

ḤASIDEI ASHKENAZ, a social and ideological circle, with a particular religious outlook, in medieval German Jewry. The first centers of the movement were Regensburg in southern Germany and the communities of Speyer, Worms, and Mainz on the Rhine; from there, its influence spread over most of Germany and, to a certain extent, to France also. Its main literature was composed during the first half of the 13th century. This movement developed in the spiritual and social atmosphere of the Jewish communities in German towns of the 12th and 13th centuries. **Kiddush ha-Shem* (martyrdom) was an extremely important factor in its formation. Another significant factor was the challenge of the Christian pietist movements. It reacted against the pressure from these trends in Christianity and was also influenced by them. Added to these was the movement's feeling of spiritual supremacy derived from its own strength and duties to God and the nation.

The Literature of the Circle

The literature of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz developed in two different directions. The movement produced some ethical works, intended to influence the mass of the Jews and direct them toward rigorous observance of the commandments and the moral values of Judaism (see *Ethical Literature). Most important of these works was the *Sefer Ḥasidim*, which continued to influence Jewish ethical thought throughout the centuries, and remained an active force in shaping Jewish ethics until modern times.

The second direction in which the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz developed was the writing of a vast body of esoteric works, some containing mystical elements. According to the traditions of the Ḥasidim themselves, this esoteric lore reached them through a long chain of verbal tradition, beginning in Italy in the eighth century. This tradition was carried mainly by the *Kalonymus family, which was transferred in the ninth century from Italy to Germany by one of the Carolingian emperors. Most of the prominent leaders of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz were members of this family, notably *Samuel b. Kalonymus he-Ḥasid ("the Pious") in the second half of the 12th century, his son *Judah b. Samuel he-Ḥasid (d. 1217), and his pupil, *Eleazar b. Judah b. Kalonymus of Worms (d. c. 1230). The tradition continued to flourish in this family, and prominent among its bearers are some of the descendants of Judah he-Ḥasid: Moses, his son; *Eleazar b. Moses ha-Darshan; and Moses b. Eleazar, Judah's great-grandson. Other writers belonging to this circle were disciples of Eleazar of Worms, among them *Abraham b. Azriel, author of *Arugat ha-Bosem* and *Isaac b. Moses of Vienna, author of *Or Zarua*. The Kalonymus family represents the central group of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, authors of esoteric literature. There were, however, other groups or individuals who wrote such works without being in close touch with the core. Most of these works remained anonymous and very little is known about the place and time in which they were written. One of the most important is the **Sefer ha-Hayyim*, written about the turn of the 13th century by a ḥasidic scholar who was deeply influenced by Abraham

*Ibn Ezra in formulating his theology, which also includes elements similar to some kabbalistic ideas. Another anonymous writer was the author of *Sefer ha-Navon*, a commentary on the verse "*Shema Israel*"; the author had no direct connection with the main group of the Kalonymus family, though apparently he had access to at least one work written by Judah he-Ḥasid.

Besides these scattered, anonymous writers it seems that there existed a group of mystical writers in the 12th and 13th centuries who are distinguished by their use of a pseudographic *baraita* attributed to *Joseph b. Uzziel, known in Hebrew literature as the grandson of Ben Sira, the legendary son of the prophet Jeremiah (see *Ben Sira, Alphabet of). The *baraita* is mainly cosmological, closely related to *Sefer Ḥasidim*. One of the earliest commentaries on this *baraita* is attributed to a scholar called Avigdor ha-Zarefati. Among the works which originated in this group was the commentary on *Sefer Ḥasidim* attributed to *Saadiah Gaon (not to be confused with Saadiah's true commentary on that work). The best-known writer of this group is *Elhanan b. Yakar, who lived in the first half of the 13th century in England and France and wrote two commentaries on *Sefer Ḥasidim* and a theological work, *Sod ha-Sodot*.

The theology of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz aroused some controversy in Ashkenazi Jewry; in *Ketav Tamim* Moses *Taku attacked their ideas as expressed in Judah he-Ḥasid's *Sefer ha-Kavod*, in the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, which Taku erroneously attributed to Abraham *ibn Ezra, and in the sources of these ideas, especially the works of Saadiah Gaon, *Emunot ve-Deot* and the commentary on the *Sefer Ḥasidim*.

Various sources were used in the formulation of Ashkenazi ḥasidic esoteric thought. There were, undoubtedly, some external, Christian influences, especially some of the neoplatonic medieval writings. In most cases these sources are unknown; only in one case, that of Elhanan b. Yakar, has it been established that he made use of material included in medieval Christian theological works. It is possible that some ideas came to the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz through verbal, not written, sources. As for the Jewish sources, the Ḥasidim made extensive use of *heikhalot* and *Merkabah literature, which they copied and quoted extensively, thus preserving some texts which might otherwise have been lost. They also made use of the works of some of the first medieval theological writers in Hebrew: Shabbetai *Donnolo, *Abraham b. Ḥayya, and *Judah ha-Nasi of Barcelona; of special significance was the influence of Abraham ibn Ezra and there is hardly a ḥasidic work which does not, directly or indirectly, reflect his influence. However, the basic ideas of the Ashkenazi ḥasidic thinkers came from Saadiah Gaon, whose writings were known to them not in the 12th-century translation by Judah ibn *Tibbon, but from an earlier, poetic paraphrase in which the discursive, philosophical character of the works had been obliterated. No wonder, therefore, that the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz saw Saadiah as a mystic, similar to the ninth-century *Aaron of Baghdad (Abu Aharon) who came from Babylonia to Italy, and on whom

they relied for some mystical knowledge, especially in the interpretation of prayer.

Theology

The basic idea which the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz tried to teach was the unity and incorporeality of God, opposing all anthropomorphic descriptions of God. In this their teachings were similar to those of the Jewish philosophers in Spain. The difference, however, lies in their concept of the intermediary powers between God and man. The Ḥasidei Ashkenaz accepted from Saadiah Gaon the idea that a supreme power, the *Kavod* (“Divine Glory”), also called the **Shekhinah*, is the subject of all the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible, but they differ from him in their concept of the essence of the *Kavod*. According to Saadiah the *Kavod* was created and was one of the angels, though supreme above all. Most of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz described the *Kavod* as a divine being, emanating from God himself (though they did not have a special word for the concept of emanation, as did the kabbalists). Some writers even described a whole world of many *Kevodot*, thus using the neoplatonic concept of a ladder of emanated beings descending from the Godhead toward the created world. *Kavod* plays a prominent part in the doctrines of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz: the soul is connected with the *Kavod*, or even emanates from it, and receives its spiritual sustenance from it. Some of the many writings on prayer, prayer exegesis, and instructions on the right way to pray, emphasize that prayer should be directed toward the Godhead itself and not the *Kavod*, thereby suggesting that there were tendencies in the circles of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz to consider the *Kavod* as a divine entity toward whom prayers should be directed. However, all of them regarded the *Kavod* as the major divine entity exerting influence on events in the lower world.

The theology of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz is deeply grounded in the idea of divine immanence, and they emphatically state that the Godhead is itself present within all created things, and not the *Kavod*. In this, Saadiah’s influence is again paramount. The immanence of God is clearly expressed in the oldest remaining work of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, the **Shir ha-Yihud*, which was probably composed at the end of the 12th century. The idea of immanence was so central to their theology, that it was questioned why a man should turn toward heaven while praying when God was present everywhere. The answer was that in heaven dwelt the *Kavod*, and this was the revealed part of God, a sign toward which man should turn, though not one toward which he should direct his prayers.

The Ḥasidei Ashkenaz did not regard the regular laws of nature, man, and society as revealing God’s true nature. These laws were arbitrary, and sometimes their purpose was adverse to God’s intentions; that is, they were created in order to serve as a trial (*nissayon*) for the just and pious who must overcome them. Wonders and unusual happenings, however, and certainly the miracles which occur in the world, do reveal God’s true nature, and the pious and learned scholar can interpret them in order to understand better the ways and na-

ture of God. In this connection the Ḥasidim made extensive use of demonological phenomena, regarding them as a kind of miracle and trying to divine some theological moral from the analysis of such phenomena. Thus their literature contains probably the largest extant body of demonological and magical information in medieval Hebrew literature.

Secretly the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz also dealt in messianic speculation, though they tried to conceal this (thus it is almost unmentioned in *Sefer Ḥasidim*). Believing that the messianic age was about to dawn, probably around 1240, they expected retribution to be meted out to the gentiles for all the sufferings undergone by German Jewry in the dreadful age of the Crusades.

[Joseph Dan]

The followers of Ḥasidut Ashkenaz regarded themselves as bearers of a religious consciousness deeper than that generally prevailing and subject to religious duties severer than the accepted ones. The maximum was asked of the person able and willing to take upon himself the “restrictions of Ḥasidut,” while a lesser standard sufficed for those who had not entered its circle. From the *tovim* (the “good”), the Ḥasidim (the “pious”), and the *zaddikim* (the “righteous”), a maximum of emotional fervor and utmost purification of soul and thought were demanded, together with exact attention to the details of both major and minor precepts. The other members of the community at large were divided into the *ra’im* (“evil ones”) and the despotic ones – whom the Ḥasidim fought against – and the *peshtim* (“simple ones”) – whom the Ḥasidim guided inasmuch as they were capable of observing and feeling. In its relations with the community and its institutions, the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz therefore fluctuated between two contrasting attitudes: between the desire for leadership and service, and the tendency among its members to seclude themselves in order to live their exalted individual lives.

Their Symbolism

The array of symbols of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz is based to a considerable extent on faith in the strength of the Holy Names and the mystic power of the letters of the Holy Language (Hebrew) and their combinations; these are the channels of man’s communication with the celestial worlds, through study and prayer: “Every blessing and prayer ... everything ... according to its measure and its weight, its letters and its words; if it were not so, then our prayers would, God forbid, be comparable to the song of the uncircumcised nations.” Love of the Creator played a dominant role in the doctrine of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz and among the duties of the Ḥasid; this love must saturate all his senses and resources; its strength must lead him toward joy so that no void remained in his instincts through which sin or the thought of it might penetrate. In the writings of the Ḥasidim the fervor of their emotional love and joy is expressed in symbols and parables drawn from the experiences and emotions of sexual relationships.

“Prayer is called a service like the service on the altar; when the Temple existed, the angels rose heavenward in the

flame of the sacrifices ... and today ... they rise in the prayer which issues from the heart; for prayer is like a ladder. If there is no devotion behind the words of any blessing, the ladder stops there." The perfection of the "ladder" is so conceived that "the pronunciation of every word must be prolonged, so that there is devotion in a man's heart for every word that issues from his mouth" (*Sefer Ḥasidim* no. 11). Inner devotion is achieved through external methods: the letters should be counted. Melodies should be appropriate: "For supplications and demands, a melody which causes the heart to weep; for words of praise, a melody which causes the heart to rejoice." However, he who is not a Ḥasid may be content with general devotion; simple men and women may be exempted from reciting the prayers in Hebrew, and in certain cases even exempted from saying them in their established form, as long as they devote their hearts to their Father in Heaven.

The supreme manifestation of love for God is *Kiddush ha-Shem* ("the sanctification of the Holy Name," i.e., martyrdom), a glory for which the Ḥasid yearns. In this act, he wages the war of the people of God against Christian heresy and serves the Creator by sacrificing his body. The Ḥasidim were among "the first of the martyrs" during periods of persecution. Their courage, their service of the *Kavod* and the Lord, and their self-sacrifice became an example for others.

In ḥasidic doctrine concerning the world and man, there are numerous occult elements. The Jew lives in a world and in a community in which, to a certain extent, the dead continue their association with the living; demons and spirits also encompass man from all sides and Judah he-Ḥasid even believed that they obeyed the *halakhah*. Sorcery is a concrete factor and a common occurrence in people's lives, and the teachings of the Ḥasidim contain many instructions and rules of conduct which serve as a protection against these powers. In these conceptions can be discerned the imprint of Christian superstitions current in their surroundings.

Ethical Views

The Ḥasidim make no reference to two inclinations in man – toward the "good" and the "evil" – and it appears that man is regarded as having only "one inclination"; the way in which this is used determines whether a deed is good or evil. The Ḥasidim therefore taught that the instincts, desires, and longings of the heart were to be turned toward the good side. According to them, mortification of the body was a method of repentance. They taught "commensurate repentance," that is, the acceptance, measure for measure, of affliction and degradation in return for the pleasure and the reward gained from sin; in some details these ideas show the influence of the notions and practices of repentance current among Christian monks. Mortification, however, had a merit of its own: the sufferings of the righteous vindicate the masses: "the Messiah bears the sins" of the nation and it is incumbent upon the Ḥasidim to adhere to this principle. In this approach there is undoubted evidence of Christian influence.

In relations between man and man, they demanded of themselves a mode of behavior according to "the law of Heaven," the application of absolute justice in the fullest sense of its spiritual significance and content; the "law of the Torah" was sufficient only for the man who was not a Ḥasid. There were some Ḥasidim who decided: "When two people come before the rabbi for him to dispense justice, if these two are of a quarrelsome disposition, the rabbi will apply the law of the Torah, even though a contrary decision would be reached according to the law of Heaven; if, however, these two are good and God-fearing men and heedful of the words of the rabbi, he must apply the law of Heaven, even if the law of the Torah requires the opposite." A practical example of this was their willingness to admit the testimony of "honest women." In their statements on the "two laws" lie occasional criticisms of the *halakhah* because of their demand for perfection of the soul. Some said that the punishments detailed in the Torah "corresponded to man's conception of what is unlawful" – that is, in respect of social codes of behavior, but "do not correspond to instinctive awareness" – that is, they do not accord with the standard by which the Ḥasid assesses sin, which gives due consideration to temptations and the difficulty of overcoming them.

From the words of the Ḥasidim there emerges a kind of cynical indifference toward those who mock them; to bear insult in this fashion they regarded as a pious virtue. In this they reveal the reaction of a minority which is resolute in its opinion and convinced of its uniqueness in the face of possible attacks from the majority and a clash with accepted habits. Their place in society can thus be deduced from this aspect of their doctrine. In the eyes of the Ḥasidim "humility for the sake of Heaven" is a virtue which elevates the soul of the individual, and through this the public attains stability and unity. Their extreme candor and their belief in the single uniform instinct in man brought them to realize the dialectic tension which is entailed when the way of life of the minority becomes known and honored by the many. They describe how "others honor themselves with their humility... they are greater than us and yet do not want to take precedence over anyone, as if to say, we are humble."

Social Doctrine

The social doctrine of the Ḥasidim assumes that the original and desirable situation is complete equality in respect of property and social status; inequality is the result of sin. However, they attributed moral significance to the unequal distribution of riches: wealth is given to the rich so that they may sustain the poor. In accordance with this, they were accustomed to give a tenth of their money to charity. Because of this outlook, the Ḥasidim were troubled by the problem of the criterion of uniformity – which does not draw any distinction between rich and poor – in the imposition of taxes and public obligations on individuals. They justified the prevalence of this system in public life through the fear that if individual considerations were taken into account, the "evil ones" would at-

tempt to evade their responsibilities. However, they required that “good ones” judge for themselves, after the general imposition, their ability and duty to see whether they were capable of making restitution to the poor for that which had unjustly been taken from them. R. Judah b. Samuel he-Ḥasid and his colleagues even advised a man to forgo the public honor of a *mitzvah* purchased in the synagogue if someone was prepared to acquire it for a higher price; the reward for this *mitzvah* would belong to him who had relinquished it if he secretly gave to the poor the sum he had previously paid in public for the *mitzvah*.

This outlook resulted in some tension between the circle of the Ḥasidim and the community leaders on several occasions. The writings of the Ḥasidim contain a critical account of these leaders and their deeds; clashes between the leaders of the Ḥasidim and the community are also mentioned. It is evident that the Ḥasidim disapproved of several principles of the leadership, while many others in the community objected to the attempt at practical application of the doctrines of the Ḥasidim within the communities.

To the Ḥasidim family life is the basis and framework of piety. Love between man and woman is legitimate as long as it does not lead to sin; they also considered that this love had a definite spiritual content. A man fasts and prays in order to win the woman he loves. In their writings, they gave considerable thought to matchmaking, believing that love and family descent were commendable and desirable factors and considerations. Family descent was also regarded as a basic element in the preservation of the proper way of life of the community. However, they considered money as a negative factor and consideration in matchmaking, although they did not ignore its importance in practice.

Along with their emotional depth and mysticism, the Ḥasidim also preserved the tradition of meditation and study. Their respect for books is profound: in the *Sefer Ḥasidim*, the “righteous” bewail the fact that their libraries are scattered after their deaths. They believed that it was commendable not to haggle over the price of a book.

The attitude of the Ḥasidim to the non-Jewish world is imbued with the bitterness of those who battle against a successful foe and suffer cruel oppression. But even here, in several instances, it is possible to recognize the influence of the spiritual environment of Christianity and current ideas.

The Ḥasidei Ashkenaz became influential in the Jewish world, while at the same time they adapted many and profound elements foreign to that world. They were marked by a refinement of feeling and simplicity of thought, and were woven together by bonds of personal honesty and responsibility before the Creator. Even at its height, the movement comprised only a small group within German Jewry, but as a result of the example of its leading personalities and its growth from the spiritual climate of the time, it succeeded in leaving its imprint. The testaments and customs of the leading Ḥasidim greatly influenced the general way of life, as well as specific details, conceptions of *halakhah*, and the versions of prayers.

From the second half of the 13th century onward they even exerted some influence over Spanish Jewry. The Jews of Poland-Lithuania of the late Middle Ages also pointed out with pride that “we are of the lineage of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz,” although the atmosphere of their social and religious life had undergone many changes since the time of the Ḥasidim.

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HASIDEI UMMOT HA-OLAM (Heb. הַסִּידֵי אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם, lit., “The pious ones of the nations of the world”), a rabbinic term denoting righteous gentiles. The concept is first found (albeit in a limited form) in the Midrash. The *Yalkut Shimoni*, for instance, explains that the verse “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness...” (Ps. 132:9) refers to “the righteous of other nations who are priests to the Holy One in this world, like Antoninus and his type” (Yal. Isa. 429). The notion that the *hasidei ummot ha-olam* also merit a place in the world to come (a true sign of their worthiness) is found in the Tosefta, which teaches that they are as eligible as any member of the House of Israel to a share in the hereafter (Tosef., Sanh. 13:2). This dictum is twice codified by Maimonides (Yad, Teshuvah 3:5), who also defines the concept (Yad, Melakhim 8:11): “All who observe the Seven Commandments”—obligatory to the descendants of Noah (see Noachide *laws) are *hasidei ummot ha-olam*, provided that they are motivated by belief in the divine origin and the authenticity of Moses’ prophecy, and not by mere intellectual cogency. In the latter case they are to be considered only as “wise ones of the other nations” (*hakhmeihem*, according to some versions). Without specifically naming the righteous gentiles, Maimonides also equates “all human beings who ardently seek God... desire to worship Him, to know Him, and to walk uprightly in His ways...”, with priests and levites (Yad, Shemittah 13:13). The concept of *hasidei ummot ha-olam* was elaborated and embellished in medieval Jewish literature. It is mentioned by such philosophers as Hasdai *Crescas (*Or Adonai* no. 364:4) and *Abrabanel (introduction to commentary to Isaiah), R. Isaac *Arama states, “Every true pious gentile is equal to a ‘son of Israel’” (*Akedat Yizhak*, ed. Venice, ch. 60). The concept is mentioned in a legal context in the Shulḥan Arukh (YD 367:1, Be’er ha-Golah). The Zohar states that all gentiles who do not hate Israel, and who deal justly with the Jews, qualify as *hasidei ummot ha-olam* (Exodus, 268a).

Since World War II the term has been used for those non-Jews who helped Jews to escape the Nazi persecutions. (See *Righteous Among the Nations.)