Important Dates

1907  - Jan. 11th – born in Warsaw, Poland.
1922/23 - Publishes first articles in sha’are Torah.
1927  - Graduated from gymnasium in Vilna.
       - Enrolled at the Hochschule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums.
1923  - Enrolled in the University of Berlin.
1932  - Dissertation submitted.
1933  - Published poetry collection: Der Shem Hameforash – Mensch.
1934  - Receives rabbinical degree from the Hochschule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums.
1935  - Ph.D. granted.
1936  - Die Prophetie published.
1937  - Becomes the director of the Mittelstelle fur Judische Erwachsenen Bildung at the invitation of Martin Buber.
1939  - Escaped Europe (Poland) to England, where he lived for 6 months.
1940  - Arrived in New York on a visa secured by Julian Morgenstern, president of Hebrew Union College.
       - Moved to Cincinnati to take a position as instructor at HUC.
1945  - Moved to New York City to join the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.
1946  - Married Sylvia Straus.
1960's - Represented the Jewish People to the Second Vatican Council.
1963  - First meets Martin Luther King Jr. at a conference of the NCCJ.
1965  - Marches with King in Selma.
1971  - Meets privately with Pope Paul VI.
1972  - Dec. 23rd – Dies in his sleep on Shabbat.

Books

Der Shem Hameforash: Mensch (1933)
The Earth Is the Lord’s: The Inner World of the Jew in East Europe (1950)
Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion (1951)
The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man (1951)
Man’s Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism (1954)
God in Search of Man (1955)
The Prophets (1962)
Who Is Man? (1965)
The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (1966)
A Passion for Truth (1973)
Heavenly Torah: As Refracted Through the Generations (2006)
Heschel's Roots

The Poet

I and You

Transmissions flow from your heart to Mine,
trading, twining my pain with yours.
Am I not—you? Are you not—I?

My nerves are clustered with Yours.
Your dreams have met with mine.
Are we not one in the bodies of millions?

Often I glimpse Myself in everyone’s form,
hear My own speech—a distant, quiet voice—in people’s
weeping,
as if under millions of masks My face would lie hidden.

I live in Me and in you.
Through your lips goes a word from Me to Me,
from your eyes drips a tear—its source in Me.

When a need pains You, alarm me!
When You miss a human being
tear open my door!
You live in Yourself, You live in me.


Two Great Traditions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sephardim</th>
<th>Ashkenizim</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Jews of the Iberian Peninsula were...distinguished not only by monumental scientific achievements, but also by a universality of spirit...The intellectual life of the Jews in Spain was deeply influenced by the surrounding world. Literary forms, scientific methods, philosophical categories, and even theological principles were often adapted from the Arabs...Jewish authors were inclined to stress the basic agreements between the doctrines of their faith and the theories of great non-Jewish thinkers. Indeed, they</td>
<td>In the Ashkenazic period, the spiritual life of the Jews was lived in isolation. Accordingly, it grew out of its own ancient roots and developed in an indigenous environment, independent of the trends and conventions of the surrounding world...the[se] Jews unfolded unique cultural patterns in thinking and writing, in their communal and individual ways of life. Tenaciously adhering to their own traditions, they concentrated upon the cultivation of what was most their own...They borrowed from other cultures neither substance</td>
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</table>
Modern Jewish Thought - Abraham Joshua Heschel
Rabbi Darren Kleinberg

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Often seemed to emphasize the elements Judaism had in common with classical philosophy to the neglect of pointing out its own specific features...</th>
<th>Nor form. What they wrote was literature by Jews, about Jews, and for Jews.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The culture of Spanish Sephardic Jews was shaped by an elite; it was derived from above and was hardly touched by the archaic simplicity, imaginative naïveté, and unaffected naturalness of the humble mass. In Spain, Jewish men of learning drew inspiration from classical philosophy and science. Frequently they took Arabic poetry and Greek ethics as prototypes. Jewish scholars were absorbed in theoretical research...Their poems were often written in a Hebrew so complicated and involved that only the erudite could enjoy them.</td>
<td>On the lips of Ashkenazic Jews, Hebrew was freed from the golden chains of a complex rhetoric...The Ashkenazim did not write <em>piyutim</em>...; they wrote mostly <em>selihoth</em>, simple penitential prayers and elegies. They drew their style from the homespun prose of Talmudic sayings rather than from the lofty rhetoric of the Prophets...Further, the East European Jews created their own language, Yiddish, which was born out of a will to make intelligible, to explain and simplify the tremendous complexities of the sacred literature.</td>
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<td>In the Sephardic period, every book or manuscript was a rare treasure. Sephardic books are distinguished by their strict logical arrangement. Sephardic books are like neatly trimmed and cultivated parks. The renowned painstaking grammarians of the Hebrew tongue came from among the Sephardim;</td>
<td>In the Ashkenazic period, Jews had all the texts...The gates of Torah were opened. Ashkenazic writers forego clarity for the sake of depth. Ashkenazic writings like enchanted ancient forests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>the Ashkenazim were more interested in the dynamics of keen gematria - the art of finding implications believed to be contained in the numerical values of letters in Scripture.</td>
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Much of what the Sephardim created was adopted by the Ashkenazim and transformed. Under the spell of the Hasidim, the rich and ponderous speculations of the Sephardic mystics were stripped of their tense and stern features without any loss of profundity or earnestness. The lofty and elaborate doctrines of the Kabbalah were melted into thoughts understandable by the heart.

Here, in the Ashkenazic realm, the amalgamation of Torah and Israel was accomplished. Ideals became folkways, divine imperatives a human concern; the people itself became a source of Judaism, a source of spirit. The most distant became very intimate, very near...The dictates of their own insight were heeded as commandments of highest authority. Jews began to know the meaning of “From within my flesh do I see the Lord” (Job 19:26).

**Hasidim**

Then came Rabbi Israel Baal Shem, in the eighteenth century, and brought heaven down to earth...Jewishness was as though reborn. Bible verses, observances, customs, suddenly took on a flavor like that of a new grain.
Theology and Depth Theology

...many issues of religious existence may be looked upon in two ways: from the perspective of depth theology and from the perspective of theology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theology</th>
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<tr>
<td>-is the content of believing</td>
<td>-is the act of believing</td>
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<tr>
<td>-speaks for the people</td>
<td>-speaks for the individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-strives for communication, for universality</td>
<td>-strives for insight, for uniqueness</td>
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<tr>
<td>-is like a sculpture</td>
<td>-is like music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-is in the books</td>
<td>-is in the hearts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-is doctrine</td>
<td>-is an event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-divides us</td>
<td>-unites us</td>
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Why are dogmas necessary? We cannot be in rapport with the reality of the divine except for rare, fugitive moments. How can these moments be saved for the long hours of functional living, when the thoughts that feed like bees on the inscrutable desert us, and we lose both the sight and the drive? Dogmas are like the amber in which bees, once alive, are embalmed, and which are capable of being electrified when our minds become exposed to the power of the ineffable. For the problems with which we must always grapple are: How to communicate those rare moments of insight to all hours of our life. How to commit intuition to concepts, the ineffable to words, communion to rational understand. How to convey our insights to others and to unite in a fellowship of faith. It is the creed that attempts to answer these problems.

The insights of depth theology are vague; they often defy formulation and expression. It is the task of theology to establish the doctrines, to bring about coherence, and to find words compatible with the insights. On the other hand, theological doctrines tend to move on their own momentum, to become a substitute for insight, informative rather than evocative. We must see to it that each has an independent status, a power and efficacy of its own which enables it to contribute something in the cooperation.

And yet 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. A creed is almost all a poor man has. Skin for skin, he will give his life for all that he has. Yea, he may be ready to take other people’s lives, if they refuse to share his tenets.

Depth theology may become an impasse, the catacomb of subjectivism. To be a passageway leading from man to man, from generation to generation, it must be crystallized and assume the form of a doctrine or principle. Theology is the crystallization of the insights of depth theology.

However, crystallization may result in petrification. Indeed, the stability of the dogma or the institution has often taken precedence over the spontaneity of the person.

The vitality of religion depends upon keeping alive the polarity of doctrine and insight, of dogma and faith, of ritual and response, of institution and the individual.
Divine Pathos

The Prophets had no theory or “idea” of God. What they had was an understanding...To the prophets, God was overwhelmingly real and shatteringly present...

To the prophet...God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world...He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure of wrath. He is not conceived as judging the world in detachment. He reacts in an intimate and subjective manner, and thus determines the value of events...

Pathos denotes, not an idea of goodness, but a living care; not an immutable challenge, but an outgoing challenge, a dynamic relation between man and God...

The theology of pathos brings about a shift in understanding of man's ultimate problems...The predicament of man is a predicament of God Who has a stake in the human situation...

Never in history has man been taken as seriously as in prophetic thinking. Man is not only an image of God; he is a perpetual concern of God...Whatever man does affects not only his own life, but also the life of God insofar as it is directed to man...

Pathos means: God is never neutral, never beyond good and evil. He is always partial to justice...

In sum, the divine pathos is the unity of the eternal and the temporal, of meaning and mystery, of the metaphysical and the historical. It is the real basis of the relation between God and man, of the correlation of Creator and creation, of the dialogue between the Holy One of Israel and His people. The characteristic is not foreknowledge of the future, but insight into to the present pathos of God.

The Civil-Rights Activist

For many years I lived by the conviction that my destiny is to serve in the realm of privacy, to be concerned with the ultimate issues and involved in attempting to clarify them in thought and in word...

Three events changed my attitude. One was the countless onslaughts upon my inner life, depriving me of the ability to sustain inner stillness. The second event was the discovery that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself...

The third event that changed my attitude was my study of the prophets of ancient Israel,...[f]rom them I learned the niggardliness of our moral comprehension, the incapacity to sense the depth of misery caused by our own failures...

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 the suffering of human beings. It also became clear to me that in regard to cruelties committed in the name of a free society, some are guilty, while all are responsible.
The Inter-Faith Activist

During the years that Heschel was achieving national prominence as a public intellectual, he was playing a largely confidential role in a great international drama. As the primary theological consultant to the American Jewish Committee (AJC), he represented the interests of the Jewish people to the Second Vatican Council (popularly known as Vatican II), the epoch-making conclave convened in 1962 by Pope John XXIII to update the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and to redefine its relationship with other forms of Christianity and with non-Christian religions, especially with Judaism. Heschel felt that his mission to the Vatican was his greatest opportunity to save Jewish lives.

On 28 October 1965, the anniversary of John XXIII’s election to the papacy, the final version of Nostra Aetate (In our times) was adopted…Pope Paul VI promulgated the text immediately as official church doctrine...

Abraham Joshua Heschel became an inspirational symbol of the Jewish involvement in helping to formulate Nostra Aetate.


The gap between the words we preach and the lives we live threatens to become an abyss...

Is it not true that God and nuclear stockpiles cannot dwell together in one world? Is it not true that facing disaster together we must all unite to defy despair, to prevent surrender to the demonic?...

The dreadful predicament is not due to economic conflicts. It is due to a spiritual paralysis...

Different are the languages of prayer, but the tears are the same. We have a vision in common of Him in whose compassion all men’s prayers meet….though they confess different conceptions of God, are really worshiping one God, the father of all men, thought they may not even be aware of it.

...We must insist upon loyalty to the unique and holy treasures of our own tradition and at the same time acknowledge that in this eon religious diversity may be the providence of God.

...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.

The great spiritual renewal within the Roman Catholic Church, inspired by Pope John XXIII, is a manifestation of the dimension of depth or religious existence...

In the words of Pope John’s Encyclical, Pacem in Terris: “Every human being has the right to freedom in searching for truth and in expressing and communicating his opinions...Every human being has the right to honor God according to the dictates of an upright conscience.”

Here is buried
Abraham Joshua Heschel
The son of sainted Master
Our Rabbi Moshe Mordecai and Reizel Heschel
The grandson of the holy Rabbi
Baal Ohev Yisrael
And the holy Rabbi of Ruzhin
And the holy Rabbi of Berditchev
And of great sanctity
The Maggid of Mezritch
Who left this life on
18 Tevet 5733
May his soul be bound up
In the bond of everlasting life