Toward a Vision of Jewish Education Inspired by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

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"If you take biblical passages or biblical documents or rabbinic statements, and submit them to a Greek mind, they often are absurd. They make no sense. But we do want to educate Jews. We wish to maintain Judaism. What can we do about it? May I say to you personally that this has been my major challenge, ever since I began working on my dissertation; that is: How to maintain a Jewish way of thinking?... It is not an easy enterprise."
Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.[1]

[1] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, in S. Heschel *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 1997, p.156.

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Dedication

Thank you to the Master of the Universe for the ability to write this paper and for the many blessings in my life: my parents, siblings, extended family and friends, and, most notably, for my wife and children, Jillian, Elah and Jonah. Thank you Rabbi Len Levin, my advisor at AJR, for your guidance and patience, particularly as the covid pandemic stretched this project well into two academic years. I have been incredibly fortunate to have you, a scholar of Heschel, serving as my advisor. Thank you Dr. Steven M. Brown for teaching me that "I am never done becoming who I am going to become."

Introduction

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel remains a preeminent thought leader in American Judaism nearly 50 years after his passing in 1972. Heschel's theology and moral leadership are well documented in his own writings and by others.[2] However, there is a gap in scholarship regarding understanding Heschel from the perspective of educational theory and practice. In his essay "Jewish Education" Heschel states what *might* be the core of his educational vision, "What we need more than anything else is not textbooks but textpeople."[3] How might the writings of Heschel and the analysis of his work inform current and future goals of Jewish education? For example, how are we to understand, from an educational lens, Heschel's call for youth to, "above all, remember that the meaning of life is to build a life as if it were a work of art"?[4] How might this understanding inform the desired outcomes of teaching prayer, Torah, and Jewish law (*aggadah*[5] *and halakhah*[6])? These are visionary concepts; what was behind them; how might Heschel's upbringing and lived experiences inform his understanding of education? What can be gleaned from the writings of Heschel to articulate a vision for Jewish education?

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[2] Green, Arthur. "Three Warsaw Mystics." In *Hasidism for Tomorrow*, edited by Hava Tirosh-Samuelson and Aaron W. Hughes, 53-103. Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2016.

[3] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Jewish Education." In *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence,* 223-241. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967. P. 237.

[4] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Carl Stern's Interview with Dr. Heschel." In *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by Susannah Heschel, 148-153. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997. P.412.

[5] *Aggadah*. Refers to the narrative tradition of rabbinic Judaism. See Glossary.

[6] *Halakhah*. Jewish law. When distinguishing between aggadah and halakhah, halakha refers to the prescriptive rabbinic literature. See Glossary.

Heschel looked at the American Jewish community as undereducated regarding Jewish thought and dominated in practice by Protestant attitudes. He sought to teach and inspire joy and purpose in living motivated by prayer, called by Torah, demanded by *Nevi'im*[7], to build a *mishkan*[8] during the week, in order to live in the mishkan[9] on Shabbat. He lived in America in the 1950s and 60s, he was well aware of and lived in a world of: TV, movies, telephone, and objectification of the human form and spirit and he sought to bring his understanding of Jewish life to America as a response to the "idol worship" of American life. As Heschel would write in 1951:

> Nothing is as hard to suppress as the will to be a slave to one's own pettiness. Gallantly, ceaselessly, quietly, man must fight for inner liberty. Inner liberty depends upon being exempt from domination of things as well as from domination of people. There are many who have acquired a high degree of political and social liberty, but only very few are not enslaved to things. This is our constant problem—how to live with people and remain free, how to live with things and remain independent.
>
> In a moment of eternity, while the taste of redemption was still fresh to the former slaves, the people of Israel were given the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments. In its beginning and end, the Decalogue deals with the liberty of man. The first Word—I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage—reminds him that his outer liberty was given to him by God, and the tenth Word—Thou shalt not covet!—reminds him that he himself must achieve his inner liberty.[10]

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[7] *Nevi'im*, the Hebrew word for Prophets, here referring to the biblical prophetic section of the *Tanakh,* Hebrew Bible. See Glossary entry for Tanakh.

[8] *Mishkan*. The sanctuary built by the Israelites after the Exodus from Egypt. See Glossary.

[9] In Talmud *Bavli* Shabbat 49b the rabbis discuss the 39 *melakhot,* the work that one does not engage in on Shabbat as corresponding to the work done to assemble the *mishkan*. As Dr. Jindo has noted, one can read this as teaching we are to work during the week in order for Shabbat to be a mishkan, a palace in time (to use Heschel's terminology). See Glossary for Bavli and melakhot and Jindo citation.

[10] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951. Pp. 89-90.

The chain of Jewish leadership is illustrated by people who embrace their understanding of tradition while striving to provide relevance for the Jews of their time, and into the future, epitomized by medieval commentators like Rashi[11] from the 11th century or Naḥmanides[12] of the 13th century. Heschel linked into that same chain of leadership as he grappled with Jewish tradition to make meaning for his own day *and* future generations, including our own, as Heschel is very much relevant today, his work can serve as a contemporary guide to us as *we* grapple with the texts of our tradition to make some sense of this world and the future which we can mold! That is a major goal of the Jewish the educator: to lead moments of meaning-making; building the skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence with the outcome of others creating meaning-making for themselves and for even more people.

This paper will explore the questions and concepts presented above first by looking at the educational development of Heschel in his youth through young adulthood, under the title "A brief biography of Heschel through an educational lens". Then, second, the paper will consider implications for educators from several of Heschel's writings that were explicitly on the topic of education, under the title "Exploring Primary Sources: Did Heschel have a theory of Jewish education?". This section asks: when writing for an educational audience what did Heschel

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[11] Rashi, "(1040–1105), acronym for R. Shelomo Yitsḥaqi (son of Isaac); preeminent commentator on the Bible and Talmud. Rashi grew up in Troyes in northern France, where the curriculum of Jewish scholars focused almost exclusively on Bible and Talmud, and not on philosophy or Hebrew linguistics—which were important fields of Jewish learning in Muslim lands…" C. Pearl, "RASHI," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. A. Berlin, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 612.

[12] Naḥmanides, "(1194–1270), biblical exegete, kabbalist, halakhist, poet, and physician; also known as Moshe ben Naḥman, Naḥmani, Ramban, and Bonastrug da Porta. Nahmanides was an intellectual and communal leader of the Jewish community in Catalonia during a crucial period of change. His writings reflect a major synthesis of the two most significant schools of thought: the dialectical tradition of northern French Jewry and the analytic-praxis orientation of Andalusian Jewry." M. Singer, "NAHMANIDES, MOSES," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. A. Berlin, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 523.

emphasize should be taught and why? Which texts does Heschel return to most frequently?[13] Does he offer guidance on what to learn and how to teach?

Following the first two sections of this paper, first the educational biography, and second, the analysis of primary sources from Heschel that were intended for an educational audience, the paper moves to a third section with two parts, first, introducing a potential vision for Jewish education based on Heschel and second, a detailed exploration of the components of the vision, including what and how to teach. The particular components of the vision are presented and clarified in detail, building upon and incorporating the research and analysis of sections one and two of the paper. As well, this third section, which introduces the vision and its components, is informed by my exploration of academic writings by those who have sought to identify overarching goals or a systematic theory for Jewish living from the works of Heschel, leaning heavily on, but not limited to, Shai Held's *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence* (Indiana University Press, 2013). A variety of works are cited and footnoted throughout the paper, and a bibliography follows at the end of the paper. The additional research focused on the theological writings of Heschel that were for general audiences, meaning not specifically for educational audiences, was essential as a vision of Jewish education based on Heschel is inherently tied to Heschel's theology. Therefore this third section explores concepts of Heschel's theology, in particular utilizing, but not limited to, Heschel's *God in Search of Man*, with an eye toward their implications for a vision for Jewish education.

The academic work on Heschel has primarily focused on attempts to systematize or, at the very least, elucidate, Heschel's theology and, as was previously stated, its implications for

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[13] Michael Marmur has written extensively on this topic. Many of his essays can be found on academia.edu and M. Marmur *Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Sources of Wonder* (University of Toronto Press, 2016).

Jewish living. There has been little research published on Heschel regarding a vision or explicit goals for education. This paper, after conducting this research, further highlights the addition to the field of understanding Heschel, and Jewish education in general, that this project hopes to provide. In conclusion, this paper presents a vision for Jewish education based upon the life, writings and analysis of Rabbi Heschel that strives to be both timely and eternal.

The Theory Behind the Educational Vision

As a graduate student at the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary I was charged with formulating my own philosophy of Jewish education:[14]

- A Jewish educator merges the central elements of Judaism - God, Torah and Israel - with the central elements of education - subject, learner, educator and environment - for the basis of educational development and implementation.[15]

- Jewish education has the responsibility of providing the tools for the learner to engage with the Jewish language, to create new literature within the Jewish language and allow the learner to find his/her place within the ongoing Jewish narrative.[16]

- A Jewish educator is charged with creating learning opportunities that will have lasting transformative effects on learners. This requires a constructivist educator who is learner-centered, differentiates instruction, asks engaging questions of a higher order, utilizes multiple intelligences, and allows for cooperative learning experiences, all of which facilitate the internalization of knowledge and values. A constructivist Jewish educator is reflective, open to diversity and respects the core Jewish value of every person as a unique individual – *b'tzelem El-ohim.*[17] In so doing, a constructivist Jewish educator creates authentic learning experiences which will result in positive learning outcomes and benchmarks of a vibrant Jewish life.

This educational philosophy is the lens through which I have explored Heschel's biography, his writings for an educational audience, the further analysis of Heschel's theology found in this paper, and the vision for Jewish education based informed by the life and work of Heschel.

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[14] This philosophy of Jewish education originally appeared in "Tyler and Egan – Two Approaches to Curriculum Design," David Charles Rosen, October, 2007. *Curriculum & Instruction*, EDU5158: Jewish Theological Seminary and has been updated as part of this research.

[15] Sinclair, A. (2006, Fall). *Foundations of Jewish Education,* EDU 5127X-1: Jewish Theological Seminary.

[16] Rosenak, M. (1995). *Roads to the Palace*. Providence, RI, Berghahn Books. P. 19-20.

[17] *B'tzelem El-ohim*. Hebrew for "in the image of God," humanity is created in the image of God, based on Genesis 1:27 and 5:1-2. See Glossary.

Part I. A Brief Biography of Heschel Through an Educational Lens

Heschel's educational upbringing – Hasidic Poland

Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in Warsaw, Poland, 11 January 1907, and would not arrive in the United Stated until 1940 until after experiencing deportation and familial loss at the hands of the Nazis.[18] Heschel was raised in a world all but lost to the Holocaust, "All of Heschel's ancestors can be traced to the Hasidic founders, and he was expected to inherit the position of rebbe – a spiritual and community leader – held by his fathers and uncles."[19] His teachers and role models represented "diverse Jewish cultures which shaped his thought and motivated his actions – Hasidic, Yiddishist, German Jewish, and ethical…"[20] The Hasidic and Jewish community in general, was not a small minority in Poland, "By 1917, when Heschel was ten years old, the Jews comprised 41 percent of Warsaw's population, fostering a vigorous diversity of religious and secular groupings…". And in his youth in Warsaw "Hasidism made up the largest grouping among observant Jews." The influence of the *Haskalah*[21] was significant in Warsaw, numerous Zionist and Jewish socialist and communist groups existed, as well as "Yiddish theater, poetry, fiction, and journalism."[22] At the age of seven Heschel would have

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[18] Dresner, Samuel H., Kaplan, Edward K. *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998, p.274 for the extent of the details that exist from Heschel's arrest in Frankfurt, 3 days standing on a train, and time in a detention camp on the border of Germany and Poland before returning to Warsaw.

[19] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.ix.

[20] Ibid.

[21] *Haskalah*. Hebrew name for the Enlightenment of 18th and 19th Century Europe. See Glossary.

[22] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.2.

seen "Jews from cities and shtetls of Tsarist Russia, Poland, and Austria-Hungary" seeking refuge in Warsaw from the decimation of World War I.[23]

Heschel was raised well aware of his Hasidic lineage, "For seven generations, all of my ancestors have been Hasidic rabbis."[24] For example, his paternal great-great-great grandfather was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the Rebbe of Apt (Opatów, Poland), also known as the Apter Rav. And his family tree included Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev and Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezeritch, the Maggid of Mezeritch, foundational teachers of Hasidic Judaism. For his bar mitzvah he wore the tefillin of Levi Yitzhak.[25] From an early age Heschel was surrounded by the stories of his family, knowing well that the "Apter rebbe was said to possess supernatural qualities… and claimed to remember standing at Mount Sinai as Moses received the Torah from God..."[26] It was through such a lens that Heschel was raised and "his earliest sense of identity formed from fantasies" of his father's childhood home in Medzibozh (Ukraine), where the Apter Rav is buried next to the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism. As Heschel recalled, it was "the place to which my childish imagination went on many journeys. Every step taken on the way was an answer to a prayer, and every stone was a memory of a marvel. For most of the wondrous deeds my father told about either happened in Medzibozh or were inspired by those mysterious men who lived there."[27]

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[23] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.3.

[24] Ibid., p.5. Citing Heschel.

[25] Ibid., p.10.

[26] Ibid., p.5.

[27] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998. Citing Heschel, *A Passion for Truth,* 1973*,* xiii.

Heschel's first teachers were his parents, his father, a hasidic rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Mordecai Heschel and, his mother, Rivka Reizel Perlow Heschel.[28] After moving from Novominsk, where they had lived with Rivka's hasidic family, the family moved to "Warsaw's Pelzovizna district, a rather poor, predominantly Jewish area on the right bank of the Vistula River."[29] Moshe Mordecai was still referred to as the Pelzovizna rebbe even after they moved to the center of Warsaw's Jewish community on 40 Muranowska Street, where Abraham Joshua Heschel was born and raised. The family home was the center of their Hasidic community, a place of religious study, communal prayer, and a private study for the rebbe, where he met to counsel his modest congregation. The Heschel "family quarters" were close by, "separated by a single door" in the apartment building.[30]

Heschel would have observed the work of his father closely, seeing him function in all forms of the life of a clergy member, in particular one leading a Hasidic community. When his father would enter the room, all would stand, including his immediate family, and children would address their father formally, in third person, as Dresner and Kaplan note, the Pelzovizna rebbe's children would not have spoken to him directly, but would have asked, in Yiddish, *Vos vil der Tate* (What does father want)?[31]

Heschel's father taught him reverence, "in every event there is something sacred at stake…". Moshe Mordecai lived the Jewish calendar, it was personal, believing, for example, on

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[28] Rivka Reizel and Moshe Morecai were the parents of six: Sarah Brakha, Esther Sima, Gittel, Devorah Miriam, Jacob, and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, for example, p.12.

[29] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.12.

[30] Ibid., p.13.

[31] Ibid., pp.13-14.

Shabbat he received an additional soul and on Shavuot he stood at Sinai receiving Torah. He understood his role as a Hasidic rebbe carried the tremendous responsibility to represent his pious and poor community before God.[32]

In addition to being ever-present for his community, Heschel learned how to pray and his understanding of the efficacy of prayer from his father, through the lens of empathy. Heschel shared that his father would listen to others share their pain, and that he had such compassion for each person that with each personal trial shared by someone "a little hole is created in my heart." Heschel's father would then plead with God, to see his broken heart of many holes and God would listen to him, for he had such compassion for others. What is implied from this retelling by Heschel of his father's empathy and prayer is that the answer was his continued ability to hear the cries of his congregants (followers) and to not cease petitioning God.[33] Questioning the efficacy of prayer was not one Heschel seems to publicly ask in his writings. Rather he would ask about the lack of prayer or question the character or subject of prayer in Jewish life. Heschel would learn to not ask what are you praying for, but to ask Jews why are you not praying?

Heschel's grandfather Rabbi Heschel of Medzibozh wrote of being in spiritual exile, of God being in exile and suffering with Israel, citing *Midrash Esther* which midrashically[34] links God being with the people (*ve-hayah*) to mean joy (*simhah*), teaching that Israel can find joy in knowing God is with them, even in exile, and "God will hasten to redeem them." As Dresner and

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[32] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.18.

[33] Ibid., pp. 17.

[34] *Midrash*. Prior to the canonization of the Mishnah, circa 200 CE, midrash denoted rabbinic literature, both narrative (aggadah) and halakhic, often overlapping. In this author's opinion it is incorrect to label midrash as solely aggadah (literature of a narrative, theological or homiletical nature). See Glossary.

Kaplan write, this teaching of God in exile with Israel is very present in the writings of Heschel and becomes his beacon. [35]

From an early age Heschel's formal education was traditional and Hasidic, first learning with individual tutors and then in a *shtiebl*.[36] The foundation of his learning began with Leviticus, with a focus on the pursuit of holiness through mitzvot. As well the siddur, the prayer book, and daily worship, were central. Traditional texts were discussed and expounded in Yiddish. At an early age Heschel would learn the Pentateuch (the Torah) along with Rashi[37], and, by age eight, would have been learning Talmud and *Shulhan Arukh*[38], well on his way in his rabbinic training, "in order to justify legal decisions and proffer advice to people."[39]

Unlike students in a yeshiva, students like Heschel, learning in a *shtiebl*, would have learned not only *halakhah* but *aggadic* works as well, along with Hasidic texts particularly relevant to their community. In order to highlight how Hasidic teachings may have informed Heschel, and served as a balance to the more legalistic aspects of sacred learning that are often the focus of yeshivah learning, a Hasidic parable Heschel learned is shared by his biographers: Two Jews were condemned to death by a wicked king; if the two could walk across a wire they would be spared. The first Jew crossed safely and the second asked "How did you do it?" The

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[35] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, pp.16-17.

[36] *Shtiebl*. Heschel learned in a shtiebl associated with Ger Hasidim. A shtiebl was a small classroom for children. Dresner and Kaplan note Hasidic shtiebls in Warsaw did not follow "the tightly organized curriculum of the network of non-Hasidic yeshivas in Poland," p.24. See Glossary.

[37] See footnote 11.

[38] *Shulhan Arukh*. An authoritative code of Jewish law written by Rabbi Joseph Caro in Safed in 1563 and first published in 1565. See Glossary.

[39] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.23.

first replied, "Just remember one thing. When you feel yourself falling to one side, move to the other." Heschel's biographer note this parable teaches "Hasidic wisdom supplies no simple answers. We must decide by doing; insight may arise from practice."[40] The insight into this parable is apt and one can see it informing Heschel's statement, "A Jew is asked to take a *leap of action* rather than a *leap of thought*."[41]

Similar to boys learning in a yeshivah, Heschel's learning would be in partnership, *havruta*[42]. Along with his haver, study partner, and the other children, the shtiebl would be filled with song. Song was a part of Heschel's education, both during prayer and learning. With his study partner, the words of the traditional text would be read in a sing-song fashion, to a "nigun [a special study melody]."[43] Heschel, and students like him, "did not simply recite the text with their mouths and lungs; they absorbed it into their bodies, chanting and rocking rhythmically."[44]

Prayer and learning began before breakfast, yet meals were all at home, so the children lived close enough to walk back and forth throughout the day, with an emphasis to not waste time. This instilled in Heschel a disdain for "killing time," not wanting to lose "one precious moment in frivolity."[45] The link between *shtiebl* and home were not only in proximity but in

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[40] The parable, attributed by Dresner and Kaplan to Heschel's ancestor the rebbe of Ruzhin, is presented here in paraphrase form; Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.26.

[41] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955, p.283.

[42] *Havruta*. A partner with whom one learns traditional Jewish texts; or, the practice of learning in partnership. See Glossary.

[43] *Niggun*. Dresner and Kaplan spell the word "nigun," typical spelling is niggun, a wordless melody, in prayer or in study. See Glossary.

[44] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, pp. 23-24.

[45] Ibid., p.25.

values as well. *Shtiebl* learning was reinforced by the lived experience at home, there was not a disconnect between the values learned in either setting.

Heschel wrote of his childhood being surrounded by conversations about *kavvanah*[46] (intention) in prayer and extreme devotion to God. The Jewish calendar "governed" the communities' lives, and the learning and prayer continued into their homes, particularly on Shabbat. As his biographers explain, to convey Heschel's view of a holiness as a life governed by the Jewish calendar and an atmosphere of devotion, in his teaching and writing Heschel will look to the Jewish sabbath, Shabbat, as an opportunity to teach about a spiritual life of integrity, a life of "inwardness, compassion, justice and holiness."[47]

[46] *Kavvanah*. Also spelled as kavanah, literally intention. Regarding prayer it denotes a personal focus. See Glossary.

[47] Citing Heschel's *The Sabbath* (1951), Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, pp.25-26.

Early Years in America

In March 1940 Heschel arrived in New York, and in April began as "fellow in Jewish philosophy"[48] at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati (HUC). Heschel was not at home as an educator at HUC; the metaphysical aspect of mitzvot and Jewish practice were counter to the Reform Movement's nontheological approach to acts of holiness.[49] As Kaplan writes, "Heschel believed that observance was a response to God's will: the Torah was divine revelation, not a human artifact. Although HUC saved Heschel from the catastrophe in Europe, it could not provide him with a spiritual home."[50] At HUC Heschel lived in the dormitory and he attended the chapel services, "which was modeled after Protestant ceremonies and performed mostly in English,"[51] while also fulling what he considered his religious obligations of worship in the privacy of his room.[52]

Presenting his view of Judaism to American Jews, in particular a personal God – Heschel challenged Albert Einstein, "America's most prestigious Jew".[53] Heschel wrote in a German-language newspaper in which he expresses concern for religion limited by the bounds of science. As Kaplan comments on Heschel's writings in this article, "Religion, not science, must clarify

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[48] Heschel was among a group of scholars brought to the US by HUC, foremost Julian Morgenstern, the group was labeled "Morgenstern's College in Exile". As Kaplan explains, HUC "had enough professors, and the refugees [including Heschel] were not official members of the faculty; they could not attend [faculty or administration] meetings or make policy decisions." Kaplan, Edward K. *Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America1940-1972*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007, p.8.

[49] Kaplan, 2007, p.12.

[50] Ibid., p.12.

[51] Ibid., p.11.

[52] Ibid., pp.12-13.

[53] Ibid., p.16.

'why there is a world in the first place' and interpret 'the meaning of life and death, the meaning of being and of history.'"[54]

His addressing Einstein in an essay just as he has arrived in the US tells the reader that Heschel has every intention to share his understanding of Judaism and his desires for the American Jewish community. To address an influential person such as Einstein also demonstrates a message, that Heschel had escaped the horrors of Europe and perhaps saw urgency in sharing his message, there was no time to waste and he would not shy away from influential figures, as this would provide a public forum, which Heschel was seeking in order to influence Jews in America. It is also telling that this was written in German and not in English.[55] While he may have been hesitant to write in English, he was not hesitant to share his message.

[54] Kaplan, 2007, pp.16-17.

[55] As Rabbi Len Levin noted to me: At that time there was a very significant constituency of German-speaking Jews in the U.S.

Part II. Exploring Primary Sources: Did Heschel Have a Theory of Jewish Education?

This section will explore Heschel's writings that explicitly relate to education. In America, Heschel will present readers with what Shai Held describes as a "multi-faceted" and "broad-reaching theology and an interpretation of Judaism."[56] Held explains Heschel's writings with "an eye toward the nexus of theology and spirituality," that through his writings, Heschel tries to convince readers of his theological interpretation of Judaism, to heed God's call of self-transcendence, and to "move us, stir us, and reorient us" spiritually, "from self-centeredness to God-centeredness".[57] The essential questions behind the analysis of these essays are: what core concepts can be gleaned from Heschel as he presents to educational audiences, what is learned from unpacking his theological concepts and, overall, how do these essays inform a vision for Jewish education?

"The Spirit of Jewish Education"

"The Spirit of Jewish Education" was published in the Journal of Jewish Education and based on an address presented at the Pedagogic Conference of the Jewish Education Committee of N.Y.C., both in 1953.[58] The essay is the first published work of Heschel's in English solely focused on a philosophy of Jewish education. A shortened version would later appear in 1967

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[56] Held, Shai. *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013, p.3.

[57] Held, 2013, p.3.

[58] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "The Spirit of Jewish Education." *Jewish Education* 24, no. 2 (1953): 9-62.

under the title "Jewish Education" in *The Insecurity of Freedom.*[59] The timing of the speech and essay are significant, coming shortly after the publication of Heschel's initial three English books, which included *The Sabbath* in 1951[60], and the essay appeared before many of Heschel's influential works for an American audience, for example both *God in Search of Man* and *The Prophets* (in English) would not be published until 1955[61] and 1962[62], respectively.

In this essay, Heschel calls for a reexamination of "our objectives and the principles of our educational philosophy."[63] This reexamination includes an educational philosophy that addresses the practitioner, the teacher, highlighted by the notion of a "text-person", one who can kindle a "spark" for lifelong learning.[64] Heschel expresses a need for educational goals that will inform the experience of the learner, particularly that of the child or adolescent. Heschel's hope

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[59] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Jewish Education." In *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence,* 223-241. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967.

[60] Prior to "The Spirit of Jewish Education" in 1953, Heschel's printed works in English included, at that time (as earlier works of Yiddish and Hebrew would later be translated into English):
The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner Life of the Jew in Eastern Europe. New York: Henry Schuman, 1950.
Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion. New York: Farrar, Straus and Young; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951.
The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man. New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951.
"To Be a Jew: What Is It?" *Zionist Quarterly* 1, 1 (1951): 78-84.
"Architecture of Time." *Judaism* 1, 1 (1952): 44-51.
"Space, Time, and Reality: The Centrality of Time in the Biblical World View." *Judaism* 1, 3 (1952): 262-69.
"The Divine Pathos: The Basic Category of Prophetic Theology." Trans. William Wolf. *Judaism* 2, 1 (1953): 61-67.
"The Moment at Sinai." American Zionist (1953), 18-20.

[61] Heschel*, God in Search of Man*, 1955.

[62] Heschel, Abraham Joshua*, The Prophets.* New York: Harper and Row; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962. *The Prophets* is the translated and edited version of Heschel's doctoral dissertation "Die Prophetie." Memoires de la Commission Orientaliste, 22, Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters, Krakow, 1936.

[63] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.9.

[64] Ibid., p.62.

is that the child's educational experiences will prepare one to grow into a Jewish adult, able to embrace the "lofty claim of the Jewish spirit" through the joys and trials of life.. This is a prescription for Jewish education to be able to prepare people "for the later crises of life," and asks: Will the Jewish education one receives "remain alive in his years of maturity, in his bitter trials, disappointments, and frustrations?" Heschel reminds his audience of the importance of early childhood education: "All our lives we draw upon the inspiration we received in childhood."[65]

Heschel's philosophy of Judaism and Jewish living is revealed through his concern regarding "three tendencies in modern Jewish teaching – *autocracy*, *apologetics*, and '*religious behaviorism*.'"[66] Heschel frames his desires for the enterprise of Jewish education by confronting modern influences in life, beginning with the influence of sociology and psychology under the heading of autocracy. One can see a consistent approach to Heschel's teaching starting to take shape in this essay, of avoiding praising or embracing one concept completely at the expense of another.[67] He does not deny the benefit of the "science of sociology… only to put it in its proper place among the other sciences and perspectives, to bring it into a democracy of thinking. Surely ethics, philosophy, and religion as such are important perspectives of Jewish life." What is of particular concern for Heschel are the questions of sociology and how they are void of what Heschel considers meaningful. Heschel looks at the landscape of 1950's American

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[65] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.18.

[66] Ibid., p.9. Italics are from the original essay.

[67] As Rabbi Len Levin, my advisor for this project, noted to me, keep in mind, that Heschel often spoke or wrote with polarities or dichotomies in mind. For example, on the one side was the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Akiva, on the other was the Kotzker Rebbe and Rabbi Yishmael. This idea aligns with the Hasidic parable presented by Dresner and Kaplan from Heschel's youth, *Prophetic Witness*, p.23.

and sees institutions and people focused on sociological questions. At the same time, Heschel sees the individual American Jew is concerned with the meaning of life. He notes sociological questions ask: "What are we? – a nation, a people, or a religious group?" These questions do not ask: "What are we morally? What are we spiritually? What is the meaning of my individual existence?"[68]

A thread throughout this essay is Heschel's view of American Jews negligence towards core concepts and practices of Judaism, teaching those who seek to espouse spiritual significance to Jewish practice that they need not apologize for such desires, beliefs and practices. For example, Heschel sees prayer as essential. And Heschel sees the lack of attention to the inner life of the Jew, which, in one way, is addressed through prayer, as the effects of Christian theology on Judaism. And in noting this allowance of Christianity to define Judaism, a core theological point is made by Heschel, that "religious individualism" is not contemporary but deeply biblical, and therefore, for Heschel, deeply Jewish: "Thou shalt love" is "in the second person singular," and an individual "tried to save Sodom," and, an individual "led an obstinate, flesh-hungry people for forty years though the wilderness." Religious individualism continues to be contemporary in Judaism: "it is as individuals that we pray. We pray for the people, to be sure, but we do so as individuals."[69]

While preaching humility, yet countering what he views as Jewish apologetics, Heschel is unabashed in his view of the grandness of Judaism as an answer to life's ultimate questions. For example, he declares [notes in brackets are mine for clarification]:

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[68] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, pp.9-10.

[69] Ibid., p.10.

"We are usually very proud of our [Jewish people's] contributions to Western civilization, but perhaps it is Western civilization that should be proud of having been touched by the spirit of the [Hebrew] prophets. Or to put it negatively, the greatest disaster and calamity in modern history was perhaps the fact that Marxism, the major philosophy of the socialist movement and one developed by Jews, was not imbued with the spirit of the Bible."[70]

In addition to Heschel's concern over the psychological analysis of Judaism, the sociological categorization of Judaism, and the negligence toward spiritual substance in Jewish practice leads to Heschel's next critique of religious practice that, in his view, puts a great emphasis on "external performance" and the "product of religious behaviorism."[71] Heschel calls for teaching not only customs but meaning. This was a message that was already part of Heschel's work in Europe. In 1937 Martin Buber provided feedback on Heschel's plans for teaching Jewish prayer, as Heschel's biographers Dresner and Kaplan share, Buber wrote to Heschel, "It's a level too high! The part on the prayer [text] is good, the part on praying does not belong in the circular." Heschel countered, "The assignment is not to learn how to read the text but to learn how to pray."[72]

This speech and essay continue to be a forum, now in English, for Heschel to further a major objective to spiritual substance, "We have a great deal of information, but how much appreciation?"[73] This is a call for not only content knowledge, which Heschel views as lacking,

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[70] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.14.

[71] Ibid., p.16.

[72] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.247 n12-13; p.346n12 (for note 12 from p.247): "Quoted in Heschel 1996, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, xvi."

[73] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, pp.15-16.

but also a call for appreciation, appreciation in terms of meaningful practice. And, critiquing religious behaviorism, it is a message of living Jewishly not only externally but also internally, for the betterment of an individual's real-life experience, "deeds [actions] are outpourings, they are not the essence of the self. Deeds reflect or refine but they remain functions. They are not the substance of the inner life."[74]

Adding to the critique of religious behaviorism, of observance absent spirit, or external practice absent attention to the real lived experience of each person, Heschel addresses an ongoing message in his writings, "customs and ceremonies." He dismisses outright the idea that Judaism has ceremonies and he equates the English word custom with the Hebrew word *minhag*[75]. Citing Rabbenu Tam[76] and employing rabbinic word play, Heschel explains *minhag* leads to *gehinnom*.[77] These terms, customs and ceremonies, are utilized by Heschel to continue his rejection of spiritless external performance[78]. It is an opportunity for him to empathize, rather than teaching customs and ceremonies, teach mitzvot, writing, "We cannot express the name of God in words, but we can express it in deeds." External performance does not necessarily address the inner life of a community or individual, and, for Heschel can miss critical aspects of living as a Jew, "The problem of the soul is how to live nobly in an animal

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[74] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.16.

[75] *Minhag*. Custom. See Glossary.

[76] Rabbi Jacob ben Meir, or Rabbenu Tam, 12th Century France, a grandson of Rashi (an alternative spelling is Rabbeinu Tam).

[77] *Gehinom*. A metaphysical place for punishment. See Glossary.

[78] This can be read as a critique of both Orthodox or traditionalist and Reform or liberal branches in Judaism at the time of Heschel – the rigidity of minhag at the expense of the individuals real-lived experience or the embrace of a non-Jewish of ceremony, devoid of Jewish tradition and spirit.

environment, how to persuade and train the tongue and senses to behave in agreement with the insights of the soul. It is to this problem that Jewish observance is meant to be an answer."[79]

As mentioned previously, this essay addresses Heschel's understanding of the importance of the teacher. A consistent message of Heschel's when writing or speaking on the topic of education includes both the concern for the student and for the teacher. It is clear to Heschel the individual teacher has a tremendous responsibility. Teachers are the object of Heschel's call for "text-people," the phrase first appearing in print in this essay.[80] And, in the same essay in which he proclaims Western civilization has much to learn from Judaism, it is in this acknowledgement of the responsibility of the teacher, that Heschel role-models humility. As he makes his case for the teacher to "kindle a spark"[81] that will implant in each Jewish learner's consciousness that it is their "personal responsibility and high privilege to continue what Abraham inaugurated,"[82] that Heschel critiques his own content knowledge and pedagogical skills: "I know facts and I know techniques, but I have failed to learn how to kindle a spark."[83] It is a personal remark that both emphasizes humility and is a call for lifelong learning, including for the educator.

At its core, the essay "The Spirit of Jewish Education" informs the reader Heschel is well aware of the role of the teacher in the experience of the student. His emphasis on learning as a lifelong endeavor is not anything new to Jewish thought, but it is not at the forefront for American Judaism, and that the external performances, be they social or religious, are in need of

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[79] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.17.

[80] Ibid., p.19.

[81] Ibid., p.62.

[82] Ibid., p.19.

[83] Ibid., p.62.

a renewal of spirit. As he writes, "Our historic experience has taught us that in order to be human, man must be more than human; that in order to be a people, the Jews must be more than a people. What we must learn all the time is how to rise a little bit above ourselves, how to be a little holy for the sake of our own souls."[84]

"Teaching Religion to American Jews"

"Teaching Religion to American Jews" was originally printed in 1956 in the journal Adult Jewish Education.[85] Heschel tells his American audience that his experience growing up in Europe and teaching European Jews presented to him Jews doing the same thing, regardless of continent, "running away from Judaism and religion."[86] To his mind, it seemed that his fellow Jews did not view the spiritual life of a person or a people as particularly relevant. And yet, since coming to America, post-World War II, the Holocaust and Hiroshima, and it being 1956, after the founding of the State of Israel, Heschel suggests people "indicate concern for spiritual orientation." Similar to the optimism Heschel was able to express to Martin Buber while Heschel remained in Germany in the late 1930's, up to his deportation by the Gestapo from Frankfurt to Poland[87], in America he was open to the potential for a Jewish renaissance and he

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[84] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.62.

[85] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Teaching Religion to American Jews." In *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by Susannah Heschel, 148-153. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997.

[86] Heschel "Teaching Religion to American Jews," 1956, p.148.

[87] "For the next six months (from May through October 1938) Heschel wrote to Buber [Buber having emigrated to Palestine with a position at Hebrew University in Jerusalem]… Heschel did not remain preoccupied with himself. Under the harsh conditions, he was mapping a curriculum that might save, and enrich, Jewish civilization menaced on all sides. While maneuvering for emigration, he drafted a booklet, of his own conception, on studying the Bible." From Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, pp.269-270, 274.

sees this as a momentous time: "We are either the last Jews or those who will hand over the entire past to generations to come. We will either forfeit or enrich the legacy of the ages."[88]

According to Kaplan, Heschel's biographer, the audience of American Jews had long been drawn toward secularization, similar to Jews in Europe, but now, a younger generation seemed to be looking for answers after the destruction of the mid 20th century. And to Heschel's eye, he sees a need to address inadequacies of Jewish leadership, of educators and clergy in particular, who Heschel sees as having let down this younger generation of American Jews who are "dissatisfied with what we are offering."

Much attention is given to what Heschel sees as a lack of depth in American Jewish education. Jewish educational experiences are either, one, only taking place during the years of early childhood, or two, are underdeveloped for adults and, therefore, adults "continue to be slaves to our first experiences with it." Both the halting of learning at an early age and the underdeveloped field of adult Jewish education leads to the general Jewish population only touching the surface of Jewish content and practice, as Heschel explains, many "are using stereotypes in our interpretation of Judaism."[89] The lack of depth and exposure to Jewish learning is such a critical problem to Heschel because Judaism venerates learning as "an act analogous to worship." As Heschel writes, "Man is not asked how much he knows but how much he learns."[90] Why this emphasis on learning? As Heschel will explain in the goals he clearly includes in this essay:

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[88] Heschel, "Teaching Religion to American Jews," 1956, p.148.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid., p.150.

> I should like to suggest as a goal of adult Jewish education that every Jew become a representative of the Jewish spirit, that every Jew become aware that Judaism can be an answer to the ultimate problems of human existence and not merely a way of "handling observances."[91]

Kaplan sees this essay presenting Heschel's pedagogical values, that there is a need for a philosophy of Jewish education with goals and methods for teaching. In particular, Kaplan highlights that the essay includes a negative critique of Jewish educators and their lack of asking "the right questions." Questions such as: "Am I anything more than just a physical being? What does it mean to be a Jew? What does it mean to be responsible for three thousand years of living experience?"[92]

Heschel emphasizes that education needs to address "inner living" in contrast to "religious behaviorism". In this essay he relates inner living to the experience of Jewish life that includes prayer that drives personal introspection and prayer that bonds a community emphasizing responsibility to one another. This is in contrast to religious behaviorism, performing Jewish prayer and mitzvot absent of consideration for personal beliefs, as Heschel labels it "a conviction of the utter irrelevance of theology and belief."[93]

Heschel continues what becomes a common theme, building on his 1953 essay "the Spirit of Jewish Education," and calls for the teaching of "mitzvot", as opposed to customs and ceremonies. He defines mitzvot as an expression of God, and employs the same words from his earlier essay in 1953, "We cannot express the name of God in words, but we can express it in

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[91] Kaplan, 2007, p.179; Kaplan quoting from "Teaching Religion to American Jews," p.149.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Heschel, "Teaching Religion to American Jews," 1956, p.148-149.

deeds. Let us teach mitzvot, therefore, instead of customs and ceremonies."[94] Here Heschel answers the question: Why teach Jewish ritual as an expression of God and prayer as a means to address one's inner life? Because, "Judaism is an answer to man's ultimate questions, and unless we understand those questions, we cannot even recognize the answers."[95] Therefore, as Kaplan noted, the emphasis of this essay is Heschel's call for Jewish leaders to address the questions people ask in life, questions about the core of human existence, to explore and not shy away from what the individual asks, and Judaism must provide answers of "the deepest personal significance."[96]

After his emphasis on the importance of asking and answering questions, Heschel explicitly describes goals for Jewish education. For Heschel, to be a Jew means being "God's stake in human history… The gravest sin for a Jew is to forget – or not to know – what he represents."[97] Therefore, Jewish education is meant to teach what it means to live as a Jew - "to live as a likeness of God." He explains this includes:

> Duties of the heart, not only external performance; the ability to experience the suffering of others, compassion and acts of kindness; sanctification of time, not the mere observance of customs and ceremonies; the joy of discipline, not the pleasure of conceit; sacrifice, not casual celebrations; contrition rather than national pride.[98]

More clearly and explicitly than in "The Spirit of Jewish Education," in this essay Heschel provides the content one should teach: bible, rabbinic literature and prayer. Here it is

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[94] Heschel, "Teaching Religion to American Jews," 1956, p.149.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., p.153.

[98] Ibid., p.150.

presented with a lens particular for adult education, but throughout Heschel considers the perspective of youth as well. First in the essay he emphasizes teaching Bible, with a focus on relevance rather than history. He emphasizes engagement with the words on a personal level rather than deconstructing its ancient structure, for example: "The fact that the prophets knew less about physics than we do does not imply that we know more than the prophets about the meaning of existence and the nature of man."[99] And he also emphasized exploring the Bible as teaching individuals and nations how "God wants us to act. Love thy neighbor as thyself… and observe the seventh day." And teach Bible because the Bible "continues to scatter seeds of justice and compassion, to echo God's cry to the world, and to pierce man's armor of callousness."[100]

From Heschel's perspective teaching rabbinic literature to all Jews is to be expected as "the living response of our people to God's claim on man and examples of our people's effort to live in a way which is compatible with man's dignity as being crate in the image of God." One can read this as explaining the Talmud and rabbinic literature as how the Jewish community, over generations, views their ongoing relationship with God, that the words of the Bible are not stagnant, that through ongoing exploration of texts deemed sacred the intention is to live a holy life, for the learning to lead to performance, meaning it is not learning simply to learn, it is learning to be part of Jewish revelation and Jewish living. This learning can be understood as *avodah*[101], as Jewish worship.

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[99] Heschel, "Teaching Religion to American Jews," 1956, p.150.

[100] Ibid., p.151.

[101] *Avodah*. Worship, service, denotes being a servant to God. The word also mean labor, work. See Glossary.

Heschel then emphasizes Jewish prayer. Heschel relies on his childhood and his prayer experiences as a child in Eastern Europe; he recollects the emphasis on inwardness and fervor with regard to prayer. For educators, he writes, "one of their foremost tasks is to discover, to explain, and to interpret" the words of the Siddur (the Jewish prayerbook).[102] This leads Heschel to an exploration of his concept of "inner life." His desire is for the siddur to not be a foreign book, to not feel "bewildered when we encounter the multitude of those strange lofty beings that populate the inner cosmos of the Jewish spirit."[103] Therefore, regarding prayer, the student is not to only translate, but understand that in the words of prayer are commitments and "that prayer is meaningless unless we stand for what we utter, unless we feel what we accept."[104] It is noteworthy that Heschel's curriculum moves from the communal texts of Bible, with an emphasis on the individual's relationship with God in Torah, to the rabbinic engagement and way to view texts, to the personal experience of the text and God through Jewish pray

"Spiritually Radical Pedagogy"

The title "Spiritually Radical Pedagogy" is a section in Kaplan's book *Spiritual Radical*, chapter 11 "A Prophetic Witness (1960-1963)."[105] As Kaplan explains, during this time, "Heschel took up the fight for religious education at three conferences… His standard was

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[102] Heschel, "Teaching Religion to American Jews," 1956, p.151-152.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Not to be confused with the book *Prophetic Witness* by Dresner and Kaplan. The citation here references Kaplan, 2007, p.205.

'spiritual audacity,' a phrase he used throughout."[106] At the 1962 Rabbinical Assembly[107] Heschel was part of a session titled "The Values of Jewish Education" along with leading educators and rabbis.[108] The points made at the World Council of Synagogues in Jerusalem was "essentially the same speech."[109] Kaplan provides the following points from Heschel, first addressing what Heschel viewed as challenges to Jewish education, the lack of shared knowledge, cultural literacy, as well as inadequate educators: "The disease from which we suffer is intellectual as well as spiritual illiteracy; ignorance as well as idolatry of false values… I insist that the vapidity of religious instruction is a major cause of this failure."[110] For the speech in Jerusalem, Kaplan adds that Heschel "maintained that Jewish educators in both Israel and the Diaspore needed to stress values over content."[111] And directly quoting Heschel, to emphasize the importance of teacher as role model and the power of experience, for both the teacher and student, "For an idea to happen, the teacher must relive its significance, and become one with what he says."[112]

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[106] Kaplan continues that in May of 1962 Heschel addressed the annual Rabbinical Assembly convention, then he spoke at the World Council of Synagogues convention in Jerusalem, and in November Heschel spoke at the interfaith conference of the Religious Education Association. Kaplan, 2007, p.205.

[107] The Rabbinical Assembly (RA) is the association of Conservative Movement rabbis.

[108] The session included Professor Seymour Fox, then associate dean of the JTS Teachers Institute, and, after moving to Israel in 1966, the founder of the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the session included Dr. David Lieber and Rabbi Simcha Kling. Kaplan, 2007, p.205.

[109] Kaplan, 2007, p.206.

[110] Ibid., pp.205-206. Kaplan cites from *Proceedings.* 1962. *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America* 26. New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America.

[111] Ibid., p.206.

[112] Ibid., p.205. Kaplan cites from what he labels as the Hebrew translation of *Proceedings* 1962: "Arakhim ba-hinukh hayehudi," *Gesher* 8, 1-2 (30-32):54-60.

The third speech, presented to an interfaith audience that was "predominantly Christian" was titled "Idols in the Temples."[113] The names of the speeches are significant to Heschel's point: when talking and writing about values of Jewish education he declares there to be idols in the Temple. As he explains:

> Jewish faith, I repeat, is not a formula. It is an attitude, the joy of living a life in which God has a stake, or being involved with God. Such faith is neither an easy nor a secure achievement. Nor is it an attitude acquired all at once or once and for all. It takes an instant to trust an idol; it takes ages to achievement attachment to him [God][114]. It requires effort, stirring, strain, preparation. It grows in awareness of mystery, in prayer, in deeds which transcend selfish needs. It grows a lifetime to burst forth for single moments. Faith implies striving for faith. It is never an arrival; it is always being on the way, man's effort to come out of his callousness. Faith comes with the discovery of being needed, of having a vocation, of being commanded.[115]

Heschel is teaching that it is a lifelong effort to transcend, "the two major goals of Jewish education may be described as learning and sensitivity. He who is devoid of sensitivity is incapable of self-denial; he who is devoid of learning is incapable of piety."[116] Heschel holds this concept to be true for all Jews, that both student and teacher are to strive to embrace lifelong learning. For example, as a teacher, he reflects, "I have been a *melamed* [teacher] all my life. I know how hard it is to teach. The first moment of each class is like the hour in which the Jews stood at the Red Sea."[117]

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[113] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Idols in the Temple." In *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence,* 52-69. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967.

[114] The text reads "him," I think Heschel meant "Him" referring to God. Heschel, "Idols in the Temple," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1967*,* p.66.

[115] Heschel, "Idols in the Temple," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1967*,* p.66.

[116] Ibid.*,* p. 68.

[117] Kaplan, 2007, p.206. Kaplan cites from *Proceedings.* 1962. *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America* 26. New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America.

"Teaching Jewish Theology"

The essay "Jewish Theology"[118] was originally titled "Teaching Jewish Theology" for a lecture in 1968 to principals of Solomon Schechter Jewish day schools (the Conservative Movement day school network). Heschel recounts his childhood as "living theology." He speaks of a world that emphasized the inner life, demonstrated by commitment to prayer and its intention as a critical part of a lived experience. For example, preparing for Yom Kippur was living theology: to move one to do *teshuvah*[119], to repent, and not "merely performance (as I have often seen and observed) or what I call "religious behaviorism."[120]

In this essay Heschel critiques both Western academic Jewish studies and Orthodox Jewish practice. First, his critique of academic Jewish studies, which Heschel sees as lacking in theology because of the impact of Baruch Spinoza. From Heschel's perspective, Spinoza labeled the Bible as only a book of law, and Spinoza influenced Moses Mendelssohn, a major voice in the Jewish enlightenment. Through this lens, the influence of Spinoza and then Mendelssohn led to a dominant view of Judaism as only to be understood as "halacha, Law – nothing else."[121] In Heschel's childhood such a distinction was not made between *halakhah* and belief (or practice and theology). For Heschel, it was not until he arrived in Berlin[122] that he learns of the absence

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[118] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Jewish Theology." In *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by Susannah Heschel, 148-153. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997.

[119] *Teshuvah*. In "Jewish Theology" Heschel writes "tshuvah," in this paper the word is spelled as "teshuvah" unless quoting from a direct citation. Teshuvah, literally means "response," it denotes repentance, pursuing forgiveness and a return to a life in concert with Jewish life. See Glossary.

[120] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, in S. Heschel *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 1997, p.154.

[121] Ibid., p.155.

[122] This statement by Heschel is not totally accurate as he certainly encountered non-Hasidic Jews early in life, certainly once he moved to Vilna as a teenager to attend a secular Yiddish educational institution.

of theology from Jewish life, which he labels as aggadah, and, as Heschel explains, the source of Jewish theology is aggadah[123].

In "Jewish Theology" Heschel makes a clear statement of educational philosophy, to not separate halakhah from aggada. This is Heschel's second critique, first pointed at academics, now he looks at American Jewish Orthodoxy. Halakhah is not to be taught on its own absent aggadah: "there is such a thing in Judaism as a halachic heresy: all one has to do is teach denim and *minhagim*" (laws and customs).[124] He reminds the listener and reader of his critique that now spans decades of the concepts of which he labels "customs and ceremonies." Here "customs" is akin to religious behaviorism and Heschel makes clear ceremonies "is not a Jewish phrase at all. It was created by Gentiles and not by Jews. Judaism does not stand on 'ceremonies.'"[125] Both concepts, or actions labeled as such, are devoid of personal spiritual meaning that demonstrates one to be in relationship with God and community.

In this essay Heschel takes this opportunity to try and distance Jewish thought from the influence of Greek philosophy. He disparages the idea that one "can say that Moses was a sort of Hebrew Plato." This critique of Greek philosophy is utilized by Heschel to introduce the situation he sees ripe for teaching Jewish theology. American Jews live in a non-Jewish world. Heschel does not disparage exposure to non-Jewish philosophy, which seems to be used as a label for, basically, all non-Jewish disciplines. His concern is for a lack of Jewish thinking and

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[123] In "Jewish Theology" Heschel writes "halacha" and "agada," this paper will spell the words as "halakhah" and "aggadah" unless quoting from a direct citation.

[124] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, p.155.

[125] Ibid.

he states it has been his "major challenge, ever since I began working on my dissertation; that is: How to maintain a Jewish way of thinking?"[126]

What does Heschel mean to express? By framing his presentation with noting Greek thought and Jewish thought do not function in the same way, and stating he does not disparage medieval Jewish attempts to fit Judaism into Greek philosophy, he introduces an educational opportunity. He states that Jews no longer need to attempt to address the tension between Greek and Jewish thought. As Heschel explains, those who may be viewed as the heirs to the great Greek philosophers, modern academic philosophers, "are helpless" in addressing the catastrophes of the 20th century. Without being explicit one can infer Heschel is referring to World War II, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and to what he would view as a lack of spirit in the life of the individual Jew.[127] Therefore, for Heschel, Jews in America have an opportunity to teach theology, and he presents what he labels principles for teaching "theological ideas, theological principles, in the spirit of our tradition, or in the Jewish way of thinking."[128]

Heschel continues to express his desire for educators to teach that the "central issue of the Bible is man," and the essential biblical claims concerning man, which are: "the infinite importance of man; what man can do and how man shall act."[129] He asks people to consider the relationship between God and man in the Bible and to understand oneself in such a situation, every day: in the Bible God performs great miracles for Israel, yet, as opposed to being "great

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[126] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, p.156.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., p.157.

[129] Ibid.

Tzadikim[130] and great Hasidim" Israel rebels, they are ungrateful and callous. Heschel sees all this as teaching each Jew that life has infinite possibilities, including "infinite possibilities to do the holy and the good."[131]

Heschel reminds his audience: "God is in search of man. It is the fundamental statement about God in Judaism."[132] He shares the implications for this lens of reading the Bible: Torah teaches that humans fail, and Heschel provides examples of Cain and Abel, Noah and the generation of the flood, the Tower of Babel – all the while God hoping for righteousness, each time failure, yet God "bothers."[133] Why? "Because God is in need of man." This is "central to Judaism and pervades all the pages of the Bible, of Chazal [the Sages][134], of talmudic literature, and it is understandable in our own time."[135]

This view requires teaching to shift perspective. For example, regarding redemption: "God waits for Israel either to do tshuvah," which, as Heschel earlier explained, tshuvah *is* living theology, "or to help bring about the redemptive act of geulah[136]… God is not going to do it alone. He needs us."[137]

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[130] *Tzadikim*. Tzadikim is plural, the singular is tzadik. A tzadik is a righteous person. The root of the word is tzedek, righteous or just. See Glossary.

[131] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, pp.157-158.

[132] This talk was given in 1968, Heschel's book *God in Search of Man* was published in 1955.

[133] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, p.158.

[134] *Chazal*. An acronym, meaning "our sages of blessed memory," generally referring to the rabbis of the Mishnah and Gemara (the Talmud). See Glossary.

[135] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, p.159.

[136] *Geulah*. Redemption, often in prayer God is the redeemer of Israel, HaGoel; and in Jewish theology redemption is often connected to Mashiach (the Messiah). See Glossary.

[137] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, p.159.

Heschel notes this is in contrast to the idea of divine omnipotence, which he defines as "holding God responsible for everything, expecting Him to do the impossible, to defy human freedom, is a non-Jewish idea."[138] Heschel clarifies, he does not deny that "God is almighty… Man has nothing to say and nothing to do except to keep quiet and to accept. But, actually, God needs man's cooperation. There will be no redemption without the cooperation of man. Omnipotence as such will not work. God cannot function in the world without the help of man. And this is where halacha, agada, and mitzvot begin to assume their crucial role."[139] And then Heschel makes a critical point, "But all this has to be seen in relation to God. In a very deep and strong sense God cannot be conceived by us in complete detachment from man. God and man have to be thought of together."[140]

Heschel then makes his call to raise prophets, or at the very least, to strive to emulate the prophets: "A prophet is a man who holds God and man in one thought and at one time. He does not think of God without man and he does not think of man without God."[141] To Heschel's point, Greek philosophy made such a split, and that has had tremendous impact on Jewish thought for generations. Also, critiquing Greek philosophy is a veiled way to critique dominant streams of medieval Jewish philosophy that describe prophecy in terms of metaphor, and, perhaps, a critique of Christian ideas of supersession as well.

Heschel explains that a shift in perspective is required in teaching Bible: "God is not the object of generalization… what we must strive for is an understanding. Understanding is an act.

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[138] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, p.160.

[139] Ibid., p.159.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

It is a slow process. The intention of it is to receive, register, record, reflect and reiterate. It is an act that may go on forever…. An idea of a theory of God can easily become a substitute for God." Rather, "God in search of man is an ongoing process. It is not a notion, it is a process. The prophets had no idea of God. What they had was an understanding."[142] He also continues his concept of a polarity of two principles,[143] to never raise one idea over another. For example: Mystery in the Bible — why God doesn't simply "give" Abraham the land, rather his descendant will toil, be enslaved and fight for it? The answer is a mystery, but Heschel cautions not to oversimplify and say it's *just* a mystery. With mystery there is also meaning; meaning and learning as one strives to uncover from mystery.[144] And, as Heschel writes, "God is the meaning beyond the mystery."[145]

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[142] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, p.162.

[143] As noted earlier, Rabbi Len Levin reminds us to keep in mind that Heschel often spoke or wrote with polarities or dichotomies in mind.

[144] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, pp.160-161.

[145] Ibid., p.163.

Part III. Formulating a Vision for Jewish Education Inspired by Heschel

Prelude to the Introduction to Section Three

Following the introduction, section three includes twelve major areas that will define a vision of Jewish education inspired by Heschel. These twelve areas include: ***Self-Transcendence***, God-centered, other-centered; ***Teaching Bible Begins with Teaching Wonder***, encountering God in life and in texts; ***Cultivating and Sustaining Wonder***, how radical amazement is counter cultural in our society; ***A Leap of Action***, the challenges to being a Jew of faith; ***The Teacher as Role Model***, the text-person who can kindle a spark for lifelong learning; ***Jewish Literacy***, the texts and the spirit required for one's life to be an expression of Jewish living; ***To Raise Prophets***, the essential question: how to hold God and humanity in one's mind at all times?; ***Teaching Prayer***, prayer as a moment of wonder and prayer as a means to cultivate empathy; ***Prayer and Mitzvot***, the relationship between liturgy and practice; ***Shabbat***, the epitome of being in relationship with God; ***Early Childhood Education***, our lived experiences and the narratives we hear at this stage of life are emotional psychological cornerstones; ***Lifelong Jewish Learning***, cultivating and sustaining a Jewish way of thinking is a lifelong project. These major areas will be explored in depth in section three. Subsequently, the conclusion will summarize the major points of this paper and clearly state a vision of Jewish education.

Introduction to Section Three

Heschel himself asks a guiding question for articulating a vision for Jewish education in his essay on teaching theology, to teach Torah through the lens of relationship in order to address his own "major challenge, ever since I began working on my dissertation; that is: How to maintain a Jewish way of thinking?"[146] A vision for Jewish education that seeks to cultivate a Jewish way of thinking and living is inherently tied to Heschel's theology. As Morton Fierman asserted in a 1969 article on Heschel and education: "The educational philosophy of Heschel cannot be separated from his general philosophy and theology."[147] And, in particular, as explained by Held: "Self-transcendence is the axis around which all of Heschel's theology revolves."[148] Therefore, a vision for Jewish education based on Heschel seeks to cultivate and sustain a Jewish way of thinking which is other-centered – striving to be in relationship, fully present for both God and the other human being before you.

The cultivation of this Jewish way of thinking has clear content that, in particular, was gleaned from the educational essays analyzed earlier in this paper: the Hebrew Bible, rabbinic literature and Jewish liturgy. Key to this content is heavy attentiveness to (one could say to be mindful of) the inner life of each person which includes sustaining a sense of wonder. And wonder, as we will see is foundational to develop the Jewish way of thinking set out in this vision. Wonder is the access point to encountering and responding to the divine, to Jewish

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[146] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, in S. Heschel *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 1997, p.156.

[147] Fierman, Morton, C. "The Educational Philosophy of Abraham J. Heschel." Religious Education 64, no. 4 (1969): 272-279, p.273. The article was part of a symposium titled "Educational Theory and Religious Education". Among the other articles in the journal were papers relating to Israel Scheffler and education and an educational interpretation of Martin Buber.

[148] Held, Shai. *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence*, 2013, p.233.

prayer and to living a life animated by mitzvot. The epitome of such a life is the observance of Shabbat.

As will be further explored, the teacher is a central to a vision for Jewish education based on the writings of Heschel, in particular as role model and facilitator, bringing together learner, content and experience. The teacher is first and foremost a role model for Jewish living, meeting each learner where they are in life. Additional components of the vision include an emphasis on early childhood and lifelong learning. Early childhood experiences in school, at home and in community, are of the utmost importance for a vision for Jewish education based on Heschel's wok. Jewish living is inherently connected to learning and Heschel is clear that it is a lifelong learning process to be a Jew who heeds the call of the divine. The result of this exploration will be found in the conclusion of the paper: a vision for Jewish education informed by Heschel that leads to living a Jewish life of joy and purpose, in relationship with God and humanity, attentive to the inner life and to life in the public square.

Self-Transcendence

As was noted in the introduction of section three, Held explains: "Self-transcendence is the axis around which all of Heschel's theology revolves."[149] Further, Held notes the "interpretive key to understand Heschel's entire approach to theology and spirituality"[150] can be found in the following sentence from *God in Search of Man*: "The greatest beauty grows at the

[149] Held, 2013, p.233.

[150] Ibid., p.4.

greatest distance from the ego."[151] As Held explains, for Heschel the fundamental challenge in life is to self-transcend, to move from self-centeredness to other-centeredness, from ego-centeredness to God-centeredness,[152] "to cultivate a posture of responsiveness to God and to others rather than remaining mired in the abyss of unrestrained self-assertion and self-regard."[153] Held's insight into Heschel is clearly found within Heschel's writing that was cited at the very beginning of this paper's introduction:

> Nothing is as hard to suppress as the will to be a slave to one's own pettiness. Gallantly, ceaselessly, quietly, man must fight for inner liberty. Inner liberty depends upon being exempt from domination of things as well as from domination of people… This is our constant problem—how to live with people and remain free, how to live with things and remain independent.[154]

Heschel is deeply troubled that people imagine their own hungers and wants to be the most important thing in the universe, and Heschel asks us to consider that to be truly be human is to make space for the reality of others and their needs.[155] Heschel sees the Israelite exodus from Egypt as our eternal struggle: to say no to Pharaoh, to say no to the idol worship of things, to say no to objectifying people for our own personal gain, and to say yes to creating a world of justice

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[151] Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, 1955, p.404.

[152] Held, 2013, pp.3-4. As well as this lecture: Shai Held, "Less Ego, More God: R. Abraham Joshua Heschel in Conversation with Hasidic Masters and Christian Mystics on the Spiritual Project of Prayer ." Dirshu: Confronting Challenges with Mind and Heart: Prayer: What are we doing? Lecture series Drisha Institute for Jewish Education, New York, March 19, 2014, https://drisha.org/audiolibrary/dirshu-confronting-challenges-with-mind-and-heart-prayer-what-are-we-doing/. And in these interviews: https://kavvanah.blog/2013/11/17/shai-held-on-abraham-joshua-heschel-the-call-of-transcendence/ and https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/wrestling-with-heschel/

[153] Ibid., p.4.

[154] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 1951, pp.89-90.

[155] Shai Held, "Less Ego, More God: R. Abraham Joshua Heschel in Conversation with Hasidic Masters and Christian Mystics on the Spiritual Project of Prayer ," 2014, https://drisha.org/audiolibrary/dirshu-confronting-challenges-with-mind-and-heart-prayer-what-are-we-doing/

and kindness and love. It is a call to make space for the reality of other people and their needs, and making space God and for God's needs. And, as Held explains, Heschel sought to express that "the God who limits His power in order to make space for humanity beckons humanity to restrain its own power in turn."[156] As Held concludes his own work on Heschel he writes:

> To state all of this simply: Heschel's project is a call to self-transcendence, an attempt to move humanity beyond the self-enclosed prison of purely reflexive concern, and to help us develop (or, perhaps better, to recover) our capacity for transitive concern. It is this capacity, Heschel avers that constitutes the very core of our humanity. Put differently, the idea of self-transcendence is the foundation, for Heschel, both of who God *is* and of who man *could be*. More, it is the dynamic principle that makes covenant possible: a God who transcends egocentricity summons man, who has the potential to transcend egocentricity, in order to be His partner, to be "in travail with God's dreams and designs, with God's dream of a world redeemed, of reconciliation of heaven and earth, of a mankind which is truly His image, reflecting His wisdom, justice, and compassion (from Heschel's *What is Man*).[157]

Teaching Bible Begins with Teaching Wonder

A vision for Jewish education informed by Heschel means a great emphasis in teaching Bible as an encounter between God and each learner. As Held writes: "For Heschel, self-transcendence, both human and divine, is precisely what makes God's covenants with Israel and humanity possible."[158] In *Who is Man?* Heschel wrote, "The Bible is not a book about God; it is a book about man."[159] Heschel wants Jews to ask: "as I read Torah, what is God asking of me?'

This is an essential question for teacher and student alike as we engage in Torah study. Heschel asks us: "The issue that emerges before us is not whether there is a God, but whether we

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[156] Held, 2013, p.233.

[157] Ibid., citing Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Who is Man*? Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965, p.119.

[158] Ibid., p.4.

[159] Heschel, *Who is Man*?, 1965, p.119.

know that there is a God… The problem is: How do we tell it to our minds? How do we overcome the antinomies that bar us from knowing clearly and distinctly what He means?"[160] Are we open to a personal relationship with God, to seeing God in this world? Can we surpass "antinomies" and remove concerns about embarrassment, perceived or real, from Western society? To do so, teaching Bible includes teaching wonder; to introduce the God of Israel in the Bible as the very same God we strive to encounter in our world today.

Heschel's approach to teaching Bible often means letting go of, or, at the very least, struggling with some of the most influential medieval and modern philosophers of Judaism. For example, Maimonides,[161] at times, seems to describe manifestations of God in the Bible as metaphor.[162] And, for example, Mordecai Kaplan,[163] considered the language of a personal God

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[160] Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, 1951, p.71.

[161] Maimonides, "(1135–1204), philosopher and codifier. Born in Spain into a distinguished family, he lived most of his life in Egypt, where he was physician to the court and leader of the Jewish community. Moses Maimonides is the Latinized form of Moshe ben Maimon, and he is known by his acronym as Rambam." M. Grossman, "MAIMONIDES, MOSES," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. A. Berlin, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 465.

[162] Rabbi Len Levin, my advisor on this project, reminded me that Heschel wrote a very complementary book on Maimonides and that his relationship with Maimonides was complex. In the book *Prophetic Inspiration After the Prophets: Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1996), Heschel asks: "Did Maimonides Believe that He Had Attained the Rank of Prophet?". To me, it seems Heschel more often is pushing away from Maimonides' theology than embracing, while certainly applauding Maimonides actions, in particular as a physician. Levin notes that Maimonides was not incapable of expressing wonder; see, for example, his references to illumination like flashes of lightning in the Introduction to *the Guide for the Perplexed*, or how God revealed his "goodness" to Moses through the works of creation in *the Guide I*, 54.

[163] Mordecai Kaplan, "(1881–1983), U.S. rabbi; founder of Reconstructionism. The son of an Orthodox rabbi, Kaplan, who arrived with his family in the United States at age nine, was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, where he became founding dean of the Teachers Institute in 1909. He taught at the seminary for over five decades and influenced generations of Conservative rabbis… He sought to reconstruct Judaism in America to make it speak to the concerns of modern Jews… he articulated a theology of religious naturalism, defining God as 'the process that makes for salvation' and not a miraculous intervener in history… [Kaplan's liturgical works] retain most of the words of the traditional liturgy, but the text has been changed to avoid affirming belief in the Jews as the chosen people, resurrection of the dead, or a personal Messiah. Kaplan introduced the *bat mitzvah* ceremony in the early

or a divine encounter in the Bible to be metaphorical.[164] Heschel sought to cultivate an awareness that allows wonder to be ever present in our lives well beyond early childhood. Sustaining wonder beyond early childhood means returning time and again throughout life, in small moments and in major life events, to wonder, to a sense of awe, fear and acceptance of mystery in life. Rather than reading biblical encounters with God as *only*[165] metaphor, Heschel

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1920s." J. Staub, "KAPLAN, MORDECAI MENAHEM," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. A. Berlin, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 416-417.

[164] See, for just one of many examples from Kaplan, Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, 1956, pp.104–105.

[165] As Rabbi Levin clarified for me: Heschel does not wholly deny the use of metaphor in the Bible; see *God In Search of Man* p.183 where Heschel writes "only metaphoric expressions must be taken figuratively. Indicative words must be taken responsively." In my opinion, Heschel's point here is *less* about accepting parts of scripture as metaphor and *more* intended to inspire a response from the reader-to keep the reader engaged in Jewish life, not to dismiss Judaism as arcane or antiquated, and to cultivate a Jewish way of thinking: "We must adapt our minds to a meaning unheard of before. The word is but a clue; the real burden of understanding [scripture] is upon the mind and soul of the reader (Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p.183)."

Heschel finds support for his reading of scripture through the lens of Rabbi Akiva, see, for example, Chapter 12 in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah,* 2007. Heschel's rejection of a metaphorical understanding of texts is clear throughout his work, for example:

> "The God of Israel" is a *name*, not a notion, and the difference between the two is perhaps the difference between Jerusalem and Athens. A notion applies to all objects of similar properties; a name applies to an individual. The name "God of Israel" applies to the one and only God of all men. A notion describes; a name evokes. A notion is attained through generalization; a name is learned through acquaintance. A notion is conceived; a name is called… The God of Israel is a "devouring fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24), not on object of abstraction or generalization. (From Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "The God of Israel and Christian Renewal." In *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by Susannah Heschel, 268-285. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, p.268).

As well, in Heschel's description of Buber's understanding of revelation as a "vague encounter," Heschel is clear how he reads descriptions of God in Tanakh:

> That [Buber's view of revelation] is untenable. A Jew cannot live by such a conception of revelation. Buber does not do justice to the claims of the prophets. So I have to choose between him and the Bible itself. The Bible says that God spoke to men—a challenging, embarrassing, and overwhelming claim. I have trouble with many of the things He said, but I have to accept them. If I don't accept the claim that God spoke to the prophets, then I detach myself from the biblical roots. (From Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "Interview at Notre Dame." In *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, edited by Susannah Heschel, 381-393. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, p.385.

asks us to remain open to an actual encounter with the divine, to sense God's presence in this world. This sense, according to Heschel, is often suppressed today.

Cultivating and Sustaining Wonder

In *God in Search of Man* Heschel clarifies what he believes is suppressed by much of modern Western culture: a sense of wonder, or what he often refers to synonymously as radical amazement: "Wonder or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious man's attitude toward history and nature."[166] After noting that from Plato, to Aristotle and to Heschel's own time of writing, wonder is considered by many to be "the seed of knowledge,"[167] Heschel cautions the reader, "Wonder is the prelude to knowledge; it ceases, once the cause of a phenomenon is explained."[168] Heschel asks if wonder is only beneficial if it is the pursuit of acquiring knowledge and he responds, dismissing wonder as only a means, or comparing it only to curiosity, by viewing wonder from the lens of the prophets, as a "*form of thinking*. It [wonder] is not the beginning of knowledge but an act that goes beyond knowledge; it does not come to an end when knowledge is acquired; it is an attitude that never ceases. There is no answer in the world to man's radical amazement."[169] Therefore, a vision for Jewish education based on Heschel asks for teaching that allows for wonder and sustains wonder, which means that wonder is a way of seeing the world—it is an attitude.

It is fitting for Heschel to label his term for wonder as radical amazement because it can

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[166] Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, 1955, p.45.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Ibid., p.46.

[169] Ibid.

be viewed as a radically counter cultural attitude or view of looking at the world. For Heschel, what many in his day considered to be advancements in society, he saw as leading to a decline in wonder: "Such a decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder."[170]

This vision considers that we have so much information and asks, do we know what to do with it? The Torah teaches us what to do with information, to question, to have curiosity and to bring that to engagement with text and ritual in relationship with peers, family and community. Judaism is an interpretive tradition, and Jewish learning and living is not to be done alone. It is an interpretative tradition in partnership (families, communities), and this partnership sustains wonder by continuously returning to our texts, asking us to engage in it and be in relationship with the text and with each other. So we are to teach wonder to sustain the text as a living text, always open to surprise, always nourishing the individual and community.

Heschel described wonder in decline, and I would argue that today it is not only in decline, but wonder is suppressed. Part of Heschel's call for sustaining wonder is a reminder that Judaism teaches respect for human dignity, that each person is unique, and that everyone's life is deserving of being lived with a sense of wonder.[171] Moreover, Heschel wrote, "Self-respect is the fruit of discipline, the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say No to oneself."[172]

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[170] Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, 1955, p.46.

[171] For more on dignity or the lack thereof in today's society see Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

[172] Heschel, "Children and Youth," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1967, p.44.

Therefore, we are to teach wonder as a virtue of dignity, of self-respect and respect for others.

And from self-respect and respect for the other we see an opening to a sense of transcendence. As Heschel continues in *God in Search of Man*, "Awareness of the divine begins with wonder. It is the result of what man does with his higher incomprehension."[173] Wonder is our link to being aware of God in the world. And when wonder is suppressed, the work to hear God's call is that much harder, for many it may feel insurmountable. Again, this is why we are to teach how to sustain wonder, because: "The greatest hindrance to such awareness is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental clichés. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is therefore a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is."[174]

Held helps clarify the depth of what Heschel is trying to convey about wonder in *God in Search of Man,* that it is deeply human to have a sense of responsibility and indebtedness, or to say it another way, to be open to the call of transcendence and see one's action, the performance of mitzvot, as partnering with God in the world. Noting that Heschel explained wonder is "not a state of esthetic enjoyment,"[175] Held clarifies, "On the contrary, he [Heschel] insists, authentic wonder always carries a question and a challenge within it."[176] Wonder is the state of being asked, and the challenge (Heschel tells us) is "what to do with the feeling for the mystery of

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[173] Heschel, *God In Search of Man*, 1955, p.46.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid., p.112.

[176] Held, 2013, p.36.

living, what to do with awe, wonder, and fear."[177] Do we dismiss or suppress wonder, or do we answer? Held explains that this state of wonder, of awareness that something is asked of us, is "for Heschel, the portal in human experience that opens us to the possibility of receiving revelation."[178] For the teacher, this implies the responsibility to teach what I name as radical openness. In spite of all the dismissive or suppressions of wonder by our overly saturated information consuming and producing society, we are to strive to live with an attitude, a view of life through the lens of wonder, which means one is open to encountering the God of the Bible in our lives today. Such openness means someone is open not only to the divine but to others as well.

A Leap of Action

Such wonder need not be considered in conflict with scientific facts.[179] To frame this understanding Heschel provides the term leap of action. Having a sense of responsibility and indebtedness does not answer theological questions for which some seek to find concrete answers in a scientific manner, for example, asking 'does God exist?' The teacher faced with such a question is to explore with learners, as Rabbi Ed Feinstein has written, 'when is God, rather than what is God'.[180] This is a way to present what Heschel means when he writes:

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[177] Held, 2013, pp.36-37, citing *God in Search of Man*, pp.112, 162, and *Man is Not Alone*, pp.68-69, 72, 76, 98, 175, 215, 223.

[178] Held, 2013, p.37.

[179] For more on the topic of a spiritual Jewish life that is not in conflict with modern science see Arthur Green, *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition*, 2010.

[180] Feinstein, Edward. Tough Questions Jews Ask: A Young Adult's Guide to Building a Jewish Life. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2003.

> What do we mean when we employ the word "God"? It is a word that is used in many ways. It may denote an idea, or a force working within the universe, or wisdom as reflected in nature, or an omnipotent Ruler, or the First Cause.[181] All of these words denote ideas. They do not convey any sense of the realness of God… Plato thinks of God *in the image of an idea*; the prophets think of God *in the image of personal presence*. To the prophets God was not a Being of Whose existence they were convinced in the way in which a person is convinced of the truth of an idea… They could not use the language of *essence*; they had to use the language of *presence*. They did not try to depict Him; they tried to present Him, to make Him present. In such an effort only words of grandeur and intensity, not abstractions, can be of any avail.[182]

Heschel is asking us to teach a sense of wonder, to respond to the realness of God, not necessarily in order to define abstract terms, but to live with gratitude, a sense of purpose, and a sense of responsibility. This does not diminish or eliminate questions; to the contrary, it invites questions and demands the facilitation of experiences by the educator that constructively builds upon the learner's wonder, "for faith is not the clinging to a shrine but an endless pilgrimage of the heart."[183]

While Heschel, in his adolescence, learned *Shulhan Arukh*, he also learned *aggadic* and Hasidic works in the *shtiebl*. The Hasidic parable Heschel learned that is shared by his biographers emphasized "when you feel yourself falling to one side, move to the other." Heschel's biographer notes this parable teaches "We must decide by doing; insight may arise from practice." The parable also highlights an ongoing teaching of Heschel's that is clear form his first English essay on Jewish education, which is to strive to never idolize one theory over another, to seek balance, in both theory and practice, for example to not ignore the inner life only for external performance. Heschel understood the challenge of faith. Through a lens of wonder,

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[181] One can read this is a critique of both Aristotelian/Maimonidean thought as well as Mordecai Kaplan and early Reconstructionism.

[182] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1962, pp.274-275.

[183] Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, 1951, p.174.

he believed deeply that taking a leap of action, living with purpose and responsibility, is what can carry a person through moments of doubt, as well as the vast number of turbulent moments all experience in life.

The Teacher as Role Model

The teacher, highlighted by the notion of a "text-person"—one who can kindle a "spark" for lifelong learning—is an essential role model who has the power to facilitate experiences for the learner to "become one" with the text. And the teacher is to remain humble in the face of such power, knowing that standing before the class is like standing before the Red Sea waiting for it to part. The teacher is to cultivate critical thinking: "We have a great deal of information, but how much appreciation?" As well, the teacher is not simply delivering content, but as noted, is creating an experience. What does it mean to be a teacher who is a text-person? To be a teacher is to learn from Abraham, leading to people who will "continue what Abraham inaugurated" – why God chose Abraham, because he could teach how to follow the path of God, teaching how to be righteous and just (Genesis 18:19).

As the teacher seeks to not only convey content but create experiences, a vison for Jewish education informed by Heschel takes a constructivist approach."[184] The teacher brings the curriculum to the learner, not forcing the learner to confirm. This leads to what is often called meaning-making, as Jane Sherwin Shapiro wrote, "Participants make a deeper set of connections between the source material and their inner sentiments and sensibilities."[185] Self-expression is

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[184] Shaprio, Jane Sherwin. "One Teacher's Path to Teaching Toward Shlemut," accessed October 28, 2021, https://www.jtsa.edu/hidden-page/one-teachers-path/.

[185] Ibid.

part of this process, while cautiously teaching and learning to not idolize the self, as the "supreme goal is *self-attachment* to what is greater than the self rather than *self-expression*."[186] This calls for the teacher to find a balance between cultivating self-expression that is realized through self-transcendence, and not at the expense of an individual losing their own sense of self. With an echo of Abraham and the binding of Isaac, the teacher is to demonstrate great care for each student, as Heschel wrote:

> [T]he social aspect plays a very great role in Jewish life, but we cannot allow it to eclipse the individual. We teachers face the pupil as an individual: we have to take into consideration his rights and his tasks. To respect these rights and to think of these tasks is the great duty of educators, for to educate means to meet the inner needs, to respond to the inner goals of the child. We dare not commit human sacrifice by immolating the individual child upon the altar of the group.[187]

For Heschel, committed and passionate text-people have the most impact on the learners, not simply the texts on their own. It is the teacher who must be the text-person, providing content and context for Jewish texts and Jewish living, bringing the texts to life with spirit. Often most easily seen at a Jewish summer camp, the camp counselor is an incredibly impactful role model. As Heschel explains: "It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupils read; the text that they will never forget."[188]

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[186] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.13.

[187] Ibid., p.12.

[188] Ibid., p.19.

Jewish Literacy

In order for Judaism to be an answer to the ultimate problems of human existence and not merely a way of handling observances, Jewish educators must strive to ask questions of a higher order[189]—or, as Heschel called them, "the right questions"—questions such as: "Am I anything more than just a physical being? What does it mean to be a Jew? What does it mean to be responsible for three thousand years of living experience?"[190]

It is not uncommon for a Jew to be told or think they need to have a conforming idea of God. As was previously explained, Heschel struggled to dispel such ideas; rather, he emphasized wonder, experience, action, purpose and responsibility. So too, it is prevalent for Jews in America to struggle to articulate why they choose to be Jewish, what it is about being a Jew they find compelling.[191] Just as one cannot simply be told to believe in God and we can assume they will live a fulfilling live with a sense of belonging to the Jewish community and serving as a good citizen, so, too, one cannot simply be told to be Jewish out of blind pride or fear of assimilation or antisemitism. There is overwhelming evidence that these are vapid arguments[192].

If, for example, a person sees the Torah and Jewish prayer as foreign to their lives, being told by someone else that they should be proud to be Jewish because of their tradition is an

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[189] For more details on asking questions of a higher order see Croom, Barry. "Are There Any Questions?" *Teachers College Record*, (2004), accessed March 3, 2004.

[190] Kaplan, 2007, p.179; Kaplan is quoting from "Teaching Religion to American Jews," p.149.

[191] For example see the 2013 Pew Research Center Study "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2013/10/jewish-american-full-report-for-web.pdf

[192] For more on this topic see Jay Michaelson's November 2013 article "Answer This Question: Why Be Jewish?," https://forward.com/opinion/187292/answer-this-question-why-be-jewish/; as well as Geffen, Peter. "Heschel's Spiritual Humanism: Jewish Education for the Twenty-First Century." *Modern Judaism* 29, no. 1 (2009): 44-57.

empty attempt, lacking educational value, as it ignores who the person is, one who likely does not have any personal or communal meaningful connection to Torah and prayer.

This vapid attempt at persuasion lacks what the educator Michael Rosenak refers to as manifold particulars, unique details and components of Jewish life. In the *Road to the Palace*, Rosenak explains that language allows for cultural expression and enhancement, and those who have a grasp of language can make literature within that culture.[193] As Rosenak states, "Judaism cannot be studied as disembodied ideas, for it is always an embodied theory. One must learn manifold particulars in order to reflect usefully."[194]

A vison of Jewish education based on the works of Heschel will cultivate personal connection to our texts as well as the ability to articulate beliefs, to express how they encounter God in their lives, and to be able to do so openly, when appropriate, not in order to preach or proselytize, but in order to internalize, solidify and sustain one's own ongoing personal relationship with God. For teachers, this requires the ability to facilitate encounters with the divine and to teach people how to talk about such encounters. One may find it more acceptable to say it this way: to teach how to have a sense of the transcendent, or to sense God's presence in their lives. Said either way, this returns to the idea of teaching radical openness, openness to encountering God and each other as unique individuals.

As cited earlier in the introduction to section three of this paper, Heschel clearly believes there are foundational texts in Judaism: Bible, rabbinic texts and liturgy. These texts provide the language for Jewish living and Heschel emphatically argues for Jews to live the texts with

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[193] Rosenak, Michael. Roads to the Palace. Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995.

[194] Rosenak, 1995, p.27.

passion, with the spirit of the text driving ones actions. A culturally literate person in America has been defined as one who is competent and productive in American society, able to move and contribute beyond one's own intimate circle.[195] Jewish literacy is not the equivalent of cultural literacy. It is more than having knowledge that enables one to be a part of the greater society. It is engagement with the manifold particulars, grasping the language to create one's own literature among the Jewish people.

In terms of language, we find from Heschel that Jewish literacy requires personal spirit. This personal spirit stems from the Jewish canon, and connects through one's learning, expression and action. This spiritually driven learning and action have a deep impact on the lives of the individual Jew, the Jewish community and the greater society at large.

It is both personal and communal interactions with the text that define Jewish literacy. Jewish literacy is not simply obtaining knowledge to perform obligatory deeds; for Heschel, it is about experiencing the texts, internalizing the texts, to live the texts because Judaism is an answer to the questions of the inner life and Judaism does not only consist of external conformity, but also requires inner devotion, paying immense attention to the inner life of each individual.[196] Content, skills, and knowledge are crucial to be a literate Jew; but Heschel argues that without spirit, without experiencing the context, the core concepts of Judaism—to be partners with God, a light unto the nations and to seek a world of peace—will not endure. As Heschel argues, it is through the understanding of texts that allows us to "participate and share in

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[195] Hirsch, E.D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.

[196] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, pp.16-17.

the spiritual experience of Jewish living."[197] In so doing, Heschel writes, we understand "what it means to live as a likeness of God."[198]

To Raise Prophets

Heschel asks us to understand that "God cannot be conceived by us in complete detachment from man. God and man have to be thought of together."[199] This is Heschel's call to raise prophets[200], a person who "who holds God and man in one thought and at one time. He does not think of God without man and he does not think of man without God."[201] How does one approach teaching the prophets of Israel informed by Heschel?

Dr. Job Jindo, in *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered*, helps unpack Heschel's view of what it means to be a prophet, and, for the purpose of this educational vision, how to teach reading the prophets and striving to obtain a prophetic view. For example, Jindo highlights that in *The Prophets* Heschel explained: *"*The prophet's task is to convey a divine view, yet as a person he *is* a point of view. He speaks from the perspective of God as perceived from the perspective of his own situation."[202]

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[197] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.19.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, in S. Heschel *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 1997, p.159.

[200] This echoes Maimonides *Mishneh Torah Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 1:2, where students are referred to as the sons of prophets. Regarding the mitzvah to teach one's children includes the obligation for each sage of Israel is required to anyone who seeks to learn, as students, or disciples, are considered children, "And the sons of the prophets came forth (II Kings 2:3)".

[201] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, in S. Heschel *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 1997, p.159.

[202] Heschel*, The Prophets*, 1962, p.xiv.

What does it mean to speak from the perspective of God? How do we teach one to hear God? The teacher cannot teach one how to hear God, the teacher can only facilitate the potential to hear God. Heschel tells us, for a prophet, the act of hearing is only a portion of what it means to be a prophet:

> The prophets tell us little of how the divine word came to them or how they knew it to be the word of the very God. Perhaps it was the discovery of being present at a divine event, "of standing at the council of the Lord" that was the essence of their experience and the source of evidence. Prophetic inspiration involved participation, not merely receptivity to communication. The term "visions," generally applied to some of the descriptions of prophetic experience, is a metonymy. Seeing is but a part of the experience. What stands out as essential, unique, and decisive is *the prophet's participation*, his affecting and witnessing the thinking of the Lord.[203]

Jindo's proposal is valuable for the educator:

> I propose a notion of the prophetic role as essentially similar to that of the poet, who employs metaphors and other figurative images to share a particular insight with the reader. Namely, poetic prophecies, like secular poems, can be intended to convey not merely propositional statements but a prophetic reality, in which the reader can actually share the *perspective* from which an insight into historical events is attained, as well as the inner *experience* through which to appreciate this insight from within. And so, in this view, poetic prophecy presents metaphors to be arranged and integrated by the reader to reproduce its reality and drama, just like secular poetry.[204]

For the prophet, poetry is not rhetorical it is poetic with the intent to orient. This approach to reading the prophets asks the reader to keep in mind the use of poetic metaphor by the prophet is "an integral part of his message. The prophet's book is a literary composition that represents a cosmic drama through global and local metaphors. The exegete's task is to

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[203] Heschel, *The Prophets*, 1962, pp.433-434.

[204] Jindo, Job Y. Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered: A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Prophecy in Jeremiah 1-24. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010, p.46.

reproduce this drama by integrating the semantic and thematic elements discontinuously present in the text. The form (metaphor) is indispensable for conveying the content (drama)."[205]

Jindo notes a key distinction between the words of a poet and the words of a prophet:

> [O]ne should not overlook the essential difference between poetry and prophecy that Heschel pointed out: poetry is result-oriented, i.e., the outcome of poetic inspiration (the poem) is the sole concern, whereas prophecy is source-oriented, i.e., the origin of poetic inspiration (from whom the prophet has received the inspiration) is the most important; see Heschel, *The Prophets*, 388–89.[206]

The teacher has a challenging task in sustaining an inviolable sense of wonder as learners explore the prophets. The process is to include being open to each prophet's unique message and experience that is presented to the reader. Each prophet, in particular Abraham, Moses, Amos and Habakkuk, struggle with the message they receive from God and strive to be present for the people, who they also serve to critique. It is a lesson in relationship as well, the prophet of Israel loves Israel, they both rebuke and defend their people.

Teaching Prayer

Prayer is central for Heschel as it is a central meeting point between individual, the Bible and the transcendent. Since Jewish liturgy is frequently composed of segments of biblical texts, prayer invites us to explore and be in personal conversation with a string of texts from the Hebrew Bible linked together as one prayer.[207] Therefore, Jewish prayer is a repetitive engagement that internalizes the liturgy, the chain of texts from tradition, that brings the inner

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[205] Jindo, 2010, p.250.

[206] Ibid., p.266n38.

[207] For more on this topic of prayer being composed of biblical texts see Rabbi Reuven Hammer's *Entering Jewish Prayer*, 1995.

life into conversation, asking the individual to respond. Prayer is to be a moment of wonder. As Heschel explained, prayer drives personal introspection and prayer bonds a community emphasizing responsibility to one another, "prayer is meaningless unless we stand for what we utter, unless we feel what we accept." Therefore, a vision for Jewish education places the experience of Jewish prayer at its center. Jewish prayer and song is to be taught from birth, surrounding the individual and community with the words and melodies that connect past, present and future.

In particular, Heschel views prayer a little differently than some of the other major Jewish thinkers.[208] Rather than basically serving as making requests [*bakashot*][209], Heschel saw prayer as intended to cultivate a sense of transcendence, "Prayer is not for the sake of something else. We pray in order to pray."[210] Therefore, teaching how to pray is crucial to the Jew as a means to overcome self-centeredness. Prayer helps orient ourselves toward the other and toward God-centeredness. Heschel explains this by observing, "Most of us do not know the answer to one of the most important questions, namely, What is our ultimate concern? We do not know what to pray for. It is the liturgy that teachers us what to pray for,"[211] and Heschel continues, it

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[208] For example, in comparison to Heschel's contemporary Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik who essentially viewed prayer as making requests of God. For more on this topic, see Rabbi Silber's 2021 lecture, https://drisha.org/audiolibrary/prayer-and-the-prayerbook/ .

[209] *Bakashot*. Prayers of request. See Glossary.

[210] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*. New York: Scribner, 1954, p.69.

[211] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 1954, p.32.

is through the words of Jewish prayer that we discover "what is urgent in our lives, what in us is related to the ultimate."[212]

A key component of prayer for Heschel is the cultivation of empathy as a virtue as it can foster a sense of obligation to respond to others. Heschel stated "the two major goals of Jewish education may be described as learning and sensitivity. He who is devoid of sensitivity is incapable of self-denial; he who is devoid of learning is incapable of piety."[213] Heschel's lived experience demonstrate that for him, prayer cultivates empathy, this is evident from his early childhood when he learned from his father to approach prayer through the lens of empathy, to his own experience with the Nazis, to being in a position of influence in America in the civil rights movement. This sense of empathy as a response to personal and communal history is reflected in the following:

> "Our historic experience has taught us that in order to be human, man must be more than human; that in order to be a people, the Jews must be more than a people. What we must learn all the time is how to rise a little bit above ourselves, how to be a little holy for the sake of our own souls."[214]

Heschel's comment to Martin Buber regarding teaching prayer is critical to this vision, "The assignment is not to learn how to read the text but to learn how to pray."[215] Teaching how to engage with the words of prayer, the act of prayer, and how to respond to the words of prayer through action is a major component of a vision for Jewish education based on the works of Heschel. For Heschel, prayer offers answers for how to respond to what it means to be human:

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[212] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 1954, pp.32-33.

[213] Heschel, "Idols in the Temple," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1967, p. 68.

[214] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.62.

[215] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.247 n12-13; p.346n12 (for note 12 from p.247): "Quoted in Heschel 1996, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, xvi."

"The problem of the soul is how to live nobly in an animal environment, how to persuade and train the tongue and senses to behave in agreement with the insights of the soul. It is to this problem that Jewish observance is meant to be an answer."[216]

Prayer and Mitzvot

A vision of Jewish education based on Heschel's view of prayer will make a clear link between prayer and mitzvot that is explicitly for learners. To emphasize what mitzvot mean to Heschel he rejects the idea of customs, which, as has been explained, he views as devoid of spiritual meaning. Rather than follow customs, we do mitzvot, listening to the God we encounter in Torah, prayer and in our inner life, and we act, bringing God into the world along with us.

For Heschel a mitzvah is "a prayer in the form of a deed."[217] Jewish living, Jewish observance, is a form of worship to God[218], and, "prayer is sacrifice."[219] As Held explains, "prayer epitomizes the self-transcendence and responsiveness that ultimately ought to animate our every deed – indeed the entirety of our lives. This is, I think, what Heschel meant when he famously said of his march in Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that 'my feet were praying': his participation in the struggle for civil rights was, he believed, a mitzvah in the highest sense – an attempt to bring God into the world through the pursuit of justice and concern for the oppressed and downtrodden."[220] Held continues, citing Arthur Green's insight, that

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[216] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.17.

[217] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 1954, p.69.

[218] Ibid., pp.69-71.

[219] Ibid., p.71.

[220] Held, 2013, p.23.

Heschel applies his reading of "the classical Jewish mystical idea of '*ha-'avodah tzorekh gavoah*,' worship fulfills a divine need," is different from the kabbalists who "focused on the heavenly consequences of ritual performances"; for Heschel, it teaches of God's concern for humanity, the divine need for humans to partner with God in this world.[221] Prayer asks us to answer life's ultimate questions; it challenges us; and "It is in his being challenged that he discovers himself as a human being. Do I exist as a human being? My answer is: I am commanded – therefore I am."[222] Heschel is telling us that God cares about us and God needs us and we have free will, we can either ignore our responsibilities, or we can strive to transcend ourselves.

For Heschel prayer is *the* embodied practice of Judaism. Heschel explains in an essay "On Prayer" how the Jewish canon is alive in prayer: "Prayer as an episode, as a cursory incident, will not establish a home in the land of oblivion. Prayer must pervade as a climate of living, and all our acts must be carried out as variations on the theme of prayer."[223] It is prayer that compels us to live the Jewish text, to act, to clothe the naked, to free the imprisoned and to raise the downtrodden. A vision for Jewish education inspired by Heschel goes deeper than reading and reciting prayer and teaches a child or adult how to reach inside themselves, to discover what it means to have been implanted with eternal life (as we say when we stand at the

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[221] Held, 2013, p.23. Held notes Heschel is building on Nachmanides, for example his commentary to Exodus 29:46, and, Held is citing Green, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: Recasting Hasidism for Moderns," 2009, pp.2-76.

[222] Heschel, *Who is Man*?, 1965, p.111.

[223] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "On Prayer." *Conservative Judaism* 25, no. 1 (1970): 1-12. Reprinted in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays,* p.258.

Torah), and to go out into the world and "live in a way which is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living."[224]

Shabbat

From Heschel's *The Sabbath*:

> The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.[225]

A vision for Jewish education from the writings of Heschel would build experiences around the observance of Shabbat. Shabbat is to be taught as it is the epitome of being in relationship with God, demonstrating responsibility to others, and being mindful of one's own inner life. As Dr. Arnold Eisen has summarized Heschel from his book *The Sabbath*: "Involvement in the workaday world, particularly in a technically sophisticated civilization, tends to focus one on space, on things, rather than on time. The latter is the province of The Eternal."[226] Eisen then quotes Heschel: "Our intention here is not to deprecate the world of space ... What we plead against is man's unconditional surrender to space, his enslavement to things…[227] We live and work in space while "aiming at the sanctification of time."[228]

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[224] Heschel, *Who is Man*?, 1965, p.111.

[225] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 1951, p. xviii.

[226] Eisen, Arnold. "Re-Reading Heschel on the Commandments." Modern Judaism 9, no. 1 (1989), P.22.

[227] Eisen, 1989, p.22, quoting from Heschel's *The Sabbath* p.6.

[228] Ibid., quoting from Heschel's *The Sabbath* pp.8,48.

Teaching Shabbat requires learning how one makes Shabbat an experience, and facilitating the experience. This will require relationship between teacher, student, parent, school and *shul* (synagogue). Dr. Jane Sherwin Shapiro wrote about her experience of teaching Shabbat. She describes selecting materials that may engage the learner in a variety of ways, including "close explorations of biblical texts on Shabbat," and, providing "images and metaphors for Shabbat, [that] used pointed and vivid language to talk about Shabbat, and had potential to help my students find inspiration and more clarification for what Shabbat could be for them going forward."[229] Shabbat is a specific example of how the teacher is responsible for showing how to "apply the lofty to the practical,"[230] establishing Shabbat as "personal spiritual practice,"[231] and as a family practice and communal experience.

Shapiro describes working with adult learners: "Trying to teach for shlemut [wholeness][232], my goal was to help students cultivate personal dispositions toward Shabbat, in ways that might unfold not just from Friday afternoon to Saturday evening but throughout their week. I was looking not for understanding about Shabbat but attunement toward it. Metaphoric language allowed students to develop a personal concept."[233] The diversity of perspectives on

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[229] Shapiro, Jane Sherwin. "One Teacher's Path to Teaching Toward Shlemut," accessed October 28, 2021, https://www.jtsa.edu/hidden-page/one-teachers-path/.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Ibid.

[232] *Shlemut*. Dr. Shapiro defines in the parenthesis as "wholeness." See Glossary.

[233] Shapiro, Jane Sherwin. "One Teacher's Path to Teaching Toward Shlemut," accessed October 28, 2021.

Shabbat can allow for a personal connection with text, making "connections between the source material and their inner sentiments and sensibilities."[234]

Early Childhood Education

In the introduction to this third section of the paper it was noted that early childhood education is a component of a vision of Jewish education inspired by Heschel. Heschel repeatedly emphasized in his writings that early childhood experiences are fundamental, in particular with regards to inspiration.[235] It is such early childhood inspiration that can often be a source of resilience throughout life as the narratives we hear and our lived experiences in early childhood are emotional psychological cornerstones. This focus on early childhood education as part of the vision is informed both by Heschel's own experiences that he shared as well as from his biographers.

The power of narrative and storytelling in Heschel's early childhood was foundational to his upbringing and informed much of his world view. In particular, as part of Heschel's Hasidic upbringing, the stories that were told by his family, rabbis and teachers became part of Heschel's narrative. We can understand that stories, especially internalized in early childhood and adolescents, have incredible power throughout life. It is the role of both parent and teacher to connect the learner to the ongoing narrative of the Jewish people. As Heschel recalled, his childhood was "the place to which my childish imagination went on many journeys. Every step taken on the way was an answer to a prayer, and every stone was a memory of a marvel. For

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[234] Shapiro, Jane Sherwin. "One Teacher's Path to Teaching Toward Shlemut."

[235] For example, Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," 1953, p.18.

most of the wondrous deeds my father told about either happened in Medzibozh or were inspired by those mysterious men who lived there."[236] Therefore, the cultural references are part of the learning experience and need to be considered by the educator.[237]

A vision for Jewish education based on Heschel seeks to infuse early childhood with Jewish prayer, music, and role models who embrace wonder and the relational aspects of mitzvot. It is in early childhood that we, as individual adults, as educators and as a society, begin to hinder a child's wonder. This hindrance is to the detriment of one's inner life. Simply put, this vision demands the embrace of wonder. In addition, as is apparent from Heschel's own upbringing, both children and adults need champions, people who care about their growth and development. Heschel experienced this with his father and in Berlin. It is another example of the necessity to be open to the learner, to meet them where they are, and be a source of support in their journey

Lifelong Jewish Learning

Held specifies for us that Heschel teaches "self-transcendence is a lifelong spiritual project."[238] Rabbi Eve Rudin's emphasis on action is a key component for lifelong learning, it doesn't just happen, "The endeavor of meaning-making in Jewish education therefore entails the

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[236] Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, .6, citing Heschel, *A Passion for Truth,* 1973, xiii.

[237] Rudin, Eve. "Meaning-Making in the K–7 Supplemental School Context ," accessed on November 2, 2021, https://www.jtsa.edu/hidden-page/meaning-making-in-the-k-7-supplemental-school-context/ .

[238] Held, "Less Ego, More God: R. Abraham Joshua Heschel in Conversation with Hasidic Masters and Christian Mystics on the Spiritual Project of Prayer," 2014.

end goal of creating and retaining lifelong Jewish participants and 'act-ors.'"[239] Eisen, citing Heschel's essay "the Individual Jew and his Obligations," clarifies two points regarding Heschel's idea of observance, in particular the leap of action, as a ladder:

> Heschel makes one final effort to ease the leap: a "pedagogy of return," a "ladder of observance." This theme dominates the address to the Jerusalem "ideological conference;" it is muted, but no less central, in part three of *Search*. If Jews were to be won back to observance, those who represented the halakha would have to stop acting "as if the primary function of halacha were to restrict, to confine, to deny, and to deprive."
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> At present, "the gates of halacha are closed. No one departs and no one enters… The byword of the day should be "elasticity, flexibility," rather than "extremism, maximal-ism." As the rabbis of old might have put it, "In our generation even modest effort a person makes with kavanah for the sake of God is much more precious in the eyes of the Lord than the great deeds done in the generations of the past."[240]

As Eisen highlights for us that here in this essay, as well as Heschel's exploration of the debate between Rabbis Ishmael and Akiva, Jewish living in the modern world demands elasticity rather than minimalism.[241] Regarding the ladder of observance, Michael Marmur notes that the third section of *God in Search of Man* "[is] devoted to promoting such an approach to Jewish observance."[242] Eisen considers demand for elasticity over extremism to be Heschel's declarative break from Orthodoxy, observance without coercion: "In a sense, all of Heschel's work was preparation for this, his break with the reality – if not the principle – of Orthodoxy."[243] Marmur presents a slight distinction between Eisen and David Hartman regarding Heschel's goal

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[239] Rudin, "Meaning-Making in the K–7 Supplemental School Context ," accessed on November 2, 2021. https://www.jtsa.edu/hidden-page/meaning-making-in-the-k-7-supplemental-school-context/.

[240] Eisen, 1989, p.23. The citations by Eisen are from: Heschel, Abraham Joshua. "The Individual Jew and his Obligations," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1967, pp. 204-206.

[241] Eisen, 1989, p.23.

[242] Marmur, Michael. "In Search of Heschel." *Shofar* 26, no. 1 (2007): 9–40. P.19.

[243] Eisen, 1989, p.23.

for American Jews and observance, here stating Hartman "believes that Heschel 'attempted to guide Jews back to Halakhah by way of the prophets implying that behind Heschel's evocative prose lies the intention to persuade his readers to undertake a traditional life of piety.'"[244]

From either perspective of Heschel, that of Eisen or of Hartman, a vision for Jewish education based on Heschel does not seek to coerce nor does it assume observance will look the same for each person. Yes, there are unique Jewish characteristics that animate Jewish observance, for example prayer and Shabbat. At the same time, Jewish observance, and Jewish living in general, is to take into great account that each ritual is to be imbued with a person's own personal narrative, a deep respect for the inner life of each individual.

[244] Marmur, 2007, pp.19-20. Marmur is citing David Hartman, "Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Heroic Witness to Religious Pluralism," in David Hartman, *A Heart of Many Rooms: Celebrating the Many Voices Within Judaism* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1999), p. 175. See also "Heschel's Religious Pass" in David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions: Spiritual Possibilities of Modern Israel* (NY, Schocken Books, 1990), pp. 173-183.

Conclusion

This paper presents a vision for Jewish education based upon the life, writings and analysis of Heschel that strives to be both timely and eternal. Heschel provided the guiding question: "How to maintain a Jewish way of thinking?"[245] This educational vision and its detailed components, by necessity, have been informed by and is inherently tied to Heschel's theology. The axis, as Held explained, is self-transcendence, "around which all of Heschel's theology revolves."[246]

To cultivate and sustain wonder is critical as an access point to embrace the God of the Bible and to respond to God in prayer and action. This requires radical openness to such wonder. The cultivation of this Jewish way of thinking has clear content: the learner, the *Tanakh*[247], rabbinic literature and Jewish liturgy. The experience of Shabbat and the understanding of prayer and mitzvot as a "call and response" between God and humanity inform this vision.

Early childhood experiences in school, at home and in community, are of the utmost importance and are framed with storytelling, music, prayer and wonder. As was cited earlier, Heschel understood that "all our lives we draw upon the inspiration we received in childhood."[248] The teacher is central, from early childhood to an adult learner. The teacher is

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[245] Heschel, "Jewish Theology," 1968, in S. Heschel *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 1997, p.156.

[246] Held, 2013, p.233.

[247] *Tanakh.* Hebrew Bible. See Glossary.

[248] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education,"1953, p.18.

first and foremost a role model for Jewish living, meeting each learner where they are in life. The teacher is facilitator of experiences, as content and literacy are not simply to be learned, rather to be experienced and internalized.[249] And, the teacher asks questions of a higher order, with an openness to wonder and an awareness of mystery. And the teacher strives to raise prophets who continue to converse with God through rabbinic texts, liturgy and in one's inner life.

This vision, based on Heschel strives to be honest and multi-layered, reflecting the ever-changing life of an individual, a community and a world. This requires lifelong Jewish learning, "Jewish faith, I repeat, is not a formula. It is an attitude, the joy of living a life in which God has a stake, or being involved with God. Such faith is neither an easy nor a secure achievement. Nor is it an attitude acquired all at once or once and for all. It takes an instant to trust an idol; it takes ages to achievement attachment to him [God]. It requires effort, stirring, strain, preparation. It grows in awareness of mystery, in prayer, in deeds which transcend selfish needs. It grows a lifetime to burst forth for single moments. Faith implies striving for faith. It is never an arrival; it is always being on the way, man's effort to come out of his callousness. Faith comes with the discovery of being needed, of having a vocation, of being commanded."[250]

In stark contrast to contemporary Jewish education that has been characterized as survivalist[251], this vision for Jewish education leads to a Jewish way of thinking and a Jewish

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[249] For more specifically on this topic of teacher and the student's experience, see Geffen, Peter. "Heschel's Spiritual Humanism: Jewish Education for the Twenty-First Century." Modern Judaism 29, no. 1 (2009): 44-57, in particular pp.46-48.

[250] Heschel, "Idols in the Temple," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1967, p.66.

[251] See Geffen, 2009, p.45, where he writes: In contrast, contemporary Jewish education is often characterized by its insularity and an unspoken practice that is often little more than "survival training" cleaned up for the public audience by its nickname "continuity." This model of Jewish education often consists of inoculations

way of living that is joyful and resilient in the face of life's many challenges. It is a Jewish way of living that does not shy away from life's ultimate questions, pushing beyond the absurd and cynical, finding purpose in conversation and action with God and neighbor, a life characterized by mitzvot done at home, in the work place and on the street, always striving for hope beyond despair.

A vision of Jewish education inspired by the life and writings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel seeks to cultivate and sustain a Jewish way of thinking and living which is centered on an axis of self-transcendence; striving to answer the call of God in Torah while serving one's neighbor; respecting the inner life of each induvial, finding personal voice within the ongoing narrative of the Jewish people; embracing wonder as one takes a leap of action, a life animated by mitzvot, demonstrating a relationship with God and humanity.

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against threats, real and imagined, posed by the "outside world." Heschel challenged this perception of Judaism with the following words: 'The significance of Judaism.. .does not lie in its being conducive to the survival of this particular people but in its being a source of spiritual wealth, a source of meaning relevant to all peoples.' Here Geffen is citing Heschel's essay "Jewish Education," in *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1966, p. 226.

Glossary

Aggadah. Refers to the narrative tradition of rabbinic Judaism, see Art Green *These are the Words* (Jewish Lights, 2000, p.39). Aggadah is often referred to as Midrash, however this limits the broader meaning of Midrash, which includes both narrative and halakhic works, sometimes overlapping and sometimes distinctively separate works.

Avodah. Worship, service, labor. It is derived from the same root for work and denotes being a servant to God. For ancient Israel avodah denoted ritual sacrifice. After the destruction of the Second Temple the service of the Temple would be replaced by the service of prayer. For more on this topic see Green, 2000, pp.119-120.

Bakashot. Prayers of request. In traditional Judaism prayers said during worship generally fall into particular categories: Shevah – Praise; Hoda'ah – Thanksgiving; and Bakashah – Petition or request. There are also blessings said for particular moments in life or experiences. For example: One may say Brakhot Hoda'ah, blessings of thanksgiving, at a festive meal or before entering Shabbat; Brakhot HaNehenin, blessings for benefit or enjoyment, for example, said for eating or drinking; and, Brakhot HaMitzvot, blessing for the performance of a mitzvah, for example before lighting Shabbat candles or before studying Torah. For more on this topic see Rabbi Reuven Hammer's *Entering Jewish Prayer*, 1995.

Bavli. Hebrew for the Babylonian, generally referring to the Babylonian Talmud, a canonical collection of rabbinic works compiled sometime between 500-600 CE. For more on this topic see: https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14213-talmud.

B'tzelem El-ohim. Hebrew for "in the image of God," the Jewish value that each person is created in the image of God, based on Genesis 1:27 and 5:1-2. As explained by Green, 2000, p.183, this concept: "is the most fundamental moral claim of Judaism and its basis for a universal interpersonal ethic." Green continues, pp.183-184: "My teacher Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel ז"ל used to say that the reason we are forbidden to *make* graven images of God is that we ourselves *are* images of God. The point of the second of the Ten Commandments is not that God is imageless, but rather that to make a true image of God you need to use the medium of your entire life. Nothing less will do."

Chazal. An acronym for Hachameinu [Our Sages] Zikhronam Livrakhah [of blessed memory]. This is standard traditional identification of the ancient pre-rabbinic teachers and rabbis through talmudic times [the sages and rabbis of the Mishnah and Gemara, which comprise the Talmud]. Post-Tanakh, the literature of Chazal are the foundational texts of Judaism. All of Halakhah across the spectrum of Jewish practice is rooted in the words

of Chazal. Note: I am intentionally referring to Chazal as sages *and* rabbis because the early teachers, for example Hillel and Shammai, did not have the title "rabbi" or "rav" [Rabbi, for the most part, would be the title given to teachers ordained in the land of Israel while Rav signifies ordination in Babylonia]. For more on this topic see, for example: https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14238-tanna and https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1421amora#sts=AMORA%20(plural,%20Amoraim,%20)

Gehinom. A metaphysical place for where those who committed evil acts while living are to be punished. A Jewish concept of Hell. For more see https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7715-hinnom; and the entry for Gehenna https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6558-gehenna.

Geulah. Redemption, often in prayer God is referred to as the redeemer of Israel, HaGoel [the One who redeems], or Ga'al Yisrael, the Redeemer of Israel. Likely originating during the Second Temple Period, the concept of geulah became linked to the concept of Mashiach [the Messiah], a semi-metaphysical character to be sent by God to once again redeem the people of Israel. Heschel is using the term geulah to imply that people can partner with God and have an active role in the redemption of Israel and the world. For more on the topic of geulah see the Jewish Encyclopedia entry written, in part, by Solomon Schechter: https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6644-ge-ullah#sts=GE'ULLAH%20.

Halakhah. Jewisw law. When distinguishing between aggadah and halakhah, halakhah is the prescriptive rabbinic literature that "outlines the path we are to follow through daily life," (Green, 2000, p.39). Today, Halakhah is used to refer to both Jewish legal literature and Jewish law in general.

Haskalah. The Hebrew name for Enlightenment of 18th and 19th Century Europe. Jewish participants of the Haskalah were the *Maskilim*. The root of the word is from sekhel, intelligence, common sense. Moses Mendelssohn was perhaps the most prominent figure of the Haskalah.

Havruta. A partner with whom one learns traditional Jewish texts; or, the practice of learning in partnership. Texts are read aloud and discussed, with the intention of unpacking the meaning of the texts, delving deeper, together, in partnership, as a form of religious worship.

Kavvanah. Literally intention. Regarding prayer it denotes focus, or bringing a personal aspect or set intention to prayer. Kavvanah is often used in contrast to the word keva. In such

circumstance keva refers to fixed or set prayer and kavvanah implies bringing a personal focus to prayer or spontaneous prayer.

Melakhot. Melakhot is plural and the singular form is melakhah. In Talmud Bavli (see Bavli in Glossary) Shabbat 49b the rabbis discuss the 39 melakhot, basically translated as categories of work, meaning tasks done for one's profession, that one does not engage in on Shabbat. These tasks outlined by the rabbis correspond to the work done to assemble the Mishkan, (see mishkan in Glossary). As Dr. Job Jindo taught, one can infer that during the week we are to engage in meaningful, purposeful work, in order for Shabbat to be a *mishkan*, or, as Heschel may have said, for Shabbat to be a palace in time. Job Y. Jindo, "Session 11: The Construction of the Tabernacle." BIB 346: The Book of Exodus - Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Blessedness (class lecture, Academy for Jewish Religion, Yonkers, NY, March, 24, 2020).

Midrash. Exegesis, specifically the derivation of [rabbinic] interpretations from [biblical] texts; the body of literature that employs this method. Prior to the canonization of the Mishnah, circa 200 CE, midrash denoted rabbinic literature, both narrative (aggadah) and halakhic, often overlapping. The Mishnah is primarily a work of halakhah and, therefore, its "publication" led to an eventual separation of terms-halakhah regarding legal works and midrash regarding aggadah (narrative, theological or homiletical) works. However, in this author's opinion, it is incorrect to label midrash as solely aggadah. For much more on this topic see entries in the Encyclopedia Judaica on Midrash, Midrashei Halakhah and Mishnah.

Minhag. Hebrew for custom, often used in relation to law and ritual. As explained by Green, 2000, p.95: "A minhag or 'custom' is a traditionally accepted way of acting, particularly in ritual matters, that is not formally required by religious law (*Halakhah*)".

Mishkan. The traveling sanctuary of ancient Israel built after the Exodus from Egypt; often translated as the Tabernacle. It served as the meeting point between Israel and God prior to the construction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

Nevi'im. Prophets**.** See Tanakh entry in Glossary.

Niggun. A Yiddish term today commonly used to describe a wordless melody, in prayer or in study (which is itself a form of Jewish worship). In Hebrew l'nagen (same root as niggun) means to play music, meaning to play an instrument, and a nagan is a musician, and, a manginah means a tune or melody.

Shlemut. Wholeness. Green, 2000, p.170, writes: "*Shalom* is related to *shelemut*, meaning 'wholeness.' We need to set our course and live it wholly. *Shalom* with oneself and with God are impossible without one another."

Shtiebl. A shtiebl was a small classroom for children, usually connected in some way to the larger beit midrash, house of study. Dresner and Kaplan, 1998, p.24, note shtiebl literally means a small hall, and they explain that Hasidic shtiebls in Warsaw did not follow "the tightly organized curriculum of the network of non-Hasidic yeshivas in Poland". An additional common usage of shtiebl was to denote a gathering space for a small prayer group.

Shulhan Arukh. Literally the set table. The Shulhan Arukh is a code of Jewish law, to this day an authoritative work of halakhah, that was written by Rabbi Joseph Caro in Safed in the land of Israel in 1563 and first published in 1565. Caro was originally from Spain and his audience were the Jews exiled from Spain, who were spread across North Africa, into the Near East, and into parts of Europe. Rabbi Moshe Isserles wrote a gloss of the Shulhan Arukh, the Mapa, the table cloth, intended for Jews of Ashkenazi communities, primarily Jews living in France, Germany and throughout Europe. Both works sought to secure the practice of communities regarding Jewish life, a "how to guide" for Jews to live life within a framework in which decisions are made through a lens of halakhah. For believers the intention is to live in accord with Torah and mitzvot.

Tanakh. The Hebrew Bible. Tanakh is a Hebrew acronym for **T**orah **N**evi'im **K**etuvim. The Torah is the Five Books of Moses, Nevi'im are the Prophets, and, Ketuvim are the Writings (comprising Psalms, Provers, Job, etc.).

Teshuvah. The word teshuvah literally means "return," implying returning a response to someone. The word denotes repentance, turning back, pursuing forgiveness and a return to a life in concert with Jewish values and/or mitzvot [depending on one's Jewish religious orientation]. As noted by Green, 2000, p.137, teshuvah is more than repentance, the concept "goes to the very root of human existence," the opportunity always exists for a person to return, "re-establishing the intimacy and trust that existed between God and God's beloved creatures before the expulsion from Eden". In this sense, teshuvah denotes responsibility and growth.

Tzadikim. Tzadikim is plural and the singular form is tzadik. A tzadik is a righteous person. The root of the word is tzedek, meaning righteous or just. A tzadik, as explained in Green, 2000, p.179: "occupies the place in Judaism held by the 'holy man,' spiritual master, or shaman in most of the world's religious traditions. But one is called a *tsaddik* [Green's spelling] primarily due to acts of extraordinary generosity and selflessness within the human community.

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