

Abraham Joshua Heschel

A
PASSION
FOR
TRUTH

*by the author of
"Man Is Not Alone"*

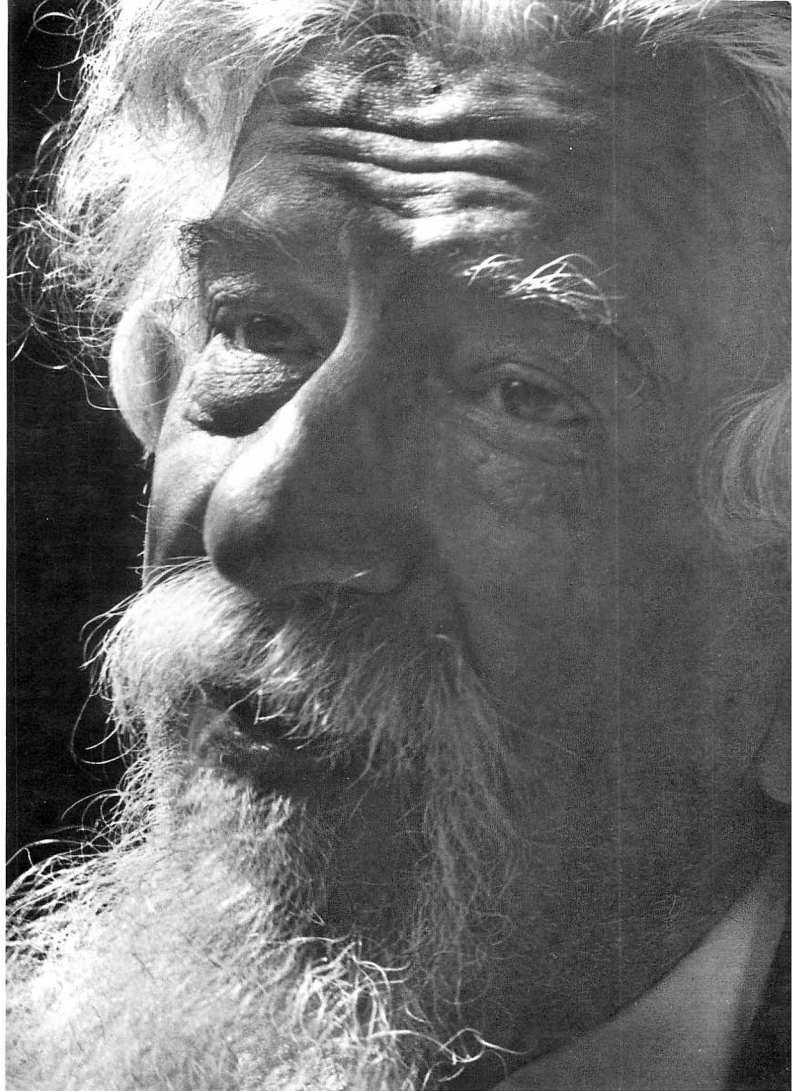


Photo by Joel Orent

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Abraham Joshua Heschel

A PASSION FOR TRUTH

This book, which Dr. Heschel completed just before his death, was very close to his heart and he delivered it in person to his publisher a few weeks before he died. Whether it is his most important book, only time will tell, but there's no question that it is his most timely book. It is concerned with the world of lies, deceit, and falsehood in which men live today. It tells us that the one solution for the problems of our time is *A Passion for Truth*.

This theme is developed by Dr. Heschel through his consideration of the ideas and teachings of two extraordinary religious figures—Reb Mendl of Kotzk (1787-1859), known as the Kotzker, and the Danish theologian, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Unknown to each other and differing in many points of view, they had in common a passion for truth. For example, Kierkegaard's answer to his own question "What do I want?" was, "Quite simply: I want honesty"; and the Kotzker "inscribed one word on his banner: *Emeth*, Truth. To achieve Truth he was ready to sacrifice everything else."

As Dr. Heschel puts it, "Religion as understood by Kierkegaard and the Kotzker is radical, pertaining to the roots of belief and motivation. Its demands are thoroughgoing, favoring drastic changes in the makeup of man. It tolerates no pretense, compromise, or camouflage. . . . Understanding can begin

(continued on back flap)

(continued from front flap)

only when man undeceives himself, for he cannot survive in deceit. For instance, can peace be secured among the nations by a politics that is laden with deception?"

He concludes: "God laughs at those who think that falseness is inevitable. . . . For Truth is alive, dwelling somewhere, never weary. And all of mankind is needed to liberate it."

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, one of the most beloved religious leaders of our time, died in December 1972. He was Professor of Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and author of *God in Search of Man*, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, and *Man Is Not Alone*.

Jacket design by Muriel Nasser

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
19 UNION SQUARE WEST
NEW YORK 10003

ISBN 0-374-22992-9

A PASSION FOR TRUTH

Books by Abraham Joshua Heschel

A Passion for Truth

Israel: An Echo of Eternity

The Insecurity of Freedom

Who Is Man?

Theology of Ancient Judaism

[two volumes]

The Sabbath

The Earth Is the Lord's

Man's Quest for God

God in Search of Man

Man Is Not Alone

Maimonides

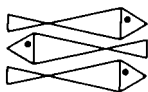
Abravanel

The Quest for Certainty in Saadia's Philosophy

The Prophets

Abraham Joshua Heschel

*A PASSION FOR
TRUTH*



FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX NEW YORK

Copyright © 1973 by Sylvia Heschel as Executrix
of the Estate of Abraham Joshua Heschel

All rights reserved

Library of Congress catalog card number: 72-94721

ISBN: 0-374-22992-9

First printing, 1973

Printed in the United States of America

Published simultaneously in Canada by Doubleday Canada Ltd., Toronto

Designed by Paula Wiener

Quotations from the following books by Søren Kierkegaard are reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press: *Training in Christianity*, translated by Walter Lowrie, copyright 1946 by Princeton University Press; *Stages on Life's Way*, translated by Walter Lowrie, copyright 1940 by Princeton University Press, copyright renewed 1968 by Princeton University Press; *Attack upon "Christendom,"* translated by Walter Lowrie, new introduction by Howard A. Johnson, copyright 1944, © 1968 by Princeton University Press; *Either/Or*, Vol. I, translated by David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, and Vol. II, translated by Walter Lowrie, copyright 1944, © 1959 by Princeton University Press; *Philosophical Fragment*, translated by David F. Swenson, translation revised by Howard V. Hong, copyright 1936, © 1962 by Princeton University Press; *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, translated by Walter Lowrie, copyright 1941 by Princeton University Press, copyright renewed 1969 by Princeton University Press; *The Concept of Dread*, translated by Walter Lowrie, copyright 1944, © 1957 by Princeton University Press; *The Sickness unto Death from Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness unto Death*, translated by Walter Lowrie, copyright 1941, 1954 by Princeton University Press; and by permission of Princeton University Press and the American Scandinavian Foundation: *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie, copyright 1941 by Princeton University Press, copyright renewed 1969 by Princeton University Press.

Quotations from the following books by Søren Kierkegaard are reprinted by permission of the publisher, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.: *The Point of View for My Work as an Author: A Report to History*, translated by Walter Lowrie, copyright © 1962 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.; *Works of Love*, translated by Howard and Edna Hong, Harper & Row, 1962; *The Concept of Irony*, translated by Lee M. Capel, "Historical Introduction" by Lee M. Capel, Harper & Row, 1965.

Quotations from *Kierkegaard* by Walter Lowrie are reprinted by permission of Howard A. Johnson.

Quotations from the following books by Søren Kierkegaard are reprinted by permission of the publishers, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., and Wm. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd.: *The Last Years, Journals 1853-1855*, translated and edited by Ronald Gregor Smith, copyright © 1965 by Ronald Gregor Smith; *The Journals of Kierkegaard*, translated by Alexander Dru, copyright © 1958, 1959 by Alexander Dru.

To Elemire Zolla

Contents

Introduction: Why I Had to Write This Book xiii

I THE TWO TEACHERS

The Baal Shem Tov	3
The Antithesis	9
Truth Is in the Grave	12
The Baal Shem and the Kotzker	15
A World of Veils	18
A World of Phantoms	20
Vanity of Vanities?	24
Immanence and Transcendence	30
God and Man	31
Isaiah and Job	34
Exaltation or Self-examination	37
Good and Evil	39
The Solution Is the Problem	42
Love or Truth	45
Being Aflame or Having Fire Within	47
Unconditional Joy	51
Joy in Spite of Anguish	53
Faith Cannot Come of Itself	55

Torah and God	58
Study Is a Means to an End	61
He Wanted to See Alfasi	63
Love of Israel Precedes Love of Torah	65
The Tzaddik Decrees, God Fulfills	69
The Ideas of Mezbizh Live On in Kotzk	72
Hasidism and Kabbalah	75
The Kotzker and Kabbalah	78
The Kotzker and the Gaon of Vilna	80

II THE KOTZKER AND KIERKEGAARD

The Affinity of Strangers	85
Who Was Kierkegaard?	88
Kierkegaard's Way	90
Against Trivialization	92
Self-inspection	93
Pitfalls in the Soul	96
Self-love or Inner Anonymity	98
Subjectivity	105
Either/Or	109
To Face the Unconditional	112

III THE POWER OF THE WILL

Faith and Will	117
A Matter of the Will	120
Against the Emaciation of the Commandments	123
Defiance of the Self	126
Severity, Tension Serve a Purpose	129

In Praise of Strict Justice	131
To Disregard Self-regard	133
In Search of the Few	136
Individualism	140

IV RADICALISM

The Attack on the Establishment	149
An End to Falsehood	156
Self-deception	158
I Want Honesty	161
To Be Truth	163
Religious Radicalism	166
A Little Heaven	171
Poverty or Property	173
Money, Pfui!	176

V THE BATTLE FOR FAITH

A Fighting Faith	183
Faith as a Leap	184
Faith According to the Kotzker	187
Be Upset and Believe	189
Faith and Reason	194
Faith According to Kierkegaard	197

VI PERSONALITY

Alienation	201
Neurosis	205

Sarcasm 208
 Solitude 211
 Sex 216

VII RESIGNATION

No Reconciliation with the World 225
 To Discard the World 226
 No Self-satisfaction 229
 The Kotzker's Withdrawal 233

VIII DIFFERENCES

Differences 239
 Self-negation 244
 Father and Mother 246
 Sin and Guilt 248
 Suffering 250
 Original Sin 252
 Guilt and Expectation 257
 Antithesis to Luther 260

IX THE KOTZKER AND JOB

To Exalt the Heavens 263
 I Am Choking 265
 Submission? 268
 Problems with God 272
 One Foot in Heaven, the Other in Hell 275
 The Eloquence of Silence 278
 The Cossack Wants a New Song 283

Barrels Full of Holes	285
The Solution Is in the Problem	289
God as the Antecedent	292
Meaning beyond Absurdity	294
Man's Responsibility for God	297

X THE KOTZKER TODAY

The Kotzker Today	307
-------------------	-----

<i>Index</i>	325
--------------	-----

<i>Index of References</i>	335
----------------------------	-----

Introduction

Why I Had to Write This Book

I was born in Warsaw, Poland, but my cradle stood in Mezbizh (a small town in the province of Podolia, Ukraine), where the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Hasidic movement, lived during the last twenty years of his life. That is where my father came from, and he continued to regard it as his home. He confided in me, "For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews" (Genesis 40:15). It was because of the advice of his spiritual mentor, Reb David Moshe, his uncle, the rebbe of Tshortokov, son of Reb Israel of Rizhin, that he took up residence in Poland.

I was named after my grandfather, Reb Abraham Joshua Heschel—"the Apter Rav," and last great rebbe of Mezbizh. He was marvelous in all his ways, and it was as if the Baal Shem Tov had come to life in him. When he died in 1825, he was buried next to the holy Baal Shem. The Apter Rav claimed that his soul had lived in several incarnations, and for his descendants it was as if he had never died.

Enchanted by a wealth of traditions and tales, I felt truly at home in Mezbizh. That little town so distant from Warsaw and yet so near 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 Mezbizh or were inspired by those mysterious men who lived there.

The earliest fascination I can recall is associated with the Baal Shem, whose parables disclosed some of the first insights I gained as a child. He remained a model too sublime to follow yet too overwhelming to ignore.

It was in my ninth year that the presence of Reb Menahem Mendl of Kotzk, known as the Kotzker, entered my life. Since then he has remained a steady companion and a haunting challenge. Although he often stunted me, he also urged me to confront perplexities that I might have preferred to evade.

Years later I realized that, in being guided by both the Baal Shem Tov and the Kotzker, I had allowed two forces to carry on a struggle within me. One was occasionally mightier than the other. But who was to prevail, which was to be my guide? Both spoke convincingly, and each proved right on one level yet questionable on another.

In a very strange way, I found my soul at home with the Baal Shem 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, wavering between exaltation and dismay? Was this a life a man would choose to live? I had no choice: my heart was in Mezbizh, my mind in Kotzk.

I was taught about inexhaustible mines of meaning by the Baal Shem; from the Kotzker I learned to detect immense mountains of absurdity standing in the way. The one taught me song, the other—silence. The one reminded me that there could be a Heaven on earth, the other shocked me into discovering Hell in the alleged Heavenly places in our world.

The Baal Shem made dark hours luminous; the Kotzker eased wretchedness and desolation by forewarnings, by premonitions.

The Kotzker restricted me, debunked cherished attitudes. From the Baal Shem I received the gifts of elasticity in adapting to contradictory conditions.

The Baal Shem dwelled in my life like a lamp, while the Kotzker struck like lightning. To be sure, lightning is more authentic. Yet one can trust a lamp, put confidence in it; one can live in peace with a lamp.

The Baal Shem gave me wings; the Kotzker encircled me with chains. I never had the courage to break the chains and entered into joys with my shortcomings in mind. I owe intoxication to the Baal Shem, to the Kotzker the blessings of humiliation.

The Kotzker's presence recalls the nightmare of mendacity. The presence of the Baal Shem is an assurance that falsehood dissolves into compassion through the power of love. The Baal Shem suspends sadness, the Kotzker enhances it. The Baal Shem helped me to refine my sense of immediate mystery; the Kotzker warned me of the constant peril of forfeiting authenticity.

Honesty, authenticity, integrity without love may lead to the ruin of others, of oneself, or both. On the other hand, love, fervor, or exaltation alone may seduce us into living in a fool's Paradise—a wise man's Hell.

