Because of his combination of intellectual substance and charisma, Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972) became a revered and notorious public figure in the United States during the tumultuous 1960s.\textsuperscript{1} In 1966 Newsweek wrote of him, “To recover the prophetic message of ancient Judaism, Heschel has built up a rich, contemporary Jewish theology that may well be the most significant achievement of modern Jewish thought,” confirming Reinhold Niebuhr’s prediction fifteen years earlier that “he will become a commanding and authoritative voice not only in the Jewish community but in the religious life of America.”\textsuperscript{2}

Heschel’s unique presence in the United States is a result of his having personally integrated the spiritual and intellectual treasures of three capitals of prewar Jewish Europe: Warsaw (his birthplace), Vilna (“the Jerusalem of Lithuania,” where he received a diploma from the Yiddish-language Real-Gymnasium), and Berlin (where he attended a liberal rabbinic school and a secular university). Reared in a devout community, Heschel was a child prodigy who mastered the immense body of basic Jewish texts; his yikhus, his distinguished Hasidic ancestry, is vaguely known and still incompletely studied.\textsuperscript{3} His astounding memory of the Bible, Talmud, and Kabbalistic texts dates from his childhood in Warsaw. Then he went on to earn a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin in 1933.

Heschel came to America in 1940 having already bridged the
traditional and modern worlds and having lived through the European cultural crisis following the First World War. He knew firsthand the Nazi rise to power but did not place in the Shoah a source of Jewish energy, as seems to have happened to many American Jews after the war. Heschel’s theology represents a challenging alternative to Judaism redefined by the Holocaust and the State of Israel. (It implies that survival does not require Jews seeing themselves, even triumphally, as victims.)

Heschel recognized that American Jewry, despite its struggle with recent historical facts, could not derive enduring values and identity from the vicarious experience of events essentially foreign to its daily reality. Heschel’s Judaism insisted upon the real presence of God and Torah, as well as that of the Jewish people.

Heschel’s major English works are addressed to observant and secular readers alike because he lived within the tensions between religious confidence and a harsh moral imperative. With his characteristic mixture of philosophical polemic and lush poetic prose, he interpreted at once universal religious experience and particular Jewish tradition. *Man Is Not Alone* (1951) and *God in Search of Man* (1955) led him to be viewed as “a zaddik (or holy man) of the 1950s.” *The Prophets* (1962) and *The Insecurity of Freedom* (1966) established the theological sources of Heschel as a “prophet of the 1960s.” *A Passion for Truth* (1973), published soon after his death, with an autobiographical preface, outlines a radical and realistic post-Holocaust faith.

Heschel acquired his modern scholarly and philosophical credentials at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin and the Friedrich Wilhelm (now Humboldt) University. On January 30, 1933, Hitler became chancellor of Germany. On February 11, 1933, Heschel successfully completed the oral defense of his doctoral dissertation on prophetic consciousness, just weeks before Jews were expelled from the German academic system. On February 27, the Reichstag building was set on fire in the course of an election campaign that was to enable the Nazis to seize total power in July of that year. That same year Heschel published his first and perhaps most intimate book, a collection of Yiddish poems, *Der Shem Ham’Forash—Mentsh* (Mankind—God’s Ineffable Name), express-
ing the intense compassion of a pious Jew who, despite his modernity, lives in intimacy with the biblical God. The poem "Ikh un Du" (I and Thou) proclaims an even more intimate reciprocity of human and divine than the dialogical relation already celebrated by Martin Buber: "My nerves' tendrils are intertwined with yours." 7

It has been observed that the systematic exclusion of Jews from Germany's bountiful cultural life after 1933 stimulated German Jewish creativity. Many assimilated Jews returned to the synagogue and enrolled in adult education courses in Judaism. 8 Publishing houses owned by Jews, forbidden to print "Aryan" authors, issued an impressive new list of books in Judaica. With a Ph.D. and a liberal rabbinical degree (he was ordained at the Hochschule in July 1934), Heschel began to present his point of view to the general public in print and as a teacher.

In 1935 Heschel became a reader for the Erich Reiss Verlag in Berlin and editor of its series on Jewish thought and history (Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart). Reiss published Heschel's biography of Maimonides in 1935 and his biographical essay on Don Isaac Abravanel in 1937. 9 Heschel complemented these inspirational biographies of Jewish thinkers and activists in exile with eight essays on Tannaim (for example, on Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Gamliel II, Rabbi Akiba, and Rabbi Jehuda Hannassi) published in the Berlin Jewish community newspaper, Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt, in 1936, signed "Dr. Abraham Heschel." 10 He gave lectures at the Berlin Lehrhaus and, in March 1937, Martin Buber called him to Frankfurt-am-Main to succeed him as codirector of the Central Organization for Jewish Education and the Jüdisches Lehrhaus; it was there that the young Fritz Rothschild first heard Heschel lecture on the Bible to a skeptical group of youth leaders. After their eventual emigration to the United States, the two men formed a lifelong professional tie. 11

Heschel was expelled from Germany on October 28, 1938, with about eighteen thousand other Jews holding Polish passports. After a short stay at the border town of Zbaszyn he returned to Warsaw. He lived with his mother and two of his sisters on Dzika Street and, from November 1938 to June 1939, taught at the Warsaw Institute for Jewish Studies. In the spring of 1939 he received an invitation from President Julian Morgenstern to teach at Hebrew Union Col-
lege. Awaiting approval of a nonquota visa to the United States, Heschel left Warsaw for London, writing to Dr. Morgenstern on July 28, "I would like very much to study the English language and to continue the work on a philosophical book on the prayer [sic]. Two chapters therefrom will be published before long in the book published in honour of Prof. Balaban... and the Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums."

"Das Gebet als Aeusserung und Einfüllung" (Prayer as Expression and Empathy) appeared in the famous swan-song issue of the Monatsschrift, volume 82 (1939). This elegant essay, without footnotes, took its place among the more conventionally academic monographs by leading German-speaking Jewish scholarly luminaries. A Hebrew essay, "Al mahut ha-tefillah" (On the Essence of Prayer), originally written for the Meir Balaban Jubilee Volume (to be published in Warsaw in 1939, but confiscated and destroyed by the Nazis), did not appear until February 1941 in Bitzaron, a Hebrew monthly.

On March 21, 1940, Heschel arrived in New York appalled by an intimate havoc. He remained acutely aware that his family and entire culture were being annihilated. Much later, in a 1965 lecture at the Union Theological Seminary of New York, he defined himself as a survivor:

I am a brand plucked from the fire, in which my people was burned to death. I am a brand plucked from the fire of an altar to Satan on which millions of human lives were exterminated to evil's greater glory. [On this altar] so much else was consumed: the divine image of so many human beings, many people's faith in the God of justice and compassion, and much of the secret and power of attachment to the Bible bred and cherished in the hearts of men for nearly two thousand years.

At the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati Heschel was perceived as a modern but religiously observant scholar committed to spiritual issues. It was there that he refined his American mission: "how to share the certainty of Israel that the Bible contains that which God wants us to know and harken to; how to attain a collective sense for the presence of God in the biblical words." Heschel's perception of God's reality and his response to human evil remained consistent with that of his years in Berlin. Grateful for
their having rescued him, Heschel judged American Jews as being in the throes of a second Holocaust—what he called “spiritual absenteeism.” He would attempt to transplant his still vibrant faith.

Heschel’s American career can be divided into three phases: (1) from 1940 to 1950 he dealt with philosophical and theological foundations; (2) from 1951 to 1962 he elaborated a critique of contemporary Jewish philosophy and practice; and (3) from 1962 to his death in 1972 he became a prophetic activist. Rather than summarize Heschel’s religious philosophy or analyze his main books, I want to explore how Heschel’s Jewish soul took root in America. Heschel’s various writings and appearances became like the divine tree of Kabbalistic legend: its roots in heaven, its branches and leaves on earth.

Heschel did not find enough American Jews struggling with the reality of God nor responding to divine imperatives. After the war, American Jews were relatively safe from antisemitism, gaining social and political power, moving to the suburbs, building synagogues and schools, yet handicapped by reductionistic conceptions of God and of the Jewish tradition. For Heschel it was essential that the living God must not be cut down to mere symbols, nor halakhah (Jewish law) to “customs and ceremonies.” Accordingly, he challenged the institutional versions of Judaism with biblical standards of truth, holiness, and justice.

During his first fifteen years in this country (1940–1955), Heschel’s publications focused on prayer and faith. He sought, literally, to save our soul (the Jewish neshamah) from oblivion. In Germany, he had already written on the spiritual crisis of the twentieth century and continued to see Nazism as but another, albeit an unspeakable, outbreak of a prolonged cultural emergency. In the HUC Bulletin of March 1943 he published an English version of a speech he had delivered to a Quaker group in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1938. “The Meaning of This War” opened, “Emblazoned over the gates of the world in which we live is the escutcheon of the demons. The mark of Cain in the face of man has come to overshadow the likeness of God.” Heschel blamed secular civilization—“us,” not “them,” including Americans—for distorted values and a feeble,
ineffective response to events: "The outbreak of war was no surprise. It came as a long expected sequel to a spiritual disaster." Nazism was but an extreme perversion of the callousness of modern civilization:

We did not sink into the pit in 1939, or even in 1933. We had descended into it generations ago, and the snakes have sent their venom into the bloodstream of humanity, gradually paralyzing us, numbing nerve after nerve, dulling our minds, darkening our vision. . . . In our every-day life we worshiped force, despised compassion, and obeyed no law but our unappeasable appetite. The vision of the sacred has all but died in the soul of man.

Heschel tried unsuccessfull y during the war to help European victims, and it became clear that his main impact would be through his writings. Heschel’s first articles written in (impeccable) English appeared between 1942 and 1944: “An Analysis of Piety,” “The Holy Dimension,” and “Faith.” For an article on “Prayer,” published in 1945, the author signed his name as “Abraham Joshua Heschel, Associate Professor of Jewish Philosophy, Hebrew Union College”; by signing his full name, the American academic had discreetly reappropriated his Hasidic ancestry. Soon after moving from Hebrew Union College to Jewish Theological Seminary in 1945, he published “The Mystical Element in Judaism.” These foundational articles anticipate Heschel’s American program.

Heschel’s manner of marketing his ideas, even then, was quintessentially American. He understood that his credibility would benefit from recognition by professionals outside as well as within the Jewish community, so he published articles in English with the prestigious journals of Columbia University and the University of Chicago and in Mordecai Kaplan’s Reconstructionist, which then reached a large, diverse readership. Moreover, Heschel’s consummate literary style was, by necessity, addressed particularly to outsiders as well as insiders. Heschel’s goal was to unveil, and make poetically concrete, life’s fundamental holiness. He understood that American readers could not recognize his constant allusions (most of them without direct citation of sources) to traditional texts and that their cultural experience was not very open to divine reality.

The destruction of European Jewry made especially urgent Heschel’s commitment to transplant the Kabbalistic tree of heaven
in the New World. In a translation of a speech given in Yiddish to the YIVO annual conference in New York in January 1945, he insisted that

romantic portraiture of Hasidism, nostalgia, and piety, are merely ephemeral; they disappear with the first generation. We are in need of Jews whose life is a garden, not a hothouse. Only a living Judaism can survive. Books are no more than seeds; we must be both the soil and the atmosphere in which they grow.\footnote{27}

His first American work of spiritual rescue, published in 1950, is an expansion of this speech in English titled *The Earth Is the Lord’s: The Inner World of the Jew in East Europe.* Illustrated with exquisite woodcuts by Ilya Schor, also a Jewish refugee from Poland, this book is more than an idealization of Heschel’s heritage and a *kaddish* to a civilization lost; it challenges Jews to a prophetic task:

We are God’s stake in human history. . . . There is a war to wage against the vulgar, against the glorification of the absurd, a war that is incessant, universal. Loyal to the presence of the ultimate in the common, we may be able to make it clear that man is more than man, that in doing the finite he may perceive the infinite.\footnote{28}

Heschel’s reputation as the spiritual voice of American Jewry was established by 1951, when two more books appeared: *The Sabbath* and *Man Is Not Alone.*\footnote{29} It was at this time that the author was lauded in the *New York Herald Tribune* by America’s leading Protestant theologian and social activist, Reinhold Niebuhr, as a definitive authority on Judaism and religion.

The polyphonic style of *Man Is Not Alone*, as well as of *God In Search of Man* (1955) and *The Prophets* (1962), combines poetically evocative metaphor, assonance, and rhythm with a sometimes surgically incisive theological and philosophical polemics to convey the authentic religious experience. He expected his words, addressed to religious and secular readers alike, to open minds to the divine presence.\footnote{30}

Having decided that Americans must at first participate in his spiritual reality vicariously, Heschel had no choice but to exploit a rhetorical strategy to stimulate readers’ intuitions. He evokes ineffable experience beyond the limits of language so as to thrust readers beyond concepts to God’s initiative. Reading him becomes a
religious odyssey. His writing can at times become a virtuoso performance, verbal acrobatics. At its best, however, Heschel’s artistry sensitizes us to holiness—in the prayerbook, in the Bible, and especially in everyday living. His style supplies both form and content for readers who do not have the advantage of the author’s biblical, rabbinic, Kabbalistic, philosophical, literary background. For those who share Heschel’s daily liturgical observance and training, his poetic renditions infuse their acts with new 

\[kavvanah\], sacred intention.\(^31\)

In 1953, in a week of intra-Jewish shuttle diplomacy, Heschel delivered two addresses within four days to the (Conservative) Rabbinical Assembly of America meeting in Atlantic City and to the (Reform) Central Conference of American Rabbis at Estes Park, Colorado. He warned his Conservative colleagues about the spiritual emptiness of their well-ordered services; he urged the Reform rabbis not to abandon halakhah. Both audiences expressed a mixture of outrage, embarrassment, and veneration.

Heschel’s message to the Rabbinical Assembly, “The Spirit of Jewish Prayer,” began with a critique of current synagogue practice. “Has the synagogue become a graveyard where prayer is buried?” he asked. “We have developed the habit of \textit{praying by proxy}.”\(^32\) Rabbis must face honestly the frailty of their religious faith: “I have been in the United States of America for thirteen years. I have not discovered America but I have discovered something in America. It is possible to be a rabbi and not believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”\(^33\)

Heschel then pinpointed a crisis in theology. He criticized (some would say caricatured) four contemporary approaches to religion that subvert true prayer: (1) the agnosticism that claimed “that the only way to revitalize the synagogue is to minimize the importance of prayer and to convert the synagogue into a center”; (2) a religious behaviorism whose “supreme article of faith is respect for tradition”; (3) the view that prayer was a social act, “built on a theology which regards God as a symbol of social action, as an epitome of the ideals of the group”;\(^34\) and (4) a religious solipsism that “maintains that the individual self of the worshipper is the whole sphere of prayer life. The assumption [is] that God is an idea, a process, a source, a fountain, a spring, a power.”
The affirmative part of his address provided a demanding standard. It began with a citation from an earlier work: "It is precisely the function of prayer to shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender." People should strive to view reality from God's perspective, a way of thinking that the Hebrew prophets both evoke and exemplify. The books he subsequently published seek to effect a religious Copernican revolution; they comprise a vast apologetics meant to recenter our consciousness from the self to God.

At the same time, Heschel's theology was fully aware of modern anguish. In response to the view that Judaism bestows a tranquil "peace of mind" and that religion makes us feel at home in the universe, he insisted that "we could not but experience anxiety and spiritual homelessness in the sight of so much suffering and evil, in countless examples of failure to live up to the will of God. That experience gained in intensity by the soul-stirring awareness that God Himself was not at home in the universe, where His will is defied, where His kingship is denied." Religious observance can provide the elements of a remedy: "To pray, then, means to bring God back into the world... God is transcendent, but our worship makes Him immanent."

Heschel seems to have considered the 1930s and 1950s as spiritually equivalent. Modern skepticism had undermined the ability to recall God's self-revelation at Sinai: "If [conviction in the reality of God] is lacking, if the presence of God is a myth, then prayer to God is a delusion. If God is unable to listen to us, then we are insane in talking to Him." (Heschel, of course, holds to the objective reality of the biblical God; to many of us, however, if taken seriously, his shocking statement might tempt one to relinquish any pretense to religious, as opposed to ethnic or political, identity.)

Heschel's admonition to Reform rabbis two days later, "Toward an Understanding of Halacha," also confronts the implicit agnosticism or atheism of American Judaism. After expressing his gratitude to Julian Morgenstern, who made Heschel's emigration to the United States possible, he reassured his Reform colleagues: "I, too, have wrestled with the difficulties inherent in our faith as Jews." Heschel described his own life as paradigmatic of the journey of the modern Jew. Scion of generations of rabbis, the young man had
arrived in Berlin in the fall of 1927 to study at the University; one
day he "walks alone through the magnificent streets of Berlin" and
suddenly notices that the sun has gone down. He had forgotten to
pray! "I had forgotten God—I had forgotten Sinai—I had forgotten
that sunset is my business—that my task is to 'restore the world to
the kingship of the Lord.'" 41 The East European hasid, nourished
in the hothouse of German intellectualism, uprooted once again and
transplanted to America, reminds American rabbis of their true
origin: "There is something which is far greater than my will to
believe. Namely, God's will that I believe." 42

Rejecting the secularism that defined Jewish observance as "cus-
toms and ceremonies," Heschel insisted on God's reality and the
divine origin of the mitzvot. He challenged his Reform colleagues
"to take a leap of action rather than a leap of thought." The current
crisis of belief results from a false premise, namely, that the mind
must first know God before serving God. The opposite is true: "In
carrying out the word of the Torah [a Jew] is ushered into the
presence of spiritual meaning. Through the ecstasy of deeds [a Jew]
learns to be certain of the presence of God." Heschel concluded,
"For many years rabbis have in speeches delivered at conventions of
the Central Conference of American Rabbis voiced their sense of
shock and grief at the state of religious chaos prevalent in modern
congregations and have urged the members of this Conference to
return to Jewish observance. May it be a return to a halakhic way
of life, not to customs and ceremonies." 43

In 1953, thirteen years after his arrival on our shores, Heschel cele-
brated his bar mitzvah as a New American by denouncing vicarious
Judaism. Faith in a real God was an imperative and must be lived.
Heschel demanded of his readers that they emulate the God of
pathos, the biblical God who cares passionately about the quality
of human life. God is the source of Jewish energy—not big syna-
gogues, community centers, money, or deeply felt responsibility
toward Israel. In Man Is Not Alone Heschel had named the
standard:

GOD. Not an emotion, a stir within us, but a power, a marvel beyond
us, tearing the world apart. The word that means more than universe,
more than eternity, holy, holy, holy; we cannot comprehend it. We
only know it means infinitely more than we are able to echo. Stag-
gered, embarrassed, we stammer and say: He, who is more than all
there is, who speaks through the ineffable, whose question is more
than our minds can answer; He to whom our life can be the spelling
of an answer.44

A full-scale intellectual and cultural biography would trace in
detail what Heschel meant by “the spelling of an answer,” yet it is
possible to draw inferences from his works. His study of the Bible,
The Prophets, defined the source of his public activism, the “theol-
ogy of pathos” sketched in his 1933 Berlin dissertation and the
Yiddish poetry that expressed his hypersensitivity to evil.45 “The
prophet is a man who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon
his soul, and he is bowed and stunned by man’s fierce greed. . . .
[The prophet makes] much ado about paltry things, lavishing exces-
sive language upon trifling subjects.”46

At the height of the Cold War, at the threshold of John Kennedy’s
Camelot and Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society,” Heschel became a
prophetic figure, which, depending on the politics of his colleagues,
either enhanced or compromised his reputation.47 Heschel first
reached mass acclaim at the 1960 White House Conference on Chil-
dren and Youth, and the next year at the White House Conference
on Aging. In 1963, he presented the opening address at the National
Conference on Religion and Race in Chicago, which began, “At the
first conference on religion and race, the main participants were
Pharaoh and Moses. . . . The outcome of that summit meeting has
not yet come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The
exodus began, but is far from having been completed.”48 At the
Chicago conference Heschel met the Reverend Martin Luther King,
Jr., beginning their close association in civil rights matters.49

Heschel applied to all social and political dilemmas what I call a
“sacred humanism” that demanded reverence for the individual as
literally an image of God.50 This theology of mankind was a re-
sponse to the living God of concern, and he supports it with cita-
tions from the Bible, the Talmud, and other rabbinic and Kabbalistic
sources. The prophets’ sympathetic identification with the
divine pathos most dramatically defined our social, political, and
religious standard. For example, with regard to civil rights, “Racial
or religious bigotry must be recognized for what it is: satanism,
blasphemy." In the realm of international politics (the question was the war in Vietnam): "Oceans divide us, God’s presence unites us, and God is present wherever man is afflicted, and all of humanity is embroiled in every agony wherever it may be."  

In the 1960s, Heschel’s increasing involvement in interfaith dialogue and cooperation made him a veritable “apostle to the gentiles,” in James Sanders’s rather startling formulation. Two examples must suffice. Starting in 1961, as a consultant to the American Jewish Committee, Heschel established a close working relationship with Cardinal Bea, whom Pope John XXIII put in charge of the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions at the Second Vatican Council. Heschel’s conversations in Rome, including a personal interview with Pope Paul VI, contributed significantly to the final version of *Nostra Aetate.* Second, Heschel’s relations with colleagues at the Protestant Union Theological Seminary culminated in his appointment in 1965 as Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor. By then Heschel was perceived as a Hebrew prophet—his activist friends William Sloane Coffin, Jr., and Daniel Berrigan called him “Father Abraham.” Heschel’s unshakable defense of the autonomy of the Hebrew Bible, Judaism, Israel, the Jewish people—and the God of Israel—allowed him both to affirm the spiritual value of other traditions and to make demands on their integrity.

Heschel’s final two books written in English—*Israel: Echo of Eternity* (1969) and *A Passion for Truth* (1973)—both confront the disasters of twentieth-century history. In their own ways, these troubling and incomplete books challenge us to redefine our relation to the God of the Bible. Heschel’s modern theology faces the inescapable discrepancy between religious ideals and the facts of persistent barbarism. Heschel’s emphasis on human freedom and responsibility does not contradict his faith in a caring God who remains involved in a continuing human process of redemption.

My view is that Heschel’s witness is valuable even for those who do not share his vigorous confidence in God’s revelation at Sinai, because his manner of thinking keeps the relevant questions alive. His “depth theology” strengthens our drive toward faith and does not contradict a commitment to harsh truth. Heschel’s demand that
we live in a manner compatible with God’s presence reinforces our resolve in the face of God’s silence.

Heschel’s most explicit response to the nihilism of our age appears in *Israel: Echo of Eternity*. (Its publication, sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, is an attempt to communicate to key Christian leaders the preciousness of the Holy Land and to help them understand Jewish fears of annihilation during the June 1967 War.) Heschel did not rationalize the Nazi destruction theologically by interpreting the Jewish state as an “atonement” either by God or by the United Nations. But the existence of the State of Israel does confirm that the Jewish people has overcome despair. The “rebirth of Israel” represents a partial answer to the question of faith after Auschwitz—but not the definitive one. Faith is not static, like a formulated creed, but an unending challenge, a way of thinking about unfinished redemption: “There is no answer to Auschwitz... To try to provide one is to commit a supreme blasphemy. One can merely say that Israel enables us to bear the agony of Auschwitz without radical despair, to sense a trace of God’s radiance in the jungles of history.”

Heschel loyally supported Israel and celebrated the reunion in 1967 of new and old Jerusalem. But he also thought critically about Israeli policies. In the late 1950s, he had warned against what might happen if religious law, spiritual authenticity, and democratic rights were to be confused: “It would be a fatal distortion to reduce Judaism to individualism... At the same time, it would be suicidal to reduce Judaism to collectivism or nationalism. Jewish existence is a personal situation.” Heschel’s own “passion for truth” afflicted him with the inability to accept expedient solutions or pious rationales.

Heschel pointed to the prophets’ “theology of pathos” as training us to view human events from the perspective of the Eternal. At the same time, he insisted that ultimate meaning remains a mystery, an unknown. There is no panacea. Heschel did not reveal his own irreducible conflict until the preface to *A Passion for Truth*, delivered to the publisher weeks before his death. Two Hasidic extremists who guided his youth represented his lifelong ethical and spiritual tensions:
In a very strange way, I found my soul at home with the Baal Shem Tov but driven by the Kotzker. Was it good to live with one’s heart torn between the joy of Mezbizh and the anxiety of Kotzk? To live both in awe and consternation, in fervor and horror, with my conscience on mercy and my eyes on Auschwitz, waver ing between exaltation and dismay? I had no choice: my heart was in Mezbizh, my mind in Kotzk.57

The Kotzker rebbe reflects Heschel’s agony at moral decay, the frailty of conscience, the trivialization of religious and ethical demands, in contrast to the Baal Shem’s uncritical love for all creation. The radical post-Holocaust theology implicit in A Passion for Truth accepts the challenge of absolute contradiction: commitment to moral integrity and faith in a caring God who, creating free human beings, allows them the power to destroy themselves.58

We can grasp the modernity of Heschel’s apologetics only in its dialectical relation to moral despair. Prophetic ethics challenges our calloused conscience, just as faith challenges our frail confidence in the Divine: “Dark is the world to me, for all its cities and stars. If not for my faith that God in His silence still listens to my cry, who could stand such agony?”59

This is not a reassuring conclusion. Heschel confronts the tensions that lacerate modern religion: the secularization of revealed Tradition, the reduction of God to symbols, the shrinking of prophetic ethics to the confines of institutional or nationalist self-interest. “Depth theology” insists that no position taken by the mind is final. Insight, he reminded us, occurs within an individual’s consciousness: but God meets the person equally in the heart and in the jungles of the world.

Notes

1. My thanks to Samuel Dresner, Aharon Appelfeld, Jonathan Sarna, Jacob Neusner, Fritz Rothschild, Arnold Wolf, and Byron Sherwin for conversations about issues relating to this paper. I began this paper before the United States started to bomb Iraq (January 17, 1991) and before Iraq launched missiles into Israel. My writing and revisions continued throughout the agonizing conflict. One test of any theology must be to provide an authentic and relevant model of Judaism at such times.


6. The printed cover of *Das prophetische Bewusstsein* carries this information but not the other version, which is entitled *Die Prophetie*; both were published in 1936 by the Polish Academy of Sciences (Krakow) and Erich Reiss Verlag (Berlin).


10. It would have been misunderstood, in Western Europe, if he had signed his full Hasidic name, Abraham Joshua Heschel Heschel—or with the abridgment that became famous in the United States. (His three given names commemorate his great-great-grandfather, the Apter Rebbe, Abraham Joshua Heschel [1748–1825], known as the *Ohev Yisrael*, the Lover of Jews.) Neil Rosenstein, ed., *The Unbroken Chain*, 2 vols. (New York: CIS, 1990) is the basic reference work.

11. Interview with Fritz A. Rothschild. Later Heschel would help Rothschild, a penniless immigrant, enter the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Rothschild, after joining the faculty, would publish an anthology of Heschel's writings, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism* (New York: Free Press, 1959; most recent revision of bibliogra-
phy, 1975), a lucid systematization of his philosophy, making Heschel accessible to a wide readership.


13. These exploratory papers define the categories developed later in Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism (Scribner's, 1954; reprinted as Quest for God).


15. God in Search of Man (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1955), 246. The sentence that follows underlines the gravity of his endeavor: "In this problem lies the dilemma of our fate, and in the answer lies the dawn or the doom" (ibid.); see ibid., 252–53.


17. In 1949 Heschel published as a fifteen-page offprint an urgent call for Jewish spiritual survival, Pikuach N'Shamah (New York: Baronial Press). This little-known (and important) essay, written in rich allusive Hebrew, was probably given as a talk to the Union of Principals of Day Schools and Yeshivas in the New York Metropolitan Area, as the cover suggests.

18. I quote from the version published as the final chapter of Man's Quest for God, 147–51. The original English essay, "The Meaning of This War," first published in the HUC Bulletin (March 1943): 1–2, 8, was revised slightly and reprinted in Liberal Judaism (February 1944): 18–21. The original German version, entitled "Versuch einer Deutung" (An Inquiry about Meaning), can be found in Margarethe Lachmund, ed., Begegnung mit dem Judentum: Ein Gedenkbuch. (Stimmen der Freunde [Quaker] in Deutschland) (Bad Pyrmont, 1962), 11–13.

19. Ibid., 149.

20. Ibid.; this part was added in the 1944 version.

21. Heschel did not confine himself to writing. In 1941, 1942, and 1943, he attempted to get American Jews to send food to Jews under German control and help them in other ways. See his interview in Yiddish with Gershon Jacobson, Day-Morning Journal, 13 June 1963, quoted in


25. For example, "An Analysis of Piety" (Review of Religion, March 1942), became the concluding chapter of Man Is Not Alone (1951), which he entitled "The Pious Man."

26. Heschel also completed his studies of medieval Jewish philosophy, the staple of academic respectability, with a monograph combining rigorous historical and philological research and theological reflections on faith. "The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy" was first published in the Jewish Quarterly Review 33, nos. 2–3 (1943): 263–313, and 34, no. 4 (1944): 391–408, and was later published as a little "book" or broadside by Philip Feldheim in 1944.

27. The original was published in the YIVO Bleter 25 (1945) and the English translation in the YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science 1 (1946): 86–106.


29. Both published by Farrar, Straus & Young, the second jointly with the Jewish Publication Society.


31. Heschel's role as "zaddik of the 1950s" comes together in the papers collected in Man's Quest for God, which includes his 1945 article on prayer and the English version of his 1938 address on the Hitler period to the Quakers at Frankfurt. Heschel announces his mission most dramatically, however, in its two central chapters (3 and 4), based on the two papers he delivered to the American rabbinate.


34. "Spirit of Jewish Prayer," 156, note 3. Heschel traces this "sociological fallacy" to the 1913 book by Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, not to Mordecai Kaplan, whose *Judaism as a Civilization* first appeared as a book in 1934. During the discussion, Heschel makes a covert reference to Kaplan, whom he admired as a person and as a passionate Jew: "The strange thing about many of our contemporaries is that their life is nobler than their ideology, that their faith is deep and their views are shallow, that their souls are suppressed and their slogans proclaimed. We must not continue to cherish a theory just because we embraced it forty years ago" (ibid., 215).


38. Ibid., 165.


40. "Toward an Understanding of Halacha," 386. Then follows a passage about his student days in Berlin, which begins, "I came with great hunger to the University of Berlin to study philosophy." An important statement omitted in the version revised for *Man's Quest* traces the emptiness of rational religion—so compatible with the ideology of classical Reform—to neo-Kantian professors who regarded "religion as a fiction, useful to society or to man's personal well-being. [For them] religion is not a relationship of man to God but a relationship of man to the symbol of his highest ideals. There is no God, but we must go on worshipping his symbol" (ibid., 387).


43. Ibid., 409.

44. *Man Is Not Alone*, 78.


47. The specific goals of Heschel's activism can be found in his collection of addresses, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966). The acknowledgments section gives names and dates of the occasions on which the papers were delivered. Community issues such as Soviet Jewry, Israel and the Diaspora, and religious education are also explored in *The Insecurity of Freedom*. Papers published after this important and insufficiently studied volume should also be consulted: Heschel's illuminating conversation on Jewish education at the Solomon Schechter School, his charismatic speeches on Vietnam, and his lectures on interfaith dialogue, beginning with the inaugural lecture of 1965 at the Union Theological Seminary, "No Religion Is an Island." See Rothschild, *Between God and Man* for the specific references. See also the anthology edited by Jacob Neusner and Noam M. M. Neusner, *To Grow in Wisdom* (Lanham, Md., 1989).


49. Martin Luther King, Jr., was invited to give the principal address at a gathering of the Rabbinical Assembly honoring Heschel on his sixtieth birthday: see "Conversation with Martin Luther King," in *Conservative Judaism* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1968): 1-19.


51. *Insecurity of Freedom*, 86.


55. *Cross Currents* 19, no. 4 (Fall 1969): 423; first delivered at the St. Louis Symposium on "Theology in the City of Man" (October 1968). Compare:

What should have been our answer to Auschwitz? . . . Our people's faith in God at this moment in history did not falter. At this moment in history Isaac was
indeed sacrificed, his blood shed. We all died in Auschwitz, yet our faith survived. We knew that to repudiate God would be to enhance the Holocaust. . . . The State of Israel is not an atonement. It would be blasphemy to regard it as a compensation. However, the existence of Israel reborn makes life in the West less unendurable. It removes some of the weight from hindrances to believing in God. (422)


