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The Search for Meaning Beyond the Mystery: The Religious Philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Post-Modern Liberal Jew

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for Ordination

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For Lori

Without whom none of this would have been possible
With whom, everything is possible

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Digest

The intellectual worldview of post-modernism poses severe challenges to the world of religion in general, and to Judaism in particular. Post-modernism's emphasis on the perceptions of the individual in the moment and the denial of the existence of eternal and unifying principles stands in sharp contrast to the religious view of the universe. Is there a way to reconcile these two worldviews? Is it possible to find transcendent meanings in individual perceptions? Can the authority of the individual be reconciled with the authority of God and the community? Is there the possibility that eternal truth exists in an ever-changing world?

This thesis will address these and other similar questions through the religious philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972). Beginning with his doctoral dissertation, later published as The Prophets, Heschel presents a vision of religion as a source for meaning in what often seems to be an arbitrary world. He envisioned religion, and particularly Judaism, as an antidote to the alienation and loneliness of modern, and now post-modern, life. He suggests not only a philosophy of Judaism, but a pattern of living that provides an opportunity for a Jewish individual to apprehend meaning in existence.

The thesis begins with a consideration of the current state of the American Jewish community. The first chapter utilizes sociological evidence to demonstrate the weakness of the link between the majority of self-identified Jews and the established institutions of the American Jewish community. The question is then raised as to whether Heschel's philosophy of Judaism provides a view of Judaism that might better address the needs and concerns of post-modern liberal Jews.

The next two chapters are a description of Heschel's religious philosophy generally and a presentation of Heschel's positions regarding various aspects of Jewish life based on that philosophy. In Chapter 2, consideration is given to the role of faith in religion and the antecedents to faith. Heschel's concept of the empathetic relationship between God and human beings, and the sympathetic response of human beings to God's concern, is also discussed. Chapter 3 discusses how Heschel applied his philosophy in his writings and speeches to concrete issues of Jewish life such as prayer, ritual, education, and social action.

The thesis then continues with a consideration of Heschel's views on the State of Israel. Late in his life, Heschel brings together many strands of his philosophy of Judaism in his hopes for Israel as a place where Jews are finally free to create a society in which they are responsive to God's demand for holiness.

The body of the thesis then concludes with a vision of a Jewish community based on Heschel's principles and a critical analysis of Heschel's religious philosophy as well as its applicability to the life of the post-modern liberal Jew.

Introduction

Abraham Joshua Heschel begins God in Search of Man with the following statement:

> It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless. *Religion is an answer to man's ultimate questions.*[1]

Heschel was a man of modernity. His concern with the decline of religion was expressed in the context of a society which derogated religion in favor of science. Heschel confronted a society in which there were no mysteries, only occurrences that were yet to be explained. In noting in this passage that religion had not been "refuted", Heschel provided a clue as to the intellectual standards of his time. Modernity's ultimate criticism of any worldview was that it had been "refuted" like an imperfect syllogism, but religion had not been refuted. Rather, religion had devalued itself by lessening its emphasis on faith because of an unwillingness to seriously address those matters from which faith springs. That is, modern religion failed to seriously address the signs of God's presence in the word and the implications of that presence. In doing so, the integrity of religion as a source for answers beyond those of science and positivism was diminished.

[1] A. J. Heschel, God in Search of Man (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), page 3.

Heschel matured intellectually in the world of theoretical philosophy but felt that the philosophical and scientific view of the world was incomplete. His early years as a Hasidic prodigy taught him that there was a mystery beyond that which was available for human comprehension and that within that mystery lay the meaning of our existence.

A recognition of, and reverence for, that which is beyond human comprehension was anathema to modernity. For Heschel, however, it was the essence of religion and the path to the ultimate answers of existence. Heschel's complaint about religion in modern times was that it had abandoned the search for the ineffable, that religion itself had adopted modernity as its prism for viewing the world. Religion had become devoid of what set it apart from science and philosophy, that is, a sense of awe in the face of what can not be explained.

Heschel's response to modernity was to pointedly expose its shortcomings, particularly its failure to develop an ethical structure that would have prevented the horrors of the 20th century along with modernity's inability to bring meaning to existence. Heschel wrote in the time of "the man in the gray flannel suit", when his overriding concern was that material goods had become the object of worship instead of that which is eternal. Heschel offered in its place a religion of meaning, where human beings could draw a sense of purpose from their natural wonder at the very fact of their own existence.

We, however, live in a somewhat different world. In a sense we have the opposite problem from that of the modern world. Modernity contends that there is truth but that it consists only of what is scientifically provable. Post-modernity, however, contends that there is no one truth, but rather many truths; that the world is constantly in flux and all that we have are our own individual perceptions of, and perspectives on, what is going on

around us at any given time. The content of truth is constantly changing and no one version of truth is better than any other. It is as if society had heard only half of Heschel's message, namely the part about the shortcoming of science and philosophy. What was not heard was Heschel's message that the mystery that lies beyond the limits of rationality contains something which is meaningful and eternal.

The problem for the post-modern individual is that the world consists only of alienation, that there is "no there, there". Post-modern humanity is looking for an anchor in a storm of constantly changing perceptions; a framework for viewing the vast and ever-changing flow of data that bombards the individual daily. We have many more facts and much more data than ever before in history but have even less of a context in which to place it than did our forbearers, so as to give the data meaning.

The result is the development of a post-modern worldview in which nothing exists beyond individual perception. An intellectual universe in which the concepts of origin, unity and transcendence are denigrated.[2] We have become a world of intellectual voyeurs, for whom intellectual pursuit has become a constant attempt to understand the perceptions of others in an effort to better understand our own. There is, however, no overarching reality to our worldview and no sense of a common origin. There is no common yardstick by which to measure the worth of one's life. If everything is transitory and there is no ultimate reality, then at its base life would seem to be absurd in the sense that Ecclesiastes and Camus discussed.

Against this empty and dispiriting view of existence Heschel comes forth to say "No." Heschel asserts that there are, in fact, truths; that the world is not absurd. That the

[2] Banks, Gary Michael, "Rabbi Heschel Through Christian Eyes", Conservative Judaism, Vol. 50:2-3, Winter/Spring, 1998, page 102.

fact that these truths are mysterious and beyond rational proof does not mean that they do not exist; only that we are in need of another viewpoint from which to apprehend them. Heschel suggests that religion should offer just such a worldview. He comes forward to say that modernity and post-modernity are both equally deficient and that neither are the answer to the human quest for meaning.

This thesis begins with an examination of the state of American Judaism at the end of the 20th century. Following that there is a general discussion of Heschel's philosophy of religion. In particular, the second chapter will focus on Heschel's antecedents to faith. The relationship between mystery and meaning will be discussed, as will Heschel's concept of divine pathos and human sympathy. Finally, human response to God's pathos through performance of mitzvot will be addressed.

In addition to religious philosophy, Heschel articulated approaches to concrete issues facing the Jewish community, and these positions will be discussed in Chapter 3. Among these issues are prayer, Jewish education, social action, and interfaith relations. Heschel's writings on the State of Israel reflect a vision of Israel as potentially being a society in which his philosophy of Judaism might reach full fruition. As a prelude, then, to a consideration of what an American Jewish community based on Heschel's philosophy might look like, Chapter 4 addresses Heschel's vision of the Israeli future as well as Israel's role in American Judaism.

Although relatively well known and widely read during his lifetime, Heschel's writings are still those of a religious philosopher and his solutions to the problems of religion are rarely concrete. Thus, at its conclusion, this paper will attempt to draw a picture of what a Jewish community might look like that based itself on being a living

expression of Heschel's philosophy of Judaism. The role of worship, Jewish education, social action and inter-faith relations in such a community will be discussed. Also Heschel's philosophy was not without its critics and some of these criticisms will be addressed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Overall, this thesis will be an attempt to allow Heschel to address the anxieties of the post-modern Jew, the Jew who has fled religion because it offers no more insight into life's meaning than does The Wall Street Journal. Heschel is a situational thinker; he bases his philosophy on the observable realities of life. Heschel asks for faith because it is his observation that one's existence is meaningless without it. His ultimate argument for faith is the abyss into which humankind fell in the 20th century and the severe sense of loneliness and alienation felt by humanity in the 21st century. We have witnessed the alternative to faith; we have witnessed that when life becomes meaningless, it also becomes cheap. Heschel comes to say that there is meaning beyond the mystery of life, even if that meaning is beyond our grasp. And, if the answers to life's questions are mysterious, then the fact that there is an element of mystery to living compels not cynicism, but wonder. If, as Heschel says, "philosophy may be defined as the art of asking the right questions"[3], then a life of meaning might begin by asking, in reverence, awe and wonder, "Why?".

[3] Quoted in Banks, page 110.

Chapter 1

The Status of Individual and Communal Jewish Identity in the American Jewish Community

Pre-Emancipation Jewish Communities

In pre-emancipation Jewish communities throughout the world, the size of the Jewish community coincided with the number of Jews in a given area. For the most part, and except under the most extraordinary circumstances, Jews lived apart from the rest of the population. Whether this separation was the result of a formal ghettoizing of the local Jews or merely a result of social or political custom, to be a Jew was to be apart from the greater community. Therefore, to be Jewish meant that one was automatically and irretrievably a part of a greater Jewish community segregated from the society at large.

There was no opting out of the Jewish community except by conversion to another religion. Marriage to a non-Jew was virtually unknown and was unacceptable to both Jew and non-Jew alike. Consequently, it was easy to identify who was Jewish since Jewish children were born to Jewish parents and Jews associated almost exclusively with other Jews. What is more, to be affiliated with the community meant that one was affiliated with the local religious institutions as well as with communal institutions such as the Jewish hospital or charitable services. There was no meaningful distinction between religious institutions and institutions that performed more secular functions within the Jewish community.

The Core American Jewish Population

To be an American Jew, however, is to be emancipated from these circumstances. To be born a Jew says something about the likelihood that one will become a member of the Jewish community but being born Jewish is neither determinative of one's religious preference or communal association. In America, the circumstances of one's birth are becoming secondary to the life choices one makes to be in or out of a given religious or even ethnic community.

That is not to say that being born Jewish has no influence on those choices. In terms of ethnicity, *halacha* prescribes that one born of a Jewish mother is a Jew and, in answer to the question of who is a Jew, the vast majority of Jews consider themselves to be Jewish by virtue of the circumstances of their birth. Of the estimated 5.5 million individuals who comprised the Core Jewish Population in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (N.J.P.S.), 4.2 million identified themselves as having been born Jewish and who consider Judaism to be their religion.[4] The remainder of the Core Jewish Population is comprised of 185,000 Jews by choice, that is, individuals who have formally converted to Judaism plus 1.12 million individuals who indicate that they were born Jewish but that they now have no religious affiliation.[5] Thus, approximately 20% of

[4] One question, however, is what does it mean to have been born Jewish? Does it mean having two Jewish parents or one? Does it include those who were born to parents, one or both of whom later converted to Judaism? Certainly, different movements within Judaism define being born Jewish in different ways but that is not the point here. Those in the survey who identified themselves as having been born Jewish did so by virtue of their own personal definition and not that of any specific movement.

[5] CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, Table 1

what is termed the Core Jewish Population (emphasis added) in the 1990 NJPS in fact has no religious affiliation. In what sense then are these 1.12 million people "Jewish"?

The answer is that overwhelmingly they view being Jewish as an ethnic or cultural identity.[6] Thus, they are able to include themselves within the Jewish world while not practicing the Jewish religion. They are Jews because they were born Jews and might even do some things that are associated with Judaism (for example, conduct some form of seder) while not considering themselves to be practicing Jews.

In his book Community and Polity, Daniel Elazar summarizes the current state of the Jewish community in an even more graphic faction than the CJF survey. Although his categories are, at best, imprecise, Elazar provides some indication of the relative numbers of Jews who are actively practicing Judaism and who view themselves as somehow within the Jewish community. He indicates that there are only 250,000 to 450,000 integral Jews, that is, Jews who live their life according to a Jewish rhythm. There are another 500,000 Jewish participants, that is, Jews who are involved in Jewish life on a regular basis. Then there are 1.4 to 1.8 million Jews who are affiliated which Jewish institutions in some concrete way. Contributors and consumers represent another 1.4 to 1.8 million Jews who give money to and/or utilize the services of Jewish institutions occasionally. The remainder of the American Jewish community, if it can be termed that, consists of people who are peripheral to the Jewish world in some way, either having repudiated Judaism or converted out of the Jewish world, or who are described by Elazar as quasi-Jews whose Jewish status is unclear as a result in of

[6] CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, Table 13.

intermarriage or assimilation in some other form. These last three groups comprise approximately 3.5 million individuals.[7]

In addition to these individuals, the CJF survey notes the existence of approximately 1.3 million gentile adults living in households that include members of the Core Jewish Population.[8] The extent of the involvement of these gentile adults in the Jewish world and their availability for participation in Jewish communal life is unclear. Anecdotally, however, gentiles have assumed increasingly important roles within Jewish institutional life depending upon the attitude of the particular Jewish institution towards their participation. Often in a Reform context, non-Jews married to Jews become active in temple affairs to at least some extent, even without formally converting to Judaism. Temple constitutions have been altered to allow for increased participation by non-Jews and non-Jews have also assumed leadership roles in many Jewish communal organizations.[9] Thus, these self- identified gentiles may assume roles within the Jewish community that exceed those of born Jews in terms of their level of involvement in the Jewish community.

Depending upon one's point of view, therefore, the American Jewish community consists of as few as 2.5 million people or as many as 8.2 million people. To put it somewhat differently, the American Jewish community begins with a base of 2.5 million affiliated and mostly committed members. The opportunity then exists to add up to another 5.7 million people to that community. The question is how we, the members of

[7] Elazar, Daniel, Community and Polity (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), page 92.
[8] CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, Table 1.
[9] Elazar, page 164.

the committed Jewish community, do that without compromising the integrity of the core group?[10]

Post-Emancipation: The Voluntary Jewish Community

Since the 1960's, when religious affiliation became more a matter of individual choice as evidenced by the increase in intermarriage, the circumstances of one's birth have become less and less of a factor in determining whether one is a member of the Jewish community. The key element, and the central fact, of American Jewish life is that, as Americans, someone who ethnically qualifies as a Jew may opt out of the Jewish community. Conversely, there are others who are not of Jewish ancestry but who choose, to one degree or another, to be included within the Jewish community.

The central issue is one of choice. In the United States religion and ethnicity are voluntary expressions of identity.[11] The American Jewish community is a unique blend of kinship and consent.[12] In Community and Polity, Daniel Elazar writes:

> Jews in the United States are not considered to be members of a corporate group, as is true in some countries, because Americans do not recognize such claims. Consequently, no corporate group can make any claim upon them. Moreover, group affiliation in American society is voluntary, in the fullest sense of the word. There is an absolute minimum of compulsion to be affiliated, to stay affiliated or, for that matter, to recognize any ties with a particular group. Strictly speaking, in American society

[10] Compromising the integrity of the core group refers to the possibility of making Judaism so inclusive that there are no normative behaviors or beliefs required for the recognition of one's status as a Jew by the Jewish community. For a Jew by choice, this means a meaningful conversion process, for a Jew by patrilineal **descent** it means having been raised as a Jew and living a Jewish lifestyle, and for one born of a Jewish mother, it means not engaging in conduct that is antithetical to Judaism such as practicing "Messianic Judaism". The lines are not clear and will vary from community to community but one's status as a Jew at least must be accepted by the segment of the Jewish community with whom one chooses to affiliate and the status of that sub-community as Jewish needs to be accepted by the majority of the Jewish world.

[11] Introduction to the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, www.jewishdatabank.com, page 3.

[12] Elazar, page 19.

> there is no greater compulsion to associate with a particular religious group than there is to join a camera club or fraternal lodge, although in most parts of the country the first two kinds of association are considered likely to be longer lasting than the latter...The patterns of participation in American Jewish life reflect this combination of individualism and voluntarism.[13]

At one time, the Jewish community was held together by an intertwined system of beliefs and behavioral norms. The rise of modernity, however, has changed the Jewish community into one based on "shared individual *feelings*" (emphasis added).[14] As Peter Y. Medding states:

> ...the contemporary community of shared individual feelings is a voluntary and partial community of personal choice, with unclear boundaries and undefined membership. It is characterized by emotions and attachments that, while often deep, are not always clearly articulated.[15]

Medding goes on to indicate that while shared beliefs have faded as a basis for Jewish identity, shared feelings which arise in a family or community setting remain as a strong bond among Jews. Religious ritual, in particular life cycle events, is associated with warm and positive feelings which are at the core of personal identity.[16]

In addition, the rise of ethnicity within American culture has provided an attachment to the Jewish community just in the sense of not being a Christian. This feeling of association, combined with an ongoing sense of threat from anti-Semitic acts

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[13]Elazar, page 91.
[14] Medding et al., "Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages", Jews in America:A Contemporary Reader (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1999), page 228.
[15] Medding et al., page 237.
[16] Medding et al., page 237.

particularly in times of crisis, is enough to maintain some form of emotional attachment to the Jewish community among otherwise peripheral Jews.

Thus, in this increasingly voluntaristic society, where Jewish associations are more emotional than intellectual, organized Jewry must be able to provide emotional experiences that encourage the individual Jew to associate with that community.

Intermarriage

If one can opt to be a member of the Jewish community, then one may also opt to exclude oneself from the Jewish community. It is for this reason that reducing the rate of assimilation among young adult Jews has become the focus of many activities within the Jewish community. Although there has been increasing concern about the efforts to convert Jews to Christianity, the number of Jews who convert each year is relatively few. The major focus of concern has been with intermarriage in the belief that children born of the intermarried parents are less likely to be raised Jews than as Christians. This concern appears to be well founded since only 28 percent of the children of mixed couples were being raised as Jews at the time of the 1990 NJPS.[17] Statistically, however, this may not pose as large a threat as one might imagine. In "American Jewry: A Population Projection, 1990-2020" Uzi Rebhun et al. projects that with an intermarriage rate of 52 percent this would result in a diminution of only ten percent in the Jewish fertility rate. In actuality, the general low fertility rate among Jewish women is a much greater threat to the size of the Jewish community than any other factor, including assimilation.

[17] Rebhun, Dellapergola, Tolts, "American Jewry: A Population Projection, 1990-2020, Jews in America, page 36.

In addition, as Elazar points out, the situation would be much worse if there had not been a parallel revival of interest in ethnicity at the same time that Jews increasingly saw their affiliation with the Jewish community as voluntary.[18] For many, this ethnicity manifested itself in a uniquely American way, that being to emphasize family background over religion and food over spiritual nourishment.[19]

Some, including sociologist Stephen M. Cohen, view mixed couples as having potential for involvement in the Jewish community. He states that "most mixed-married Jews report not one, but several sorts of attachment to the Jewish people and Jewish ritual and, less frequently, to organized Jewry."[20] Although entry into a mixed marriage does increase the chances of estrangement of the Jewish partner from the Jewish community, on the whole Cohen maintains that intermarriage does not present a grave threat to the continuity of the American Jewish community.[21]

Nonetheless, Medding constructs an "index of Jewish identification" based on ten elements of Jewish identity.[22] Using this scale, the differences among in-married and mixed-married families is striking. Only 1% of mixed married couples exhibited high levels of Jewish identity, 30% a medium level, and 69% exhibited a low level of Jewish identity. By contrast, in-married or conversionary marriages exhibited a high identification rate of 33%, a medium rate of 50% and a low identification rate of 17%.[23]

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[18] Elazar, page 39.
[19] Elazar, page 39.
[20] Cohen, "Reason for Optimism", The Quality of Jewish Life: Two Views (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987) cited in Medding et al., page 228.
[21] Medding et al., page 228.
[22] Those elements are synagogue membership, synagogue attendance, Sabbath candle lighting, participation in a Passover seder, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Hanukah candles, membership in a Jewish organization, donating to a Jewish charity, visiting Israel, and having predominantly Jewish close friends. Medding, page 249.
[23] Medding, page 250.

These statistics refer only to the parental generation but, given these levels of identity in the parents, the identity levels of the children are likely to be even lower. In a society that offers many competing forms of identity, the chances of a child formulating a strong, or even a moderate, Jewish identity in all but the most highly identified Jewish households is moderate at best.

The concern expressed in established Jewish communal circles and institutions, therefore, goes beyond the issue of intermarriage simply producing fewer Jewish children. The concern extends to the level of identification among the children of interfaith couples, even among those who identify themselves as Jewish, and how these lower levels of identification will affect future generations.[24] For in-married couples or conversionary marriages, the establishment of Jewish identity has a presumptive advantage. In a mixed-marriage, on the other hand, there is the obstacle of a rival majority culture co-existing in the home. Yet in all cases, Jewish identity is based on individual emotional attachments rather than beliefs or bloodlines. How then do we nurture the emotional attachments that underlay identity?

Synagogue Affiliation

Another indicator of attachment to the Jewish community is synagogue affiliation. The clearest indicator of a desire to identify oneself with a Jewish community would be synagogue membership but only 60 percent of the NJPS Core Jewish Population and only

[24] Interestingly, the Jewish establishment may be experiencing inter-marriage as a problem to a much greater extent than does the Jewish population in general. In the 2001 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion taken by the American Jewish Committee, only 27 percent of the respondents cited intermarriage as a greater threat to Jewish life in the United States than anti-Semitism while 69% saw anti-Semitism as the greater threat. (www.ajc.org/IntheMedia) In addition, the AJC concluded based on its 2000 Survey that "the Jewish taboo on mixed marriage has clearly collapsed" and that "only the Orthodox, among the various groupings of American Jews, maintain by a large majority strong opposition to mixed marriage." (www.ajc.org/jl/intermarriage.htm)

41 percent of those households that characterized themselves as households that were comprised totally by Jews were affiliated with a synagogue.[25] As might be expected, that percentage decreased substantially in households that were not populated entirely by individuals who consider themselves to be Jews.[26] Thus, with intermarriage rates between Jews and non-Jews exceeding 50 percent as of 1990, left on its own, synagogue affiliation is likely to decrease to an even greater extent.[27]

The issue of affiliation is even more acute for the Reform movement. Only 35 percent of those Jews who are affiliated with a synagogue belong to a Reform congregation despite the fact that nearly half of those who were either born Jewish or who are Jews by choice identify themselves as Reform.[28]

Another indicator of Jewish identity might be volunteering for a Jewish organization. Here the statistics are even more stark than in regard to synagogue affiliation. Only 21% of those who identified themselves as Jews by religion in the NJPS had volunteered within the previous year for a Jewish organization and the percentages are much lower for the other members of the core Jewish population.[29]

Considering these statistics for formal association with the community, one must wonder what it is that brings about one Jew developing a Jewish identity that leads to association with the community while ties to the Jewish community are almost irrelevant for other Jews.

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[25] Jewish Identity: Synagogue Affiliation, 1990 National Jewish Population Study, North American Jewish Databank, www.jewishdatabank.com/njps90/idchig, page 6.
[26] Jewish Identity: Synagogue Affiliation, page 6.
[27] Rebhum, DellaPergola and Tolts, American Jewry: A Population Projection, 1992 to 2020, in Farber and Waxman, eds., Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader, (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press), 1999, page 36.
[28] Jewish Identity: Synagogue Affiliation, page 6.
[29] CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, Table 27.

Elements of Committed Identity: Education, Ritual and Gimilut Hasadim

For the Jew, the intensity of identification is expressed through action. The importance of Judaism to the individual is best expressed by what an individual does that is Jewish. In other words, most sociological studies measure the intensity of Jewish identity by the frequency with which an individual performs Jewish acts such as holiday observance, sending children to religious school or participation in Jewish communal affairs. In general, such expressions take the form of some combination of educational activity, ritual and mitzvot. For the purposes of this paper, education means formal Jewish education in a day school or synagogue setting (childhood or adult); ritual refers to the performance of prayer service, life cycle ceremonies and holiday observance; and gimilut hasadim refers to those activities that are generally categorized as social action such as staffing a homeless shelter, visiting the sick, or visiting the elderly.

In reality, these three concepts cannot be totally separated in terms of the intensity of Jewish identity. Since Jewish identity is measured by Jewish actions and associations, individuals with a higher level of Jewish identity tend to be among those who perform more ritual and who tend to provide their children with a more intensive Jewish education.[30] In other words, involvement in the Jewish community comes in a package. Those who perform more rituals are usually the ones whose children receive a more intensive Jewish education and are available to participate in mitzvah projects. So where is the Jewish identity created, at home, in the synagogue or at school?

The answer, of course, is that Jewish identity is formed in all three places by performance of a mixture of education, ritual and mitzvot. Yet, despite the inter-

[30] Cohen, "Impact of Varieties of Education on Identity" in Jews in America, page 266.

relationship among education, ritual and mitzvot, each raises its own questions about the formation of Jewish identity.

Education

It is impossible to develop an attachment to something that one does not understand. Jewish education has, therefore, become a primary focus in the struggle against assimilation. In turn, this has catapulted Jewish education to the top of the priorities list for many Jewish communities. "Jewish education", however, is rather broad term for a number of different activities and experiences, some more effective than others in building Jewish identity.

Initially, it is necessary to realize the limits of formal Jewish education in terms of building Jewish identity. In "Does Jewish Schooling Matter?" Dr. Geoffrey Bock writes that in terms of the formation of a Jewish identity, "Jewish schooling is an important factor in this process but I have also found that it is never the most important factor."[31] Bock divided Jewish identification into "personal Jewishness" and "public Jewishness". Personal Jewishness focuses on the internal identification of the individual Jew. In terms of building a personal Jewish identity, home background was twice as important as formal education. That is, the personal practice and identification displayed in the home was twice as important as Jewish schooling in shaping the personal identification of a child. Additionally, he found that one's generation was another critical factor in building Jewish identity. Second and third generation American Jews were progressively less identified than first generation Jews, although there was some evidence of a "return" in

[31] Bock, "Does Jewish Schooling Matter?" in Jewish Education and Jewish Identity: Colloquium Papers (New York: The American Jewish Committee), page 2.

the fourth generation. Furthermore, the generation in which one was born played as great a role in forming one's Jewish identity as did the effects of one's Jewish education. Bock interpreted this to mean that:

> ...the decline in personal Jewishness due to generation is roughly offset by the effects of Jewish schooling. Consequently, with each generation of American-born Jews, Jewish schooling became a progressively more important factor affecting personal Jewishness. But this also means that the effects of Jewish schooling cannot compensate for the effects of home background.[32]

In regard to public Jewish practice (service attendance, synagogue involvement, communal involvement) Bock found Jewish schooling to be as important as home background. Public Jewish practice, however, was also affected by the nature of the community in which one resides. The more intensely the area is identified as Jewish, the less of an incentive there is for formal Jewish involvement. Jews in less identified areas are more likely to participate in public Jewish practice and communal involvement. Ultimately, Bock found all of these factors to be inter-related saying "schooling supports the public values initially fostered by the home environment."[33]

Given the declining rates of Jewish practice both in-home and in the synagogue, however, the burden of being the primary source for Jewish identity has shifted sharply to the school. As Bock puts it, "American Jewish parents now expect Jewish schools and other educational efforts to teach their children about a cultural heritage which is no longer primarily reinforced by the home and the community."[34]

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[32] Bock, page 5. Bock seems to be indicating that since generation and education offset one another, then home background becomes the most significant factor in building personal identity.
[33] Bock, pages 5-6.
[34] Bock, page 2.

So how well are our educational institutions doing at building Jewish identity? For the vast majority of Jewish children, the answer is not very encouraging. Most Jewish children receive their Jewish education in the form of Sunday and weekday afternoon schools at the synagogue that their family attends. In fact, according to the sample surveyed by Steven Cohen in 1993, 65% of Jews received their Jewish education in this fashion.[35] Unfortunately, Cohen also found that Sunday schools and part-time afternoon schools are not performing well in terms of building religious identity. The percentage of adults who scored high on his Jewish Involvement Indices and who attended Sunday school or afternoon school was 14% and 32% respectively, while 15% of those who had no Jewish schooling at all scored high in terms of Jewish involvement.[36]

Despite substantial efforts to improve Sunday and part-time weekday religious education, it appears that Harold Himmelfarb's 1977 summary of the effectiveness of part-time Jewish education continues to hold true:

> Both Sunday and afternoon schools have almost no effect on total religiosity. There is no significant increase in religiosity with additional years of such schooling and there is no significant difference in religiosity between those who have attended Sunday schools only or afternoon schools only and those who have had no Jewish schooling ....Apparently, afternoon schools and Sunday schools are not equipped to compensate for the negative effects of irreligious parents, spouse or other influences, and when compared to no Jewish schooling seem to accomplish little, if anything.[37]

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[35] Cohen, page 270.
[33] Cohen, page 271.
[37] Himmelfarb, "The Non-Linear Impact of Schooling: Comparing Different Types and Amounts of Jewish Education" in Sociology of Education, volume 42 (April, 1977), page 122.

Jewish day school education, by contrast, has been substantially more successful in building Jewish religious identity. The percentage of adults who attended a non-Orthodox day school and scored high on Cohen's Jewish Involvement Indices was 50% and of those who attended Orthodox day schools, the percentage jumped to 83%.[38] Clearly, a full-time Jewish education does make a difference and the growth of Jewish day schools bodes well in this regard.

Another possible indicator of the effectiveness of Jewish education is its effect on rates of intermarriage. As intermarriage rates have risen, more and more emphasis has been placed on Jewish education as a bulwark against assimilation. In this regard, the part-time afternoon school is nearly as effective as a non-Orthodox day school. Of those adults who received no Jewish education, 45% were married to non-Jews and 52% of those who received only a Sunday school education are married to non-Jews. That percentage drops to 23% for those who attend a part-time afternoon school, 21% for those who attend a non-Orthodox day school and only 9% for those who received an Orthodox day school education. When adjusted for age, however, looking at Jews ages 25-44, Fishman finds that 50% of those who received six or more years of supplemental school married non-Jews while the percentage climbs to 60% of those who attended Sunday school or fewer than six years of supplemental school. Of those with no education, two-thirds married non-Jews. For day school attendees (she does not distinguish between Orthodox and non-Orthodox day schools), the inter-married rate drops to 20%.[39]

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[38] Cohen, page 271.
[39] Fishman, "The Changing American Family Faces the 1990s" in Farber and Waxman, eds., Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader, (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press), 1999, page 73.

The problem with each of these studies, however, is that they present statistics without analysis as to why there is a connection between education and Jewish identity. They do not indicate what is and what is not effective about the way in which Jewish education is delivered. These studies confirm that the quantity of Jewish education is a factor, with more Jewish education being more likely to instill Jewish identity and prevent intermarriage.[40] However, the studies do not have very much to say about how effective Jewish education is delivered.

The first step toward having a more effective Jewish educational system is to recognize that education does not operate in a vacuum. The issues facing Jewish education are the same issues that face American Jewry in general.

In "Jewish Education: Crisis and Vision", Dr. Jonathan Woocher summarizes the situation well:

> ...Jewish education's problems in America today are not primarily problems of Jewish education; they are problems of American Jewry. In its strengths and weaknesses, Jewish education is a reflection of Jewish society, of how American Jews define themselves and of what they want for themselves and their children. Jewish education cannot be significantly more or better than American Jews want or allow it to be."[41]

American Jewry will set the goals for the Jewish educational system based on how the community views itself. As Woocher observes, "all of the ills besetting Jewish education today can ultimately be traced back to the fact that Jewish education too often floats in a vacuum, unanchored in a community prepared to embrace it, shape it, use it, and be permeated and transformed by it in order to pursue its Jewish vision and vocation

[40] Cohen at 277, Fishman at 73, Himmelfarb, page 124.
[41] Woocher, "Jewish Education: Crisis and Vision" (JESNA), page 4.

as a community."[42] Without the vision of a Jewish community, one can not establish goals and curricula for Jewish education. We get the Jewish education that we want for our children. Our own ambivilance about being Jewish (or perhaps "too Jewish") is reflected in our attitudes toward and demands upon the Jewish educational system.

The Jewish community in America today can boast about having more day schools and pre-schools than ever before. As reflected in the NJPS study, the average number of years of Jewish education is increasing.[43] The question remains, however, is our educational system to be directed at fighting a rear-guard action against the forces of assimilation or should it present a grander vision, the vision of a new Jewish community bound together by a common vision of what it means to be Jewish?

Ritual

In each of the studies cited above, the performance of various rituals has been included as an indication of the strength of Jewish identity. These rituals included (in order of popularity of performance):

Lights Hanukah Candles	88%
Passover Seder Participants	82%
Fasts on Yom Kippur	67%
Lights Sabbath Candles	31%
Has separate milk and meat dishes	16%[44]

It is striking that a higher percentage of Jews light Hanukah candles, participate in a Passover seder and fast on Yom Kippur than are affiliated with a synagogue. The popularity of the performance of these rituals would seem to re-enforce the criteria for the

[42] Woocher, page 4.
[43] CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, Table 21.
[44] Cohen, page 270.

frequency of ritual performance articulated by Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum in 1967. According to their findings, a ritual is more likely to be performed if:

(1) it is capable of effective redefinition in modern terms

(2) does not demand social isolation or adoption of a unique life style

(3) accords with the religious culture of the larger community and provides a Jewish alternative when such is felt to be needed

(4) is centered on the child; and

(5) is performed annually or infrequently.[45]

These five criteria for ritual performance, however, only indicate common factors in the frequency of ritual practice but not why these factors are relevant to the Jews who choose to perform the rituals cited above. I would suggest that there are four factors that help to explain why Jews choose to perform these home bound rituals. These factors may also clarify the basis on which Jews associate with a Jewish community. The four reasons are (1) that the ritual performance has a personally efficacious meaning to the individual in the context of modern Jewish American society,[46] (2) it is demonstrably tied to a Jewish tradition which has value for the individual, (3) the ritual provides a sense of separation from Christian society, and (4) it re-enforces childhood education.

[45] Sklare, Marshall and Greenblum, Joseph, Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier: A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society, (New York: Basic Books, 1967) cited in Waxman, Chaim, Jewish Baby Boomers: A Communal Perspective, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2001), page 68.

[46] For a ritual to be personally efficacious, it must provide the performer with a sense of personal satisfaction through its performance. This might take the form of an insight into the message of the ritual for one's life; a greater sense of being connected to the Jewish community/world by virtue of having shared the ritual experience; a nostalgic connection to previous generations of practitioners of the same generation, etc. In other words, the practitioner has a sense of having gained something intellectually, emotionally or spiritually by virtue of the ritual performance as opposed to having only the satisfaction of having fulfilled God's commandment.

Adapting of Ritual to the Individual's Needs in the Context of American Judaism

Many studies indicate that there has been an increase in the practice of Jewish ritual in the past 20 years. Yet, to say that Jews are performing rituals in increasing numbers does not address the content of those rituals or the motivations behind the practice. If by ritual we mean "stylized repetitious behavior that is explicitly religious" then there may not by an increase in ritual behavior at all.[47] Ritual involves very exacting performance of behaviors which are dictated either directly God or by authoritative figures who draw their own authority from their relation to God. Ritual is also considered to be efficacious in the sense that it links the practitioner to God because one is doing something exactly as directed by God or God's surrogates.[48] In other words, the motivation behind the performance of ritual is to fulfill a commandment. The affect on the practitioner is irrelevant, the question is whether the performance of the ritual is pleasing to God.

The performance of ritual according to this definition, therefore, clashes with the voluntary nature of American Jewish religious practice. Adherence to a commandment is, by definition, not voluntary but is instead an obligation one takes on by virtue of having taken on the "yoke of the commandments". From an Orthodox point of view, performance of the mitzvot in accordance with halacha is a mandatory part of being Jewish.

[47] Liebman, Charles S., "Ritual, Ceremony and the Reconstruction of Judaism in the United States" in Jews in America: A Contemporary Reader, page 307.
[48] Liebman, page 308.

It is for this reason that Charles Liebman distinguishes between "ritual" and "ceremony".[49] American Jews, with the exception of Orthodox Jews, overwhelmingly perform ceremony. That is, they engage in ceremonial practices which are symbolic of the underlying ritual but the main purpose for which is to affirm one's group identity and/or to achieve personal spiritual satisfaction.[50] To say, for example, that one participates in a seder does not indicate if that seder was performed in accordance with the *halakhah* for seder ritual or if the seder was a collection of traditional symbolic practices punctuated by various modern readings and interpretations of those practices. The first is ritual and the second is ceremony. Liebman writes:

> "Ceremony is symbol. It, too, may be cloaked in an aura of mystery—participants may derive a variety of meanings from the ceremony, and the specific connections between the ceremony and the social order it represents may be sensed rather than articulated. But even the "sense" of the participants allows them to judge the content of a ceremony as unsuitable or inappropriate or poorly done."[51]

As modern American Jews, we perform ceremony. We wish to affirm our Jewishness in ways that represent how we view ourselves as Jews rather than in ways which are commanded by God. Arnold Eisen uses the example of feminist haggadah texts in this regard.[52] In some of these texts, Egyptian oppression is translated into male oppression of females. The addition of Miriam's Cup is an attempt to add a female element to what is traditionally an all-male history. An additional example is the relating of the Exodus story to the experiences of the Holocaust or Russian Jewry. As these issues pass from contemporary consciousness, however, they are replaced by other

[49] Liebman, page 308.
[50] Liebman, page 308.
[51] Liebman, page 308.
[52] Eisen, Arnold, Rethinking Modern Judaism, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), page 250.

contemporary interpretations. The basic framework of the seder remains the same but the content of the seder's meaning to the individual practitioner is subject to modification to meet the needs or interests of the individual. Thus the individual becomes part of a sub-group within the context of the American Jewish world. As Eisen writes:

> Almost all contemporary Haggadot, like the texts composed for use at other rituals, conceive symbols rather didactically as shorthand statements of truths which can be translated into prepositional terms, short or lengthy. This is perhaps inevitable, given that the seder, like other rituals, has as it were to plead the case for its own performance before participants who normally live outside the world of Jewish tradition. 'Outsiders' such as these will enter only if and when the *meaning* of doing so is demonstrable, a case best made by symbols which possesses emotional power and are used to convey truths at once relevant and uncontroversial.[53]

Given the levels of participation in Jewish life cited above, the majority of the Jews are "outsiders" to Jewish tradition. The individual Jew's participation in ritual ceremonies is highly dependant on the meaning that one is able to attach to the ceremony. Truly, God's commandment to retell the story of the Exodus may underlie why one has a seder at all but the meaning attached to the content of the seder in the liberal (i.e. all but Orthodox) Jewish community is subject to the judgment of the individual Jew.

The Role of Tradition

The term "tradition" has at its heart two complementary concepts. The first is the lending of authenticity to the ritual/ceremonial practice and the second is a sense of nostalgia which implies an obligation to those who preceded us.

[53] Eisen, page 251.

Despite the need to invest ritual practice with a sense of modern meaning, a parallel requirement is that our practices be rooted in "Jewish tradition". The sources of that tradition and the sway that those sources hold over the individual will vary with the denomination, but the issue of authenticity for Jewish practice in any of the denominations is very real.

The determination as to whether a given practice comports with Jewish tradition is inextricably tied to the role of halacha for a given movement. The role of halacha is clearest for Orthodox Jews. The legitimacy of any Jewish practice is related directly to one's ability to tie it to Talmud, the Shulchan Aruch, or any number of authoritative commentaries on the underlying principles of Jewish legal texts. Differences within the Orthodox world may arise from whether an individual Orthodox Jew or community recognizes the authority of a given rabbi or scholar's interpretation of the law. The claim to legitimacy of any given ruling, however, rests on a claim of adherence to the halachic tradition and not on whether such rulings comport with the exigencies of the modern world.

In discussing a Conservative view of *halakhah*, however, Elliot Dorff presents a picture in which Jewish law is rooted in the traditional codes but subject to modern interpretation. Each generation retains the authority to interpret Jewish legal precedents in their own way but the tradition itself must be maintained. When a question of law arises, first the Jewish legal codes are examined but "if all precedent proves out of keeping with contemporary needs and sensitivities, however, it should be changed forthrightly, without recourse to legal fictions."[54] Also, the list of available texts for

[54] Eisen, page 232.

analysis is more expansive than in Orthodoxy, with more latitude for the utilization of minority opinions.

The Reform movement also regards *halakhah* as a necessary ingredient for establishing the authenticity of practice. In the Reform context, however, the traditional Jewish sources exercise only an advisory role with overall authority given to "fundamental principles" of Judaism. These "fundamental principles" can be in the form of overarching moral or ethical principles or the performance of practices which are determined to be essential to the being Jewish such as placing a *mezuzah* on one's doorpost.[55]

In Jewish Living, Mark Washofsky outlines the the following distinctive features of Reform *halakhah* : that Reform legal rulings are not binding on the individual Jew, that they may utilize minority views to the same extent as generally accepted authorities and that Reform rulings are subject to "essential moral and ethical commitments" such as gender equality. Finally, Reform *halakhah* reserves the right to reject all traditional Jewish sources if they conflict with the "moral and religious commitments" of liberal Judaism.[56]

In each denomination, however, there is an appeal to "Jewish tradition", in whatever way that term is understood. There is a sense, although often not well articulated, that our practice as Jews must reflect that which Jews have done for centuries, even if we wish to infuse those practices with meanings of our own.

[55] Eisen, page 235.
[56] Washofsky, Mark, Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice, (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), pages xxii-xxv.

Related to the concept of an authentic practice needing to be rooted in Jewish legal tradition, is the concept that traditional Jewish practice often includes an element of nostalgia. Jews feel an obligation to continue certain practices simply because their parents or grandparents did so. Judaism is often seen as practiced in the context of the extended family. Part of the popularity of such rituals as the seder or lighting of Hanukah candles revolves around the gathering of extended family which accompanies such events. These rituals are also infused with warm memories of childhood and a sense of wanting to create such memories for our own children. The *Amidah*, the heart of the Jewish prayer service, begins with the *Avot*, a recollection of God's relationship to our ancestors upon which we draw for our own aspirations for worthiness for those things which we are about to request. Our relationship to previous generations is a key ingredient to what we do as Jews.

Nostalgia also has played a role as a form of critique of the practice of immediately prior generations.[57] This has become a familiar phenomenon in recent Reform Jewish circles, within which the classical Reform practice of the immediately past generation has come in for harsh criticism as being "not Jewish enough". In feminist circles, women are urged to bring a greater awareness of female contributions to Jewish tradition for the sake of those female ancestors whose contributions were not sufficiently recognized by the male dominated Jewish establishment.

As Eisen writes concerning the seder ritual:

> To perform the mitzvah is to remember the forefathers and foremothers, to say words they said and eat what they ate, and even in some sense to *redeem* the promise of their lives, thereby bearing witness to the liberation visible all

[57] Eisen, page 252.

> around the seder table. The ritual is so powerful, in part, because the redemption is so palpable.[58]

Increasing the Individual's Sense of Separation from the Dominant Christian Society

To some extent, certain rituals derive their popularity from the fact that they serve to separate Jews from Christian society. For some, particularly more alienated Jews, the practice of ritual, if only on rare occasions, allows them to connect with their Jewish identity. In American society, part of that identity derives from not being Christian. As Sylvia Fishman writes:

> In the United States, being Jewish rather than Christian separates Jews. In Robert Bellah's words, 'It is part of Jewish identity and the maintenance of the boundaries of the Jewish community to deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.' Paradoxically, as the religious aspects of Judaism have become relatively less central to the core of Jewish identity, and shared feelings have become more important, being not Christian has taken on greater salience as a defining element of Jewishness.[59]

This element is reflected in the vast numbers of Jews that do not have the quintessential symbol of American Christian life in their home—a Christmas tree. Among families where both partners are born Jews, 98% do not have a Christmas tree. Among marriages where one of the partners converted into Judaism, 78% do not have a Christmas tree. The pattern only breaks down in mixed marriages, where 62% *do* have a Christmas tree.[60] This last statistic reflects the ambiguity of Jewish identity in such households, where an emphasis on not being Christian would be an affront to one spouse.

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[58] Eisen, pages 253-54.
[59] Fishman, Sylvia, "The Changing American Jewish Family Faces the 1990's", Jews in America, pages 73-74.
[60] Fishman, page 74.

This desire to be separate from American Christian society also manifests itself in the high levels of Jews who indicate that their Jewishness, however that may be defined, is important to them. The NJPS survey found that 87% of those who identified themselves as Jews by religion indicated that their being Jewish is important in their life.[61]

In part, this reflects the rise in American society of what sociologist Herbert Gans terms "symbolic ethnicity".[62] Symbolic ethnicity consists of identifying oneself with a particular ethnic group while maintaining personal autonomy in terms of one's behavior. In other words, by expressing one's ethnic identification on a voluntary basis without submitting to any communal norms of behavior. Individuals pick and choose what it is about their ethnic identity they accept and what it is that they reject, just as they do in terms of their religious practice.[63] The important thing to note, however, is that Jews do tend to want to identify themselves as members of an ethnic or cultural group in much greater numbers than as a religious group.[64] By definition, a sense of ethnicity reflects a sense of separation from other ethnic groups. Simply put, part of being Jewish on both a religious and ethnic level is to recognize that one is not Christian.

Re-enforcement of Childhood Education

To a large extent, this issue has been covered previously. The only point that needs to be made here is that one motivation for performance of ceremonies is simply that our children motivate us to do so. As Sklare and Greenblum point out, one of the elements that points to increased frequency of the practice of a given ritual is whether it is

[61] NJPS at Table 14.
[62] Waxman, page 153.
[63] Waxman, page 153.
[64] NJPS at Table 13.

centered on the child. This helps to explain the popularity of seders and lighting Hanukah candles. Both of these rituals are primarily aimed at children, at least in their traditional setting and emphasis. Their purpose is didactic with the primary targets of the lesson being children. It is also during the years that a child attends religious school that parents are subject to the most pressure to perform ritual in the home because of what the child has been taught in religious school. Service attendance is also a requirement of many religious schools, especially during the year preceding bar or bat mitzvah. It is during this time that the children are often the driving force behind ritual practice.

Gimilut Hasadim

The last of the elements of Jewish identity I have termed "mitzvot." By this I mean associations with the larger Jewish community which provides one with an opportunity to perform *gimilut hasadim* or reciprocal acts of kindness within the Jewish community or for the general community through Jewish agencies. Unlike Jewish education and Jewish ritual, often such behaviors are not particularly Jewish but are performed within a Jewish context, thus contributing to one's Jewish identity. It is in this last area that Jewish identity is weakest.

Only 21% of those who identified themselves as Jews by religion in the NJPS indicated that they had volunteered for a Jewish organization during the previous year.[65] Yet, overwhelmingly Jews view pursuit of "social justice" as an element of being a "good Jew."[66] Thus far, studies have measured this aspect of Jewish identity through an

[65] NJPS at Table 27.
[66] Legge, Jerome S., "Understanding American Judaism: Revisiting the Concept of 'Social Justice'," in Jews in America, page 204.

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examination of charitable contributions to both Jewish and secular charities as well as volunteering for Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

One way to measure Jewish identity in this regard would be to examine how large a role the religious affiliation of charities plays in giving patterns among Jews. Jerome S. Legge's 1991 study of New York area Jews showed a high frequency of giving among Jews generally to both Jewish and non-Jewish charities. His study further examined differences in giving patterns among the various denominations and found higher frequencies of giving among Orthodox Jews but mainly to Jewish organizations. In regard to Conservative Jews, giving was at approximately 72% for both Jewish and secular charities, while Reform Jews gave at a rate of 63% for Jewish charities but 76% for non-Jewish charities. The largest gap, however, occurred among "secular" Jews who gave at a rate of 67% to secular charities but only at 46% to Jewish charities.[67] Finally, Legge found a strong correlation between the importance that one places on being Jewish and the likelihood that such an individual will give to a Jewish charity. Thus, although Jews from all denominations appear to give charity at a high level, intensity of Jewish identification appears to affect whether their funds are directed toward Jewish charities.

This pattern also holds true in terms of volunteering for organizations although participation is at much lower levels. Here the levels of participation found by Legge were at higher levels than the NJPS study found with Conservative and Reform Jews volunteering at a rate of approximately 40% and Orthodox Jews at a rate of 61% for Jewish organizations. Volunteering for non-Jewish organizations is much lower at 14% for Reform Jews, 10% for Conservative Jews and only 3% for Orthodox Jews. Secular

[67] Legge, page 206.

Jews followed this same pattern with 31% volunteering for Jewish organizations but only 19% for non-Jewish organizations.[68] Again, at a lower level, organizational participation appears to be part of Jewish identity but at a significantly higher level in an area such as New York where there are more opportunities to participate in Jewish organizational work.

Another opportunity for participation in social action projects is through synagogue sponsored programs. I was unable to find any studies of levels of participation in synagogue sponsored social action but, anecdotally, the level of importance placed on social action varies greatly from synagogue to synagogue. An indication of the relative position of social action within the Jewish community might be found, however, in comparing the prominence social action receives within the 1937 Columbus Platform and the 1999 Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism. In the Columbus Platform, "Ethics" is one of three major categories and contains lengthy statements addressing "Ethics and Religion", "Social Justice" and "Peace".[69] By contrast, ethics is addressed only in the last paragraph of the section labeled Torah, the remainder of which addresses religious practice. A series of issues of interest are listed in the paragraph and a statement is made that social action and social justice are being reaffirmed as "a central prophetic focus of traditional Reform Jewish belief and practice."[70] The relative position of the discussion of ethics and the length of that discussion reflects a decreased emphasis on social action in the one movement that has traditionally treated social action as an integral part of Jewish practice.

[68] Legge, page 206.
[69] "Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism (1937)" in Meyer and Plaut, The Reform Judaism Reader, (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), pages 201-202.
[70] "A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism (1999)" in The Reform Judaism Reader, pages 210-211.

Finally, a word needs to be said about the reputed liberalism of Jews as reflected in Jewish attitudes toward minorities and civil liberties. Citing research done by the National Opinion Research Center between 1973 and 1994, Charles Liebman and Steven M. Cohen indicate that Jews do view themselves as more liberal than other ethnic groups.[71] Yet, when Jews are compared with non-Jews by sub-group adjusted for age, education and residence, the difference in attitudes between Jews and non-Jews on such issues is not significant.[72] The exception to this is that Jews have decidedly more liberal attitudes on issues of sexual morality, particularly regarding attitudes towards homosexuals. Jews are also more liberal on issues concerning a separation between church and state, which might be expected given their status as a religious minority.

Even assuming that Jews are in some ways more liberal than other groups, what is the basis for Jewish liberalism? There are many potential explanations for Jewish liberalism. Certainly Jews as a group have benefited from more liberal legal interpretations, statutes, and social attitudes. The utilitarian basis for continued Jewish liberalism, however, appears to be on the wane. As noted above, adjusted for age and education, Jews are no more liberal than any other ethnic group. Is there, however, a basis for Jewish liberalism within Jewish tradition itself? In particular, is liberalism tied to Jewish tradition or "traditional Jewish values" as has long been held in Reform Judaism? Judging by the attitudes of Orthodox Jews, those Jews whom one would assume are closest to the Jewish tradition, the answer would be no.[73] Much of Jewish tradition is extremely particularistic in its outlook and often conservative in its attitudes. The so-called "traditional Jewish values" stems instead from a particular interpretation of

[71] Leibman and Cohen, "Jewish Liberalism Revisited" in Jews in America, page 197.
[72] Liebman and Cohen, page 199.
[73] Liebman and Cohen, page 199.

Jewish sources by liberal Jewish thinkers in the 19th century which, of course, is now the predominant belief system of the overwhelming majority of American Jews. The question remains open as to whether Jews are motivated to engage in social action because of a perceived connection between their Jewishness and a mandate to help others, Jewish and non-Jewish, or because American society in general has placed social action in a religious context as a universal religious value adopted by the modern American Jewish community as well?

The Challenge

The central fact of American Jewish life is that all associations are voluntary and, while motivations for joining the Jewish community are not totally clear, there are some guideposts for creating a larger and more engaged Jewish community. There is no shortage of available Jews to carry on Judaism in America. Arguably, there are up to 8 million people who have the potential to be part of the American Jewish community. The challenge is to give these people a reason to identify with that community. Identity and practice are inextricably linked. In each of the areas noted above--education, ritual and mitzvot--frequency of performance is related to the depth of the individual's Jewish identity. The low rate of synagogue affiliation and the high rate of intermarriages that do not produce another generation of Jews, indicates that efforts to build Jewish identity have had limited success thus far.

Despite an increased effort to upgrade both the quality and quantity of Jewish education, the fact remains that formal Jewish education can only be effective in building Jewish identity if it is part of an overall Jewish lifestyle. Home environment remains a pre-eminent factor in building Jewish identity, and the success of Jewish day schools also

indicates that a consistent daily Jewish environment builds identity. Most important, the objectives and content of Jewish education must arise out of a shared vision of what it means to be a Jew in 21st century America. Children and adults must be given an opportunity to grasp what it means to be a Jew as well as how to be Jewish. Jewish education that provides "how-to" guides about Jewish rituals but does not address the underlying message of those rituals is vacuous. Conversely, it is equally ineffective to teach that the ritual practice of Judaism does not matter, and that only its ethical content is important. Jew living needs to be rooted in an understanding of how being Jewish makes a difference in one's life; how being Jewish gives meaning to one's existence. Education then becomes a tool for preparing children and adults to live meaningfully as Jews.

Like education, ritual performance only has meaning for the individual if an individual is able to grasp that meaning intellectually and emotionally. As voluntary activities, the performance of rituals (or ritual-based ceremonies) depends on whether one is able to place those rituals within a meaningful context in one's life. If a ritual is viewed as a necessary, or even burdensome, aberration then it is unlikely to be performed in a meaningful way or not at all. If, however, rituals are given a content that is relevant to one's life and provides the individual with a spiritually satisfying experience, then they will be more likely to be practiced. Furthermore, one might also seek out others with whom to share the experience. Thus one develops an internal sense of having been commanded to engage in rituals since those rituals become opportunities to invest one's life with meaning. In order to accomplish this, however, one needs to have a grasp of

what it means to be a Jew. The commitment can not be to a list of customs and ceremonies, it must be a commitment to living as a Jew.

Finally, association with, and contributing to, a greater Jewish community can only result from a shared vision of the meaningful nature of that community. One is more likely to identify with the Jewish community if that identity is viewed as part of an overall pattern of Jewish living. The activities of the community must be viewed as fulfilling religious obligations of the individuals within that community. If Jewish content is not attributed to the activities of Jewish agencies, then their activities cease to be Jewish, although still charitable, since the meaning behind the given activity is no longer apparent. The accomplishment of a charitable act is only part of performing mitzvot; the other element is the effect that the act has on the performer spiritually and intellectually. Participation in Jewish communal life must be viewed as an opportunity to enrich one's life as a Jew and to fulfill the mitzvot associated with *gimilut hasadim*.

So how is that identity to be built and re-enforced through one's lifetime? Since commitment grows with a deeper sense of Jewish identity, diluting Judaism so as to appeal to the lowest common denominator is not the answer. Rather, the challenge is to create a Judaism that makes involvement more enriching; one that gives the individual Jew a consistently meaningful sense of identity. Overwhelmingly, Jews who identify themselves as such see their Judaism as an important part of their life. What makes Judaism important to these Jews is that they are able to view their Jewish activities as adding something meaningful to their lives as 21st century Americans. What, then, is the source of meaning and how do we create a Jewish community that fosters meaning? The

answer may be contained within the writings of a 20th century Jewish philosopher, Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Chapter 2

The Religious Philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel

Raised as a Hasidic prince in Eastern Europe, later blossoming intellectually in the world of secular philosophy and religious scholarship in Berlin, Heschel embodied of the emergence of the Eastern European Jew into the intellectual world of the West. Although he could not have foreseen the destruction of the world of Eastern European Jewry in which he was raised, Heschel's writings reflect his perception that the sensibilities of the Hasidic world could form the intellectual and philosophical basis for a new Western Jewish tradition. He already sensed the potential that the Western intellectual tradition had for moral relativism, alienation, and materialism. He also knew that religion, in general, and Judaism, in particular, did not appear to be compatible with the positivist and rationalist philosophies of the West. It was Heschel's genius to place Jewish tradition within the language and format of 20th century Western philosophy. Heschel took the values and sensibilities of a pious Hasidic world which was unknown to the vast majority of 20th century, much less 21st century, Jews and placed them within the context of modernity. In this regard, Heschel's accomplishments are comparable to those of Maimonides who placed Jewish tradition within the context of Greek philosophy.

Descended from three Hasidic dynasties, Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in Warsaw on January 11, 1907.[74] In his childhood, Heschel was exposed to conflicting philosophies within Hasidic tradition. This early experience of having to integrate competing religious and philosophical traditions may have prepared him for his more

[74] Merkle, John C., The Genesis of Faith: The Depth Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1985), page 4.

difficult integration as a young scholar of the Hasidic world into Western secular and religious philosophy.

On his father's side, Heschel was descended from Hasidic masters who were close associates and disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. On the other hand, early in his education, Heschel came under the intellectual influence of the tradition of the Kotzker, Rabbi Menahem Mendl of Kotzk. As John C. Merkle writes:

> The Baal Shem Tov found God everywhere and rejoiced in God's presence. The Kotzker was dreadfully aware of God's absence and stormed the heavens, accosting God for permitting evil to exist in the world. The Baal Shem taught people to find a trace of heaven on earth. The Kotzker told people they were living in the chamber of hell. The Baal Shem inspired joy and ecstacy, the Kotzker fear and trembling. The Baal Shem emphasized love, the Kotzker truth.[75]

One can detect the ongoing struggle between these two great intellectual forces in Heschel throughout his life and in all of his writings. Heschel's God is one that is simultaneously the ultimate Source of comfort and challenge; a God whose Divine Pathos leads both to acts of love and awesome expressions of wrath.

Following the death of Heschel's father shortly before Heschel's tenth birthday, his mother became more instrumental in determining the course of young Heschel's education. At age 14, Heschel had already published several Talmudic commentaries in various rabbinic publications in Warsaw, where his family then lived.[76] It was his mother, however, who saw to it that Heschel came under the care and tutelage of Dr. Fishl Schneersohn, a physician, psychiatrist, writer and public speaker.[77] Schneersohn

[75] Merkle, page 5.
[76] Kaplan, Edward K. and Dresner, Samuel H., Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pages 48-49.
[77] Kaplan and Dresner, page 52.

himself had made the transition from the Hasidic world to that of modern scholarship, and it was Schneersohn who provided Heschel with his first exposure to secular learning. Heschel first undertook to supplement his religious studies with secular subjects in Warsaw and then undertook a full course of secular studies at the Real-Gymnasium in Vila, at that time the intellectual center of secular Judaism.[78] His time in Vilna not only infused Heschel with secular knowledge but also provided him with opportunities to develop his skills as a writer and poet. It was in Vilna that Heschel developed his love of Yiddish literature and penned his first Yiddish poems.

Following graduation from Gymnasium, Heschel enrolled at the University of Berlin at the age of 20. He enrolled in both the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Theology. He had minor concentrations in the history of art and Semitic philology.[79] It was at the University that Heschel studied the works of Kant and Hermann Cohen. Under the influence of Julius Guttmann, Heschel developed the ability to present his personal views in the form of rational argument. Heschel also came under the influence of Franz Rosenzweig's situational thinking, which formed the core of his own philosophy.[80]

At the same time, Heschel enrolled in the Hochshule where he was first exposed to the methodologies of Wissenschaft des Judentums.[81] It was also at the Hochshule that Heschel studied under Leo Baeck and his philosophical mentor, David Koigen.[82] It is at this point that Heschel's religious philosophy truly began to take shape as he shares Koigen's concern with the limits of rationalism. He began to construct a philosophy of

[78] Kaplan and Dresner, page 74.
[79] Kaplan and Dresner, page 102-103.
[80] Kaplan and Dresner, page 115.
[81] Kaplan and Dresner, page 114.
[82] Kaplan and Dresner, page 123.

religion that employs modern philosophical approaches such as neo-Kantism with Hasidic sources. Heschel begins to explore issues such as the nature of the relationship between God and man, the role of the performance of mitzvot, and his application of phenomenology.

Heschel's years in Berlin, however, were marked by more than intellectual growth. While personally maintaining an observant lifestyle, Heschel was also exposed to assimilation and indifference to religion for the first time. He also witnessed first hand the rise of anti-Semitism in the Germany of the late 1920's. Heschel saw Judaism as being in a crisis of meaning, and he searched for a philosophy that would bring about a Jewish renewal in an increasingly secular world. That philosophy would focus on a God who reaches out to human beings with divine concern for their welfare and who is in turn affected by human actions. It is a philosophy of Judaism that would promote a consciousness of God's presence and evoke a human response to that presence.[83]

With the writing of Heschel's doctoral dissertation, *Die Prophetie*, Heschel produced his first full presentation of his synthesis of Hasidic and Biblical sources with situational thinking. By 1937, Heschel was recognized as the leading Jewish intellectual figure in Germany, succeeding Martin Buber as head of the Jüdisches Lehrhaus, the organization for adult Jewish education.[84] Heschel's writings reflect by that time the mind of a Western philosopher and the heart of a Hasidic master. It is from these seemingly contradictory strains that Heschel's philosophy of Judaism emerges.

[83] Merkle, page 9.
[84] Rothschild, Fritz A., Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), page 8.

Mystery and the Search for Meaning

The writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel often provide more questions than answers. For Heschel, the ultimate question is what does it mean to be human? To some extent, all of his work is directed at cultivating a sense of what it means to live as a human being. The search for meaning in one's life begins with the simple question, "Why?" Beyond "How?" lies the question "Why?" It is the ultimate question, and "religion is an answer to man's ultimate questions."[85] But why must human beings ask the question in the first place?

Heschel's answer is that such an inquiry is compelled by observation of the human condition in everyday life. At the outset, one is struck by the human ability to perceive at all. We are often amazed at what we see, but what is more amazing is our recognition of the very ability to see. Heschel designates this awareness as "radical amazement."[86] He writes:

> Radical amazement has a wider scope than any other act of man. While any act of perception or cognition has as its object a selected segment of reality, radical amazement refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to *our own selves* (emphasis added), to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see...The most incomprehensible fact is the fact that we comprehend at all.[87]

Having been endowed with the ability to perceive, human beings are also given a sense of curiosity and wonder. Curiosity leads to a desire to understand how the world works, but wonder leads to a desire to understand why the world works, that is, what is the meaning behind the world's existence?

Human beings will comprehend from their observations about the world around them that their existence is not coincidental and, therefore, must have some meaning.[88] Heschel's argument is that humans are compelled by the overwhelming presence of the sublime in the world to wonder about both the origin and meaning of Creation. His argument is from the negative, that is, wonder is the only rational response to one's observations of the world because any other response just doesn't make sense.[89] We are shocked into the realization that:

> ...there is only wonder, the realization that the world is too incredible, too meaningful for us. The existence of the world is the most unlikely, the most unbelievable fact. Even our ability for surprise is beyond expectation...Who could believe it [the existence of the universe]? Who could conceive it?[90]

Human beings are challenged, therefore, to go beyond the relatively simple questions associated with how the world works (i.e. the subject of science) to why the world works at all. Human beings are challenged to move beyond abstract conceptualizations of the universe and its workings (i.e. the subject of secular philosophy) to seeking a meaning for the universe from concrete human experiences of the world. Heschel believes that the search for meaning begins with "situational thinking", an examination by human beings of our own real life situations in an effort to find meaning in our existence.[91]

[85] Heschel, God in Search of Man at 3. Please note that Heschel writes using the masculine for both people and God. It will be my practice to use the term "human" and to avoid assigning gender to God. However, any quotations from Heschel will be set forth as he wrote them, including his gender usage.
[86] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 46. See also Heschel, Man is Not Alone, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), page 11.
[87] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 46-47.
[88] Merkle, page 58-59.
[89] Merkle, page 59.
[90] Heschel, Abraham Joshua, Man is Not Alone (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), page 58.
[91] Heschel, Abraham Joshua, God in Search of Man (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), page 5.

One's sense of wonder is awakened by our perception of the sublime in the world. In examining the world, we perceive the world's power, beauty and grandeur. A realization of nature's power leads to a desire to understand how that power works and to exploit it. Beholding the world's beauty leads to the enjoyment of nature. Perception of the world's grandeur, however, leads to a state of awe.[92]

Power and beauty are capable of description while grandeur is beyond description. Grandeur is that which is sublime and, therefore, ineffable in the world. Although we are not able to fully describe certain aspects of our existence, we nonetheless sense their reality. Heschel writes that "the sublime is that which we see but are unable to convey."[93]

Heschel uses the example of love. While very real, the reality of love can not be fully described. One may describe the feelings that love engenders or actions which are motivated by love, but love itself is beyond our ability to describe. Love is one of the sublime elements of the world, it is part of the grandeur of creation.

The sublime, however, is not the ultimate reality. It is an allusion to something greater, something beyond itself that humans can not see but the presence of which we can perceive. Heschel writes that "the grand premise of religion is that man is able to surpass himself."[94] That is, humans are able to connect with something, some source of meaning, beyond themselves. We react to our perception of the sublime, of the grandeur in the world, with "wonder and amazement". As the sublime is beyond description, we are simply dumbstruck at its existence and, more importantly, the greater reality to which the sublime alludes. Our wonder and amazement compel us to look beyond our own

[92] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 33-34.
[93] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 39.
[94] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 33.

selves to seek that to which the sublime alludes, for the sublime alludes to the very source of the meaning of our existence.

That to which the sublime alludes, of course, is mysterious. It is beyond our knowledge. The world of religion involves human efforts to understand that which is beyond the mystery of our own existence, that is, to understand the meaning of our existence. "All we have is an awareness of the presence of the mystery but it is a presence that the mind can never penetrate."[95] The ultimate solutions to the mystery of our existence can not be discovered by man, they reside only with God.

It is crucial to know, however, that God is not the mystery. God is beyond the mystery. As human beings, we are incapable of fully knowing God. Yet, God does reveal certain things to us, enough at least to let us know that there is meaning beyond the mystery of our existence:

> The extreme hiddenness of God is a fact of constant awareness. Yet His concern, His guidance, His will, His commandment, are revealed to man and capable of being experienced by him. *God is a mystery but the mystery is not God*...The certainty that there is meaning beyond mystery is the reason for ultimate rejoicing.[96]

Our amazement at the world's existence and awareness of God's presence beyond the mystery brings about in us a sense of awe. It is through this sense of awe that we become open to the aspects of God which are available to us as humans. "Awe enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine."[97] For Heschel:

[95] Heschel, God in Search of Man, pages61-62.
[96] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 66.
[97] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 75.

> *Awe precedes faith;* it is *at the root of faith.* We must grow in awe in order to reach faith. We must be guided by awe to be worthy of faith. Awe rather than faith is the cardinal attitude of the religious Jew.[98]

Though our sensing of the sublime elements of this world, we are exposed to allusions to the Divine and our response is one of awe toward the One to whom the sublime alludes. Beyond the sublime, however, is the Divine glory. The glory is the presence of God in the world, although again it is not the essence of God. As Isaiah is told by the seraphim (Isaiah 6:3), *the earth is filled with God's glory.*[99] It is not a physical phenomenon, it is the presence of God's goodness in the world:

> The glory is the presence, not the essence of God; an act rather than a quality; a process not a substance. Mainly, the glory manifests itself as a power overwhelming to the world. Demanding homage, it is a power that descends to guide, to remind. The glory reflects abundance of good and truth, the power that acts in nature and history.[100]

Except on very rare occasions, such as in the wilderness and in the case of the prophets, the glory is concealed from human beings. "The whole earth is full of His glory, but we do not perceive it; it is within our reach but beyond our grasp."[101] Yet we sense the Presence and the commanding nature of the Presence's awareness of *us*. "We have no words to describe the glory; we have no adequate way of knowing it. Yet what is decisive is not our knowing but our awareness of *being known* by it."[102] The presence

[98] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 77.
[99] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page and Merkle, page 78.
[100] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 82.
[101] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page83.
[102] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 84.

of God on earth is a manifestation of God's concern for us and we are compelled to respond to that concern.[103]

But why are we compelled to respond? We are compelled because our very humanity lies in our response to God's concern. Heschel writes that "the peculiar asset of organic existence, or life, is concern. Life is concern."[104] We are human only to the extent that we act in response to God's concern for us. Thus, prayer is "an ontological necessity."[105] In order to be human we must express our gratitude to God for our existence, otherwise we are accepting God's gift of existence without gratitude, and such an attitude would be less than human. Prayer itself is a response, it is an act of love directed toward God.[106] In addition to prayer, there is action. People who are only concerned for themselves are not fully human; humanity is exhibited through transitive concern for others in imitation of God's concern for us. Thus, for the sake of our own humanity, we are compelled to respond to the needs of others.[107] For Heschel, our expressions of concern in response to, and in imitation of, God's concern for us is what gives meaning to our lives.

To summarize thus far, religion is rooted not in abstract concepts but in actual human situations. Heschel writes that the religious situation is one "in which we are challenged, aroused, stirred by the sublime, the marvel, the mystery and the Presence. We do not choose to raise the [ultimate] question, we are compelled."[108] That ultimate question is "Why?". Having become aware of the mystery of our own existence and that

[103] Merkle, page 186.
[104] Hechel, Man is Not Alone, page 137.
[105] Heschel, Abraham Joshua, Man's Quest for God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), page 78.
[106] Merkle, page 186.
[107] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, pages 137-138.
[108] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 130.

of Creation, we are compelled to seek answers to the "why" of our lives, that is, "what is the meaning of my existence?". Our sense of meaning for our lives arises out of the insight that God is concerned for us and that we must respond to that concern about our lives:

> The ultimate insight is the outcome of *moments* when we are stirred beyond words, of instants of wonder, awe, praise, fear, trembling and radical amazement; of awareness of grandeur, of perceptions we can grasp but are unable to convey, of discoveries of the unknown, of moments in which we abandon the pretense of being acquainted with the world, of *knowledge by inacquaintance*. It is at the climax of such moments that we attain the certainty that life has meaning...that beyond all being there is someone who cares.[109]

The Divine Pathos and Human Sympathy

While God is both transcendent and unknowable, that does not mean that God is aloof from the world or the affairs of humankind. Quite the opposite, for, at least to the prophet, "God was overwhelmingly real and shatteringly present."[110] Unlike other theological perspectives, Heschel's God is not a "Wholly Other" standing apart from the world but instead has a personal stake in the fate of human beings. As a totally unified and fully complete reality, God has no need to provide anything to human beings. The fact, however, that God does so indicates God's concern for the human situation. That God is concerned with human beings may be grasped empirically. The Revelation at Sinai, God's revelation to the prophets, and all of the allusions to God's presence in the universe noted above, indicate that God must be concerned with human beings. There is no other reason for God to engage in creation or revelation except out of concern for

[109] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 131.
[110] Heschel, Abraham Joshua, The Prophets, Part II (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), page 1.

humankind. Our very existence reflects God's concern for us, "to be" is to be an object of God's concern.[111]

God's transitive concern implies that God is a God of pathos. Obviously, God's concern, as expressed in human history, affects human beings. Those expressions of concern, however, are not sua sponte. They are instead a reaction to human actions. In other words, God is affected by human actions and reacts passionately, positively or negatively, to human affairs.[112] God's reactions, however, are neither involuntary nor ethically neutral. Rather, God's expressions of concern are purposeful and directed toward fostering justice.[113] For Heschel, the revelation to the prophets was God's reaction to the human situation at that time in history. For Heschel, the Revelation at Sinai and the acts of revelation to the prophets are instances of God reaching out to human beings. It is God's attempt to reach human beings with a message of Divine justice, it is God's initiative towards us.[114] It is an event for the humans who receive the revelation but it is also an event for God.

It is this response that Heschel terms "the Divine pathos", and it is pathos that underlies the relationship between God and humans. The essential element in the relationship between God and humans is God's concern for human beings. God reacts to human actions in order to compel proper behavior, that is, to provide direction so that human beings may reach their full potential for righteousness.[115]

[111] Rothschild, page 22.
[112] Merkle, page 120.
[113] Heschel, The Prophets, page 5.
[114] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 198.
[115] Human beings do enjoy freedom of action but, for Heschel, freedom to select from a range of possible actions is only one element of freedom. When our range of choices for action is constrained by our reflexive concern for our own personal needs, then we are not truly free. We are free to the extent that we are able to divorce our actions from meeting our own needs and instead have our actions reflect a wider concern with the needs of the world, in imitation of God's transitive concern for the world. To be free

The God of pathos is the cornerstone of the prophetic perspective of God. It depicts an interactive and dynamic view of the relationship between God and human beings. Neither God nor human beings are immutable, God responds to human actions, and human beings respond to God's challenge. Heschel writes:

> God does not stand outside the range of human suffering and sorrow. He is personally involved in, even stirred by, the conduct of man.
>
> Pathos denotes, not an idea of goodness, but a living care; not an immutable example, but an ongoing challenge, a dynamic relation between God and man; not mere feeling or passive affection, but an act or attitude composed of various spiritual elements; no mere contemplative survey of the world, but a passionate summons.[116]

God does not merely put forth a set of norms for humans to follow and then leaves the scene, rather God reacts to and is involved in human affairs through threats or exhibitions of divine wrath, benevolent miracles, or expressions of feelings concerning the state of humankind.[117] At these moments, human beings are summoned to follow the divine ways, often because there is a penalty (or potential penalty) attached to non-compliance. These moments of revelation of God's will remain a summons for future generations through remembrance, with remembrance being accomplished through study, prayer and ritual. What is more, the content of the summons is dynamic, with God reacting to the human behavior of a given time in addition to providing commandments for all time.[118]

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means to be able to creatively **select** actions that respond to the issues of everyday life as well as irregular traumatic occasions in accordance with the ethical pattern set forth by God. To operate outside of that ethical pattern is sub-human and reflects a failure to comprehend the needs of others besides ourselves. See Rothschild, pages 26-27.

[116] Heschel, The Prophets, page 4.

[117] Merkle, page 130.

[118] Rothschild, page 25.

The writings of the Prophets depict a God who cares about the destiny of human beings, particularly Israel. At the outset, Creation was an act of giving in and of itself. God is self-sufficient with no need to create anything, so the very existence of the universe is a gift from God.[119] On a smaller scale, our lives are a gift from God, for God has no need to create us as individuals or human beings in general. God gave Torah as a design for the universe, a depiction of the way that God expects human beings to act both for their own good and to fulfill their promise as the capstone of Creation.

Humans, however, inevitably stray from the commandments of Torah. At such times, the prophets communicated God's distress, and often anger, at human actions. They foretold pending Divine retribution but, at the same time, the prophets also communicated God's desire for human beings to mend their ways and return to the way of God as well as the benefits of doing so. Finally, prophets reminded the people Israel how God wanted them to act, providing an answer to the question, "what does God desire of us?".

It is through these interactions with God that God's will for human beings is expressed. The revelation of Torah at Sinai provides humans with a blueprint, as it were, but it is the ongoing relationship between God and humans that provides us with a fuller presentation of God's expectations for human beings. Heschel viewed the covenant established at Sinai as a stagnant legal agreement. The prophetic interaction with God, however, moves beyond the covenantial relationship established at Sinai to a dynamic and multi-faceted relationship between God and human beings based on God's ongoing pathos:

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[119] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 143.

> The covenant is an extraordinary act, establishing a reciprocal relation between God and man; it is conceived as a judicial commitment. Pathos on the other hand, implies a constant concern and involvement; it is conceived as an emotional engagement. From the point of view of the unequivocal covenant-idea only two forms of relationship between God and people are possible; the maintenance or dissolution of the covenant. This rigid either-or is replaced by a dynamic multiplicity of forms of relationship implied in pathos.[120]

God's exercise of pathos, moreover, has an ethical component. God reacts to human events out of a sense of justice. God's reactions are neither irrational nor morally neutral. "God is never neutral, never beyond good and evil. He is partial to justice."[121] Pathos exists in ongoing relationship. Should humans respond to the Divine pathos and mend their ways, then God will respond in turn by accepting their repentance and withholding punishment.

The prophetic reaction then is in the nature of sympathy with the Divine Pathos, sympathy being defined as "an intimate [human] concern for the divine concern."[122] The prophet is rocked to his very being by his awareness of the Divine pathos. He is compelled to proclaim the will of God as it has been revealed to him. The prophet feels the presence of God's pathos but awareness of that feeling is not an end in itself:

> Not mere feeling, but action, will mitigate the world's injustice or the people's alienation from God. Only action will relieve the tension between God and man. Both pathos and sympathy are, from the perspective of the total situation, demands rather than fulfillments.[123]

[120] Heschel, The Prophets, page 10.
[121] Heschel, The Prophets, page 11.
[122] Heschel, The Prophets, page 88.
[123] Heschel, The Prophets, page 89.

Through sympathy, the prophet is compelled to react to that which is revealed by God. The mark of a prophet is an extraordinary sympathy towards the concerns of God. Because the prophet is sympathetic to God's concerns, the prophet will share his experience of revelation and its contents with others in order to bring about actions that address God's concerns. Revelation does not take place as one person's experience of God but rather serves to convey God's demands on humankind. The word of the prophet is a mediation of God's demands on us.[124]

The prophet does not live in a dream state but instead brings a keen awareness of the "divine aspect of events" in the real world.[125] The prophet reacts to the human condition in the same way as God. He can be sympathetic *with* God out of a sense of outrage which the prophet shares with God or he can be sympathetic *for* God because of his understanding of God's pathos.[126] The prophet is ultimately guided by what God feels.[127] As God's feelings change, so do the sympathetic reactions of the prophet. Thus, the relationship between the prophet and God is dynamic.

At this point, one might ask how does the prophet know that the revelation that he has received is real? Heschel does not answer this question in a positive sense. He realizes that one's belief in the reality of the prophetic experience is dependent on acceptance of the accounts of the prophets in the Bible. Then how does one know that these accounts are true? Heschel's response is to ask why shouldn't they be accepted as

[124] Merkle, page 117.
[125] Heschel, The Prophets, page 91.
[126] Heschel, The Prophets, pages 93-94.
[127] The word "feeling" is used here in the sense of a purposeful voluntary concern for humankind. As noted above, God's concern is both transitive and voluntary. God does not have moods in the sense of involuntary feelings like human beings; rather God feels a purposeful concern in response to the human situation.

true? He then goes on to address a wide range of possible objections to the reality of revelation.

For example, he raises three potential modern reasons to resist the idea of revelation. The first is that humans are self-sufficient; moving ever forward toward greater levels of morality on their own. Heschel cites the horrors of the 20th century as proof that humans remain in need of moral guidance. The second is that humans are not worthy of hearing God's voice but, Heschel counters, humans are powerful enough to be able to destroy all of God's creation so they are in need of God's moral guidance to avoid such a disaster. The third is that God is too far away to be heard by human beings. To this, Heschel responds with the analogy that the sun is far from a blade of grass, yet the grass receives the benefit of the sun's rays.[128] Heschel also explores various potential theories about the mental stability of the prophets and finds no evidence in the Bible to find them unstable.[129] Heschel also rejects the notion that revelation can not be true because it is an unexplainable phenomenon. Many experiences in this world are incapable of being fully expressed in words (such as sunsets and love) but we fully accept them as real.[130]

Ultimately, however, Heschel admits that there are no proofs. Reason operates at a lower level than prophecy; prophecy is a different type of knowledge not susceptible to proof or logic.[131] Its truth is intuitive; we sense it all around us just as we sense the allusions to God's presence in the world:

[128] Merkle at 118 and Heschel, God in Search of Man, pages 169-174.
[129] Heschel, God in Search of Man, pages 222-232.
[130] Heschel, God in Search of Man, pages 220-221.
[131] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 233.

> There are no proofs for demonstrating the beauty of music to a man who is both deaf and insensitive, and there are no proofs for the veracity of the prophet's claim to a man who is spiritually deaf and without faith and wisdom. Proofs may aid in protecting but not initiating certainty; essentially they are explications of what is intuitively already clear to us.[132]

Heschel also makes the point that the prophet's sympathy is not aimed at imitation of a static vision of God. Rather, prophets react out of an ongoing relationship with God. Heschel draws a clear distinction between a relationship based on pathos and one based on imitation of God:

> The prototype of *imitatio* is an unchanging model; a constant traditional knowledge of it indicates a ready path to be followed. Pathos, on the other hand, is ever changing, according to the circumstances of the given situation. The content of sympathy is not fixed by any predetermination. What is abiding in it is simply of orientation toward the living reality of God. *Imitatio* is concerned with a past, sympathy with a present, occurrence.[133]

Non-prophetic Human Concern

By definition, a prophet is one who is abnormally attuned to God's pathos, to God's desires for human behavior. Yet, every human being has the ability to at least imitate the prophet's intuition of the Divine pathos and the prophet's sympathetic response. Heschel writes that "the peculiar asset of organic existence, or life, is concern. Life is concern."[134] Human concern is, at its base, reflexive but "a vital requirement of human life is transitive concern, a regard for others."[135] Our concern for ourselves and

[132] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 233.
[133] Heschel, The Prophets, page 102.
[134] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 137.
[135] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 138.

for others is "a cupful drawn from the spirit of the divine concern."[136] We, like the prophets, feel the tug of the divine pathos:

> There are moments in which we feel the challenge of a power that, not born of our will nor installed by it, robs us of independence by its judgment of the rectitude or depravity of our actions, by its gnawing at our heart when we offend against its injunctions.[137]

We can not know the essence or God nor even anything remotely close to it. We do know, however, that God is full of compassion and that God's compassion permeates the world.[138] We know this through our apprehension of God's concern for us. While Heschel primarily relies on the Biblical accounts to establish God's concern and compassion for humankind, he does not preclude the possibility of modern moments of insight that are analogous to revelation. As Merkle writes:

> Heschel's writings are replete with the conviction that the revelation of God's concern and challenge is not limited to the biblical era and may even be experienced apart from an encounter with the biblical testimony. The prophetic experience may be quite unlike our own experience which is, nonetheless, somewhat like it. The experience of the prophets may be unattainable to us, but it is not alien to us.[139]

Having now become aware of the presence of a caring God, the question becomes how do we respond to God's interest in us?

[136] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 145.
[137] Heschel, Man is Not Alone , page146.
[138] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 148.
[139] Merkle, page 117.

Responding to the Presence of God

Revelation is only the beginning. The moment of revelation is not the entire event, rather the event is fulfilled only in deeds undertaken in response to the Divine command:

> The event must be fulfilled, not only believed in. What was expected at Sinai comes about in the moment of a good deed. A commandment is a foresight, a deed is fulfillment. The deed completes the event. Revelation is but a beginning, our deeds must continue, our lives must complete it.[140]

It is through examination of the Bible that we discover the manner in which we are to live our lives. The Bible is not a collection of stories or historical events, it is a living testament to the human condition and an ongoing explication of how one ought to live. It presents to us the challenge to be just and holy. "There is a task, a law, and a way; the task is redemption, the law, to do justice, to love mercy, and the way is the secret of being *human and holy*."[141] The Bible is record of the encounter between the Divine and the human in concrete situations. The Bible is not a collection of abstract commands, rather it is application of the Divine will to real life events.

For the Jew, living is done through action. Deeds take precedence over thought. "A Jew is asked to take a *leap of action* rather than a *leap of thought*.[142] As human beings, we must live a life which reflects the fact that we are created in the image of God and, by doing so, we will come to discover the meaning of our lives.[143] Such meaning is

[140] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 217.
[141] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 238. To be holy, for Heschel, is to act in response to the will of God. By definition, God is holy and, as God's creation, each individual has the potential for holiness. Human **beings** are responsible for bringing holiness into the dimension of the everyday through deeds that reflect the Divine will. Heschel, God in Search of Man, pages 266-267.
[142] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 283.
[143] Heschel does not address the existence of a specific meaning for each person's individual life. Instead he speaks about discovering the meaning of human existence generally. One might speculate, however,

mysterious, and our lives are spent in an effort to go beyond the mystery of our existence to the meaning of our existence. It is the particularly Biblical outlook on life that there is a meaning beyond the mystery of existence; that our lives have meaning to God and that God has a meaning for our lives.[144] This is the essence of monotheistic faith; that God created the world in a meaningful fashion thus giving meaning to Creation.[145]

This meaning can not be fully comprehended nor articulated but an awareness of its existence can be ascertained. Such awareness does not come through abstract contemplation, but through our observation of the reality of the world and through observance of God's commandments. Our actions are influenced by our awareness of the grandeur and mystery of existence and, through our actions, we become more attuned to that grandeur and mystery. "A mitzvah is an act which God and man *have in common*."[146] When we act in accordance with God's commandments, we are acting in partnership with God in fulfillment of the Divine will:

> Human action is not the beginning. At the beginning is God's eternal expectation. There is an eternal cry in the world: *God is beseeching man* to answer, to return, to fulfill. Something is asked of man, of all men, at all times. In every act we either answer or defy, we either return or move away, we either fulfill or miss the goal....Mitzvot are not ideals, spiritual entities for ever suspended in eternity. They are commandments addressing every one of us. They are the ways in which God confronts us in particular moments. In the infinite world there is a task for me to accomplish. Not a general task, but a task for me, here and now. Mitzvot are *spiritual ends*, points of eternity in the flux of temporality.[147]

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that since each individual apprehends the mystery and meaning of human existence differently, each person therefore has their own individual sense of the meaning of their own existence.

[144] Merkle, page 76.
[145] Merkle, page 77.
[146] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 287.
[147] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 291.

In order to respond to God's commands, however, human beings must know the content of those commands. Humans receive that content through God's acts of revelation, but still we must ask, "what is the nature of that revelation?"

Heschel writes that God's will is revealed in both halachah and aggadahh. Certainly, the legal content of Torah and the Bible as a whole are commanding, but our ultimate obligation is to the Divine ways rather than to the Divine Law:[148]

> Reverence for the authority of the law is an expression of our love for God. However, beyond His will is His love. The Torah was given to Israel as a sign of His love. To reciprocate that love we strive to obtain *ahavat Torah*.[149]

To live as a Jew is to balance between the whole and its parts. Whether each individual act complies with halachahh is important but one must also judge whether one's life is lived in accordance with God's will in a more general sense. Heschel writes:

> Some people are so occupied collecting shreds and patches of the law, that they hardly think of weaving the pattern of the whole; others are so enchanted by the glamour of generalities, by the image of ideals, that while their eyes fly up, their actions remain below.[150]

A meaningful life certainly includes actions prescribed by law, but one must also comply with God's general ethical imperative in the way one lives one's life. It is the difference between doing what is legally obligatory and doing what is ethically correct. God stands for justice and ethics; thus the whole of one's life consists not only of individual acts that meet legal requirements but also must be able to withstand ethical scrutiny.

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[148] Merkle, page 136.
[149] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 300.
[150] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 301.

On the other hand, broad ethical mandates are not enough. As Jews, we are obligated to fulfill our ethical obligations within a legal framework. Jews do not ignore halachah in favor of solely fulfilling what one sees as one's ethical obligations.

Our objective as human beings is to be holy, in imitation of God's holiness. Holiness consists of living totally in accordance with God's ways. The ultimate commandment is to love God, and we express our love for God through walking in God's ways. One expression of that love is compliance with halachah but obedience to halachah is not enough:

> Jewish observance, it must be stressed, takes place on two levels. It consists of acts performed by the body in a clearly defined and tangible manner, and of acts of the soul carried out in a manner which is neither definable nor ostensible; of the right intention and of putting the right intention into action. Both body and soul must participate in carrying out a ritual, a law, an imperative, a mitzvah. Thoughts, feelings ensconced in the inwardness of man, deeds performed in the absence of the soul, are incomplete.[151]

Humans are transformed, are made holy, by the performance of mitzvot. But mitzvot are more than acts prescribed by halachah. Mitzvah "has the connotation of goodness, value, virtue, meritoriousness, piety and even holiness."[152] It requires not only action but a state of mind. Mitzvot require kavanah or intention. A good act alone is not a mitzvah, for mitzvot not only affect those who are touched by the good deed but also are transformational for the doer. "The true goal is for man *to be* what he *does*."[153] It is in the performance of mitzvot that we meet God, for God is present in sacred deeds. Mitzvot are concrete expressions of God's ways in the world; thus when one performs a

[151] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 307.
[152] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 362.
[153] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 310.

mitzvah, he/she is the embodiment of God's ways and how they work. God is more imminent in the performance of sacred deeds than even in nature:

> Indeed, the concern of Judaism is primarily not how to find the presence of God in the world of things but how to let Him enter the ways in which we deal with things...The way to God is a way of God, and the mitzvah is a way of God, a way where the self-evidence of the Holy is disclosed. We have few words, but we know how to live in deeds that express God.[154]

Deeds must be performed with an awareness of their Divine content. Mitzvot must be carried out with an awareness of the One who commanded the mitzvah in the first place. The objective is to have our lives reflect the overall will of God and not simply be a collection of pious acts. In this regard, Heschel describes the polarity between halachah and aggadah. The Bible contains both and both are crucial to Judaism. Halachah is the legal aspect of Torah while aggadah provides the reason for halachah in the first place, that is, to promote the love of God and the knowledge of God's ways. We are commanded to act beyond halachah, for halachah can not address every situation in life.[155] Instead, aggadah provides the Jew with an understanding of how divine-human interaction works; with numerous examples of the application of the Divine ways in real life situations. The application of aggadah is left to the creativity and the conscience of the individual.[156] Obedience to the law is important but "what is the ultimate objective of observance if not to become more sensitive to the spirit of Him, in whose ways the mitzvot are signposts?"[157] Yet, aggadah without halachah also is not enough to sustain Jewish life.

[154] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 312.
[155] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 327.
[156] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 327.
[157] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 326.

The Role of Tradition in Jewish Life

While there are individual moments of insight and radical amazement, such moments are rare and not enough to sustain one's religious life. Between these individual awesome moments are the memories of these moments. It is these memories that form the basis for faith:

> Memory is a source of faith. To have faith is to remember. Jewish faith is a recollection of that which happened to Israel in the past. The events in which the spirit of God became a reality stand before our eyes painted in colors that never fade. Much of what the Bible demands can be comprised in one word: *Remember*.[158]

It is true that we have individual moments of insight, but Heschel writes that:

> The individual's insight alone is unable to cope with all the problems of living. It is the guidance of tradition on which we must rely, and whose norms we must learn to interpret and to apply. We must learn not only the ends but also the means by which to realize the ends; not only the general laws but also the particular forms.[159]

As Jews, we share Biblical memories along with a tradition of insights into the meanings of those memories. We are recipients of memories of Divine revelation and historical events recorded in the Bible. We have inherited the insights of the sages in generations past as well as those of the current generation. Our personal insights are extensions of our knowledge of the insights of the past. We build upon the past.

This tradition comes down to us in the form of both aggadah and halachah. The role of aggadah as an expression of the values which underlay halachah has been addressed previously. Heschel perceives that what was intended to be a balance between

[158] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 162.
[159] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 298.

halachah and aggadah, however, has become heavily weighted toward halachah. Thus, he is highly critical of the performance of halachah without the proper intention.

Nevertheless, Heschel does see a critical role for halachah in Jewish life. Divine law is "derived from prophetic events, the interpretation of which is in the hands of the sages."[160] The role of the prophet was to inform humans about the demands made upon them by God. Often these were legal demands and part of Jewish life is compliance with halachah. Living a Jewish life involves commitment and discipline. It involves a commitment to both performing and refraining from various acts, that is, positive and negative mitzvot.[161] It is true that beyond the halachah is the spirit of the halachah, but one is not excused from compliance with the law because of any prior obligation to comply with one's perception of the spirit that undergirds the law. Quite the opposite, for when one complies with halachah with the intention to utilize the law to apprehend God's will, the performance of mitzvot provides a typical individual with the opportunity to comprehend at least a small part of the Divine will.

The question for Heschel is whether any form of the observance of mitzvot is spiritually justifiable?[162] This is not to be confused with whether the individual finds the performance of a given mitzvah to be personally meaningful, for such a formulation would place the emphasis on meeting the needs of individual people rather than on serving God.[163] Nor is spiritual justifiability to be confused with rational justification. Religion deals with issues of the eternal which are beyond rationality.[164] If we, as human

[160] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 299.
[161] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 300.
[162] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 350.
[163] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 350.
[164] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 351.

beings, are unable to determine a rationale for a given mitzvah, that has no bearing on the spiritual value of that mitzvah and our obligation to observe it.

The essence of the spiritual justifiability for mitzvot is in their worth in aiding humans to understand at least the allusion to an attribute of God. The reason for observance is not to fulfill a legal obligation but a spiritual one. It is by performance of mitzvot that humans come to understand something about what it means to be holy through conducting their lives in a holy fashion. God has set forth specific actions designed to provide humans with ways in which to be holy and sanctify their lives. Mitzvot are the ways in which humans act out the insights contained in Torah and elucidated by the sages:

> A mitzvah is the perpetuation of an insight or an act of bringing together the passing with the everlasting, the momentary with the eternal...Religion without mitzvot is an experience without the power of expression, a sense of mystery without the power of sanctification; a question without an answer. Without Torah we have only deeds that dream of God; with the Torah we have mitzvot that utter God in acts.[165]

It is through performance of mitzvot that we attempt to reach out to the ineffable. We address the mystery of being through mitzvot, for God has provided them to us as tools for obtaining insight into the ineffable. It is through mitzvot that we address the ultimate answers to our lives. "A mitzvah is where mind and mystery mate to create an image of an attribute of God. A sacred deed is where earth and heaven meet."[166]

Heschel does not specifically address what he means by observance, however. It is clear that he does not consider the performance of mitzvot to be spiritually meaningful

[165]Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 352.
[166]Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 353.

without the kavannah to be open to the meaning behind the mitzvah. Heschel also speaks of the performance of mitzvot evoking new meanings for successive generations. "Mitzvot are not only expressions of meanings given once and for all, but ways of evoking new meaning again and again."[167] Even so, Heschel does not hesitate to criticize what he saw as Reform Judaism's efforts to create a less demanding and more popular Judaism:

> Those who, in order to save the Jewish way of life, bring its meaning under the hammer, sell it in the end to the lowest bidder. The highest values are not in demand and are not saleable on the marketplace.[168]

Heschel appears to have in mind a high level of observance according to the tenets of halachah because the halachah expresses the spiritual insights of the sages and because the halachic system allows for the generation of new spiritual insights in the present as well as successive generations. At the same time, he realizes that halachah's greatest danger is that it will promote the triumph of law over spirituality, that performance of mitzvot will become an end unto itself rather than a means to the ineffable.

Nevertheless, it is clear that embracing tradition lies at the heart of the Jewish way of life. It is the performance of mitzvot that brings joy to religion. More important, mitzvot are reminders that we are living "in the neighborhood of God, of living in the holy dimension."[169] It is for the sake of human beings that mitzvot are performed; our souls grow by the performance of sacred deeds.[170] That is not to say that mitzvot are not performed in the service of God but only that mitzvot were given so that we might grow

[167]Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 354.
[168]Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 351.
[169]Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 356.
[170]Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 357.

spiritually through our service of God. It is through mitzvot that we add sanctity to our lives by the performance of sacred deeds.

Social Justice and the Problem of Needs

Each individual is a cluster of needs, which in themselves are neutral. Human needs are neither good nor evil; rather good and evil are contained within the human response to needs. "*Needs are spiritual opportunities.*"[171]

We have immense power at our disposal, but little in the way of guidance on how to exercise that power. Ethics, in themselves, are not helpful because no ethical system can encompass the totality of life. Ethics are general rules by their very nature but we live within specific situations.[172] Morality and ethics are no match for the human desire to fulfill each individual's self-interest.

> One of the lessons we have derived from the events of our time is that we cannot dwell at ease under the sun of civilization, that man is the least harmless of beings. It is as if every minute were packed with tension like the interlude between lightening and thunder, and our moral order were a display of ancient oaks with ephemeral roots. It took one storm to turn a civilization into an inconceivable inferno.[173]

There is an ongoing conflict between personal interest and the interests of universal justice. The need for universal justice is the real need of humankind while the need for material goods and power are artificial ones.[174] We say that we value the freedom that comes with success but true freedom comes from being dedicated only to

[171] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 263.
[172] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 184.
[173] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 185.
[174] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 188.

doing that which is right and promoting that which is true. We become enslaved to things but are set free by truth.[175]

We discover meaning in our lives through fulfillment of our actual needs, not artificial ones. We need to do something of lasting value, and that something is to fulfill a need. The key to understanding the essence of existence is that our lives are an effort to fulfill our own need to be needed.[176] But by whom are we needed? We are needed by God. It is the nature of religion that demands are made on us, our lives are meant to serve ends beyond ourselves. God needs man to fulfill the ends of Creation.

We fulfill the ends of Creation by the performance of good.[177] What is good? "Good is that which God cares for; good is that which *unites* man within himself, which unites man and man, man and God."[178] That which is right and good goes beyond human needs. While the definition of right changes in history, the recognition that there is a difference between good and evil is universal. "Justice is something that all men are able to esteem."[179] Since the very nature of God is justice, it is the vision of God's justice that motivates the search for justice by human beings.

The essence of Judaism consists in directing the smallest deeds to the task of bringing justice to the world. The Jewish way of life is composed of a continual performance of small deeds which form a pattern of one's life.[180] This extends not only to ritual deeds but to secular living as well:

> It is just the non-ritual, the secular conditions, which the prophets of Israel regarded as being a divine concern. To

[175] See Note 42 above for a discussion of human freedom.
[176] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 215.
[177] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 224.
[178] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 225.
[179] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 226.
[180] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 270.

> them the totality of human activities, social and individual, of all inner and external circumstances, is the divine sphere of interest.[181]

Piety consists of the ability to discern the Divine presence in all aspects of life. Not only religion, but in the daily conduct of one's secular life. The pious man lives with the recognition that all of life and the universe is a gift from God and that we are responsible, therefore, for its preservation. In 1951, well before environmentalism emerged as an issue, Heschel wrote that "man is responsible for the way that he utilizes nature. It is amazing how thoughtless modern man is of his responsibility in relation to his world."[182]

The pious individual lives a life in pursuit of the will of God. The pious individual feels compelled to serve others, that one is obliged to contribute towards the realization of God's will on earth. Heschel writes that "the world to come is not only a hereafter but a *herenow*."[183]

> In aiding a creature, he is helping the Creator. In succoring the poor, he fulfills a concern of God. In admiring the good, he reveres the spirit of God. In loving the pure, he is drawn to Him. In promoting the right, he is directing things toward His will, in which all aims must terminate.[184]

For Heschel, our lives are the response we give to God for the gift of life. Our doing of justice and right in our lives connects us to the demands of the Eternal and gives our lives lasting meaning. "The deepest wisdom man can attain is to know that his destiny is to aid, to serve."[185]

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[181] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 270.
[182] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, pages 289-290.
[183] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 295.
[184] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 295.
[185] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 296.

Summary

The value of the religious philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel lies in its concreteness, notwithstanding its presentation in lofty and poetic forms. Heschel believes that religion must address the realities of the human condition and the challenges of everyday life. Faith is built upon one's observations of the world as it is and a realization of our own limitations in understanding it. The underlying assumption of positivism is that everything ultimately is capable of explanation. Heschel's depth theology comes to remind us that our very ability to understand and the very fact that we have the craving for explanations is beyond explanation. We are at a loss to explain our compulsion to ascertain meaning in the world and in our lives. The ultimate mystery is why we exist at all.

Heschel serves to open an entire realm of inquiry beyond the physical and the temporal. His greatest contribution, however, is to point out that we are compelled to respond not with a sense of frustration but with a sense of awe at the wonder of our own existence and that of the universe. The very fact that our existence ultimately is inexplicable to us demonstrates that there is a power beyond our own in which resides the answers to the mysteries of life. We can not know those answers in full but we can recognize allusions to those answers in this world; allusions to the attributes of God in whose image we are created.

We gain insight into these signs of God's presence through the performance of sacred acts, mitzvot. Mitzvot must be performed, however, with an intention to utilize their performance as opportunities to reach greater understanding of the nature of holiness, inasmuch as holiness is the nature of God. We are given God's revelation of the

demands placed upon us through Torah, through the articulation of the Divine pathos by the prophets, and through the ongoing construction of the tradition by sages, ancient and modern. We are also obliged to engage in sacred deeds of our own making which reflect God's ongoing concern for humankind. It is in this way that we act as God's partner in completing Creation even as the meaning of the existence of the universe, as well as our own existence, is beyond our comprehension.

The religious philosophy of Abraham Joshua Heschel provides a vision of religion based on an ongoing interaction between human beings and the will of God as expressed in the Bible and in one's observations of the world. The question arises, however, as to the form that a practical application of Heschel's philosophy would take in a religious, specifically Jewish, community. What would be the nature of the worship experience in such a community? How would rituals be observed? How would the community balance the tension raised by Heschel between the requirements of both halachah and aggadah? What would be the objectives and curriculum for adult and childhood education programs? What would be the role of social action and inter-faith relations in such a community? The following chapter will be an exploration of Heschel's thoughts on these questions as a means for developing a vision of a Jewish community that lives out Heschel's religious philosophy.

Chapter 3

Abraham Joshua Heschel and Living Judaism

For Abraham Joshua Heschel, to live as a Jew meant to live in a constant state of anxiety, caught in the tension between contradictory demands. He called the phenomenon "polarity".[186] Beginning with his youth, Heschel was buffeted by the conflicting views of the universe offered within Hasidic Judaism. He felt the strain between the Judaism of joy espoused by the Baal Shem Tov and the Judaism of despair preached by the Kotzker. These two poles of thought, and of approaches to what it means to live as a Jew, were the sub-text to Heschel's Jewish worldview.

The tension between the worldviews of the Baal Shem Tov and the Kotzker was only the first of many instances of polarity within Judaism noted by Heschel in his work. As his academic career and philosophy of religion developed, the tension between many sets of opposite concepts in Jewish life in regard to theology and practice became a significant theme to his work. Far from being a liability, however, Heschel viewed this polarity of ideas and practices as an essential part of Judaism:

> Jewish thinking and living can only be adequately understood in terms of a dialectic pattern, containing opposite or contrasting properties. As in a magnet, the ends of which have opposite magnetic qualities, these terms are opposite to one another and exemplify a polarity which lies at the very heart of Judaism, the polarity of ideas and events, of mitzvah and sin, of kavanah and deed, of regularity and spontaneity, of uniformity and individuality, of halacha and aggada, of law and inwardness, of love and fear, of understanding and obedience, of joy and discipline, of the good and the evil drive, of time and eternity, of this world and the world to come, of revelation and response, of insight and information, of empathy and self-expression, of creed and faith, of the word and that which is beyond

[186] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 341.

words, of man's quest for God and God in search of man.[187]

For Heschel, the existence of these opposite forces is the substance of our lives. To live the life of a Jew is to be in a constant state of balancing these opposite demands, for each provides an opportunity to enter the realm of the holy. Conversely, ignoring one pole in favor of another hampers, if not cripples, one's ability to reach the state of piety which is required to obtain a sense of the ineffable, which is what brings meaning to life.[188] Both poles enrich and enhance the other in the human search to understand God and thereby bring meaning to life:

> Taken abstractly, all these terms seem to be mutually exclusive, yet in actual living they involve each other; the separation of the two is fatal to both. There is no halacha without aggada, and no aggada without halacha. We must neither disparage the body, nor sacrifice the spirit. The body is the discipline, the pattern, the law; the spirit is inner devotion, spontaneity, freedom. The body without the spirit is a corpse; the spirit without the body is a ghost...Our task is to learn how to maintain a harmony between the demands of halacha and the spirit of aggada.[189]

It has been pointed out by numerous critics of Heschel that he was unable to cogently articulate how this balance is to be achieved. If so, he is far from the first philosopher or rabbi to be unable to put forth a complete and universally acceptable plan for the application of his insights to daily life.[190] Heschel's failure to balance the conflicting poles of Judaism in such a way as to make his views acceptable to all strands of the Jewish world do not obviate the importance of his work in raising the existence and

[187] Heschel, God in Search of Man , page 341.
[188] Hyman, James, "Meaningfulness, the Ineffable, and the Commandments", Conservative Judaism, Vol. 50, No. 2-3, Winter/Spring 1998, page 85-86.
[189] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 341.
[190] Eisen, Arnold M., "Re-reading Heschel on the Commandments", Modern Judaism, Vol. 9, February, 1989, page 3.

centrality of polarity to Judaism in the first place. It is to two elements of that polarity and their implications that we now turn.

Halacha and Aggada/Keva and Kavanah

For Heschel, halacha and aggada are combined elements of Torah and it is to living the life of Torah that we aspire as Jews and human beings.[191] By halacha, Heschel means the strictly legal corpus of the Torah, as interpreted by the rabbis, which provide the basis for the halachic system. By aggada, Heschel means the narrative elements in the Bible and rabbinic literature that provide examples to us of the spirit and values exemplified by the lives of the Biblical characters. He defines aggada as follows:

> Aggada is usually defined negatively as embracing all non-legal or non-halachic parts of rabbinic literature, whether in the form of a tale or an explanation of scripture; an epigram or a homily.[192]

These two elements are totally interconnected and interdependent in the life of a religious Jew.

Heschel's position in this regard is best represented by two complementary speeches that he made in 1953. The first, "Toward an Understanding of Halacha" was delivered to the national convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The second, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer" was addressed to the Rabbinical Assembly of

[191] I use Torah here interchangeably with Bible, as did Heschel. Heschel does not distinguish between revelation to Moses and revelation to the prophets. While Heschel rejects the claim that all of Oral Law was given to Moses at Sinai (he quotes Exodus Rabba that only the principles were taught to Moses by God), he nonetheless acknowledges the power of the early sages and later sages to authoritatively expand Jewish law. (See Heschel, Man's Quest for God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954, page 101.) Thus, Written Torah, Oral Torah and the Bible combine to provide human beings with information about God's will and Heschel does not distinguish among them in terms of their authority in Jewish life.
[192] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 324.

America.[193] In these two presentations, Heschel addressed what he believed to be the imBaalance in the amount of attention being paid to halacha and aggada in the respective approaches of each of these organizations.

Having spent five years at Hebrew Union College following his rescue from the Holocaust by that institution in 1940, Heschel was well-acquainted with Reform Judaism and its emphasis on personal religious experience over adherence to Jewish law as the key element in the practice of Judaism.[194] In the beginning of "Toward an Understanding of Halacha," Heschel recognizes the importance of maintaining prophetic, values but then the problem of implementation arises. As he put it, "how to live in consonance with what we promise, how to keep faith with the vision we pronounce."[195] Heschel spoke passionately about his time in Berlin studying at the University where he felt a disjunction between the concepts of the "good" that he was studying and the way he was living his everyday life. Specifically, he speaks of an occasion on which he became so enamored of the manifestations of German civilization that he forgot to pray the evening service. When he did remember to pray, he was again able to infuse his life with meaning because through the mitzvah of prayer he was able to do God's will and encounter God's love as "manifested in His teaching us Torah, precepts, laws."[196]

> How grateful I am to God that there is a duty to worship...I am not always in a mood to pray. I do not always have the vision and strength to say a word in the presence of God.

[193] These speeches combine to form the heart of Heschel's Man's Quest for God and page references to portions of these speeches will be made to pages in that work.
[194] That Reform Judaism had become more traditional in its orientation even prior to Heschel's death was acknowledged by Heschel to Dr. Alfred Gottshalk, then president of HUC-JIR. (See Gottshalk, Alfred, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Man of Dialogues", Rabbinical Assembly, 1973.) Nonetheless, the concern over the balance between aggada and halacha in Reform Judaism remains the key issue facing the Movement today.
[195] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 94.
[196] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 97.

> But when I am weak, it is the law that gives me strength; when my vision is dim, it is duty that gives me insight.[197]

Heschel extends the necessity to comply with the duty to pray to all of Jewish observance, to the performance of the mitzvot. The performance of mitzvot is part of the fabric of Jewish life; it is part of a whole that is "the spiritual order of Jewish living."[198] Having said this, Heschel does acknowledge his own concerns about the halachic system. In regard to the issue of whether it is necessary to perform all of the mitzvot, he is less concerned with the number of mitzvot performed than with the quality of the observance. This emphasis on quality of observance over quantity leads Heschel to downplay liberal Jewish concerns about the multiplying of legal obligations with each passing generation. Heschel allows that in different times in Jewish history, different mitzvot are more necessary to fulfill as expressions of the will of God and that successive generations will "make necessary ordinances according to the state of each generation."[199]

Heschel sees the Bible as of one piece, with its legal requirements equal to the moral and ethical requirements of the prophets:

> If we are ready to believe that it is God who requires us "to love kindness", is more difficult to believe that God requires us to hallow the Sabbath and not violate its sanctity?[200]

God is not reached through rational speculation or lip service to ideals. The Jewish life is lived out through deeds. For the Jew, life has spiritual meaning but such meaning is the "fruit of hard, constant devotion."[201] The Jew acquires spiritual knowledge through performance of mitzvot; it is the Jewish route to knowledge of the

[197] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 97.
[198] Heschel, Man's Quest for God , page 100.
[199] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 101-102.
[200] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 103.
[201] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 105.

will of God. Such living can not be sporadic, it must be constant. Moments of inspiration are relatively rare and one must maintain a spiritual vision every day, and this is achievable only through the performance of sacred deeds.[202] The performance of mitzvot enable us to integrate the holy into our daily existence. There is no such thing for Heschel as "exterritoriality", that is, a realm of living that is beyond holiness and thus beyond Torah.

Heschel then calls upon each rabbi "to sacrifice his prejudice against our heritage", so that traditional practice is at least respected as part of the Jewish heritage.[203] Finally, Heschel condemns the proliferation of "customs and ceremonies" in place of true worship. Ritual practice is directed to God while ceremonies are directed to humans. "Too often a ceremony is the homage which disbelief pays to faith."[204] He sees ceremonies as artificial and inauthentic:

> Ceremonies are created for the purpose of signifying: mitzvot were given for the purpose of sanctifying. This is their function: to refine, to ennoble, to sanctify man.[205]

Thus Heschel's challenge to Reform Judaism is to realize the importance of halachic practice for the development of spiritual insight, that one can not fully acheive the full breadth of insight without the discipline of halacha. The goal of responding to the will of God remains the same, but one must include the halacha among the avenues to ascertaining the will of God.

Later that year, Heschel addressed the students at HUC-JIR. If anything, he was more direct in his comments to them:

[202] Heschel, Man's Quest for God , page 106-107.
[203] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 112.
[204] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 114.
[205] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 114.

> There can be no Jewish holiness without Jewish law, at least the essence of Jewish law. Jewish theology and teffilin go together...Why are you afraid of wearing Tallis and Tefillin every morning, my friends? There was a time when our adjustment to Western Civilization was our supreme problem...By now we are well adjusted...Our task today is to adjust Western Civilization to Judaism. America, for example, needs Shabbos. What is wrong with Shabbos, with saying a bracha every time we eat, with the regularity of prayer? What is wrong with spiritual discipline? It is only out of such spiritual discipline that a new manifestation of human existence will emerge.[206]

The issue presented to the Rabbinical Assembly, however, was the opposite. With regard to Conservative rabbis, Heschel's concern was not with halacha but aggada. Specifically, his concern was for the cultivation of an intentionality to perform mitzvot in the spirit of their utilization to discover the will of God.

At the outset, Heschel bemoans the fact that worship services lack "life".[207] By this he meant that they lack kavanah, a devotion to grasping the meaning behind the words being uttered. The prayer service is all keva, the repetition of the prescribed prayer without the experience of the prayer awakening the worshiper [if one could be called that] to the meaning behind the prayer. Such prayer performance lacks spontaneity; it is perfunctory, and the content is not felt.

> The problem is not one of synagogue attendance but one of spiritual attendance. The problem is not how to attract bodies to enter the space of the temple but how to attract souls to enter an hour of spiritual concentration in the presence of God. The problem is time, not space.[208]

[206] Quoted in Dresner, Samuel H., "Heschel and Halacha: The Vital Center", Conservative Judaism, vol. 43 (4), Summer 1991, page 22.
[207] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 49.
[208] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 52.

Heschel decries "religious behaviorism", where the act alone is what is important but not the feeling behind the act.[209] He rejects the argument that people should attend services out of a sense of tradition, loyalty to the people of Israel or because it somehow provides some form of benefit to the individual.[210] Instead, Heschel maintains that the worshiper should "Know before Whom you stand." He explains that "to know" implies that one prays in order to gain an appreciation of who it is one is praying to. True prayer both comes from a position of spiritual insight and, in turn, generates spiritual insight.[211] "Whom" implies that the object of prayer, God, is a living entity, not an inanimate "what". "You stand" implies standing in the presence of God and one's obligation to bring that presence into the world.[212]

As he did with his concern for the primacy of aggada over halacha, Heschel extends his concern about religious behaviorism to all mitzvot and not just prayer. Yet, prayer is the mitzvah par excellence; a mitzvah is "a prayer in the form of a deed."[213] He equates kavanah with aggada, inwardness.[214] Both halacha and aggada require discipline and, if anything, kavanah is more difficult to maintain on a regular basis. Kavanah is more than attentiveness of the mind, it is a directing of the heart towards God.[215] Kavanah is a response to the mystery of being, an attempt to apprehend the meaning beyond the mystery.

[209] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 54.
[210] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 54-56.
[211] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 59-60.
[212] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 61-62.
[213] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 69.
[214] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 68.
[215] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 84.

The tools of prayer, of course, are words. Heschel states that "it takes two things to make prayer come to pass: a person and a word."[216] Words, however, have meanings beyond simply what might be communicated to another or even understood by the one who utters the prayer. Words form commitments, when one utters a prayer, one commits oneself to the meaning of that prayer. Thus, before one prays it is critical to be in a frame of mind in which the full implications of one's prayer are recognized.[217] Thus when properly done, prayer is offered with "trembling" at the awesome significance of what is being said.[218]

When performed with appropriate kavanah, prayer also links one to the Divine. There are two types of prayer: the expressive and the empathic.[219] The expressive takes place when the worshiper has a thought to express and seeks a prayer for doing so. The other type of prayer is the empathic. In reading the words of the prayer, the worshiper gains insight into the prayer's meaning and becomes empathetic with that message. In this way, since prayers reflect the will of God, the worshiper is empathetic with the Divine.[220] Thus the process of prayer is a significant element in our ability to become sympathetic to the Divine pathos. When we have the kavanah to look beyond the surface meaning of a prayer to the full implication of its meaning, we are prepared to truly "accost God, to lay our hopes, sorrows, and wishes before Him."[221] Thus, prayer is not just an obligation; it is a gift from God to allow us to contact the Eternal.[222] This is what

[216] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 23.
[217] Borodowski, Alfredo Fabio, "Hasidic Sources in Heschel's Conception of Prayer", Conservative Judaism, Vol. 20 (2/3), Winter/Spring 1998, page 37.
[218] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 30.
[219] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 28.
[220] Borowdowski, page 44-45.
[221] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 9.
[222] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 9.

makes prayer worthwhile, the knowledge that our prayers are being heard and that they, along with other sacred deeds, affect God and the universe.

Ultimately, true prayer moves beyond words. "In a sense prayer begins where expression ends."[223] Mere mortals do not have the ability to express all that is within them to God. Part of what we offer to God is our desire to pray. Heschel cites Ibn Gabriol in saying "The highest form of worship is that of silence and hope."[224] Obviously, this type of devotion is beyond halacha; it is a function of what is within the individual; it is a function of aggada/kavanah.

The issue went beyond prayer, however, to other forms of mitzvot. Heschel was also deeply concerned with the punctilious observance of legalities while moral commandments went unheeded. At a seminar after the release of Joseph Soloveitchik's *Halachic Man*, Samuel Drenser recorded the following statement from Heschel:

> The legalistic attitude has profoundly influenced Jewish observance, distorting ritual prescriptions over moral ones. Some Jews who refuse to say a d'var Torah without a hat have no hesitation in saying lashon hora even while wearing a hat...Those halachot have become "mere" aggadot, which is to say that they are not taken seriously.[225]

Dresner also relates that following a vigorous discussion, which Heschel provoked, in a class concerning whether gelatin was kosher, Heschel then asked, "Is the hydrogen bomb kosher?"[226] Heschel was deeply concerned that moral laws have the same status as legal commandments.

Likewise, Heschel sees the performance of mitzvot other than prayer as potential repositories of meaning. The hope was that when a mitzvah was performed correctly,

[223] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 39.
[224] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 41.
[225] Dresner, page 26.
[226] Dresner, page 26.

that the performer would experience the divine meaning behind the mitzvah.[227] Mitzvot, therefore, like prayer are vehicles for making contact with God. This only occurs, however, when one performs the act with the intention to see its deeper significance.

This leads to the ultimate difficulty in Heschel's work in this area. He is basing the efficacy of the performance of mitzvot, the foremost of which is prayer, on the personal experience of the performer while calling for adherence to group norms. This concern, along with others, will be addressed in Chapter 5. For now, suffice it to say that given the current state of American Judaism, it would be quite enough if Heschel's work were to provide only an avenue to remind the vast majority of American Jews that Judaism, practiced with some degree of intention, can bring a sense of meaning and an awareness of God's presence in their lives. To say that Heschel's work would not compel the majority of American Jews to adapt even a flexible halachic system is a remarkably weak attack, when the need is to interest most self-identified Jews in Judaism at all. If, as Dresner points out, Heschel's work simply serves as a call upon the typical American Jew to love God, to love Israel and to love Torah, then that is sufficient.[228]

The Role of Jewish Education

Heschel the educator is inseparable from Heschel the theologian. For Heschel, religious education is pointless if it does not address the same central issue as his religious philosophy, namely the development of the individual's ability to bring his or her inner life into the realm of daily existence. In terms of his writing on education, Heschel was not specific as to methodologies for implementing his priorities. Rather he

[227] Hyman, page 92.
[228] Dresner, page 30.

challenged the current emphases of Jewish education and encouraged teachers to confront their true responsibilities as educators.

To Heschel, study is an indispensable part of living a life of piety for people of all ages. Education is a lifelong endeavor, "termination of education is the beginning of despair."[229] He viewed study as a sacred act:

> Genuine reverence for the sanctity of study is bound to invoke in the pupils the awareness that study is not an ordeal but an act of edification; that the school is a sanctuary, not a factory; that study is a form of worship. True learning is a way of relating oneself to something which is both eternal and universal.[230]

Most of Heschel's writing in this area is in the nature of polemics against the same faults which he saw in organized religion generally. His concern was with the spiritual state of Judaism and the human condition in general. His pedagogy was to relate any information communicated to his students to a larger spiritual challenge in the student's life.[231] He understood the power of the ideas contained in secular education and the ability of the world at large to set the agenda for intellectual development. He desired a Jewish educational system that openly taught values different from that of society at large, for it was those values of power and materialism that Heschel saw as the problem for modern society in general.

> General studies are taught on a high level of learning, while religious education is satisfied with cliques buttered with sentimentality. As a result, religious instruction acquired in childhood fades away when exposed to the challenge and splendor of other intellectual powers in an age of scientific triumph.[232]

Heschel assails the "vapidity of religious instruction" and "the trivialization of education".[233] Religious education is failing to provide its students with the values needed to confront the challenge of modern living.[234] Educators do not address the great difficulties of moral living in the modern world.[235] Instead an oversimplified view of the world is presented in which difficult choices are not discussed; where the sources of values needed to confront evil are not presented. The bulwark against immorality is faith, but we do not teach those things which precede faith. There is no effort to introduce the concept of wonder into the classroom, to cultivate the kavanah which is necessary for a life of piety.[236] Instead, Heschel writes:

> What we must strive for is education in depth, a kind of teaching which is capable, again and again, of evoking a sense of wonder and mystery, of raising issues which the individual is called upon to answer personally, inwardly.[237]

While the sense of inward devotion must be met by external performance, Heschel decries the introduction of "religious behaviorism" into the classroom. Educators teach children about the external deeds of Judaism but few instruct students about the inward state which is necessary to understand the meaning behind the deed.[238] Thus the student is unable to understand the relevance of the rituals being taught to the challenges that the student faces in his or her own life. No effort is made to draw moral lessons from the practice of mitzvot which might be applicable to life in general.

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[229] Heschel, Essay on Youth, (New York: Synagogue Council of America, 1960), page 8.
[230] Heschel, Essay on Youth, page 7.
[231] Breslauer, S. Daniel, "Abraham Joshua Heschel and Religious Education", Religious Education, Vol. 72, September/October, 1977, page 485.
[232] Heschel, "Idols in the Temple" in The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Press, 1972), page 53.
[233] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1962, page 83.
[234] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 87.
[235] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 88.
[236] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 89.
[237] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 87.
[238] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", Jewish Education, Vol. 24, No. 2, Fall, 1953, page 16.

This leads Heschel to the criticism of the teaching of "customs and ceremonies" in Jewish life.[239] One gains no insight from the performance of customs and ceremonies; spiritual insight is gained from the proper performance of mitzvot.[240]

Remarkably, in the 1950's, before the upsurge of inter-marriage and increasing emphasis on education as a source for Jewish identity in order to avoid the extinction of the Jewish people, Heschel is asking questions about the effectiveness of relying on Jewish education for so such a vital mission without a thorough reform of the objects of Jewish education:

> The survival of the Jewish people is our basic concern. But what kind of survival, we must continually ask, and for what purpose?...Let us remember that it is not enough to impart information. We must strive to awaken appreciation as well. Our goal must be to enable the pupil to participate and share in the spiritual experience of Jewish living; to explain to them what it means to live as a likeness of God.[241]

Furthermore, Heschel writes that "what young people need is, not religious tranquilizers, religion as a diversion, religious entertainment, but spiritual audacity."[242]

The challenges to the Jewish educator are great. What Jewish students need are "text-people", teachers who live and advocate the values that they impart. There is no greater responsibility for a Jewish educator than that of role model:

> Here, of course, everything depends on the person who stands in the front of the classroom. The teacher is not an automatic fountain from which intellectual beverages may be obtained. He is either a witness or a stranger. To guide a pupil into the promised land, he must have been there himself. When asking himself: Do I stand for what I teach?

[239] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", page 17.
[240] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", page 17.
[241] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", page 19.
[242] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 83.

> Do I believe what I say? he must be able to answer in the affirmative.[243]

Heschel discusses the exact mission of the educator as follows:

> The teacher must impart information as well as to let the student share his appreciation...The secret of effective teaching lies in making the pupil a contemporary of the living moment of teaching. The outcome is not only the retention of the content of teaching but also of the moment of teaching. It is not enough for the pupil to appropriate the subject matter; the pupil and the teacher must go through significant moments, sharing insight and appreciation.[244]

What is more, each student must be reached on an individual basis. Judaism is a religion of individuals, even if those individuals are acting together as a group. It is the individual who prays, who acts and who experiences.

Nor are teachers the only educators. Heschel points out that the teacher is a surrogate for the parent, that Jewish law places the responsibility on the parent for the education of a child. Children have a Biblical obligation to "revere" their parents, but parents must conduct themselves so as to be worthy of reverence. Heschel writes, "Unless my child will sense in my personal existence acts and attitudes that evoke reverence...why should she revere me?"[245]

The object of Jewish education is spiritual development of the individual.[246] The way of the world is that individuals make life decisions based on their own needs. By itself, this is not a problem. However, some needs are legitimate while others are not. The legitimacy of a need depends on whether it serves an end that enhances the meaning

[243] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", page 19.
[244] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 84 and 86.
[245] Heschel, Essay on Youth, pages 3-4. In the next paragraph, however, Heschel points out that parents are always worthy of reverence simply because they are the most immediate part of the mystery of a child's being.
[246] Heschel, "Idols in the Temple", page 64.

of existence. Serving legitimate needs creates opportunities for spiritual development while serving needs that merely have self-interest as their end are vulgarizations of life. Jewish education should develop in students an awareness of the ends of living and the needs which serve those ends.[247] Students must develop a sense of what is demanded of them by God.

Ultimately, reverence is the desired outcome. In his "Essay on Youth", delivered as an address to the White House Conference on Children and Youth in 1960, Heschel writes:

> The mainspring of tenderness and compassion lies in reverence. It is our supreme educational duty to enable the child to revere.[248]

Social Activism as Religion

Just as his concern for religious education came out of his theology, Heschel came to his social activism as a theologian and not a politician. Although he was well aware that his social activism would bring him into the political realm, his mission was religious. In truth, he saw no alternative but to involve himself in issues that elicited his moral outrage. "To speak about God and remain silent on Vietnam is blasphemous."[249]

Heschel's social activism was centered in his conception of the nature of human beings. His analysis of the human condition begins with the Bible:

[247] Heschel, "Idols in the Temple", page 63.
[248] Heschel, Essay on Youth,, page 3.
[249] Heschel, "A Prayer for Peace", reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Susannah Heschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), page 231.

> There are three aspects of human existence which seem to be basic to the Bible.
> 1. Man is created in the image of God.
> 2. Man is dust.
> 3. Man is an object of Divine concern.[250]

From these basic principles, Heschel develops of theology of obligations to our fellow human beings. From the concept that all humans are created in God's image, Heschel draws the principle of human equality and mutual respect. He writes, "Reverence for God is shown in our reverence for man."[251] All of humankind in its essence is the same, for unlike plants or animals; God did not create different varieties of humans but just one.[252]

The concept that human beings are created from dust, drawn from the alternative Creation story, provides Heschel with the opposite pole to the idea that human beings are created in the Divine image. By emphasizing that humans are created from dust, Heschel focuses on the frailty of human existence and the necessity of human beings seeking God's forgiveness through repentance.[253] As dust, humans are constantly in a situation of moral, if not physical, danger, and are subject to spiritual as well as physical extinction.[254]

The third, and perhaps most important, principle is that humans are the object of God's concern. By introducing the concept of Divine pathos and prophetic theology to the discussion of social action, Heschel was able to apply not only prophetic values to the world but also to obtain a basis for a prophetic-type response to human suffering and evil.

[250] Heschel, "Sacred Images of Man", Religious Education, March/April, 1958, page 97.
[251] Heschel, "Sacred Images of Man", page 98.
[252] Heschel, "The Religious Basis of Race Equality", United Synagogue Review, Vol. 14, Summer, 1963, page 5.
[253] Heschel, Sacred Images of Man", page 99.
[254] Heschel, "The Plight of Russian Jews" reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Susannah Heschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), page 213.

The Divine concern manifests itself in prophetic pronouncements of Divine standards for human behavior and humans, in turn, are challenged to reflect those standards in their own behavior.

But Heschel moves beyond "ethical monotheism" to prophetic consciousness and action.[255] The prophets did more than simply announce God's expectations for human beings; the prophet is a person, not a microphone.[256] A prophet is empathetic to the Divine pathos and responsive to God's will. The prophet, and God, in the Bible continually mix into politics and social injustice.[257] Prophets do more than announce their positions from a pulpit; they take their message into the streets.

Through prophetic empathy, prophets are able "to hold God and humanity in one thought, at one time, at all times."[258] Heschel explained that the implication is that:

> Whatever I do to a person, I do to God. When I hurt a human being, I injure God. It is the realization that God is involved in the lives of human beings, that God cares about how human beings act, that God is affected by what human beings do.[259]

Prophetic consciousness also leads to a sense of individual responsibility for the actions of humankind in general. He cites repeatedly Leviticus 19:15, "Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor." In an essay published after his death, Heschel wrote:

> The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what the lives of the prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for

[255] Heschel, Susannah, "Social Justice--The Theme of Heschel", reprinted in Prayer and Politics: The Twin Poles of Abraham Joshua Heschel, Joshua Stampfer, ed. (Portland, Oregon: Institute for Judaic Studies, 1985), page 40.
[256] Heschel, Susannah, "Social Justice--The Theme of Heschel", page 44.
[257] Heschel, Susannah, "Social Justice--The Theme of Heschel", page 45.
[258] Heschel, Susannah, "Social Justice--The Theme of Heschel", page 46.
[259] Heschel, Susannah, "Social Justice--The Theme of Heschel", page 46.

> the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty but all are responsible.[260]

Heschel brought this viewpoint to race relations in the 1960's:

> The Negro's plight...are they not the fruit of our sins? By negligence and silence we have all become accessory before the God of mercy to the injustice committed against the Negroes by men of our nation. Our derelictions are many. We have failed to demand, to insist, to challenge and to chastise.[261]

Responsibility, of course, also implied the need for repentance. Heschel called on white America to repent and to undertake new actions in a new spirit to compensate for past sins.[262] In this regard, Heschel also cites that distinctly Jewish concept of the need to obtain forgiveness from those who have been wronged before seeking forgiveness from God.[263] Again, the need for true repentance, *teshuva*, a change of direction of one's actions are part and parcel of the prophetic demand on humans.

Heschel also felt that a failure to respond to injustice was degrading to him as a Jew and as a human being. It was not in accord with his vision of a full human being that one could ignore the pain and suffering of others. To remain indifferent affected the spiritual state of the indifferent individual. Also on the subject of race relations in the United States, Heschel wrote:

> This Conference should dedicate itself not only to the problem of the Negro but also to the problem of the white man, not only to the plight of the colored but also to the

[260] Heschel, "My Reasons for Involvement in the Peace Movement", reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Susannah Heschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), page 225.
[261] Heschel, "The Religious Basis of Race Equality", United Synagogue Review, Vol. 14, Summer, 1963, page 5
[262] Heschel, "The Religious Basis of Race Equality", United Synagogue Review, Vol. 14, Summer, 1963, page 6.
[263] Heschel, "The Religious Basis of Race Equality", United Synagogue Review, Vol. 14, Summer, 1963, page 5.

> situation of the white people, to the cure of a disease affecting the spiritual substance and conditions of every one of us. What we need is a NAAWP, a National Association for the Advancement of the White People.[264]

Heschel also had a profound sense of punishment being visited upon those who actively or passively contributed to injustice. Although God's justice could not be demonstrated in every case, his analysis of World War II is instructive in this regard, an analysis which he extended to the agonies suffered in Vietnam and in this country during that war:

> We have failed to fight for right, for justice, for goodness; as a result we must fight against wrong, against injustice, against evil. We have failed to offer sacrifices on the altar of peace; now we must offer sacrifices on the altar of war.[265]

One's outcry against injustice must also be timely. Heschel ended several of his essays on various social issues with the parable of a young student who expresses great fright when reading the Akedah even though he knows the outcome of the story. When the teacher asks why, the child responds that he is afraid that the angel will arrive too late and the teacher assures the child that angels do not arrive too late. Heschel's challenge was to maintain a moral awareness that allows us to be like that angel, not to arrive too late. There is a time for response and there is a price for a late response to injustice. Perhaps this incorporates Heschel's belief in the holiness of time, that Judaism involves performance of sacred deeds in a timely fashion.

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[264] Heschel, "The Religious Basis of Race Equality", United Synagogue Review, Vol. 14, Summer, 1963, page 5.
[265] Heschel, "The Meaning of This War (World War II)", reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Susannah Heschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), page 225.

Related to this notion was Heschel's suspicion of culture and rationality as a bulwark against evil. In a television interview shortly before his death, Heschel was asked about the meaning of his statement that "No philosophy can be the same after Auschwitz and Hiroshima":

> I think I indicated to you completely the unreliability of our cultural securities, of our cultural foundations. If Germany, which developed such a high culture, such marvelous music, so many beautiful cathedrals, so many scientists—if the German people were capable of doing what they did, how can I rely on humanity?[266]

Prophetic consciousness also implies an ongoing interaction with the Divine. Heschel's moral outrage was not static; it was not a political concern with a particular issue which he found offensive in some way. Heschel's sense of personal responsibility caused him to speak out on multiple issues in the 1960's from race to spending on space exploration in lieu of spending on societal ills. He emerged from academia as a public figure, and for him this was not without its price. Having often seen the now famous picture of Martin Luther King and Heschel marching arm in arm in Selma, it is difficult to remember that he went to such demonstrations on his own without support from any Jewish organization or the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was pressured by the Israeli government not to speak out against the Vietnam war for fear of endangering arms shipments to Israel.[267] Heschel recognized that often the life of the prophet is a lonely one and he endured vilification as well as admiration.

Ultimately, Heschel came to social activism as an act of spirituality, as the living embodiment of his theology. As noted above, prayer for Heschel was an act of

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[266] "Carl Stern's Interview with Dr. Heschel" reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Susannah Heschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), page 401.
[267] Heschel, Susannah, "Bringing Heaven Down to Earth", Tikkun, Vol. 11, March/April, 1996, page 39.

commitment and he said after the march in Selma that "my legs were praying."[268] Social activism was not a choice for Heschel, he felt compelled to action by his commitment to the will of God as expressed by the prophets. It was a commitment of mind and body, heart and soul. As Susannah Heschel wrote about her father:

> His activities in the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement, for example, were undertaken not because he concluded, intellectually, that they were the correct positions to assume, but because his heart would not allow him not to be involved.[269]

Ecumenism

The central aspects of Heschel's religious philosophy are what make interfaith dialogue not only desirable but indispensable. In arguing for the necessity of dialogue, Heschel was able to move the discussion beyond considerations of doctrine to the common subject matter of all religions: faith.

As early as Man is Not Alone in 1951, Heschel draws a sharp distinction between faith and creed. Faith results from an experience of God while creed is an attempt to verBaalize the experience and make it accessible to others.[270] Inevitably creed becomes dogma, further stultifying the religious experience. Heschel writes:

> Man has often made a god out of a dogma, a graven image which he worshipped, to which he prayed. He would rather believe in dogmas than in God, serving them not for the sake of heaven but for the sake of a creed, the diminutive of faith. Dogmas are the poor mind's share in the divine.[271]

[268] Waskow, Arthur, "My Legs Were Praying", Conservative Judaism, Vol. 50, Winter/Spring 1998, page 144.
[269] Heschel, Susannah, "Social Justice--The Theme of Heschel", page 47.
[270] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 167.
[271] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 169.

Although Heschel does not address the subject of interfaith relations in Man is Not Alone, the very nature of the work testifies to the fact that Heschel was thinking at that time about the issue of religion in general rather than one religion in particular. Only a small portion of the book concerns Judaism. It can easily be read as an interfaith work. For the most part, the subject is faith. Man is Not Alone is, as the sub-title indicates, a philosophy of religion. In that work, he is addressing all people of faith, Jew and gentile alike. Creed is secondary to faith. "A minimum of creed and a maximum of faith is the ideal synthesis."[272]

In God in Search of Man, published five years later, Heschel produces a philosophy of Judaism yet his general concern is still about religion. At the very beginning of that work, Heschel writes:

> Religion declined no because it was refuted but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message become meaningless. *Religion is an answer to man's ultimate questions.*[273]

There is no reference here to Judaism or Jews. The issue is the decline of religion generally because of its own internal defects. As the book proceeds, Heschel proposes solutions for religion's ills in a Jewish context, but his call is for the development of reverence towards God rather than belief in any particular creed. The rationale behind halachic practice is that it affords one an opportunity to experience of the presence of God. Halacha is not an end in itself. The diminishing of creed will emerge as critical to

[272] Heschel, Man is Not Alone , page 170.
[273] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 3.

Heschel's rationale for interfaith dialogue as well as his strategy for overcoming the issues which cause dialogue to break down.

At the heart of Heschel's philosophy was faith in One God, the God of Israel. That faith is common to Judaism and Christianity.[274] This was the basis for his work with Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI during the Second Vatican Council. His efforts resulted in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions in which the survival of Judaism is recognized as an indication of God's will and affirmation of the marvel of the Bible.[275] Having affirmed the holiness of the Jewish religion, Heschel then took the next logical step and pressed for the Catholic Church to end its call for conversion of the Jews. The result was the Schema on the Jews issued by the Council in 1965.[276] Writes Heschel:

> The Schema on the Jews is the first statement of the Church in history—the first discourse dealing with Judaism—which is devoid of any expression of hope for conversion...Let me also remind you that Pope Paul VI has revised the prayer in the Good Friday Liturgy, which included the famous prayer for the conversion of the Jews. It is now, according to the change, a prayer for the Jews.[277]

By focusing on faith and emphasizing that the objective of religion is to cultivate faith in God, Heschel laid the groundwork for a claim to legitimacy for all religions while downplaying the need for any one religion to win its claim on absolute truth. The relationship of Judaism to Christianity is as the "mother" of Christianity but recognition

[274] Of course, that faith is also held by Islam but Heschel's focus was on Jewish-Christian relations.
[275] Fisher, Eugene J., "Heschel's Impact on Catholic-Jewish Relations", No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Inter-religious Dialogue, ed. Harold Kasimow and Byron L. Sherwin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), page 111.
[276] For text of the Schema, see http://www.christusrex.org/www1/CDHN/v9.html.
[277] Heschel, "From Mission to Dialogue?", Conservative Judaism, Vol. 31, Spring 1967, page 10-11.

of Judaism's ongoing role as a messenger of God's word through the Bible undermines Catholic claims to supersession.

In its essence, Heschel's appeal for religious unity was based on fighting a common enemy, what he termed "nihilism".[278] Heschel sees two alternatives—"we must choose between interfaith and internihilism."[279] Heschel sets forth his position on the need for interfaith dialogue most completely in his inaugural lecture as a visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary, subsequently reprinted as "No Religion is an Island". He calls for religious leaders to move beyond that which divides them and concentrate on the larger issue uniting them, that is, the attack on faith in the modern world. Creed is irrelevant compared with the issue of bringing recognition of God's presence into the world:

> The supreme issue is today not the halacha for the Jew or the Church for the Christian—but the premise underlying both religions, namely, whether there is a pathos, a divine reality concerned with the destiny of man which mysteriously impinges upon history; the supreme issue is whether we are alive or dead to the challenge and the expectation of the living God. The crisis engulfs all of us. The misery and fear of alienation from God make Jew and Christian cry together.[280]

On what basis then might Jew and Christian encounter each other in order to share their mutual concern? More than anything else, Jews and Christians are fellow human beings, created in the image of God. This allowed committed people of various faiths to disagree while remaining equal as human beings. The important aspect of being human lies not in one's creed but in one's faith and responsiveness to God. Heschel suggests

[278] Heschel, "No Religion is an Island" reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, Susannah Heschel, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), page 237.
[279] Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", page 237.
[280] Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", page 236.

that "the most significant basis for meeting of men of different religious traditions is the level of fear and trembling, of humility and contrition..."[281] He further writes:

> What unites us? What divides us? We disagree in law and creed...What unites us? Our being accountable to God, our being objects of God's concern, precious in His eyes.[282]

Heschel then uses the metaphor of Judaism as mother to Christianity and Islam to emphasize that the "children" should honor their mother and father but also that the parent religion should acknowledge that it has a stake in the success of its progeny.[283] No religion can claim knowledge of the true route to God. Heschel's observations of the world convince him that all we can know is that, at least for this time in history, God wishes a multitude of routes to be available to humanity.[284]

While acknowledging that insular reasoning has prevented dialogue in the past, the shared concern of all religions with the need for revitalizing the inner life of all human beings renders such insularity obsolete. As signs of progress, Heschel cites the then recent statements from the Catholic Church as well as the writings of the prominent Protestant theologians Gustave Weigel and Reinhold Niebuhr as well as Paul Tillich calling for an end to conversionist efforts aimed at Jews. In response, he also cites Yehudah Halevi and Maimonides as stating that Christianity as part of God's plan for redemption of all human beings. He also cites the tradition of all people who obey the Noahide covenant having a place in the world to come.

Heschel's great contribution to interfaith dialogue was to find a basis for dialogue which removed the traditional obstacles of creed and claims to truth, while preserving

[281] Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", page 239.
[282] Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", page 240.
[283] Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", page 242-243.
[284] Heschel, "No Religion is an Island", page 246.

respect for those very things as potential routes to God. Heschel writes that *"the first and most important prerequisite of interfaith is faith."* As in every other aspect of Heschel's life, faith is first and foremost. Theology divides but pre-theology, the faith that underlies theology, unites.

Chapter 4

The Meaning of the State of Israel

Prior to 1967, Heschel wrote very little about the State of Israel. Like many Americans, Israel seemed to be a remote place, of general interest but not linked to the daily reality of Jewish life. Heschel's focus was on reformation of American Judaism and Western religion in general. In neither Man is Not Alone nor God in Search of Man is the State of Israel addressed. Heschel's concern was with the people Israel and not the State. This all changed, however, during the anxious weeks preceding the Six Day War and with Israel's triumph in the War itself. In July, 1967, Heschel traveled to Jerusalem in order to experience Israel himself. As a result of that trip, he published Israel: An Echo of Eternity later in 1967. Heschel's reflections on Israel are notable because, like his writings on social action, they were an opportunity for Heschel to bring together various strands of his religious philosophy into a practical setting.

Heschel's examination of the State of Israel in the aftermath of the Six Day War is an excellent example of his concept of situational thinking. In Israel: An Echo of Eternity, Heschel brings together a consideration of the past, an evaluation of the present, and a call to respond to both in order to shape the future:

> The integrity of our lives is determined by seeing ourselves as part of the historic context in which we live. Failure to be open to the demands of our historical situation liquidates one's own position of meaning. In order to be responsible, we must learn how to be responsive.[285]

[285] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), page 223.

The miracle that is the modern State of Israel, particularly following the Six Day War, compels a response on the part of the Jewish world for three reasons. The first reason is the possibility that modern Israel is the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis of land to Abraham and his descendants; the second reason is the long history of Jews settling in Palestine, particularly in response to events in the Diaspora; and the third reason is the meaning of the events of the Six Day War themselves. In his discussion of the promise, the history of Palestine, and the events of the Six Day War, Heschel is never explicit about God's role in bringing about the phenomena that he describes, he only comes very close to saying that Israel's success is proof of God's concern for the people Israel. He is not about to attempt to fathom God's motivations nor attempt to discern God's plan. For Heschel, this would be blasphemous, yet the reality of the existence of the State of Israel, like all other observable phenomena, speaks for itself.

The Promise. Why Israel? The reason is that Israel is the land promised by God to Abraham. The Jewish people's claim to Israel begins with the Bible, "to abandon the land would be to repudiate the Bible."[286] It is through the Jewish people that the Bible lives on and the Bible lives on because the Covenant between God and the Jewish people is alive; and the reward for the people's fidelity to that Covenant is the promise of the land to Abraham.[287]

The claim of the Jewish people to the promise of the land of Israel is based on their continual trust in God's promise to Abraham. Even when objectively there was no basis for hope, the Jew trusted in the fidelity of God to His promise.[288] That faith was

[286] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 44.
[287] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 46.
[288] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 94.

expressed in their willingness to wait with faith that the day of redemption would, in fact, come.

It was that faith in the promise that maintained the return to Zion as a central part of Jewish theology and practice throughout the centuries. It was not only the small remnant that refused to abandon life in the Holy Land that kept the Jewish claim on Zion alive; the Jews in the Diaspora also did their part in bringing about the renewal of Israel. The role of the Jew in the Diaspora was to keep the hope of the return to the Holy Land alive. Although continually oppressed and often despite no evident reason for hope, Jews worldwide maintained a vision of a return to the Promised Land. The theme of a restoration of Zion is an integral part of the daily liturgy as well as Shabbat and festival observances. The annual observance of Tisha B'Av and the accompanying reading of the Book of Lamentations kept the hope of restoration immediately before the Jewish people.[289] Thus, when the historic moment came for a renewal of a Jewish nation, the historical consciousness of the Jewish people compelled a return to Zion and nowhere else.

History. The second basis for the Jewish claim to the land is historical. For Heschel, history is not chronology. "Genuine history occurs when the events of the present disclose the meaning of the past and offer an anticipation of the promise of the future."[290] Thus Heschel presents an extensive history of Palestine and its relationship to the Diaspora to demonstrate the validity of the Jewish claim to Israel in two ways.

The first argument is based on the historic presence of Jews in Palestine throughout the centuries, including the Jewish pioneers of the previous century. Starting

[289] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, pages 60-63.
[290] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 129.

with the Biblical time period, Jews have been present in one way or another throughout the history of the region and regardless of the many rulers of the area. At various times, Jews have been welcome on the land in varying degrees but, whether welcome or not, some number of Jews have remained.

Heschel then makes a very interesting point. Throughout this time period, many rulers have come and gone without being able to establish a permanent hold on the land. While the Jews were not able to bring about a renewal of the Commonwealth, no other power has been able to effectively govern the area either.[291] No other people have been able to develop any real attachment to this land nor has it been the cultural center of any other civilization.[292] It is not clear whether Heschel is making a utilitarian argument here in that Jews have made the best use of the land or, as is more likely, he is stopping just short of saying that God was saving the land for occupation by the Jewish people.

Heschel is more explicit about seeing the hand of God in history when he discusses the events of the late 19th and 20th centuries. The pogroms of Eastern Europe in the late 19th century along with a rising tide of anti-Semitism in Central and Western Europe gave rise to the Zionist movement. In response, political Zionism took root in Western Europe and cultural Zionism emerged from the East. Pioneers of the First and Second Aliyot came to build the land and they made the desert bloom. Again, Heschel is not explicit but he falls just short of stating that the success of the pioneers in Palestine is an indication of God's approval of their work:

> Israel reborn is an answer to the Lord of history who demands hope as well as action, who expects tenacity as well as imagination.[293]

[291] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 56.
[292] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 56.
[293] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 118.

Heschel puts great stock in the success of the Jews in Palestine as indicating the validity of their claim to it. For Heschel, each indication that the State resembles or approximates the vision of the prophets re-enforces the Jewish claim to the land.

The other argument that Heschel puts forward is based on the tragic history of the Jewish people. The Jewish people have been more than faithful in their belief in God's promise of redemption, they have been faithful to that promise in the face of overwhelming and repeated horror. He calls this concept the "distress" of the Jewish people but that is too mild a word.[294] Heschel recounts the long history of Jewish oppression beginning with the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70. He then traces the history of the Jewish people in the Diaspora throughout the Middle Ages, through the various expulsions and the Inquisition. He also addresses the Jewish suffering during the Crusades both in Palestine and in the Diaspora.[295]

Heschel's greater attention, however, is addressed to the previous century. He notes the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany, the pogroms in Russia and Poland, and the Dreyfus Affair in France.[296]

The Holocaust, however, was Heschel's main focus. In most of Heschel's other writings, the Holocaust is mentioned in a rather oblique way; as a backdrop to modern Jewish life. Often references to the Holocaust were in the context of discussions of the ethical and moral limits of Western culture.[297] He also cites the Holocaust for the

[294] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 104.
[295] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, pages 68-71.
[296] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 106.
[297] See, for example, Heschel's interview with Carl Stern reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, page 401.

necessity to speak out in a timely fashion against evil.[298] In his writings on Israel, however, Heschel is more dramatic and emphatic about the Holocaust's meaning for the claim to a Jewish Homeland.

First, the lack of responsiveness to the plight of the Jews before and during World War II on the part of the nations of the world clearly establishes a need for a place of refuge for Jews. "The gates of all continents were closed, and the gates of the extermination camps opened."[299]

Second, when faced with unprecedented murder and horror, the Jewish people did not abandon God and did not abandon their faith in God's promise of redemption. The Jews who survived the Holocaust did not relinquish their Judaism; they renewed it:

> We did not blaspheme, we built. Our people did not sally forth in flight from God. On the contrary, at that moment in history we saw the beginning of a new awakening, the emergence of a new concern for a Living God theology. Escape from Judaism giving place increasingly to a new attachment, to a rediscovery of our legacy.[300]

Again, Heschel stops short of making the claim that the State of Israel is the Jewish people's reward for its suffering. Instead, Heschel artfully brings in the image of one being able to see in Israel an allusion to God's glory. He addresses the question directly:

> Is the State of Israel God's humble answer to Auschwitz? A sign of God's repentance for men's crime of Auschwitz? No act is as holy as the act of saving human life. The Holy Land, having offered a haven to more than two million

[298] See "The Meaning of this War", reprinted in Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, pages 209-212.
[299] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 107.
[300] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 112.

> Jews...has attained a new sanctity....And yet, there is no answer to Auschwitz...To try to answer is to commit a supreme blasphemy. Israel enables us to bear the agony of Auschwitz without radical despair, to sense a ray of God's radiance in the jungles of history.[301]

Elsewhere, Heschel writes:

> Dark and dreadful would be our life today without the comfort and joy that radiate out of the land of Israel. Crippled is our people, many of its limbs chopped off, some of its vital organs torn out—how strange to be alive, how great is our power to forget.
> Like a flashlight in the darkness of history came the State of Israel. It is a haven of refuge for those in despair who cried for a sign that God is not forever estranged from the world of history.[302]

Israel stands as an allusion to God's presence in the world in the face of the experience of the Holocaust. Humans brought about the Holocaust, while Israel is a partnership between humans and God. The Holocaust is the ultimate example of faith in humanity; Israel is the ultimate example of faith in the promise of God. Israel is the place that God has ordained and humans have sanctified by their deeds for renewal of the Jewish people:

> When I go to Israel every stone and every tree is a reminder of hard labor and glory, of prophets and psalmists, of loyalty and holiness. The Jews go to Israel not only for physical security for themselves and their children; they go to Israel for renewal, for the experience of resurrection.[303]

The Six Day War. The last part of Heschel's explanation of the Jewish people's claim on Israel involves his interpretation of the events of the Six Day War and the weeks leading up to it. Here Heschel again turns to the distress of the Jewish people as a basis for their claim. This time, however, the distress takes the form of anxiety rather than

[301] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, pages 113 and 115.
[302] Heschel, "The Individual Jew and His Obligations" in The Insecurity of Freedom, page 188.
[303] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 113.

annihilation. During the month of May, 1967, as the Arab forces from nations throughout the Arab world massed on the Israeli borders, Jews around the world wondered if another Holocaust was in the making:

> Terror and dread fell upon Jews everywhere. Will God permit our people to perish? Will there be another Auschwitz, another Dachau, another Treblinka?[304]

But the answer this time was triumph and exaltation. Not only survival of the State but the restoration of Jerusalem to Jewish control. In the outcome of the Six Day War there is a new miracle--an opportunity to experience prayer once again at the Wall; to encounter the Bible with every step. Heschel feels the presence of Jews throughout history in Jerusalem:

> I did not enter on my own the city of Jerusalem. Streams of endless craving, clinging, dreaming, flowing day and night, midnights, years, decades, centuries, millennia, streams of tears, pledging, waiting—from all over the world, from all corners of the earth—carried us of this generation to the Wall. My ancestors could only dream of you—to my people in Auschwitz you were more remote than the moon, and I can touch your stones! Am I worthy? How shall I ever repay for these moments?[305]

Heschel calls on Jews worldwide to retain the memory of those moments of supreme distress and wonder; to remember how the Jewish world was united in its fear and its marvel at Israel's overwhelming victory. To never again relegate Israel to being "a footnote to one's existence enjoyed as a fringe benefit, a nice addendum, a side dish, a source of self-congratulation and pride."[306] We must remember that once again the

[304] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, pages 196-197.
[305] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, pages 5-6.
[306] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 202.

Jewish people faced severe distress but this time the answer was not tragedy but triumph. Once again, the Jewish claim to Israel was renewed through sacrifice and faith.

The Challenge. Heschel begins Israel: An Echo of Eternity with his impressions of a walk through Jerusalem. Heschel views Jerusalem as God's paradigmatic city, the place where God intended for the Messianic Age to begin:

> God had a vision of restoring the image of man. So He created a city in heaven and called it Jerusalem, hoping and praying that Jerusalem on earth may resemble Jerusalem in heaven. Jerusalem is a recalling, an insisting and a waiting for the answer to God's hope.[307]

Caught up in the exaltation surrounding the liberation of East Jerusalem during the Six Day War, Heschel sees Jerusalem and, by extension, all of Israel as the place where the vision of the prophets is to be fulfilled. This is the primary focus of Heschel's call for response, that for Israel to have meaning for the Jewish people it must be a land in which the promise of God's redemption is fulfilled. The underlying meaning of having the land is to be able to fulfill the Biblical vision of the world as it should be:

> The Bible is an unfinished drama. Our being in the land is a chapter of an encompassing, meaning-bestowing drama. It involves sharing the consciousness of the ancient biblical dwellers in the land, a sense of carrying out the biblical legacy...The State of Israel is not the fulfillment of the Messianic promise, but it makes the Messianic promise plausible.[308]

Consecration of the land is to be through deeds. God sanctifies through time, by providing for holy times while human beings sanctify through deeds creating holy spaces. "The holiness of the land of Israel is derived from the holiness of the people of Israel."[309]

[307] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, pages 32-33.
[308] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, pages 222-223.
[309] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 11.

The Land of Israel as a holy space is constructed by the performance of holy deeds; by the conduct of the people in accordance with the biblical/prophetic vision.

In this regard, Heschel harmonizes two conflicting views of the Messianic Age in Judaism. He cites the scholar Samuel and Maimonides for the more limited naturalistic or political view of the Messianic Age. In that vision, the Commonwealth will be re-established and Israel will be allowed to live in peace.[310] The alternative vision is that of the prophets, which views the Messianic period as one of a real Messiah leading the Jews back into Israel and initiating a time of complete peace and harmony among nations.[311] Heschel maintains that the two visions are complementary, again emphasizing the polarity of Judaism:

> The spiritual without the political is blind, the political without the spiritual is deaf. The attainment of the first is an epilogue, the attainment of the second is a prologue.[312]

The message is that the establishment of the political State of Israel is a prologue to the bringing about of the total fulfillment of the Messianic Age. Redemption is to come about by degrees, one good deed at a time, eventually bringing about the establishment of God's sovereignty on earth.[313]

Thus the challenge is for the State of Israel to conduct itself by prophetic standards of behavior. The challenge is to invest the existence of the State of Israel with meaning. The meaning of Israel must be beyond mere survival since its very existence is

[310] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 158.
[311] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 158.
[312] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 159.
[313] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 160. It is in this way that Heschel brings Moslems and Christians into the building of Israel. He reiterates his ecumenical view of Jesus' life as a step toward bringing about the Messianic Age but that the timing of redemption lies with the Father. (page 164) Similarly, Heschel quotes the Koran concerning the promise of the land to Abraham (pages 168-169) He calls upon the Arab world to recognize Israel's existence and to join in efforts to move the entire region ahead economically and culturally. (pages 188-189)

"a solemn intimation of God's trace in history."[314] Israel has spiritual significance but "the primary religious problem is Israel is how to articulate in deeds, in living the commitment that there is an echo of God in history, trust in the prophet's words."[315]

Heschel does not supply a detailed plan for living out this commitment to the prophetic vision, but he repeatedly emphasizes the need for peace in the region. While placing the blame for the state of war on the Arab nations, he recognizes the high moral cost of war to the Israelis. He quotes passages from Yitzhak Rabin and from *Siach Lohamin* ("Soldiers' Talk") published shortly after the war concerning the lingering sorrow and depression over the destruction which the War brought on all peoples of the region. Heschel recognizes the moral price that Israel pays for being the conqueror and supreme power of the region.[316]

So if Israel is to become the site on which the prophetic vision is to be gradually achieved, then what is the role of the Jew in the Diaspora in building an Israel in which the Messianic Age can begin? The existence of the State of Israel poses a challenge to all Jews that "calls for more than generosity; it calls for wisdom and sacrifice."[317] Every Jew has an obligation to be a part of the drama of the resurrection of Israel and for the American Jew, in particular, Heschel writes that there are three ways to help the State:

> First, to lend financial and political help to the utmost of our ability. Second, to dwell in the land of Israel. The State of Israel is not only an inspiration but also an embarrassment. One feels abashed at the thought of being a distant spectator while the most dramatic act of building and defending the land is being enacted by others...There is a third way of aiding the State of Israel, which is, in a sense, an answer to the embarrassment I just mentioned: To

[314] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 220.
[315] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 220.
[316] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 215.
[317] Heschel, Israel: An Echo of Eternity, page 205.

> bring about an inner spiritual and cultural aliyah on the soil of America.[318]

Our obligation in the Diaspora is to aid the spiritual redemption in Israel by having a spiritual redemption of our own. The remainder of "Israel and Diaspora" is dedicated to ways to bring about the spiritual renewal which are the subject of the remainder of Heschel's works. After the Holocaust, the sublime in the existence of Israel is the same as the sublime in the existence of Judaism as such. The problem of the modern Jew is a failure to grasp the sublime in the mystery of Jewish existence and to respond to "the majesty which hovers over our existence."[319] Our contribution to building of the Messianic Age in Israel is the building of the Messianic Age in America.

How Heschel would respond to the Israel of 2002 is unknown. He would undoubtedly be disappointed at how accurately his description of the political situation in 1967 describes the political situation today. He would also be disappointed that the spiritual renewal in Israel seems to be nowhere in sight, with a religious/political structure designed to emphasize keva over kavanah. Yet he would also be encouraged that the great philosophical debate as to what is the meaning of a Jewish state continues in a serious way; that Israelis do indeed feel a sense of destiny beyond mere survival. Heschel taught that the Messianic Age comes about in small degrees, in communities conscious of and responsive to the presence of God. It is with the description of such communities that we conclude this study.

[318] Heschel, "Israel and Diaspora" in The Insecurity of Freedom, page 213.
[319] Heschel, "The Individual Jew and His Obligations" in The Insecurity of Freedom, page 189.

Chapter 5

A Vision of a Heschelian Jewish Community

The key element in any community constituted on Heschelian principles would be responsiveness to God will as expressed in the Bible. Such responsiveness is built on faith which presupposes an awareness of the presence of God in the world.[320] A Heschelian community would, therefore, need to be self-conscious in its practice of Judaism so as to cultivate an awareness of the allusions to God's Presence in the world. Having cultivated an awareness of God's Presence, then the community would need to develop ways in which to respond to the implications and demands of that Presence through the various activities of a given Jewish community; those being prayer and ritual, education, social action, interfaith relations, Israel and general governance of the congregation. What follows is a discussion of the attitudes and activities of just such a community.

A Heschelian community would require a conscious effort on the part of its members to find a "vital center" between the polarities of Jewish tradition.[321] These tensions within Judaism were demonstrated to Heschel at an early age as he struggled between the religious joy of the Baal Shem Tov and the anxiety of the Kotzker.[322] Heschel's writings reflect his sense of polarity within Judaism and his lifelong effort to reach a balance between opposite religious poles.

[320] Heschel, The Insecurity of Feedom, page 60.
[321] Cf. Drensner, "Heschel and Halachha: The Vital Center".
[322] Merkle, page 5.

Heschel writes of a need to balance halacha and aggada; to observe the letter of the law but to also live a life which is reflective of the spirit of the law.[323] He writes of the need to balance keva and kavanah; the regularity of prayer and ritual with an awareness of the underlying meaning behind prayers and rituals. He sees a role for both regularity and creativity.[324] He advocates a Judaism that balances inner devotion with deeds. In order to have meaning, the underlying values apprehended through prayer and study must lead one to a "leap of action."[325] Moreover, the balance between these and other polar elements within Judaism is not static.[326] The balance between these elements will be different in different communities.

Above all, a community reflecting Heschel's philosophy would be self-conscious about these issues and open to change as the community finds additional meaning in both old and new activities. Heschel believed that so long as deeds are performed with the intention to use that opportunity to gain insights about God, then the number of those opportunities is less important than the quality of the actions. Heschel spoke of a "ladder of observance" with each Jew being met on whatever rung he/she might be at a given time in their life. Certainly, Heschel's desire was for every Jew to climb that ladder but only if increased observance led to increased insight and understanding.[327]

It is also important to realize that much of what would take place in a Heschelian community will be considered efficacious or not on an individual basis. Depending on one's point of view, this is one of the great assets or the great liabilities of Heschel's

[323] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 336.
[324] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 343.
[325] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 282.
[326] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 241.
[327] Drensner, "Heschel and Halachha: The Vital Center", page 23.

philosophy of Judaism. Kavanah resides within the heart of the individual worshiper.[328] The question is one of creating a culture that provides opportunities for kavanah to develop without excluding keva since keva itself provides opportunities for kavanah. The Heschelian community is one in which the group dynamic is the development of individual insight. It is a community in which sacred deeds are performed with attention to their meaning; where religious behaviorism has no place. For, as Heschel writes, religious behaviorism "reduces Judaism to a sort of sacred physics, with no sense for the imponderable, the introspective, the metaphysical."[329]

Prayer and Ritual

The prayer ritual of a Heschelian community would need to balance keva with kavanah. As a primary opportunity to ascertain God's will, prayer would need to take place regularly but not necessarily on a halachic schedule. A daily evening or morning minyan, for example, might provide an opportunity for daily moments of contemplation of the themes raised by the daily liturgy. Shabbat and festival observances would emphasize the ways in which those days are special, leading to an increased awareness of their sanctity.

More important than how often the community gathers to pray, however, would be the need to foster an appropriate atmosphere for prayer. This involves more than decorum, it also involves creativity. Integral to such an atmosphere is creating a culture in which each worshiper is responsible for his/her own prayer. The role of the prayer

[328] Heschel, God in Search of Man, pages 314-315 and see also Heschel, Man's Quest for God, pages 54-55.
[329] Heschel, God in Search of Man, 320. As to the dangers of religious behaviorism, see Man's Quest for God, page 54.

leader would not be to pray on behalf of the congregation but instead to lead the congregants in their own prayers.[330] It is also critical that the prayer leader also prays. Whether prayer is being led by a rabbi, cantor or lay leader, the service leader should be less concerned with choreography and more concerned with the content and intentionality of his/her own prayer.

Certainly liberal Jews have come to expect decorous services but decorum should never preclude participation. A given individual may wish to linger a little longer over a given prayer or pay less attention to another. So long as that individual is not disruptive to the kavanah of another, lockstep prayer is not necessary. The message should be conveyed to the individual worshipers that each one is entitled to control the emphasis of his/her own prayer.

For Heschel, prayer is a personal commitment to God; a commitment that can not be fully undertaken or understood without an intimacy with the meaning of the words of a prayer. He writes:

> This is our affliction—we do not know how to look across a word to its meaning. We forget how to find the way to the word, how to be on intimate terms with a few passages in the prayer book. Familiar with all words, we are intimate with none.[331]

At the same time, a culture should be created in which individual members understand the value of praying together as a community and of attempting to respond to the content of all prayers. "A Jew does not believe alone. He is never alone. He believes with *Klal Yisrael*, with the community of Israel."[332] There is no one way to pray with kavanah but the Heschelian community will be one where each member will be

[330] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 86.
[331] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 78.
[332] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 98.

encouraged to explore how to reach their own awareness of the meaning behind the prayers.

One way of accomplishing this is to include background on the individual prayers and alternative readings which emphasize the theme of a given prayer. Explanations of prayer content from the service leader may be useful.[333] Additional readings would not replace the prayer itself, it is important that the liturgy remains the liturgy, but advantage should be taken of the opportunity to emphasize one aspect or another of a given prayer. This puts the onus on the prayer leader to be attentive to the quality of his/her own prayer experience and fully knowledgeable of the content of the service which hopefully, will pervade the congregation's worship. Sometimes it will work and sometimes it won't, but at least the attempt will have been made to bring a greater depth of meaning to the service.

Much the same analysis applies to the performance of ritual. One of the hallmarks of ceremony in contrast with ritual is that ceremony is open to criticism on the basis of aesthetics rather than content.[334] A ritual must be performed in a certain way or else the full content of its message may be lost. Conversely, if a ceremony is improperly performed, then it just doesn't look right. Passing the Torah from generation to generation at a b'nai mitzvah service can be either a ritual or a ceremony, it depends on the mindset of the participants and of the *shaliach tzebor*. If the participant's concern is which set of grandparents holds the Torah first, then the event will be experienced as ceremony. When the Torah is passed in the spirit of providing the child with a sense of the moment at Sinai, then it is a ritual. Again, this is in part an issue of the community

[333] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 80.
[334] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", page 17.

establishing expectations for its prayer and ritual. The mindset of the individuals performing the ritual reflects the cultural mindset of the congregation.

The question must then be faced, what about rituals which no longer hold meaning for the individual? The responsibility of the community is to provide the opportunity for the individual to find meaning in a given ritual through education and practice. Heschel does not appear to allow for the elimination of ritual because he believes that each ritual conveys a message of meaning concerning God. Yet those meanings are not static. The role of Jewish tradition is to expose the worshiper to the meaning of past events so that that meaning can be applied to the situation faced by the contemporary worshiper. Heschel, therefore, encourages reform in the sense that innovation is required in order to keep alive meanings that would otherwise be consigned to history. He also allows for future generations to find new meanings in old practices.[335] "Every generation is expected to bring forth new understanding and new realization."[336] Therefore, Heschel does not seem to believe that any prayer or observance is hopelessly devoid of meaning in any given generation. Rather, his answer would be to work to modify one's understanding of the ritual and thereby seek new meanings which are relevant and contemporary.

What is envisioned is a vibrant community where theology plays the primary role in decision-making. For example, a congregation might decide the question of whether to hold a 6:30 or 8:00 service on Friday night based on how many people are likely to attend. That is a consideration but more important in the Heschelian community would be how does the time of a service contribute to the sanctity of Shabbat. As Heschel

[335] Merkle, pages 111-112.
[336] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 274.

states, "Spiritual problems cannot be solved by administrative techniques. The problem is not how to fill the buildings but how to inspire the hearts."[337] The ultimate answers may be the same but the questions being asked are significantly different. Does the community view Shabbat as a synagogue activity or a response to God's gift of holiness in time? Is kashrut to be observed at synagogue functions for the value of the sanctity it brings to the consumption of food or just to make the traditionalists happy? Observance of kashrut, therefore, can become a sacred act or just a pain in the neck; it all has to do with the kavanah underlying the observance. By conducting the community in a deliberate and thoughtful fashion, the community will be modeling the deliberate and thoughtful practice of Judaism for its members.

The community should also be a place for encountering the sublime in everyday life. By definition, one's sense of the sublime is beyond description, it is ineffable.[338] Nevertheless, a culture might be cultivated within a Heschelian community that provides opportunities for members of the community to sense the ineffable in daily life. This can be done by emphasizing how certain prayers, such as the morning blessings, provide the opportunity to reflect on deeper meanings behind the events of daily life. If there is anything habitual about the community, it will be the habit of being open to the allusions to the Presence of God in everyday life.

As Heschel points out, insight is grounded in religious discipline, one becomes insightful by doing those things that result in insight. The plight of postmodern societies is that postmodern intellectual life has ceased to cultivate the means to detect meaning in our lives; instead there is a widespread belief that there are no unifying truths to be

[337] Heschel, Man's Quest for God, page 52.
[338] Heschel, Man is Not Alone, page 4-5.

discovered.[339] Heschel comes to say that Torah provides us with the truths that we need in order to live meaningful lives, even though the full meaning of Revelation is yet to be disclosed.[340] Among these discoverable truths are that there are allusions to God's Presence in the world; that human beings are an object of God's concern and that our actions must indicate our sympathy with that concern; that the sacredness of humanity comes from every human being having been created in the image of God; and that there is meaning beyond the mystery of our existence. By taking prayer and ritual seriously, the Heschelian community would search for the truth content behind its ritual observance and, by responding to those truths, bring meaning to life.

Education

As Heschel states, a Heschelian community would educate for reverence. Too often we teach our children how to recite the prayers, but we do not convey the seriousness of what they are saying. We teach ritual but not the meaning of the message behind the ritual. We not only do this in childhood education but we do it in adult education as well. Jewish education is often focused more on how to be Jewish than on the meaning behind being Jewish. Even those adults who feel comfortable with prayer often have not been given the opportunity to develop their skills to probe into the meaning behind their practice.

The emphasis in childhood education in a Heschelian community would be on values education; that there is a Jewish way of living.[341] Postmodern children and adults need to hear the message that there are values by which life is to be led and that these are

[339] Banks, "Rabbi Heschel Through Christian Eyes", page 102.
[340] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 262.
[341] Heschel, "The Values of Jewish Education", page 87.

embodied in the Bible. Torah study should be a balance between halacha and aggada. It is important that people learn the individual commandments but it is just as important that students be given the opportunity to ascertain the lessons for human relations taught through the experiences of the Biblical characters.

Both children and adults need to be exposed to a wider range of Biblical commentaries and then to literature which amplifies the values exemplified in the Bible. Particularly children should be made aware that Jewish tradition contains a response to real issues in their lives; that Judaism brings resources to the search for ways of living a moral, ethical and meaningful life. The context of education should be practical. Heschel emphasizes situational thinking, that Judaism is lived in a real life context. Young children should know that Judaism has a tradition as to how animals are treated. Adolescents need to know that Jewish values mitigate against drug use and tattoos. Adults should understand that Torah addresses issues of honesty in business dealings. This education, moreover, should not be in a literary vacuum. Students, adults and children, need to confront specific texts and special efforts should be made to increase Jewish literacy at all levels.

The goal is to educate in such a way as to provide the individual with the tools necessary to find meaning in what one does as a Jew. Part of a religious school education is learning how to recite various prayers, but students should also develop the skill of understanding what is being said in all of its richness. If not by the age of bar or bat mitzvah, certainly Confirmation (or graduation from a Jewish high school program) should represent an informed commitment to Judaism, one which is renewed throughout adulthood.

This is not a call to fundamentalism. Increased levels of intellectual and emotional maturity call for increased levels of sophistication in the materials being presented. In this regard, people need to know that there are variations in interpretation in the Jewish world and always have been. It may be beyond what Heschel intended, but congregants also need to be confronted by the less "relevant" or attractive aspects of the Bible and learn how to reconcile them with their own theology. For example, an informed Jew needs to wrestle with the sacrificial cult, to understand its previous role in Judaism and how its practices affect our own beliefs about what it means to communicate with God. Adults in particular need to work through for themselves the fact that the Bible contains passages which describe behaviors which, by our standards, are reprehensible. What does one do with the mass killing of non-Jews at the conclusion the Book of Esther, for example? A healthy debate on such issues brings vitality to a community.

Teachers in the Heschelian community are role models themselves.[342] Not only must they be intellectually prepared but also spiritually prepared to bring their students into the Jewish world. As Heschel writes:

> To guide a student into the promised land, he must have been there himself. When asking himself: Do I stand for what I teach? Do I believe what I say? he must be able to answer in the affirmative.[343]

Teachers will need to be self-conscious about their own teaching, to be certain that their pupils see them as people who are able to relate Judaism to their everyday existence. Parents also need to see themselves as teachers and as visible practitioners of Jewish values. One cannot expect Judaism to provide the necessary bulwark against the

[342] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", page 19.
[343] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education", page 19.

general society's messages emphasizing materialism and ethical relativism if parents treat religious school as the least important event of the week.

Heschel's objective was to make study a holy act in itself; to have study provide its own opportunity to discover allusions to God's Presence throughout nature and Jewish history. This is done by teaching larger concepts and values and then showing how they are given concrete expression in Jewish prayer and ritual. When the concept of the importance of remembrance is taught, then the recitation of the Kiddush and the order of the seder become more meaningful. It is not enough to learn in order to do, the Jew must how to do with intention, so that each prayer or ritual contains the potential for gaining a deeper understanding of the divine will.

Social Action and Ecumenism

It is in the realm of social action that one might find the most concrete application of Jewish values. Heschel's concept of the divine pathos is manifested in human behavior through social action. In itself, social action can be a religious experience. The feeling engendered by helping another human being is beyond our powers of description. The Jew in a Heschelian community is not only constantly seeking awareness of God's will but also attempting to respond to it. The importance of what Heschel calls prophetic literature is that it contains moral expectations of human beings. The literal words of the prophets, however, are understatements, they are only indicative of God's will, not fully descriptive. These words "stand in a fluid relationship to ineffable meanings...[they] intimate something we can intuit but can not fully comprehend."[344] Such indicative words require a response on our part and in our situations in order to give them meaning;

[344] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 181.

the words themselves are only clues. It is through our response to these words that we are able to understand the meaning, and therefore the demand, made on us by them.[345] Our response is not only inward, it is in the form of a "leap of action."[346]

By responding to these expectations with concrete actions, we also provide ourselves with an opportunity for further insight into God's expectations. Heschel writes:

> The deed may bring out what is dormant in the mind, and acts in which an idea is lived, moments which are filled with dedication make us eloquent in a way which is not open to the naked mind. Kavanah comes into being with the deed. Actions teach.[347]

In other words, social action is not only important for the affect that it has on those who are being helped. It is equally important for those who are doing the helping. Engaging in social action is our way of participating in our own salvation by living up to the responsibility of being Jews by more fully realizing our potential as human beings.

Heschel received much attention for his positions on civil rights and against the Vietnam War. One does not sense such great issues at this time in history but a further examination of Heschel's work indicates a concern with social issues which were smaller in scale as well. His concern for justice extended to education and poverty as well as the right to vote, for example. We are compelled to respond to needs large and small, to raise our voices for equal education and equal access for the handicapped. There are issues of economic justice to address as well. Finally, there are simply *gimilut hassadim* (i.e. reciprocal acts of kindness) to perform such as comforting the sick, visiting the elderly, tutoring and a myriad other ways to express our concern for others just as God expresses the divine concern for us.

[345] Heschel, God in Search of Man, pages 182-183.
[346] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 283.
[347] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 345.

Another aspect of social interaction takes the form of interfaith dialogue and, increasingly, inter-cultural dialogue. One of the more promising aspects of post-modernism is the cultivation of a greater awareness of the viewpoints of others. Yet Heschel reminds us that there is an underlying unity amidst the diversity; that the ultimate truth is that all human beings are created in the Divine image. Heschel suggests that this truth should be the starting point for dialogue.[348] The Heschelian community recognizes that universal truths are a better basis for dialogue than any particular creed. In addressing the needs of the community at large and in an effort to build better understanding, the Heschelian Jewish community would reach out to all faiths that share a vision of the world in accordance with the message of the prophets. Once dialogue begins based on mutual respect, there will be no need to defend individual creeds, for there may be a multitude of paths but they are all leading to the same Place.

Israel

No Heschelian community would be complete without an emphasis on the theological and practical importance of the State of Israel. For the Jew, Israel is not just another country on the map that happens to be the home for several million Jews. It is a nation which embodies the aspirations of the Jewish people over many centuries. It is both a blessing and a challenge to the Jewish world.

By comparison, Heschel lived during a time when it was easier to have a more idealistic and optimistic view of the State of Israel. During Heschel's lifetime, Israel was the clear underdog in the Middle East and the religious, social and political ideologies

[348] Heschel, No Religion is an Island, page 7.

underpinning Israeli society were more in flux than they are today. Israel's overriding issue was survival; social and spiritual development would have to wait.

The situation is different now. Israel has not been under an equivalent threat to its existence since the end of the Yom Kippur War. The issue now facing Israel is the more complex one of an appropriate response to its position as the supreme power in the region and as the ruler over millions of Palestinians. Israel's internal politics are beset by religious squabbles and are as cynical as those of any other nation.

How is a Heschelian community to respond to the reality that is Israel? The response would be both practical and spiritual. In practical terms, Israel's existence still stands as an allusion to the presence of God in history. Despite whatever disappointment one may feel about Israeli policies, it is the responsibility of all Jews to guarantee its existence through financial and political support.

In spiritual terms, a Heschelian community would not give up the hope of an Israel which, as stated in its Declaration of Independence, is "based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel." It would encourage Israeli policies that promote these values and raise questions about policies that do not. This is particularly so in regard to religious pluralism in Israel. Its educational program would also be teaching about Israeli culture, exposing its students to Israeli literature and music. Israel is not only a political entity, it is also a cultural center. Spiritual support of Israel would also extend to visiting Israel. The only way to truly understand the importance of Israel for the Jew is to do as Heschel did, to walk in the footsteps of our ancestors. A Heschelian community would recognize that we are privileged to live in a time when

Israel exists and that with that privilege comes a responsibility to help Israel fulfill its destiny as a holy nation.

Governance of the Community

While Heschel never addressed the issue of synagogue governance, the question of values extends here as well, and in two ways. First, the decision making process at a synagogue should reflect the espoused values of the congregation. Those values should be shaped by a clear vision of the synagogue as a holy institution. In a Heschelian community, education would be funded and staffed in a way which would allow for an education program as outlined above. Social action projects would be featured in the temple bulletin. A regular trip to Israel would be sponsored by the temple and funds to subsidize teen trips to Israel would be made available. The focus for lay leadership would be on determining the right thing to do in order to promote an awareness of God within the temple.

The other evidence of an institution governed in accordance with Heschel's philosophy would be reflected in the treatment accorded each congregant. In a Heschellian community, each congregant would be treated with the respect due to a fellow human being created in God's image. There would be more concern with the welfare of each congregant and less *lashon hara*. Relationships would be marked with dialogue instead of argument. People's ideas would be respected and freely exchanged.

Finally, there would be flexibility to the governing structure in order to accommodate new insights and new ideas. There would be regular avenues for

individuals to express their own perceptions and experiences. There would be more than a d'var Torah at Board meetings; there would be the sense of God's presence in the room.

In short, there would be an element of holiness to temple operations. This is an element which unfortunately is in all too short supply in the American Jewish community.

So, then is there currently a model for a Heschelian community? There are none that I am aware of. Yet a community is composed of the individual lives of its members and there is one example of what a life lived in accordance with Heschel's philosophy might be like. That example, of course, is the life of Abraham Joshua Heschel himself.

Conclusion

The writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel provide a vision of Judaism which addresses many of the concerns of post-modern liberal Jews. One of the hallmarks of postmodernism is that there is no overarching sense of unity or structure to the world; there is no sense of transcendent meaning.[349] All that one has is one's perceptions of world at any given moment. Therefore, there is legitimacy, and truth content, to each individual's or each society's worldview.

Liberal religion does not operate in a vacuum. What makes it liberal is that it is responsive to social, political and philosophical changes. If, as Heschel writes, "religion is the answer to man's ultimate questions", then, in order to be relevant to postmodern society, religion must provide those answers utilizing a process that is in accord with postmodern thinking. Thus, postmodern liberal religion needs to provide space for individual perceptions about the meaning of life.

Yet, the postmodern liberal Jew also seeks a religion which provides some form of eternal truth and community; an oasis from the vagaries of individual perception as reality. As postmoderns, we live in a state that Heschel termed "metaphysical loneliness":

> We have in common a terrible loneliness. Day after day a question goes up desperately in our minds: Are we alone in the wilderness of the self...It is such a situation that makes us ready to search for a voice of God in the world of man: the taste of utter loneliness..."[350]

Heschel provides a philosophy of Judaism which validates individual perceptions and experiences while providing a promise of transcendence and meaning. For Heschel,

[349] Banks, page 102.
[350] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 101.

God's word is eternal but the meaning of those words is subject to change. One obtains faith through individual observation of the world, one's own observation of history and of the underlying values expressed in prayer and ritual. Therefore, postmodernity's demand that individual perception be respected is met. Yet, Heschel also provides the community aspect of religion in the manner in which individual perceptions are ascertained. The vehicles for obtaining meanings for one's existence are both individual and communal. Heschel argues for the need for both halacha and aggada; for a shared observance of the same law while allowing the individual to invest that shared observance with different meanings. The action required by halacha is clear. The meaning associated with the observance of that halacha, however, is not so clearly defined. There are commentaries presenting the possible significance behind each halacha but each generation, each individual, reserves the right to invest the halacha with meanings of their own. In order to understand the meaning behind the liturgy, one must pray the words, but the commitment made by each worshiper is not necessarily identical.

Heschel writes:

> The legitimate question concerning the forms of Jewish observance is the question: Are they spiritually meaningful?...To say that the mitzvot have meaning is less accurate than to say that they lead us to wells of emergent meaning, to experiences which are full of hidden brilliance of the holy, suddenly blazing in our thoughts.[351]

But then, what of the issue of rabbinic authority in regard to halacha? If the efficacy of mitzvot depends on the personal experience of the performer, then what authority is there in the demands of the halachic system itself? Personal experience is personal; halacha is a system. As James Hyman points out, Heschel never really resolves

[351] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 351.

this issue. Heschel's hope is that individuals will climb a ladder, a ladder of observance, on which each Jew will take one step at a time, ever upward.[352] Heschel hopes that after observing one mitzvah and experiencing meaning, the individual Jew will attempt more until, through having several experiences of meaning, the individual will accept the entire halachic system. The problem is that, with individual experience as the criterion, the range and selection of mitzvot available for performance are left in the hands of the individual. There is not necessarily anything in the individual's experience to compel acceptance of the entire system.[353]

Heschel attempts to address this first by arguing that his halacha is not the halacha of the Orthodox rabbinic system. Heschel's view of halacha is squarely within the Conservative camp with substantial room for flexibility and historic development. Heschel sets forth the basis for this position in Torah Min Ha-shamayim, his massive three-volume work on the history of rabbinic literature.[354] In discussing the sources for halacha and aggada, Heschel traces the concepts back to the second century and the schools of Ishmael and Akiba. Ishmael argues for the supremacy of halacha, while Akiba argues for aggada. Ishmael argues for a transcendent God while Akiba argues for a God who is immanent. For the most part, Heschel sides with Akiba in finding aggada superior to halacha in terms of giving meaning to Torah. It is in this way that Heschel moves to rehabilitate aggada as halacha's equal, pointing out that aggada "has been lost in the

[352] Dresner, page 23.
[353] Hyman, page 97-98.
[354] Unfortunately, this work is **presently available** only in Hebrew and thus the thoughts that follow are second-hand and dependent on the work of Eisen and Hyman.

course of generations."[355] On the question of the meaning of "Torah from Heaven", however, he sides with Ishmael.[356]

Here, it would be best to quote Arnold Eisen directly on the subject:

> 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 and, still later, all the Oral Torah as well. 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.[357]

The implication, therefore, is that Torah from Heaven is a partially human work based on the teachings of a transcendent God and thus is open to human expansion in the hands of the rabbinic authorities. The halachist should be flexible and responsive to the human condition. Thus, Heschel argues for a halacha that is open to ongoing interpretation. Overall, Heschel seems to make an argument that the observance of rabbinically determined halacha is the individual's best chance to attain spiritual insight. However, that halacha must be flexible enough to address the realities of the contemporary world and, thereby, continue to promote the process of insight being derived from the practice of halacha over the generations. Dresner refers to this position as "the vital center."[358]

[355] Eisen, "Re-reading Heschel on the Commandments", *Modern Judaism*, Volume 9, Fall, 1989, page 15.
[356] Eisen, page 13.
[357] Eisen, page 14.
[358] Dresner, page 18.

It is over the issue of the need for halacha, however, that Heschel makes his break with Reform Judaism. He feels bound by halacha as a means for discovering the allusions to the Presence of God in the world. Thus observance of halacha is one of the primary vehicles, along with study and observation of nature, for investing one's existence with meaning. Although individual statutes are subject to interpretation, Heschel does not make distinctions among legal demands. It is observance of halacha that provides continuity for Judaism. Halacha is keva while aggada is kavanah. Heschel sees the vitality of Judaism as residing in a balance between both as essential elements. One is not free to reject either element. Heschel does not appear to entertain the possibility that any particular element of halacha might no longer hold any meaning whatsoever. His assumption is that God acts purposefully and that our inability to ascertain God's purpose speaks only to our limitations as human beings. Our response should be, therefore, to continue to follow the halacha in an ongoing effort to apprehend the meaning behind it.

It is also important to recognize that another critical assumption for Heschel, and that is that the Bible is historically accurate and ethically true. Heschel's proof in this regard, however, is to address various alternatives to the prophetic experience being true and rejecting each alternative as irrational. This method, however, does not provide proof of the veracity of prophecy.[359] Heschel would also argue that the survival of the Bible and its ability to address the issues of living over the centuries until the present day indicates its Divine origins.[360] However, the essence of all of Heschel's arguments for the authenticity of the Biblical narrative is that the only logical possibility is that the

[359] Eisen, page 10.
[360] Heschel, God in Search of Man, page 235.

Bible is historically and morally accurate because the alternative is that life is meaningless and, to Heschel, such a possibility is illogical. Illogical or not, however, the possibility does exist that human existence has no meaning beyond its own existence. Try as Heschel might to attempt to ground faith in rationality utilizing the language and methodology of Western philosophy, at some point faith must be based simply on belief; that one's life experiences convince the individual of the presence of God in the universe and that the Bible provides information concerning the nature of that presence.

In assessing the evidence cited by Heschel for the phenomenon of divine pathos, one must also be willing to accept Heschel's somewhat narrow definition of the phenomenon called prophecy. Heschel indicates in a footnote to the Introduction of volume II of The Prophets that "this book deals with the classical or literary prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. Of other prophets there is only occasional mention..."[361] Therefore, it remains an open question whether the other forms of prophecy in the Bible, such as ecstatic visions and incoherent speech, also provide allusions to the divine.

The question arises, therefore, whether the issues of Heschel's reliance on the truth content of the Bible, as well as the contradiction between the efficacy of halacha being dependent on individual experience while communal observance is mandated, are fatal to his entire religious philosophy?

To some extent, the value of Heschel's work depends upon who determines whether these flaws would be fatal. To non-believers, Heschel is unlikely to be persuasive in the first place. If one is happily able to go through life without wondering

[361] Heschel, The Prophets, Volume II, page xiii.

about a meaning behind the mysteries of existence and without experiencing a sense of cosmic loneliness, then Heschel will not be persuasive that such concerns are a necessary element of what makes us human. Heschel is addressing the individual who is at least minimally religious. He is trying to convince the casual Jew, that is, those Jews who drop their kids off at religious school or attend services as a social event, that there is the promise of something meaningful for their lives, and for God, if they will take his "leap of action" by performance of mitzvot in the form of study, ritual and deeds of kindness towards others. Such an individual probably has enough of a general belief to accept that the ethical and moral values expressed in the Torah as "true" based on their own life experiences. That may be enough to entice such a person into a first step. The personal experiences of meaning which would follow that leap of action may well convince them of the veracity of at least portions of the Biblical account.

Heschel recognized that fulfillment of God's call to holiness does not come through religious behaviorism but through the spiritual advancement of the individual. Given the veneration of the development of the individual in contemporary American society, there is some popular appeal to a religion that offers personal spiritual growth as one of its benefits. But Heschel does not see a contradiction in religion providing benefits to both God and human beings. Heschel believes that spiritual growth will result in increased levels of holiness being brought into the world.

Truly, for Heschel, the relationship between God and humanity is one of mutual need and mutual concern. God is seeking man to bring holiness into Creation; man is seeking God to bring meaning to existence. Heschel's philosophy of Judaism may not be acceptable in all of its elements to all post-modern liberal Jews, particularly Reform

Jews. Yet the kernel of Heschel's teachings, that there is meaning to life and that humanity is not alone in the universe, speaks to the spiritual needs of post-modern Jews the way that manna and water addressed the physical needs of the Israelites in the wilderness.

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