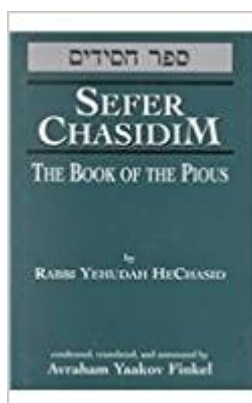


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Sefer Chasidim: The Book Of The Pious



Synopsis

Written by Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid in the late twelfth century, Sefer Chasidim is a unique and engaging ethical work that addresses the concerns of everyday life. In this first-ever translation into English, Avraham Yaakov Finkel has reorganized the work topically for clarity and easy reference, at last making this important text available to a wider audience. Although written more than seven-hundred years ago, the author's observations on the world are strikingly relevant to the contemporary scene. The work addresses subjects ranging from love of God, Torah study, and the after-life, to choosing a mate, financial matters, and anger. Scattered throughout the book, Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid includes examples of actual life experiences to illustrate moral lessons. The original work has been a favorite of both scholars and laypeople for its straightforward style, in contrast to other medieval writings on ethics that are largely theoretical and reflective. Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid was born in Speyer, Germany, ca. 1150, about fifty years after the Jews of the region were massacred in the First Crusade of 1096, and only three years after the mobs of the Second Crusade killed thousands of Jews throughout Germany. He is the most prominent of the chasidei Ashkenaz, the German pietists (not to be confused with the chasidic movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov) who stressed strong and simple faith. He is also one of the Rishonim, the early Talmudic sages who expounded on the Talmud and halachah - other Rishonim include Rashi, Maimonides, and Nachmanides. Remarkably, the Jewish people of Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid's time were concerned with the same philosophical questions asked by Jews today: While society around us is in constant flux, how can we find inner space? How can we manage to live in harmony with ourselves, our families, and our neighbors? What does God want from us? The challenge brought by Rabbi Yehudah HeChasid in his stories and teachings is to practice self-exam

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Customer Reviews

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Hebrew

To have this work available is simply amazing. The price seems a little high, but more than a jewel a page still can be called a bargain.

The Sefer Chasidim is supposed to be a paradigmatic book of the early German Jewish Pietistic movement, called the Ashkenazi Hasidim, who flourished from the twelfth and thirteenth century (and not to be confused by the later Chasidic movement founded by the Baal Shem Tov in the late eighteenth century). Known for its ascetic customs and other-worldly orientation, the German Pietists have been given only a grudging acknowledgement by subsequent generations of religious Jews. With its calls for fasting, rolling around nude in the snow, and dips in ice cold mikvehs, there was something too extreme in this movement for later, more temperate Jews. Sefer Chasidim will not help this image. While there are passages that admonish Jews not to be too holy, fast too much, or deny their bodies, there are other passages which revel in this. This is a harsh form of Judaism and not for everyone. The book also abounds with passages that can only be called superstitious. The book is filled with invective against superstition, yet delves deep within bizarre speculations of supernatural cause and effect. But don't get me wrong; the book is interesting. It shows Judaism during the crusader time period, when Jewish life in middle Europe was in great peril. This work reflects that crouched, perilous position.

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