

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Zunz, *Gesch.*, 388; M. Guttman, *Das Judentum und seine Umwelt*, 1 (1927), 171.

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**HASIDIM** (Heb. חַסִּדִּים, “pietists”), term used in rabbinic literature to designate those who maintained a higher standard in observing the religious and moral commandments. The various definitions in rabbinic literature of the *hasid*, and the more numerous accounts given there of them and their actions, clearly indicate that the image of the *hasid* was not identical at all times and in all circles. The sources reflect a broad spectrum of religious types, each distinguished in its own way, but common to all is a divergence from what was regarded as conventional behavior and the normal standard that was deemed praiseworthy, as is evident from the appellation *hasid*.

The precise period of the *hasidim ha-rishonim* (“first *hasidim*”) mentioned in rabbinic literature cannot be determined. Statements about them recount their virtues, which were utter devotion to fulfilling the *mitzvot* with a total disregard of any danger, extreme solicitude for human relations to the extent of transcending the strict requirements of the law, a fear of sin expressed by avoiding anything that might possibly lead astray or to the commission of sin, and by a constant readiness to undergo purification and to seek atonement for any doubtful sin by offering sacrifices. Before praying the early *hasidim* would meditate for an hour in order to direct their hearts to God (Ber. 5:1), nor did they interrupt their prayers even in the face of possible danger (Tosef., Ber. 3:20; TB, Ber. 32b). They refrained on a weekday from doing anything that involved the slightest apprehension of ultimately desecrating the Sabbath (Nid. 38a). They would bury thorns and broken glass deep in their fields, “placing them three handbreaths deep in the ground so that the plow might not displace them” and people stumble over them (Tosef., BK 2:6). The *tanna* R. Judah stated that “the early *hasidim* were eager to bring a sin offering,” but since they did not inadvertently commit sins “they made a free-will vow of naziriteship that they might bring a sin offering” (Tosef., Ned. 1:1; TB, Ned. 10a). They were accustomed to making a free-will offering of a suspensive guilt offering (*asham talui*), and this type of sacrifice “became known as the guilt-offering of the *hasidim*” (Ker. 6:3; Tosef., Ker. 4:4).

Akin to the *hasidim ha-rishonim* are the “*hasidim* and men of action” (*hasidim ve-anshei ma'aseh*). This phrase does not indicate two distinct groups of people – the *hasidim* were so called on account of the special good deeds which they performed and the miracles vouchsafed them by virtue of these good deeds. The only extant tradition states that during the “Rejoicing of the Water-drawing” (*simhat bet ha-sho'evah*) “they used to dance with lighted torches and sing songs and praises.” Some of them used to say, “Happy my youth, that has not put to shame my old age”; others, “Happy my old age, that has atoned for my youth” (Suk. 5:4; Tosef., Suk. 4:2). Outstanding representatives of the “*hasidim* and men of ac-

tion” were \*Ḥoni ha-Me'aggel, his grandsons \*Abba Hilkiyah and Ḥanan ha-Neh̄ba (Ta'an. 23a), and \*Ḥanina b. Dosa who lived at the end of the Second Temple period and whom the Mishnah regards as the last of the “men of action” (Sot. 9:15; the reading in TJ is “*hasidim*”). These men did not belong to the class of the halakhists, and there was even certain opposition to them (cf. Ta'an. 23a; Ber. 34b). Expressive of their deep faith and implicit belief in God's omnipotence are the deeds of the “*hasidim* and men of action” and the remarks that accompanied them on various occasions. Thus Ḥanina b. Dosa entertained no doubts when he said, “He who commanded oil to burn will also command vinegar to burn” (Ta'an 25a), for to them the miraculous was regarded as quite natural. When a poisonous lizard bit Ḥanina b. Dosa and died, he brought it on his shoulder to the *bet ha-midrash*, commenting simply: “See, my sons, it is not the lizard that kills, it is sin that kills” (Ber. 33a). The contents, motifs, and form of several stories related in the sources about “a certain *hasid*” (e.g., Tosef., Pe'ah 3:8; TJ, Shab. 15:3, 15a; BK 50b, 80a) indicate that the stories refer to these early ones (BK 103b). A difficulty is posed by the statement that “wherever the Talmud speaks of a certain *hasid* it refers either to Judah b. Bava or Judah b. Ilai” (Tem. 15b). However, this may mean no more than that these *tannaim* were the ones who reported such stories.

Despite the differences in time and conditions, the conduct and deeds of the *hasidim* and men of action bear a certain resemblance to the stories in the Bible about the earlier prophets, in that their influence derived not from the power of their exhortations but from the force of their deeds, courage, and sense of dedication. The rabbis gave expression to this in their homiletical interpretation of Genesis 2:5, “And there was not man to till the ground,” on which they commented: “There was no man to cultivate people's allegiance to God, such as Elijah and Ḥoni ha-Me'aggel” (Gen. R. 7; and see Theodor-Albeck, 117, n. 5).

The early *hasidim* created no organization or sect but were active as individuals, each in his own vicinity and time. Nor can they be identified with the \*Essenes, as various scholars from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward (Frankel, Geiger, Derenbourg, Kohler) have sought to do, for what is known about them does not accord with the descriptions of the Essenes in Philo, Josephus, Pliny, and others. Y. Baer has assigned to the “early *hasidim*” a central place in the history of Second Temple times, identifying them with the sages who flourished in the pre-Hasmonean period. Thus he contends that the Great Synagogue was a development of *hasidim* and sages, that its continuity was preserved by the \*zugot, and that these *hasidim* are to be identified with the Essenes and with Philo's \*Therapeutae. He believes that they were the first exponents of the *halakhah* as embedded in the earliest layers of the Mishnah, and that they laid the foundations of the entire structure of faith as reflected in the ascetic-spiritual-martyrological aspects of statements in the *aggadah*, Midrash, and Philo's writings. This account of them does not, however, accord with what is reported in rabbinic sources about the early *hasidim* and their activities. They