled, and sang. Over the years, they uplifted the downhearted and brought flocks of thousands back to their spiritual home in Judaism.

As we now reflect upon the nearly twenty-two years since Reb Shlomo's passing, and two years since Reb Zalman's passing, we can contemplate their shared decades of global work. Perhaps there are some deep wells to explore about their shared journeys and the motivations that propelled them. Perhaps there are layers to uncover about their inspiration, their styles of influence, and their passion to dance with the evolving times. How did they stay current, yet solidly connected to the old while exploring the new?

It's time for a new era of contemplation, examination, and detective work. As historians and spiritual treasure hunters, it is incumbent upon us to let the reflection of the light of these two giants of Jewish Renewal inform us, move us, and carry us forward with a passion and dedication, an

impulse of exploration and continuity, as we carry forth the torch of the wisdomkeepers into the dawn of the next unfolding era. **[End Page 547]**

Rabbi Hanna Tiferet Siegel shares her story: “The first time I met Reb Shlomo was in 1967, my first year at university in Cleveland, when he came to do a Shabbaton at Hillel. I had no idea who he was or what was going to happen to me. I was an enthusiastic prayer and song leader in the Conservative youth movement and had never heard of Hasidism.

“Reb Shlomo spoke to some higher transcendent place in me where we could leave our limited beliefs and become One. I had no words for this experience, yet I knew I had tapped into something true for myself. This included a pure love of God, and the heart connection of people through song and bringing down new melodies. His music inspired me and his presence and teachings gave me new life.

“The following year I married Daniel Siegel, and we began our journey together. He developed a connection with Reb Zalman in Winnipeg as a rebbe, colleague, and spiritual mentor. Daniel went on to become a rabbi and dedicated his life to serving the Jewish people with the awakening of newly acquired skills and texts of Hasidism and the support of a real teacher. That was the story of the two of them, Rebs Shlomo and Zalman, for us — the heart and the mind. For each of us, our creative process was reflected more fluently through one teacher or the other.”¹

Both Reb Shlomo and Reb Zalman touched so many souls, uplifted so many, brought them back into the Jewish fold. How did they stay rooted in the past, each with significant Jewish backgrounds, while unfolding into the present moments that kept unfurling with new branches and leaves on the living...

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SHONNA HUSBANDS-HANKIN

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