



Mystical Origins of Hasidism (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)

By Rachel Elijor

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The words 'hasid' and 'hasidism' have become so familiar to people interested in the Jewish world that little thought is given to understanding exactly what hasidism is or considering its spiritual and social consequences. What, for example, are the distinguishing features of hasidism? What innovations does it embody? How did its founders see it? Why did it arouse opposition? What is the essential nature of hasidic thought? What is its spiritual essence? What does its literature consist of? What typifies its leadership? What is the secret of its persistence through the centuries? How have scholars explained its origins? Is hasidism an expression of mystical ideas, or a response to changing social circumstances? What is its connection to kabbalah? To Shabateanism? To messianism? What is its relationship to the traditional structures of authority in the Jewish world? This book aims to answer all these questions in a lucid and accessible manner.

Rachel Elijor focuses on the fundamental positions and the factors of primary importance: the substantial issues that recur in the hasidic texts, including how hasidim have seen themselves over the centuries, how they have constructed a new spiritual and social ideal, and how that ideal has stood the test of reality. The goal is to present the main characteristics of the hasidic movement and to examine the social implications of its mystical ideas. The text is fully supported by references to the relevant hasidic sources and academic literature. The book concludes with a list of the hasidic texts on which the discussion is based and a comprehensive bibliography of scholarly works on kabbalah and hasidism.

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Review

'Well written and concise and, together with her glossary, provides a good grounding for the educated reader beginning a study of hasidic texts ... I recommend this book for all academic libraries.' Daniel J. Rettberg, Association of Jewish Libraries Newsletter 'Such a survey of basic questions presented in a concise and lucid form, on a scholarly basis but written for a general readership was a desideratum. Not many monographic introductions to hasidism have appeared, although the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization has recently published several important books on the subject ... highly commendable book ... there is much to be learned from it about hasidism.' Annelies Kuyt, European Journal of Jewish Studies 'An impressive scholarly work which eloquently paints a beautiful picture of Hasidism's emergence and fate.' Federico dal Bo, Journal of Jewish Studies

About the Author

Rachel Elijor is John and Golda Cohen Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Jewish Mystical Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has been a research fellow and visiting professor at University College London, the University of Amsterdam, Oberlin College, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Case Western University, Yeshiva University, Tokyo University, and Princeton University. She is the author of numerous works on Jewish mysticism and hasidism, two of which are also published by the Littman Library: *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (2004), and *Jewish Mysticism: The Infinite Expression of Freedom* (2007). The recipient of many honours, she was awarded the 2006 Gershom Scholem Prize for the Study of Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

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