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RE-READING HESCHEL ON THE COMMANDMENTS

Abraham Heschel has not fared well among students or fellow-practitioners of contemporary Jewish theology. Disciples and admirers, rarely taking the trouble to criticize Heschel's failings, have tended to bury his thought in mounds of undifferentiated praise.¹ Critics have focussed either on the difficulties of Heschel's style and manner of argument or on his notoriously problematic notion of divine pathos.² They have paid remarkably little attention to other principal themes in Heschel's oeuvre, and indeed have utterly ignored entire portions of his work. Note for example that Heschel's massive two-volume study of rabbinic thought, *Torah Min Ha-shamayim*, is rarely encountered in the scholarly literature.³ Note as well the widespread focus, as in a recent full-length study, upon an undefined and undefinable state of being called "faith", rather than upon the clearly defined regimen to which Heschel sought to move his readers: the life of mitzvot, commandments.⁴ The present essay, therefore, will offer both a reading and a re-reading: the former aimed at exposition and analysis of Heschel's many writings on the authority and purpose of the mitzvot; the latter an attempt to re-orient thinking about Heschel's thought as a whole, by considering it as a whole—focusing attention on works and themes which to date have rarely come into critical view.

Several aspects of that reorientation should be mentioned at the outset. First, the usual reading of Heschel has been skewed by undue concentration upon a single work—*God in Search of Man* (1955)—to the virtual exclusion of many others. Heschel himself is partly to blame for this mis-reading. The book does bear the subtitle "A Philosophy of Judaism," after all.⁵ What is more, only *The Prophets*, *Torah Min Ha-shamayim* (hereafter: *TMS*) and Heschel's Yiddish study of the Kotzker rebbe are of comparable length. All three—unlike *Search*—are rather specialized, and *TMS* and *Kotzk* are of course inaccessible to most English-speaking readers. As if that were not enough, *Search* also drew attention to itself by attacking its likely audience of philosophers, theologians and rabbis. Heschel aggressively argued the superiority of "faith" over philosophy, urged a move from theology as conventionally practiced to his own sort of "depth theology," and announced in the very first paragraph that religion had declined because it had become irrelevant, oppressive,

dull and insipid. Critics predictably seized on *Searth* as the definitive statement of Heschel's philosophy,⁶ and charged in response that while Heschel was eloquent, even a poet, as a philosopher—"of Judaism" or anything else—he was not to be taken seriously.⁷ The present essay will argue that Heschel, read in toto, is serious indeed—and a good deal more persuasive.

Heschel himself drew in *Searth* upon much previous work (*Die Prophetie*, for example, or his 1935 biography of Maimonides⁸) without bothering to repeat the arguments made in those studies in any detail. More crucial for our purposes, though, is the fact that Heschel's most successful writing, without exception, came not in lengthy volumes such as *Searth* but in a shorter and no less respectable theological form: the sermon, adapted by Heschel at his best into highly rhetorical and carefully structured theological essays. Readers have long noted that the longer volumes are only sporadically effective. Successful units of one or at most two chapters generally alternate with rather more rambling and less coherent chapters. The argument advances by fits and starts.⁹ *TMS*, a stylistic masterpiece which contains quite compelling individual chapters, has perhaps been so roundly ignored even by readers of Hebrew because of its repetition, indirection and infuriating refusal to supplement extensive quotation with explicit argument.¹⁰ What has been too little noted is the stunning series of shorter addresses which Heschel delivered in the mid-'fifties, and which, to my mind, constitute his finest work—chief among them two papers presented to conventions of Reform and Conservative rabbis in the summer of 1953.¹¹

The shorter works often succeed where longer ones do not because Heschel's manner of composition did not lend itself to the sort of argument which the latter require. He tended to write in units of sentences, at most paragraphs.¹² Stylistic and substantive unity could not be maintained indefinitely. The longer works, therefore, exhibit continuous coherence only in individual chapters or at most groups of chapters, while the best of the free-standing sermon essays comprise a single argument sustained from start to finish.

No less important, I think, was the matter of audience. The major works such as *Searth* and *The Prophets* were apparently meant for several different sorts of reader: the lay men and women whom Heschel sought to move from secularity to faith and mitzvot; the scholars for whose benefit Heschel supplied elaborate documentary footnotes; the rabbis whom Heschel sought to strengthen and reassure; the theological insiders able to appreciate Heschel's many allusions and his vast erudition. The shorter pieces, however, are generally transcripts of addresses delivered to homogeneous audiences of Jewish professionals: rabbis, cantors, educators. Heschel, we might say, found his natural voice when speaking to the people charged with bringing American Jews back to God and the

commandments. He was at his best when teaching the teachers—those who shared both his language and his calling, and could therefore be relied upon to hold expectations which Heschel, donning his prophetic mantle, could gleefully confound. He was less successful when attempting, as in *Search* or *The Prophets*, to meet the scholars, philosophers or theologians head on, or, as in *Man is Not Alone* (1951) to speak to lay people while at the same time looking warily over his shoulder at the philosophers.¹³ The strain shows. In addition to re-orienting the critique of Heschel away from an exclusive reliance on *Search*, therefore, the present essay will emphasize the importance of the shorter pieces for understanding Heschel's project.

Finally, I hope to recast somewhat the standard used to evaluate Heschel. It is pointless, I believe, to measure him (as many scholars have) by criteria which he explicitly rejected—even if, at times, we find him invoking those very criteria, or claiming to have met them.¹⁴ Heschel should not be judged by the forms of argument which he adopts in a given instance—for example: whether he proceeds in linear or cumulative fashion; whether he deploys aphorism, poetry, quotation, or syllogism. The sole relevant standard is *cogency*: whether his assumptions are plausible, his claims warranted, his insights helpful. Quite simply, do his arguments work, one by one and as a whole, on the terms which he himself set?¹⁵ Jewish tradition has comprised a variety of theological forms, and most have found their way into the style as well as the substance of Heschel's own oeuvre. His readers should be equally broad-minded.

Employing the standard just announced, we find that when Heschel's arguments fail to work, it is usually for one of two reasons.¹⁶ Either he has come to a particularly difficult juncture in his thought—those keystones which, if removed, would bring down the entire edifice which he labored all his life to build. The divine authority of the prophets is one such Heschelian cornerstone; the potential radicalism of his own critique of halakha is another. Or, Heschel stumbles because he has come up against one of the central problems besetting all of modern Jewish thought. This context is often missed by Heschel's readers, perhaps because one rarely finds citation of contemporaries in Heschel's all-too-extensive footnotes.¹⁷ Viewed in terms of modern Jewish thought as a whole, Heschel's failures are more comprehensible. Reconciliation of the heteronomous demands of mitzvah with modern selves and societies reluctant to submit to divine authority—the problem at the heart of the present study—eluded Moses Mendelssohn, Samson Raphael Hirsch and Abraham Geiger as well as Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. If Heschel too failed in that effort, and he did, he stands in honored company.

It remains for an essay such as this one to take the measure of his success as well as his failure. I will first place Heschel's writings on the

commandments in the context of his work as a whole, then detail his many efforts to set forth the authority underlying the mitzvot and the purposes which they serve. I will attempt to explain as I proceed why the implications of Heschel's thinking on the commandments are consistently more wide-ranging than he ever permitted himself to believe. In conclusion, I hope to suggest why, despite the failings of that thinking, it nonetheless compels—and deserves—our serious attention.

I. BEYOND FAITH

Heschel's strategy for accomplishing his readers' teshuva—their return to God and mitzvot—was threefold, and in its conception not at all original.

First, he would take his readers as they were, in secularity or uncertain faith, and seek to move them only gradually, step by step, to where he wanted them to be. “Objective” or “positive” religion—belief and practice—could be expected only after the “subjective” religiosity latent in abiding wonder at creation had been aroused. Some of this labor could be accomplished by rational persuasion—confronting reason with its own inherent limitations, in the manner of Kant—but still more of it would involve evoking the reader's dormant sense of awe and raising it to consciousness. If Heschel could convince his readers that “our mind is like a fantastic sea shell, and when applying our ear to its lips we hear a perpetual murmur from the waves beyond the shore,” he might well persuade them that “the issue is not whether there is a God” but “How do we tell it to our minds?”¹⁸ This is a strategy often employed in the modern West (recall Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, for example). It is also recommended by Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah*.¹⁹ Heschel too put it to good use, particularly in the first nine chapters of *Alone*.

In order to win his readers' trust, Heschel had to demonstrate that he shared their alienation from religion as it was normally encountered. The charges levelled against religion at the start of *Search* (“irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid”), followed at once by the author's self-distancing from conventional theology, recapitulated similar critiques and redefinitions by others in the modern period—Schleiermacher's, for example, in the “Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers” (1799) or, closer to home, Hirsch's strategy in the *Nineteen Letters* (1836). Heschel, like them, strove to convince us that religion as we know it is not religion as it really is and should be. He had to purify Judaism, reconstruct it in our minds, if he was to save it and so save us. The defense—and critique—of halakha to which I will turn momentarily were part and parcel of that effort.

Winning his readers' trust is all the more essential because Heschel must also persuade them at a certain point to leave behind the very skills

and mode of thought employed in reading his books. This paradox is built into any post-Kantian attempt to separate reason from a distinct religious faculty, the phenomenal world of appearance accessible to reason from the hidden noumenal reality beyond its ken. Like Schleiermacher and Otto, Martin Buber and Joseph Soloveitchik, Heschel summons us to a bifurcation of sensibility. Science, reason, cannot pronounce upon matters of faith. "The search of reason ends at the shore of the known; on the immense expanse beyond it only the sense of the ineffable can glide."²⁰ Once we have begun to sail, Heschel believes, awe and wonder will take us all the way to God. It will then emerge, however, that the relation between the two realms is asymmetric. Ultimate reality has a good deal to say about how worldly time and space should be organized.

The difficulties of the passage from "signals of transcendence"²¹ like awe and wonder to belief in a transcendent yet personal God have often been noted,²² and are not the issue here. Our concern is to place Heschel's thought concerning the commandments in the context of his larger purpose as a theologian, and vice versa. Two points are essential in this connection.

- (1) Heschel emphasizes time and again that the end point of his quest is not belief but piety. "The Problem of God," part one of *Alone*, is succeeded by part two, "the Problem of Living." Part one of *Search*, "God," is succeeded by parts two and three, "Revelation" and "Response". God's existence and concern may be a problem for Heschel's readers, one which he certainly recognizes, but they are not the central issue for Heschel himself. "The quest for right living, the question of what is to be done right now, right here, is the authentic core of Jewish religion."²³ "The Bible is an answer to the supreme question: what does God demand of us?"²⁴ The point for him is what lies "Beyond Faith," "Beyond Insight."²⁵

Heschel has been widely misunderstood on this matter, and once again he is partly to blame. The three-stage progress of wonder to faith to "pattern for living" is unmistakable in *Alone*, and the Biblical scholar Bernhard W. Andersen, for one, has had no trouble discerning it in *Search* as well.²⁶ Heschel confused matters, however, by speaking of wonder, revelation (Torah) and mitzvot as three "ways to His presence" in *Search*,²⁷ as well as by speaking of "faith" at times as if it were an end point, a static mode of relation to God, rather than a dynamic and infinite process, the end ever beyond reach. The latter was Heschel's view on most occasions. The confusion has enabled John Merkle to separate "sources of faith" (mystery, glory, Jewish tradition) far too neatly from "antecedents of faith" (wonder, indebtedness and praise, remembrance and mitzvah) and to distinguish both

from “aspects of faith”—encompassing all of the above.²⁸ Heschel’s mis-statements have also led Marvin Fox to fault him for not realizing that a measure of belief must precede observance of mitzvot.²⁹ Heschel made that very point time and again.³⁰

He believed, however, that halakhic Jews often stand in need of a reinfusion of kavvana or proper intention; that faith often emerges and re-emerges from study of the Torah and observance of its commands rather than from wonder at the mystery of things; that faith is ever a struggle, a way, in the course of which the commandments come to our aid.³¹ The process is not uni-directional. Indeed, “Faith” (chapter nine of *Alone*) is invariably succeeded by “Doubts” (chapter ten). It is crucial to Heschel’s belief, as to Buber’s, that moments of undoubted encounter with God are rare, and inevitably supplanted by stretches of palpable distance. “An inspiration passes, having been inspired never passes. It remains like an island across the restlessness of time, to which we move over the wake of undying wonder.”³² On what shall we live in the meantime? Where shall we plant our feet? The Biblical answer to this “supreme question,” Heschel advises, is clear: on the holy ground of mitzvot.

In sum: the three “paths to God” are in fact one interconnected and never-ending way. The point is to begin to walk it. For the secular or searching readers whom he assumed much of the time, Heschel recommended the three-stage progress, beginning in wonder and culminating in commandment, which I have described.

- (2) That is why the turning points in *Alone* and *Search*, the nodes of the argument at which Heschel is most vulnerable to criticism, come at the two transitions from wonder to God and God to mitzvot. Step three, moreover, is impossible without step two. One cannot have commandment without a Commander. All of Heschel’s thought, therefore, and not merely the single volume which he titled his “philosophy of Judaism,” turns on the matter to which the middle section of *Search* is devoted: revelation, the source of the commandments’ authority.

We should note, before turning to it ourselves, that the subject of revelation does not arise in *Alone*, “A Philosophy of Religion,” because Heschel could not speak there of the Jewish encounter with God, and found it impossible to speak of revelation in general. (It is absent from *Who is Man?* [1963] for the same reason.³³) He also believed (as opposed to Buber, for example) that our innate moral sense is insufficient to generate a “pattern for living” in God’s presence. *Alone* has two parts, then, while *Search* has three. The “pattern for living” described in the former has only the formal characteristics required of any suitable response to God. These include: satisfying our yearning for meaning and “spiritual living;”

affording a life "in the neighborhood of God;" and leading us to piety: "the orientation of human inwardness toward the holy."³⁴ So long as he remains on this universal plane, Heschel can appeal only to the needs of the homo religiosus whom he has postulated throughout. In order to say more about God's demands, he needs a particular revelation, which only a particular faith can supply.

This in turn necessarily involves (1) bearers and transmitters of the message: the prophets; (2) knowledge of how the message may legitimately be interpreted, supplied by sages, philosophers and mystics; and (3) the rendering of such an interpretation for our own day. These are quickly discernible as the concerns which preoccupied Heschel in all his works. We will consider them in that order – turning first to the authority of the Biblical claim to revelation, then to the methods of interpretation set in place by the rabbis, and only then to Heschel's view of *ta'amei ha-mitzvot*: the purposes served by the commandments.

II. REVELATION

The easiest way to sight the major problem in Heschel's approach to revelation is to begin with a detailed exposition of the argument in *Search*. Heschel sets the stage at the very end of Part One, asserting that while "logic and scientific method" are indispensable to thought about the world, "in thinking about the living God we must look to the prophets for guidance." A dramatic claim follows at once.

Those who share in the heritage of Israel believe that God . . . confided Himself at rare moments to those who were chosen to be guides. We cannot express God, yet God expresses His will to us . . . Our faith does not derive its full substance from private insights. Our faith is faith by virtue of being a part of the community of Israel, by virtue of our having a share in the faith of the prophets. From their words we derive the norms by which to test the veracity of our own insights.³⁵

I take it that we have more here than a sociological statement about Jewish belief. Heschel offers us, rather, a Maimonidean definition of authentic Judaism, one which stands or falls on the claim that God revealed His will to the prophets. Jews can gain knowledge of that will through their tradition, and only this knowledge can legitimately validate (or invalidate) belief based upon individual reason or religious experience. Heschel has staked everything on precisely the ground marked out by Spinoza in the attack upon Jewish belief which inaugurated the modern period in Jewish thought.³⁶ Everything depends upon prophecy. "A Jew without Torah," Heschel agrees at the start of part two, "is obsolete."

The remainder of chapter 17 is devoted to negation of other negations of this central Jewish belief, for example "the dogma of man's self-suf-

iciency,” of God’s total silence, of human unworthiness. Chapter 18 reiterates the Bible’s claim to prophetic inspiration and stresses the inadequacy of prophetic language in the face of God’s ineffability. Two points should be noted. First, Heschel has moved at once to the core of his concern, the lever with which he hopes to open new space for modern belief: the nature of religious language. “What did the prophet mean by the phrase, ‘God spoke?’”³⁷ Second, Heschel everywhere assumes the authenticity of the Biblical account which he is trying to argue. “In a rare moment of crisis Moses stakes his entire authority on the claim of being inspired by God.”³⁸ How do we know that? Heschel is aware that the relevant question is “is it true? Did it really happen?”³⁹ But he never considers, as Spinoza had, the prior question of whether the text as we have it is in fact the original, or whether our understanding of it is adequate for the weight placed upon that understanding. Consideration of “is it true” will be postponed repeatedly, while the Biblical text continues to occupy center stage, its authority presumed rather than argued.

Chapter 19 returns to the matter of language: the Bible, “as a report about revelation . . . is itself a midrash.”⁴⁰ Chapter 20 returns to the inexpressability of God, relying as always upon the veracity of the “report” about Sinai which we find in Exodus. It is, clearly, a “midrash” which Heschel takes very literally. He has not broken out of the circle of his own assumptions. Chapter 21 argues that not all time is of equal import; Sinai represented a moment unique in human history. It was, chapter 22 affirms, an *event* and not part of a continuous, ongoing *process* of revelation. Chapter 23, reiterating Heschel’s opening definition of Judaism, describes Jewish commitment as “loyalty to a moment . . . God gave His word to Israel, and Israel gave its word of honor to God.”⁴¹ The veracity of the event has remained unquestioned.

Chapter 24 then justifies this evasion. Heschel had to “show what it is that necessitates our raising the question about revelation, to clarify its meaning, as well as to establish the possibility and likelihood of its having taken place.”⁴² But we already knew why the question was important, and Heschel has of course not “established” anything by citing the text’s own account of what took place. Moreover, he is aware that “what is possible and likely is not necessarily actual and certain . . . Our major aim is to find an answer to the question: Is revelation a fact?” Again, however, preparatory work gets in the way. Heschel tries to clear our minds of the notion that prophecy is scientifically impossible—the Kantian separation of realms is again invoked—and then argues that it is in fact beyond scientific explanation. The prophets were not insane, self-deluded, or in thrall to their own sub-conscious fantasies. It would seem, then, that they deserve our trust.

Needless to say, everything rests on the matter of self-delusion (we will assume that the prophets acted in both sanity and good faith) and

Heschel's answer on this score is weak. Self-delusion, he writes, usually involves imaginative attainment of a goal which one has failed to achieve in reality; but the prophets were not eager for the gift of prophecy.⁴³ Heschel then falls back (chapter 25) on traditional hyperbole about the Bible—it is said, for example, to “surpass everything created by man”—and upon the wonder of Israel's survival, “a continuous verification of the marvel of the Bible.” Spinoza, we recall, knew this was a point to be reckoned with, and sought to dispose of it through a sociological account of Jewish survival. Heschel asserts but never argues the matter. We are left where we began. Chapter 26 again urges us to keep faith with the prophets, while chapter 27—the last in part two of the book—returns us to the issue of language. “Are the words of Scripture coextensive and identical with the words of God?” This is of course a question vital to those already inside the circle of commitment. On the outside, it does not arise. To Heschel it is paramount. By way of answer, he cites the Zohar at length, and concludes with the verdict of Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk: “The meaning of the Torah has never been contained by books.”⁴⁴

It should be apparent that the task which Heschel set himself in this section of the book has not been met. Eugene Borowitz's judgment of the matter two decades ago stands confirmed: Heschel raises all the right questions, only to avoid them time and again.⁴⁵ My intent here is to probe that avoidance, principally by drawing on Heschel's other writings on the subject. We can fruitfully begin, I think, by examining the two issues which seem uppermost in Heschel's exposition and indeed are dealt with extensively in other books: the nature of prophecy, and the limits of religious language. We will then be in a position to state clearly, as Heschel did not, his view of the commandments' authority.

A. The Prophets

Heschel attributed Maimonides' lifelong preoccupation with prophecy to the philosopher's yearning to attain it. Maimonides sought the fuller knowledge of God which only prophecy, surpassing reason, could provide.⁴⁶ Heschel's own preoccupation was in part quite similar. He knew from experience that there was more to knowledge than could be dreamt of by rational philosophy. Time and again in his work we find the authority of prophecy adduced in order to counter-balance philosophical claims to self-sufficiency. His dissertation in philosophy represented such an effort. The young student who, he confesses, would have forgotten his obligations to his Creator were it not for the summons to prayer which issued, ultimately, from the prophets;⁴⁷ the scion of Hasidism who found philosophy oblivious to social and existential issues which for him were central—chose to receive certification from the uni-

versity with a phenomenological account of the prophets. The two worlds would be joined by the binding of that dissertation. More crucially, philosophical method would demonstrate the supremacy of faith. Reason itself would place the claim of prophecy beyond the bounds of rational adjudication.

Heschel's methodology, borrowed from the world of the university, seemed to suit his purpose exactly. Phenomenology would permit him to suspend the question of whether the prophets' view of themselves was true. He would focus rather upon the consciousness which gave rise to that view. Even the content of the prophets' message would be set to one side. Only prophetic experience would be considered. In order to get at that experience, moreover, the reader would have to follow R.G. Collingwood's call to step inside the prophets' heads.⁴⁸ *Verstehen*, inner understanding—a byword in German religious studies, since Dilthey and Weber—could not be gained from detachment. Heschel's aim would be “to attain an understanding of the prophet through an analysis and description of his consciousness, to relate what came to pass in his life—facing man, being faced by God—as reflected and affirmed in his mind.”⁴⁹

This task, however, was hopeless from the outset, for two reasons which are immediately apparent. First, Heschel could not and in fact did not suspend the question of truth. His method rather demanded that every explanation which cast doubt upon the prophets' veracity be discounted. (Mircea Eliade similarly excludes other scientific disciplines from his own approach to religious consciousness⁵⁰.) “Pure reflection” and “sheer seeing”⁵¹ turn out to involve acceptance of the prophetic vision into which Heschel hopes to enter. The prophets “lived as witnesses, struck by the words of God, rather than as explorers . . .”⁵² We too must depart from our stance of analytic distance and assume the reality of that which overwhelmed the prophets, if we are to understand them. Time and again Heschel accuses doubters of bias.⁵³ Trust in the prophets' account is assumed necessary to objective understanding.

But—a still greater problem—to understand the prophets, to enter their consciousness, means to enter into their understanding of God! To have sympathy with them means nothing less than sharing their sympathy with the divine pathos. “Prophecy, then, may be described as exegesis of existence from a divine perspective. Understanding prophecy is an understanding of an understanding . . . It involves sharing the perspective from which the original understanding is done.”⁵⁴ This is extremely problematic. It means that understanding of the authority underlying Jewish faith is only attainable from inside the bounds of that faith—and that full understanding of what the prophets understood involves access to the divine!

Why then engage in the exercise of rational persuasion in the first place? Heschel's hope in *The Prophets*, it seems, is the same as his intent

in *Search*: not so much to argue or persuade rationally, despite the question “is it true?” and the form of scholarly argument, as to set the reader face to face with the “ultimate question” and then rely on the latent religiosity in each one of us, the “ontological presupposition” of God, to do its work. Phenomenology as Heschel understood it gave him license for such an effort. Disbelief would be suspended, in the name of science, and then, he hoped, dispensed with forever. To the extent that we submit to the flow of Heschel’s prose (and the prophets’), we can enter imaginatively into the minds of Israelites who believed themselves transmitters of the divine will.

Such rational argument as one finds for their authority is in fact quite familiar. Where Maimonides postulated a post-rational faculty, imagination, which takes rare individuals to knowledge that reason alone cannot reach, Heschel invoked the same sort of pre-rational intuition we find in *Alone*, here labeled “sympathy.” In doing so he deftly adapted notions current in German philosophy of religion since Schleiermacher. The Kantian division of noumenal and phenomenal is once more implicit. But whereas Maimonides’ defense of the concept of prophecy had come at the expense of belief in a personal God, Heschel felt the need (as he put it elsewhere) to synthesize the rationalism of Kozk with the emotional cleaving to God emphasized by the Baal Shem Tov.⁵⁵ Heschel went beyond the rationalist tradition, beyond even the simple affirmation of divine concern for humanity, to the vexing notions of divine pathos and prophetic sympathy which have received the burden of his critics’ attention.⁵⁶

The relevant point for the present essay is the way out of the tangle which Heschel himself suggested: that our problem here is one of language. The prophets’ words “of necessity combine otherness and likeness, uniqueness and comparability, in speaking about God.”⁵⁷ God’s ways are not our ways, God’s pathos not our pathos, but God’s language is ours—for human words are the only sort available. Recall that the key question for Heschel in *Search* was not “is it true?” but “What did the prophets mean by the phrase, ‘God spoke?’” For Heschel, the issue of revelation came down to what we should understand by it. That God spoke to Moses in some fashion at Sinai is never in question. The way to Heschel’s ultimate answer on the matter of prophetic authority, then, leads via the long detour of his views on “Torah from Heaven”—just what was spoken at Sinai, and how.

B. Torah Min Ha-shamayim

Again, it is most fruitful to work outwards from *Search*, in this case from the climactic discussion in chapter 27. Heschel’s opening words make it clear that his intended audience at this point is not the secular or doubt-

filled reader, and certainly not the philosopher. He is rather addressing Orthodox Jews—whose views, I suspect, were powerfully represented inside Heschel's own mind as well.

It is a serious misunderstanding to reduce the problem of revelation to a matter of chronology. Thus it is frequently assumed that the authority and sanctity of the Pentateuch depend upon the fact that it was written down in its entirety in the time of Moses; that to assume that even a few passages were added to it after the death of Moses is to deny the principle of revelation.⁵⁸

For whom is this even an issue? Not for non-believers, or for Reform or Conservative believers content in their reliance upon "inspiration" or other modes of progressive revelation. The issue is however the paramount matter of belief dividing the "right" of the Conservative movement—where Heschel stood—from Orthodoxy. It seems to have concerned Heschel greatly. Only thus can we explain his confusing statement, in an essay titled "Depth Theology" (1960), that whereas Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch is a matter of *theology*, involving belief and obedience, Moses' status as a prophet inspired by God is a matter of *depth theology*—evoking response and appreciation.⁵⁹ An outsider can discern no difference in the character of the two beliefs. For Heschel, however, the latter was bound up in the very fabric of faith in a God in search of man. Such a God must communicate; He must have prophets such as Moses. Authorship of particular chapters and verses was another matter. That difference, I believe, marks Heschel off from most contemporary Orthodoxy—and constitutes the wedge with which he hoped to redefine contemporary Jewish piety. Thus, in *Search*, Heschel writes that "the essence of our faith in the sanctity of the Bible is that its words contain that which God wants us to know and to fulfill. How these words were written down is not the fundamental problem."⁶⁰

Heschel's intent in the notions of pathos and sympathy should now be coming into view. Where Spinoza had attacked the prophets upon the basis of their *words*, most notably by demonstrating that their messages were often at variance with one another, Heschel took his stand upon the unity and veracity of the prophetic *experience*. Just as in our own encounters God remains ineffable, but always One, so He was to the prophets. Their words are not and do not claim to be transcripts of the words of God. The prophets were not passive vessels of divine pronouncements but active, individual participants in divine dialogue. And what applies to the least of the prophets applies to the greatest. Jewish faith demands belief in Moses' prophetic inspiration—Heschel saw no point to it otherwise—but not in Moses' capacities as recording secretary to divine dictation. Heschel required a Moses unsurpassed in his pre-rational, intuitive apprehension of the divine will—not a philosopher-

king of the sort described by Maimonides. He moved the focus from the cognitive to the experiential—meaning that prophetic uniqueness must lie in sympathy for pathos rather than access to knowledge. In Moses, the greatest of prophets, noumenal and phenomenal knowledge combined to result in a text that in turn comprises the major portion of the Torah. Hence the Torah's authority.

We are now in a position to unpack the extremely dense formulation at the heart of chapter 27.⁶¹ “The words of Scripture . . . are neither identical with, nor the eternally adequate rendering of, the divine wisdom.” God did not write them. Moses did not transcribe them. Prophets could speak only in “understatement.” “As a reflection of His infinite light, the text in its present form is, to speak figuratively, one of an endless number of possible reflections. In the end of the days, it was believed, countless unknown rearrangements of the words and letters and unknowable secrets of the Torah would be made known.” Heschel is at his most kabbalistic here. Never will he explicitly go further. But the implications, drawn more than once in the history of Jewish thought, are both clear and radical. Heschel has thrown open a door, even if he never actually chooses to walk through it. “Yet in its present form the text contains that which God wishes us to know.” Not all that God might have said is in the Torah. What there is represents a human interpretation of God's intent, mediated by human experience. It can be read in more ways than one. The question of authority, then, moves from the origin of the Torah to its interpreters, whose debates on the proper reading of Torah are presented in awesome detail in *Torah Min Ha-shamayim*.

I cannot do more in the compass of this essay than suggest the richness of that major work, part of which still remains unpublished. Nor, of course, can I pass judgment on the accuracy of Heschel's claims concerning the existence of two schools of thought among the Tannaim and Amoraim, schools which Heschel traces back to (and names for) the two towering second century figures, Ishmael and Akiba. Suffice it to say that Volume One, after a long defense of the importance of aggada vis à vis halakha, traces the opposing positions of the two schools on matters such as miracle, sacrifice, love of God, *ta'amei ha-mitzvot*, suffering, and—most crucially—religious language. Ishmael is the rationalist, ever wary of anthropomorphism in talk about God and ever watchful of intrusions upon God's transcendence. “Love of Gōd” for Ishmael means observance of God's commandments. Akiba on the other hand stresses God's immanent presence, has no problems with miracle, understands love of God to mean just that—and finds anthropomorphism permitted, even required, by God's own use of language in the Torah.⁶²

This last issue occupies all of Volume Two, an audacious attempt to sift through two millennia of sources, all of them building on the original rabbinic debate, concerning the possible meanings of the phrase “Torah

from Heaven." Heschel argues that the scope of what came "from heaven" originally included only the Ten Commandments but was later widened (in the context of debate with sectarians) to include all the Written Torah and, still later, all the Oral Torah as well.⁶³ At the heart of the matter, he suggests, lay Ishmael's conviction that Moses apprehended God's will but authored the words of the Torah himself—and not necessarily all of them. Akiba contended by contrast that Moses faithfully wrote down exactly the words that God spoke to him. For Ishmael, the Torah's vocabulary is human. Moses "ascended" to God. For Akiba, God "came down." The language on the parchment before us is divine. God learned our language, as it were, and chose from among our words with Infinite care.⁶⁴

Two general aspects of Heschel's intent in the work are relevant to our present concerns, and should be mentioned before consideration of the matter of religious language. First, the very repetition and endless quotation which are so infuriating when one desires explicit argument are in fact the most effective argument which Heschel could have made for the aggaddic pluralism which he sought to espouse. One can leave the book with doubts about Heschel's rabbinic scholarship. But it is impossible to doubt either his immense learning or the presence of profound disagreement among the vast array of sources which he cites—at length, in the original, and with extensive footnotes.

Maimonides treats the principle of "Torah from Heaven" as if it were plain and simple . . . an axiom so basic that one does not inquire as to its history. But when one goes into the matter in depth, one sees that this principle—its content and scope—has many sources . . . it has been the object of disagreement as well as agreement . . . My own investigation of the primary sources opened my eyes to see that the principle as grasped by Maimonides was not always fixed or unchallenged.⁶⁵

At another point Heschel writes, "Let Abbaye come and raise his voice in protest at the notion that 'whoever believes that Moses and not God wrote a verse of the Torah has spurned the word of the Lord.' Consider how many great men of Israel, by whose words we live and from whose waters we drink, would have to be brought to judgment!"⁶⁶

Heschel demonstrates beyond dispute that the ultimate authority of the Torah—written and oral—depends upon its status as Torah from Heaven. He then shows how divided traditional interpreters have been over what "Torah from heaven" means. No one, not even Maimonides, can insist upon one rendering of the principle to the exclusion of others. Heschel has once more opened serious space for disagreement.

He has also, again by the sheer weight of the sources he has amassed, accomplished a twofold reclamation. The first is restoration of aggada to parity with halakha—critical to his reformation of the latter. Matters of faith, of the heart, of the mind, are no less important than matters of law,

of action; indeed, the authority of law rests upon belief in Torah from Heaven—by definition a matter of aggada! Again, the audience here is the Orthodox yeshiva world which had emphasized halakha to the virtual exclusion of aggada, particularly the “Mitnagdic” opponents of Heschel’s ancestors, the Hasidim. For the latter, aggada had been paramount. The second object of reclamation is Ishmael. Heschel details the “victory of Rabbi Akiba” in rabbinic tradition, and complains that “the teaching of Rabbi Ishmael, whose original creation has no peer in our ancient literature, did not achieve recognition from future generations. Only indirectly, and without knowing it, were many sages influenced by his thought; echoes of it are found in Biblical commentators who stressed the *pshat*, and in the rationalistic approach of several medieval thinkers.”⁶⁷ Heschel, ever in search of the polarities, wants our Judaism to include Akiba and Ishmael, halakha as well as aggada—and not only for the sake of inclusiveness. A systematic comparison of Heschel’s own point of view on a whole host of matters with those of Ishmael and Akiba reveals that on almost all questions of belief Heschel sides with Ishmael.⁶⁸ The one notable exception concerns the appropriate bounds of human speech about God.

Here Heschel favors Akiba—who, in the reading provided in *TMS*, turns out to be the source of Heschel’s notions of divine pathos and prophetic sympathy.⁶⁹ Where Ishmael stressed God’s transcendence, and fought against all religious language unsuitable to that transcendence, Akiba stressed God’s palpable presence among Israel, and taught regarding anthropomorphism, “were it not written, we could not say it.”⁷⁰ Having been written by God and not Moses, the words can and must be uttered. Expression is not to be confused with concept—precisely Heschel’s defense of the prophets, and himself.⁷¹

In this case it is Akiba who has been “forgotten in the course of the generations. It is not in our power anymore to reveal what is hidden, or reanimate what is lost. The wells are stopped up, encounter has stopped, the ladder is broken. None go up and none come down. Only crumbs of language are left—and the coinages without owners have been rubbed clean and become mere worthless tokens.” Ishmael’s clear and rational approach better suits the modern sensibility, Heschel suggests. But we should remember that

wherever you find the power of critical thought, you also find its weakness . . . Even language which seems to us appropriate to God is in reality idle in relation to God. Neither sort of language is better than the other—for both are in vain. Even more so are all efforts at adjustment which allow us to believe that language could actually express matters as they are. Is God’s essence in any way within the sweep of our evaluation? No matter which direction you go, you conclude that human reason is limited. His ways are not ours.⁷²

Heschel has here attempted, as he did in *Search*, to move debate from the agnostic question of “is it true” on the one side and the insistence that “Torah from heaven means Torah from heaven, plain and simple” to a murkier middle ground where a whole range of opinion can be legitimately entertained. If “God’s ways are not ours,” both agnosticism and fundamentalism are precluded. I shall argue below that Heschel’s thought on the nature and purpose of the commandments constitutes an implicit Conservative stance. The definition of Judaism offered in *Search* and cited above, as well as the entire project of *TMS*, stake out territory upon which only Conservative and some modern Orthodox Jews could stand comfortably. “Those who share in the heritage of Israel believe”—in a word, in Torah from Heaven. Reform Jews do not. Many Orthodox Jews mistakenly think that one and only one proper interpretation can be given to that belief. Heschel wishes to widen the circle, thereby permitting more Jews to enter, all the while preserving its boundary.

Our detour through *The Prophets* and *TMS* has yielded the following insight into Heschel’s conception of the authority underlying the commandments.

- (1) Heschel never does address the question which he poses in *Search*. “Is it true?” is simply not a question for him. It cannot become one. For the entire edifice of his faith rests on the keystone of Moses’ prophecy. If there is no prophecy, Jewish faith is “obsolete.” But if there is a God in search of man, there must be prophecy. We can, therefore, proceed to consider the claims of Judaism seriously; we are driven to do so, in the first instance, simply because we are Jews.⁷³
- (2) The logical path to affirmation of those claims goes as follows. Personal religious experience attests to the reality of divine encounter. Reason cannot contest its reality. Jewish tradition attests to a unique meeting with God at Sinai that resulted in a set of beliefs and practices—Torah—wholly consonant with what reason and experience teach us about God’s will for the world. There is thus no reason for a Jew, a priori, not to accept the essentials of the tradition’s account. Having made the leap to acceptance, and acted upon it by observing the commandments, the Jew will find study of the Torah and observance of the commandments a path to personal encounter with God. That encounter will of course constitute verification that the revelation claimed by the tradition is authentic.
- (3) Heschel’s posing the question of how much of the Torah Moses actually authored accomplishes the same objective as Rosenzweig’s meditations upon “divine and human” in revelation.⁷⁴ If Rabbi Akiba was correct, there is no room whatever for talk of human autonomy. The prophets were merely “microphones” and not partners to revelation; the only author was God. All commandment is heteronomous,

and Akiba's strictness with regard to its observance is appropriate. If Moses is granted a major role in the Torah's authorship, however, human reason and experience may be deemed to have entered into the expression of God's will upon which Jewish practice is based, without peril to the divine character of that expression. Moreover, if prophecy is not limited to Moses, neither need authorship be—and so the human role in the foundation of Jewish piety is further expanded.

Heschel has no inclination to doubt Moses' pre-eminent part in the writing of the Torah. But the greater role which he ascribes to human partnership with God leads, we shall soon find, to greater flexibility when it comes to observance of the commandments. Heschel, like Ishmael, is a "*maḥmir*" (strict) as to himself, but a "*mekel*" (lenient) as regards others. In sum: while neither the human role in revelation nor the divine role can be denied, the exact balance of "divine and human" is a matter of personal belief. Once Heschel has ruled it such, attention can shift from precise definition of faith and practice to the strengthening of both where they are weak.

- (4) It is in this sense that the Torah "contains that which God wishes us to know,"⁷⁵ and the mitzvot are said to be both "expressions and interpretations of the will of God."⁷⁶ The ambiguity of that formulation is intended. More than this need not be said. More should not be said—lest we foreclose avenues to faith, and silence modes of expression, which are entirely legitimate. Heschel's own faith, reflected in the range of the works he wrote, was wide enough to include Isaiah and Ezekiel, Ishmael and Akiba, Maimonides and Abarbanel, the Kotzker and the Baal Shem Tov. Not for nothing does part two of *Search* end with the Kotzker's belief that "the oral Torah was never written down. The meaning of the Torah has never been contained by books."⁷⁷ That teaching mandated Heschel's own pluralism and, in a wider sense, his ecumenicism.⁷⁸ For the same reason, Heschel concluded the two long volumes of *TMS* with a collection of teachings that "Moses did not publicly transmit everything" which he had received from God, instead reserving some teachings for secret transmission to "the ears of Joshua."⁷⁹ This is no mere defense of Oral Law, as stated in Pirke Avot 1:1. Heschel has rather labored long and hard in *TMS* to uphold the possibility and legitimacy of a wide range of interpretations, including those with which he disagreed—and those, yet to come, of which he could not possibly conceive.

The point, again, was to open space—so that his own doubts, and those of many other Jews, might comfortably enter. Heschel's intent with regard to the commandments, I believe, was identical. There too he occupied ground between Reform and Orthodoxy. There too he opened wide a door through which he declined to walk. And there too his assertions significantly outreached the grasp of his argument.

III. MITZVAH

The work of offering argument for the regimen of divine commandment was problematic to Heschel, for several reasons discussed at length in three major addresses which he delivered in the mid-fifties. In the first place, as we have seen, Heschel believed such argument useless unless his readers already stood at a point from which the "leap of action" was practicable. If one did not believe in a God who listens to prayer, he remarked to Conservative rabbis, it was insane to pray.⁸⁰ If one did not believe in a God so concerned with human life that He had issued orders about how we should spend our time, no life of mitzvah was possible. Heschel seemed never quite sure that his readers actually were at the proper degree of readiness. *Search* constantly harks back to steps one and two of their progress when we have reason to expect exclusive focus upon step three.

He was, moreover, disenchanted with several traditional modes of argument for the mitzvot. One, exemplified by S. R. Hirsch, sought to describe the mitzvot as a symbolic language in which every act or aspect of an act is fraught with meaning. Mendelssohn had couched the explanation of mitzvot as symbolic rather broadly, apparently conceiving of the commandments as a framework in which questions of "eternal" and "historical truth" could properly be asked and answered.⁸¹ Hirsch conceived of a more thoroughgoing symbolism, encompassing every number, every color, every detail.⁸² Heschel almost certainly had Hirsch in mind when he remarked in his 1953 address to Reform rabbis that

Kavanah is awareness of the will of God rather than awareness of the reason of a mitzvah. Awareness of symbolic meaning is awareness of a specific idea; kavanah is awareness of an ineffable situation . . . What is characteristic of Jewish piety is not to be mindful of (the) reason but to forget all reasons and to make place in the mind for the awareness of God . . . The striking fact is that the symbolic meaning of the mitzvot was neither canonized nor recorded. Had such understanding ever been considered essential, how did it happen that the meaning of so many rituals has remained obscure?⁸³

The question is very much to the point, and effectively undermines Hirsch's often elaborate rationales for particular commandments. Such allegedly authoritative explanation, moreover, would of course have constituted an obstacle to Heschel's aggadic pluralism. He was therefore not about to engage in the sort of argument for the mitzvot which goes: by doing X, we affirm that Y; or, equally bad, X means Y. In general terms, such rationales were trite. In the particular, they seemed to prescribe what Heschel believed only individual kavvana could supply.⁸⁴

Heschel objected no less to what he termed "religious behaviorism" or "pan-halakhism" (what we might term orthopraxy): emphasis upon

mitzvot without any attempt at rationale whatsoever. This stance, at the opposite extreme from Hirsch, had arisen in part because “the numerous attempts to explore the semantics of the mitzvot have been futile,”⁸⁵ in part because of a long-standing rabbinic fear that such exploration trespassed on the domain of divine intent, in part too because of an inability to argue convincingly for particular mitzvot, especially in the modern period. Heschel treated the matter in his 1953 address before Conservative rabbis,⁸⁶ and two chapters of *Search* are devoted to it as well. “There are some people who seem to believe that religious deeds can be performed in a spiritual wasteland, in the absence of the soul, with a heart hermetically sealed; that external action is the essential mode of worship.” Heschel was not one of them. It was “grotesque and self-defeating” to make respect for tradition, observance with or without kavvana, “the supreme article of faith.”⁸⁷ Kavvana was integral to prayer, and observance of a mitzvah was “a prayer in the form of a deed.”⁸⁸ Silence on the purpose of mitzvah was thus unacceptable.

What could one say, however, particularly to modern non-Orthodox readers as Heschel perceived them? There was, first of all, the matter of autonomy. Kant was an ally when it came to achieving “true freedom” through the performance of duty rather than the indulgence of desire. “Unfree men are horrified by the suggestion of accepting a daily discipline.”⁸⁹ Heschel knew he was swimming against the modern current by insisting upon the virtue of any discipline; invocations of Kant on this matter are frequent, in the effort to get upstream. Kant was much less an ally, however, when it came to submission to a heteronomous order that included, but went beyond, morality. This is the burden of Heschel’s insistence before the CCAR that “the infinite God is intimately concerned with finite man and his finite deeds; that nothing is trite or irrelevant in the eyes of God.” Such belief was “the very essence of the prophetic faith.” Our duty to God went “beyond faith” and beyond ethics. “If we are ready to believe that it is God who requires us ‘to love kindness,’ is it more difficult to believe that God requires us to hallow the Sabbath?”⁹⁰ The criticism in *Search* of moral philosophers who assume that “the good is unrelated to the morally neutral deeds” (sic)⁹¹ here takes the form of Deuteronomic insistence that “every move, every detail, every act, every effort to match the spiritual and the material, is serious. The world is not a derelict; life is not a neutral ground.”⁹² God was decidedly concerned with more than ethics.

Heschel therefore had to resist the translation of commandment into ritual and ritual into symbol so pronounced in modern explanations of the commandments since Spinoza. “To us, the will of God is neither a metaphor nor a euphemism.”⁹³ The enemy here was far more immediate than the ghost of Kant; it was the powerful presence within the Conservative movement of Mordecai Kaplan. “There are some people who believe that the only way to revitalize the synagogue is to minimize the im-

portance of prayer and to convert the synagogue into a social center . . . To pray with kavanah (inner devotion) may be difficult; to pray without it is ludicrous."⁹⁴ "The doctrine . . . that God is an idea, a process, a source, a fountain, a spring, a power" is denounced as "religious solipsism" and "ego-centrism."⁹⁵ Hence too Heschel's opposition to viewing the commandments as ceremonies or customs—esthetic rather than normative, folkways of the Jewish people rather than obligations owed by the Jewish people to God. "Ceremonies are relevant to man; mitzvot are relevant to God. Ceremonies are folkways; mitzvot are ways to God."⁹⁶ Mitzvot existed not to express what we think, but to express what God wills. Their point is not to affect society, but to "affect God."⁹⁷

I have presented these obstacles to argument for the mitzvot at such length because they are essential to understanding Heschel's many attempts to offer such argument. Heschel himself always proceeded by means of negation. The RA address, for example, criticizes "praying by proxy," "spiritual absenteeism," "the doctrine of agnosticism," "the doctrine of religious behaviorism," and several other mistaken paths, before offering a positive statement built around exegesis of the injunction "Know before Whom you stand." The CCAR address, as we have seen, attacks Kant, Spinoza and Kaplan at length. Part Three of *Search* alternates between positive and negative. Chapter 28 sets forth "the partnership of God and man," while chapter 29 battles over-emphasis upon inwardness. Chapters 30-31 stress the need for "the heart," for kavvana, while 32 attacks "religious behaviorism." Chapters 33-34 lay out the polarity of halakha and aggada, the "ecstasy of deeds," while 35-37 take up sin, evil, and "the neutral." Etc.

In short: Heschel's most cogent explanations of the commandments are without exception couched polemically. Like other halakhic thinkers in the wake of Kant, he had to criticize excessive devotion to the principle of autonomy and counter the reduction of obligation to ceremony. He also, however, sought to position himself—as in *TMS*—between Reform thinkers who had renounced halakhic obligation and Orthodox thinkers who as a rule had defined it too narrowly for his liking. The task of bringing Jews back to halakha, therefore, had to involve a new sense of what mitzvah could mean, for all the problems that this task presented.

Heschel consciously chose, I believe, to turn negation into a virtue, a method. His approach to the commandments took the form of (1) eliminating obstacles, thereby freeing the reader to (2) appreciate what a life ordered by commandment could provide, once (3) a set of possible and compelling meanings for mitzvot had been provided. If the reader can make the leaps from wonder to God and from God to the search for a "pattern for living" appropriate to God's presence; if the Jew can learn not to be dissuaded from the path of mitzvah by the barriers of heteronomy or behaviorism; if the misunderstandings of mitzvah as symbol,

ceremony or folkway can be removed—Heschel can bring his reader face to face with the commandments and ask: why not? The rhetorical questions which Heschel repeatedly poses embody the larger form of his argument. Why not commandment? Beyond that, he can only hope to suggest—autobiographically, phenomenologically, evocatively—how the commitment to mitzvah can transform one's entire existence.

Search offers four discrete “reasons of this sort, all of them recapitulated in other works. First, as we would expect, mitzvot constitute an appropriate response to God's presence. That is so because of the nature of the mitzvot; the behavior which they require promotes holiness, and God is holy. It is so because the mitzvot are the “expression” or “interpretation” of God's will. Finally, the mitzvot are an answer to the question, “how must man, a being who is in essence the image of God, think, feel and act?” One sees at once how the argument of appropriateness to God's presence elides into the more traditional argument (offered only in *Quest*) of appropriateness to creation in God's image.⁹⁸ Through mitzvot we aspire to *imitatio dei*.

The commandments thereby bring us closer to God—if we are prepared to be moved in God's direction. They afford us knowledge about God, reminding us of God's presence and demand. Immersed in our world, we might otherwise forget our higher obligations, as Heschel almost forgot to pray when a student in Berlin. But since all mitzvah, if performed with kavvana, involves recognition of higher duties, and thus constitutes a direct response to God, all mitzvah is an extension of prayer, the mitzvah par excellence. Stage two of our progress to piety carries with it a duty to praise the author of our wonder. Indeed, “we praise before we prove,” arriving at praise of God before we can “tell it to our minds” that He exists and is in search of us.⁹⁹ How much more so once we have made the leap to faith. If the prophets really did express God's will, how could we not perform it joyfully—thereby confirming, from the midst of stage three, that our leaps were not in error?

Faith is thereby deepened and reinforced. “God asks for the heart, but the heart is oppressed with uncertainty . . . (we need) deeds to objectify faith, definite forms to verify belief.”¹⁰⁰ One learns more about the God who ordered that we do X by doing X, and thus plumbing to a degree the depths of God's intent. Kavvana can only be increased as a result.

Heschel is here carrying on an age-old debate within Jewish tradition concerning the way in which one comes to know God. He is siding with Judah Halevi against Maimonides, holding that reason is a far less effective vehicle of faith than experience, the religious life. By doing, we perceive.¹⁰¹ Heschel is embracing Akiba's aspiration to intimacy over Ishmael's resignation to unbridgable distance from God, even while following Ishmael in stressing the effect of mitzvot upon us rather than in

venturing with Akiba to speak of their effect upon God, and while retaining Ishmael's sense of the significant human role in defining halakha, through which the distance from God may be overcome. "The foremost sources of my own religious insights," Heschel affirmed in 1958, "lie in reverence for halacha, in my feeble effort to live by it. Elimination of halacha would be spiritual suicide."¹⁰²

A third and related theme concerns the deepening of human life. By integrating life within an overarching pattern, by facilitating insight otherwise unavailable, and most crucially by linking one's moments to eternity, halakha enables us to live fully and well. This is the force of Heschel's statement that "ritual acts are moments which man shares with God." The meaning goes beyond the fact that in these moments "man identifies himself with the will of God."¹⁰³ One should rather focus on the word "moment". "Our imperishable homeland is in God's time," Heschel wrote elsewhere. "We enter God's time through the gate of sacred deeds. The deeds, acts of sanctifying time, are the old ancestral ground where we meet Him again and again."¹⁰⁴ Because God stepped into time at Sinai, and has done so repeatedly ever since, we can share time with God, encounter God without leaving time, live in space without abandoning God.

Note the relation between Heschel's well-known dictum that Jews are a people who sanctify time rather than space and his account of the commandments. When Heschel extols Eastern European Jewry for living "more in time than in space . . . as if their soul was always on the way, as if the secret of their heart had no affinity with things,"¹⁰⁵ his point is certainly not to laud existence in *galut* per se at the expense of rootedness in a land. The point is rather, as he makes clear in *The Sabbath*, that involvement in the workaday world, particularly in a technically sophisticated civilization, tends to focus one on space, on things, rather than on time. The latter is the province of The Eternal. "Our intention here is not to deprecate the world of space . . . What we plead against is man's unconditional surrender to space, his enslavement to things."¹⁰⁶ One must "work with space but love eternity. Judaism is "a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time."¹⁰⁷

Not, we observe, of space. The relevant comparison to Heschel on this matter is not Soloveitchik, whose halakhic man seeks to impose the divine will upon worldly existence, but Rosenzweig, who believed the life of mitzvah a way to step out of the world and into eternity. Heschel is, once more, Akiba and not Ishmael. He points inward, not out. Mitzvot are less a way to transformation of the world than a means of transforming the self.

The reason for this emphasis may well be Heschel's pessimism, in the shadow of the Holocaust, concerning our ability as human beings to rise to the task of holiness. One is not at all surprised to find that the

Kantian theme of discipline and duty versus desire figures prominently in part three of *Search*. One is startled, however, to find two entire chapters devoted to sin and evil. The continuum of sin ranges from indifference at one end, through the loss of integrity in a world which values power, success, and money, to actual wickedness and the confusion of good and evil. "The Torah is an antidote," Heschel concludes¹⁰⁸—an allusion to midrashim in which the lust of the serpent infuses itself into all mankind, and only Torah can save us from its venom.

Mitzvah, then, is a way of life appropriate to existence in the presence and likeness of God; a means to deeper knowledge of God; a way to partake of eternity without stepping out of time; and an antidote to the evil in our world and in ourselves. Having brought the Jew to the point where commitment to mitzvah is a live option, Heschel implicitly asks: why not choose such a life? Reason can have no legitimate objection to it, and two thousand years of obedience testify on its behalf. Step round the barriers, and a "palace in time" can be yours.

Heschel makes one final effort to ease the leap: a "pedagogy of return," a "ladder of observance."¹⁰⁹ This theme dominates the address to the Jerusalem "ideological conference;" it is muted, but no less central, in part three of *Search*. If Jews were to be won back to observance, those who represented the halakha would have to stop acting "as if the primary function of halacha were to restrict, to confine, to deny, and to deprive." At present, "the gates of halacha are closed. No one departs and no one enters. Those inside are not concerned with those on the outside. Those on the outside do not understand those within . . ." The byword of the day should be "elasticity, flexibility," rather than "extremism, maximalism." As the rabbis of old might have put it, "In our generation even a modest effort a person makes with kavanah for the sake of God is much more precious in the eyes of the Lord than the great deeds done in the generations of the past."¹¹⁰

In a sense, all of Heschel's work was preparation for this, his break with the reality—if not the principle—of Orthodoxy. The use of the prophet as his ideal of piety, rather than the rabbinic sage, or the philosopher, or the mystic, or the hasid, set a standard for activist commitment and existential involvement that halakha alone could not meet. Imbued with the prophetic faith, Heschel could assert the failings of any life that did not comprise "sensitivity, understanding, engagement, and attachment." Obedience was insufficient.¹¹¹ Heschel's meticulous reconstruction of the debate between Ishmael and Akiba likewise positioned him to demand "elasticity" rather than "maximalism." The CCAR address speaks of two ideas concerning Jewish law which have proved "inimical to its survival." The first is the mistaken notion that observance is "all or nothing," that "all of its rules are of equal importance." The second is the

assumption “that every iota of the law was revealed to Moses at Sinai.” Heschel explicitly called this “an unwarranted extension of the rabbinic concept of revelation.” The authority of Ishmael enabled him to say, very much in the manner of Rosenzweig, “There are times in Jewish history when the main issue is not what parts of the law cannot be fulfilled but what parts of the law can be and ought to be fulfilled, fulfilled as law, as an expression and interpretation of the will of God.”¹¹² Heschel was on firm rabbinic ground—*Genesis Rabba*—when he wrote that if “the vineyard is being trodden down,” one should not “insist upon the sanctity of the hedges”—the *siyyagim* of rabbinic ordinances erected in order to protect the law from unwitting trespassers.¹¹³

The Kabblistic tradition, always an undercurrent in Heschel’s thought, moves to the surface dramatically precisely here, on the question of halakhic flexibility. Chapter 29 of *Search*, after distinguishing the hedge from the vineyard, concludes with a lengthy quotation from Moses Cordovero. The key section is this. “The power to observe depends on the situation. So in this age, we are not obligated to fulfill the laws of the Temple, and the little that we do is counted as equal with the observance of those who were able to fulfill the laws that were possible in the time of the Temple . . . Each word and each deed of the law has its own time in which it can and must be kept.”¹¹⁴ It is as if Heschel had to speak from inside rabbinic authority in order to question its misuse, to eulogize Eastern European Jewry in order to observe that “a Judaism confined to the limits of the Halacha, with all due respect, be it said, is not exactly one of the happiest products of the diaspora.”¹¹⁵ Only “as a Jew committed to halacha,” his observance unimpeachable, could Heschel stand before Conservative rabbis and “say to you that halacha is not the central issue of this generation.” Meaning had to be seen in the mitzvot if they were again to take hold of Jews.¹¹⁶

It is in this context, I think, that we must see Heschel’s social activism. One cannot, *pace* some critics, separate the thinker in his study from the demonstrator on the streets. The books and the politics were devoted to the same end, articulations of the same commitment. Heschel sought to reinfuse the concept of mitzvah with kavvana, to liven the meaning of commandment in the minds of a generation far outside the “locked gates” of observance. How could one do that, given his conviction that that meaning was not propositional, that it could not be spelled out in words, that it had to be experienced from within, and preceded by leaps in faith which could be encouraged but by no means compelled? His entire oeuvre, spanning every period of Jewish history and thought, evoking every sort of Jewish piety, deploying a variety of rhetorical modes, was one means of getting around that problem. “Sparks are kindled in the souls of people open to religion by the words of the pious, sparks which become luminous in their hearts.”¹¹⁷ His life, however, was

another means to the same end. The biography of Maimonides and the preface to the English version of *The Prophets* leave no doubt that Heschel saw it as such. *Alone* concludes with "The Pious Man," *Search* with an ideal portrait of collective piety, "The People Israel." Heschel's larger-than-life public persona was intended as another model, an element of the "pedagogy of return" which could assist in the popular imagination of contemporary piety. To the degree that Heschel could redefine mitzvah, widen its scope to include public activity on behalf of civil rights, Soviet Jewry or cessation of the Vietnam war, he could project the meaning of observance onto a larger screen. Masses of Jews would then have the opportunity to share his vision of what the life of mitzvah in our day might look like. Books were useful, but in the end "it is the pious man to whom we must turn in order to learn how to live."¹¹⁸ Heschel hoped to be such a pious man, to whom—and through whom—Jews turned.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the end, as I have indicated, Heschel's apologia for the mitzvot falls victim to its own assumptions and hesitations, in several ways.

First, Heschel by his own admission could not convey to outsiders the experience of those within, but only urge them to make the leap. He hoped to persuade through suggestion and evocation, a method inherently limited in the leverage which it can bring to bear.

Second, the question to which Heschel devoted most attention with regard to mitzvot—the extent of Torah from Heaven, the meaning of revelation—lay far beyond the interest and capacity of the secular audience to which his argument was ostensibly addressed. The sorts of questions which were appropriate to philosophical and theological outsiders were rarely raised in his writing, and, when raised, evaded.

Third, we are given an elaborate defense of the purposes served by the mitzvot—knowledge of God, meaning to life, escape from sin, entrée to eternity—but almost no insight into how particular mitzvot or aspects of mitzvot relate to those ends.

Fourth, Heschel's potential radicalism—as in the calls for elasticity, or the Cordovero quote—always remained potential. He repeatedly came to critical turns only to turn back by turning away. Time and again we find generalities where only specifics will do.

Finally, never ever, not even in his magnificent speeches before conservative rabbis, would Heschel spell out the institutional implications of his critique of orthodoxy. Given that the halakha's current representatives transmitted a message of "restriction, confinement, denial and deprivation," was one to break with their authority and supplant it with a

parallel halakhic order? Did Heschel mean to endorse the stance of the rabbinical assembly before which he spoke? Or would he advise adherence to halakha as defined by orthodoxy, latitude when it came to newcomers, flexibility with regard to aggada, and vocal criticism of the sort which he himself offered—all the while remaining within the bounds of orthodox practice? On such crucial matters Heschel, who spoke and wrote a prodigious amount, said and wrote absolutely nothing. The omission was hardly accidental. It does however leave his writing on the commandments, however, voluminous, decidedly incomplete.

When all is said and done, I believe, Heschel's success in evoking the richness of the life of mitzvah, as well as his failure in arguing persuasively for its authority, can only be appreciated against the background of similar efforts by other modern Jewish thinkers—this despite the fact that he himself rarely alluded to such efforts, and almost never cited them. Our sympathy, as it were, must nonetheless comprehend the pathos of his position. Two concluding reflections should make that pathos—in which he was far from alone—more apparent.

First, a careful reading of Heschel's oeuvre reveals significant vacillation on the seriousness of the problem which he faced in returning Jews to mitzvah. Heschel's finest definition of the modern Jew—"a person who lives within the language and culture of a twentieth-century nation, is exposed to its challenge, its doubts and its allurements, and at the same time insists upon the preservation of Jewish authenticity in religious and even cultural terms"—is followed immediately by a warning that "the modern Jew is but an experiment," its success uncertain.¹¹⁹ How could one reconcile "authenticity in religious and even cultural terms" with life within the "culture of a twentieth-century nation"? At times Heschel seems utterly pessimistic. The gap is too wide to be bridged. Reform of the prayerbook was no answer, he declares; it was the soul of the prayer which needed overhauling.¹²⁰ At other moments he seems to believe that contemporary non-belief and non-observance are the result of misperception and poor instruction. Religion, so long as it continued "oppressive, insipid," etc. did not deserve anyone's allegiance. Enliven it with kavvana, and its light would pierce the darkness. Heschel, we might say, possessed both the pessimism necessary to evoke his labors and the optimism needed to sustain them. The combination is not unusual in religious thinkers of any faith, in any period, but it seems particularly pronounced in Jewish thought in the modern period—and it does not add to Heschel's persuasiveness.

The problem is so pronounced in modern Jewish thought because, as Heschel well knew, all the models of piety which he sought to evoke—whether prophets or rabbis or philosophers or Hasidic tzadikim—addressed communities for which mitzvah was an overwhelming reality, its commands enforceable by coercion. For Heschel's readers, by contrast,

halakha was generally counter-factual—far from daily experience and against its grain. How then argue the rewards of its observance? One answer, as I have suggested, was the variety of rhetorical modes which Heschel deployed in his many works, evoking the variety of models which he himself emulated. Another was that emulation itself: the public persona which Heschel created for piety.

Moses Mendelssohn, in the work which perhaps inaugurated modern Jewish thought, complained that people in the modern world no longer learned from living examples, but had recourse only to books.¹²¹ Heschel, like Mendelssohn, knew that piety was best learned from observation; like him too, I believe, he crafted a larger-than-life image of himself to assist in the observation of piety from afar. If that is the case, we should perhaps read Heschel's life, as well as his work, as a way of providing instruction to his audience. Heschel could exemplify the authority of mitzvah, even if he could not argue it successfully.

Modern Jewish thought in general—witness Mendelssohn or Rosenzweig as well as Heschel or Soloveitchik—may well be accounted less persuasive than its embodiment in modern Jewish lives. Heschel, ever insisting on “depth theology,” would perhaps not have been surprised by that verdict, or even disappointed.

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NOTES

1. For a recent example, see John Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith* (New York, 1985), which ventures criticism only with extreme reluctance. Criticism is also the notable lacuna in Fritz Rothchild's otherwise excellent readings of Heschel. See for example the introduction to *Between God and Man* (New York, 1959) or “Varieties of Heschelian Thought” in John C. Merkle (ed.), *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Exploring His Life and Thought* (New York, 1985), pp. 87-102. For a similar criticism of Heschel's critics—“Either he was dismissed or he was given uncritical, often unintelligent, praise”—see Jacob Neusner, “Faith in the Crucible of the Mind,” *America*, Vol. 128, No. 9 (March 10, 1973), p. 208. The issue is a memorial tribute to Heschel.

2. On the difficulties of Heschel's manner of argument, see Emil Fackenheim's review of *Man is Not Alone in Judaism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan. 1952), pp. 85-89, or Arthur A. Cohen, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew* (New York, 1962), pp. 234-259. The best-known and most thoroughgoing critique of pathos is Eliezer Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York, 1974), pp. 192-224. However see the response to Berkovits offered by Steven T. Katz in his *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (New York, 1983), pp. 125-133.

3. Berkovits does not cite it, despite the centrality of the book to understanding Heschel's thought on revelation. Neither does Eugene Borowitz, another reader of Hebrew, in *A New Jewish Theology in the Making* (Philadelphia, 1968).

4. Merkle, *Genesis*. We are rather treated to an intelligent Christian reading of Heschel, the emphasis squarely upon faith rather than "works".

5. Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York, 1955).

6. Eugene Borowitz, a very reliable reader of Heschel, writes that *Search* remains the "pivotal work," and relies heavily upon it. See *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York, 1983), p. 294. Lou M. Silberman by contrast urges us to see Heschel's work as a whole—but then proceeds like most critics to emphasize *Man is Not Alone* and *God in Search of Man*. See "The Philosophy of Abraham Heschel" in *Jewish Heritage*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 1959), pp. 23-26, 54. Marvin Fox focuses on *Search* exclusively in his critique. See "Heschel, Intuition and the Halakhah," *Tradition*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall 1960), pp. 5-15.

7. This is the import of Fackenheim's review of *Alone* (see note 2). His review of *Search*, in *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 15 (1960), pp. 50-53, praises Heschel as a religious thinker, but emphasizes that he is to be read only as such, and not, despite appearances to the contrary, as a philosopher.

8. Heschel's book *Die Prophetie* was published in Cracow in 1936, based upon a dissertation published by the Polish Academy of Sciences (Cracow, 1936) under the title, *Das prophetische Bewusstsein*. The English version, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia, 1962), expands the original and provides illustration at length from prophetic texts. The biography of Maimonides has recently appeared in English (New York, 1982), tr. Joachim Neugroschel. See also Heschel's Hebrew article, "Did Maimonides Believe He had Attained to Prophecy?" in the *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1946), Hebrew pages 159-187.

9. *Man is Not Alone* (New York, 1951), the one significant exception to this rule, is sustained with minor lapses over the first twelve chapters, but falters noticeably once Heschel has made the climactic and problematic move from awe and wonder to belief in a personal God. Thereafter the book alternates between cogent chapters such as 15, 22, 25 or 26 and rather more rambling and less focussed chapters such as 14, 20 or 21. The first section of *Search* is far less successful than the parallel unit of *Alone*, with only chapters 1, 4, and 11 matching the earlier book either in stylistic grandeur or compelling argument. What follows is again hit-or-miss: successful, in part two, only in chapters 17, 19-20, 24 and 27, and in chapters 29, 32 and 34 of part three.

10. Abraham Heschel, *Torah Min Ha-Shamayim*, 2 Vols. (London, 1961, 1965.) The book bears the English title, *Theology of Ancient Judaism*. For a critique of the work's scholarship see Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages* (Jerusalem, 1979), Vol. 1, p. 17, and Vol. 2, p. 695, n. 20. My concern here is rather Heschel's "Theology of Modern Judaism," which the book implicitly and explicitly embodies.

11. Reprinted as chapters 3 and 4 of Abraham Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, recently reissued as *Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* (New York, 1986). Heschel delivered an address of comparable quality to the so-called "ideological conference" convened by David Ben Gurion in 1957, the English version of which appears in chapter 13 of *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (Philadelphia, 1966). For the Hebrew original see the special issue of *Hazut*, Vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1956). Note also the high quality of *The Earth is the Lord's and the Sabbath* (published together; New York, 1966). I am not suggesting that the shorter pieces are uniformly successful. At his worst, Heschel merely strings together isolated thoughts or phrases.

12. See the testimony of Heschel's assistant for the writing of *Israel: An Echo of*

Eternity (New York, 1967), Judith Muffs, "A Reminiscence of Abraham Joshua Heschel," *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Fall 1973), pp. 53-54. The issue is a special memorial tribute to Heschel. During a conversation I had with Heschel in 1970, he repeatedly made notes on little yellow slips of paper and then stuffed the slips in a drawer already overflowing with them. I suspect that the slips found their way into paragraphs—and then pages—of Heschelian prose.

13. Only such readers would know, for example, that in postulating a "categorical imperative" to reverence, Heschel plays off Kant.

14. Here I concur with Fackenheim in his review of *Search* (note 7).

15. Here I disagree with Cohen and Fackenheim (see note 2) and side with Rothschild, who suggests the four criteria of comprehensiveness, depth, consistency and relevance. See Rothschild, "Varieties," p. 87. It should also be apparent that I agree with critics who perceive unity beneath Heschel's rambling discourse. See for example Borowitz, *New Theology*, p. 150, and Herbert W. Schneider, "On Reading Heschel's *God in Search of Man: A Review*," *The Review of Religion*, Vol. 21, No. 1-2 (Nov. 1956), pp. 31-38.

16. Aside from sheer carelessness, which bedevils every writer.

17. Two examples from *Alone* must suffice. Heschel's stipulation that "Faith is a relation to God; belief a relation to an idea or a dogma" (p. 166) may draw upon Buber's distinction between *emunah* and *pistis* in *Two Types of Faith* (New York, 1961), the German original of which had appeared in 1950. His insistence that we substitute a mode of relation to God for a subject-object dichotomy aiming at knowledge (ch. 8) is likewise Buberian. Why the omission of references to contemporaries? Perhaps Heschel's biography of Maimonides supplies a clue. Heschel speculates that Maimonides saw himself as "a codifier, not a commentator" (p. 84), that he wished his *Mishneh Torah* to be a definitive book, and hence omitted footnotes. He wanted to be conclusive, not to convince (p. 93). Heschel, by citing only the tradition, appears its faithful expositor—rather than one among a number of voices competing for our allegiance, all of them in the name of authenticity and tradition.

18. Heschel, *Alone*, pp. 8, 71.

19. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Yesodei Ha-Torah*, 2:2.

20. Heschel, *Alone*, p. 8.

21. The term, common currency now in the discussion of modern religious thought, is Peter Berger's. See *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City, 1970), and *The Heretical Imperative* (Garden City, 1979). Heschel fits Berger's type of the "inductive theologian." See *Heretical Imperative*, ch. 5.

22. See for example Jakob Petuchowski's discerning essay, "Faith as the Leap of Action: The Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel," *Commentary*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (May 1958), pp. 390-397.

23. Heschel, *Alone*, p. 269.

24. Heschel, *Search*, p. 168.

25. The titles, respectively, of chapter 17 of *Alone* and chapter 16 of *Search*.

26. Bernhard W. Andersen, "Co-Existence With God: Heschel's Exposition of Biblical Theology", in Merkle (ed.), *Exploring*, p. 49.

27. Heschel, *Search*, p. 31.

28. Merkle, *Genesis*. See in particular the introduction, setting forth the distinctions then argued at length in the body of the book, and the conclusion, a final attempt to justify the method (pp. 218-222). I find Merkle guilty of, in his

words, "foisting an alien system upon Heschel's mosaic of insights," despite an otherwise careful reading. In the first place Heschel's manner of argument, while coherent, does not lend itself to such fine categories; in the second place, as I try to argue in this essay, Heschel's notion of faith cannot possibly be divorced from the observance of mitzvot. The latter is not means but end; Heschel writes, ever and always, as a halakhic Jew. That is not to say his work is irrelevant to non-Jews; far from it. But Heschel can only go so far in his attempts at universal "philosophy of religion," and beyond that suggest criteria which any appropriate "pattern for living"—non-Jewish parallels to halakha—must satisfy.

29. Fox, "Heschel".

30. See for example *Search*, p. 325; *Quest*, p. 58; *Insecurity*, pp. 194-196, 216.

31. See for example *Insecurity*, p. 199 ("Faith is not a system but an ongoing striving for faith") or *Search*, p. 345 ("Deeds not only follow intention; they also engender kavanah . . . Actions teach").

32. Heschel, *Alone*, p. 78. See also Abraham Heschel, *Who is Man?* (Stanford, 1965), p. 79.

33. Heschel, *Who is Man*. The three stages are however evident: (1) reverence to (2) God (p. 89) to (3) "how to live" (p. 94)—a question which Heschel must put off because he cannot discuss it in the abstract.

34. Heschel, *Alone*, pp. 253, 265, 278.

35. Heschel, *Search*, pp. 163-164.

36. Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* (New York, 1951). See in particular chapters 1-2. Chapter 25 of *Search* meets Spinoza head-on.

37. Heschel, *Search*, p. 178.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 224. We know from Heschel's remarks in an article entitled "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 32 (1942), pp. 265-313, that doubt of the sort Heschel seeks to dispel here was a serious problem for him, as it was for Saadia. The latter's argument for the prophets' authenticity—the miracles which they performed—is mentioned by Heschel (p. 312) without comment. I am indebted to David Ellenson for pointing out that much in Heschel reminds us of the medieval Jewish philosophers upon whom he worked in the 'thirties.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 258, 276.

45. Borowitz, *New Theology*, p. 157.

46. Heschel, *Maimonides*, pp. 26, 179-180, 252; "Did Maimonides?", pp. 159-160, 172.

47. Heschel, *Quest*, pp. 94-98.

48. Heschel, *The Prophets*, "Introduction." Collingwood is cited explicitly on p. 168.

49. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

50. See, most conveniently, Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane* (New York, 1959), and "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism"

in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, edited by Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa (Chicago, 1959), pp. 86-107.

51. Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. xv.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 190, 407. Heschel declares on p. 311 that there can in fact be no understanding on our part of how the prophets were able to understand God's will.

54. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

55. Abraham Heschel, *A Passion for Truth* (New York, 1973), p. xiv. The book encapsulates a good deal of the material on the Kotzker rebbe found in the longer Yiddish work,

56. Cf. Berkovitz, *Major Themes*. What are we to make, for example, of the claim that "in sympathy, man experiences God as his own being"? *The Prophets*, p. 319.

57. Heschel, *The Prophets*, p. 270.

58. Heschel, *Search*, p. 257.

59. Heschel, *Insecurity*, p. 118.

60. Heschel, *Search*, p. 250.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

62. Heschel, *TMS*, Volume 1. See in particular the introduction and chapters 9, 11, 12. The discussion of loving God occurs in chapter 9.

63. *Ibid.*, Volume 2, introduction, chapters 4-5, 15-16.

64. *Ibid.*, chapters 4, 8, 10, 13-14.

65. *Ibid.*, p. ii.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

67. *Ibid.*, Volume 1, p. lix.

68. Detailed evidence for the claim cannot be presented here. But note the following points of agreement between Ishmael and Heschel: (1) on miracles, which Heschel never mentions in his writings, and minimizes in his treatment of *The Prophets* (e.g. p. 17); cf. *TMS* 1, ch. 2; (2) on the meaning of God's presence in history; cf. *TMS* 1, ch. 11, particularly pp. 189, 193, compared with Heschel, *Israel*, pp. 130-131; (3) on the question of whether the commandments are for our benefit exclusively or for God's as well; cf. *TMS* 1, pp. 232-241; (4) on whether Moses saw God's face; cf. *TMS* 1, ch. 15; (5) on the prophet as participant or merely recipient; cf. *TMS* 2, ch. 11; (6) on Moses' authorship of the final verses of the Torah; cf. *TMS* 2, p. 382. Heschel's irenic tolerance also contrasts sharply with Akiba's bitter critique of Ishmael; cf. *TMS*, p. 97. His stance as a *mekel* rather than a *mahmir* (a lenient rather than a harsh decisor) is also Ishmael's; cf. *TMS* 1, ch. 8. Finally, we should note Heschel's comment that Rabi (Judah the Prince) followed Ishmael in matters of aggada, Akiba in matters of halakha. He himself sought a comparable synthesis.

69. *TMS*, Volume 1, p. xliv.

70. *Ibid.*, chs. 11-12.

71. Heschel, *The Prophets*, ch. 15.

72. Heschel, *TMS*, Vol. 1, p. 194.

73. Fackenheim's verdict in his review of *Search* is correct: Heschel writes as an insider to faith, one for whom the truth of revelation is assumed.

74. See, most conveniently, Nahum N. Glatzer (ed.), *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1961), pp. 242-247.
75. Heschel, *Search*, p. 264.
76. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 134.
77. Heschel, *Search*, p. 276.
78. Heschel never pronounced upon the validity of non-Jewish claims to revelation. He had no authority for doing so. One gathers, however, that in the case of Christianity he took these claims very seriously.
79. Heschel, *TMS*, Vol. 2, p. 439.
80. Heschel, *Quest*, pp. 58, 62.
81. Cf. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, tr. Allan Arkush (Hanover, 1983), pp. 104-120.
82. See in particular S. R. Hirsch, "Jewish Symbolism," *Collected Writings*, Vol. 3 (New York, 1984), and *Horeb* (Two Volumes) (London, 1962).
83. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 137.
84. Only with regard to two paradigmatic mitzvot, prayer and the Sabbath, did Heschel approach this sort of explanation, and there too he avoided the prescriptive mode favored by Hirsch.
85. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 138.
86. But not in the parallel address before Reform rabbis, for whom this was not an issue. Heschel's stance on this matter did draw Modern Orthodox attack, witness Fox's criticism that in demanding kavvana Heschel conceived an elite religiosity that left out the masses of Jews unable to attain it. See Fox, "Heschel," pp. 11-15.
87. Heschel, *Quest*, pp. 53-54.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.
91. Heschel, *Search*, p. 382.
92. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 94.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 114. The theme is also prominent in Heschel's 1953 address on Jewish education, ch. 15 of *Insecurity*. See especially p. 225.
97. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 136. Petuchowski rightly criticizes this formulation, and apparently has it in mind when he speaks of the "almost magical quality" of the mitzvot according to Heschel. Petuchowski, "Leap," pp. 392, 397. I think Heschel simply mis-spoke when he said that the mitzvot "affect God." At no other point in his thought is anything remotely similar claimed. The meaning seems to be that "mitzvot transcend reality," that they have an "ontological status" as the word of God. They "affect God" in that God proclaimed them, and by doing so entered into a new relation with the world. Heschel thus follows Ishmael and not Akiba; see the discussion of *ta'amei ha-mitzvot* in *TMS*, 1, pp. 232-237.
98. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 95.
99. Heschel, *Alone*, pp. 71, 74.
100. Heschel, *Search*, p. 297.
101. Heschel, *Quest*, pp. 104-106.

102. Heschel, *Insecurity*, p. 219.
103. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 139.
104. Heschel, *Israel*, pp. 127-128.
105. Heschel, *Earth*, p. 15.
106. Heschel, *Sabbath*, p. 6.
107. *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 8.
108. Heschel, *Search*, p. 374. See also p. 380, and *Quest*, p. 98.
109. Heschel, *Insecurity*, p. 206.
110. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-6.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
112. Heschel, *Quest*, pp. 100-102.
113. Heschel, *Search*, pp. 302-303.
114. *Ibid.*
115. Heschel, *Insecurity*, p. 198.
116. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.
117. Heschel, *Alone*, p. 231.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
119. Heschel, *Insecurity*, p. 197.
120. Heschel, *Quest*, p. 83.
121. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, p. 103.

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