

Optimism, Joy, and Hitlahavut

ḥasidic optimism and joy (*simḥah*) are also based on the notion that all is in God. If the world and its sorrows do not enjoy true existence and the divine light and vitality pervade all, what cause is there for despair or despondency? When man rejoices that he has been called to serve God, he bestirs the divine joy above and blessing flows through all creation. A melancholy attitude of mind is anathema to Ḥasidim, serving only to create a barrier between man and his Maker. Even over his sins a man should not grieve overmuch: "At times the evil inclination misleads man into supposing that he has committed a serious sin when it was actually no more than a mere peccadillo or no sin at all, the intention being to bring man into a state of melancholy [*aḥvut*]. But melancholy is a great hindrance to God's service. Even if a man has stumbled and sinned he should not become too sad because this will prevent him from worshiping God" (*Ṣavva'at Ribash* (1913),9). Some ḥasidic teachers, however, draw a distinction between man's "bitterness" (*merirut*) at his remoteness from God and "sadness." The former is commendable in that it is lively and piercing whereas the latter denotes deadness of soul. A further result of the basic ḥasidic philosophy is *hitlahavut*, "burning enthusiasm," in which the soul is aflame with ardor for God whose presence is everywhere. Man's thought can cleave to God, to see only the divine light, and this state of attachment (*devekut*), of always being with God, is the true aim of all worship.

Rubinstein, Avraham, et al. "Ḥasidism." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. 2nd ed.

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