

# Man is Not Alone

A Sense of the Ineffable.

Radical Amazement.

**Sunday, November 14**  
**10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.**

*Everyone is welcome!*

# Opening Prayer

**Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever.**

- From *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 815

MAN IS NOT ALONE

A PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

**Man is Not Alone. A  
Philosophy of  
Religion**, by Abraham  
Joshua Heschel.  
Farrar, Straus and  
Giroux, New York,  
1951

Edward K. Kaplan

**ABRAHAM  
JOSHUA  
HESCHEL'S  
POETICS  
OF PIETY**

**H O L I N E S S  
I N W O R D S**

**Holiness in Words.  
Abraham Joshua  
Heschel's Poetics of  
Piety.** By Edward K.  
Kaplan, State University of  
New York Press, 1996



Abraham Joshua Heschel

# Abraham Heschel

- **January 11, 1907:** born in Warsaw, Poland.
- Received his high school diploma in Vilna (“the Jerusalem of Lithuania”) from the secular, Yiddish-language *Real-Gymnasium*
- Attended a liberal rabbinic college and university in Berlin.

# Abraham Heschel

- **1933:** completed a doctoral dissertation on prophetic consciousness (later expanded into a book, *The Prophets*).
  - That same year, the Nazis rose to power.
- **1934:** ordained a rabbi.
- **1938:** spoke to a Quaker group in Frankfurt, Germany:
  - “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.”

# Abraham Heschel

- **Oct. 28, 1938:** expelled from Germany. Returned to Warsaw.
- **Mar. 21, 1940:** arrived in New York City as a refugee.
  - Had left Warsaw 6 weeks before the Nazi invasion.
- **1940 to 1945:** Associate Professor of Jewish Philosophy at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.



# Abraham Heschel

- During the war, he was acutely aware his family and the thousand year old Jewish civilization was being annihilated in Europe.
  - His mother and two sisters perished in the Warsaw Ghetto.
  - Another sister and his brother-in-law were murdered at Auschwitz.

# Abraham Heschel

“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.”

– Heschel, 1965 inaugural address at Union Theological Seminary

# Abraham Heschel

- His mission became to preserve the principles of biblical religion: “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.”

# Abraham Heschel

- **1945:** moved to Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York City.
- Works in English:
  - *The Earth is the Lord's*, 1950
  - *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, 1951.
  - *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion*, 1951.
  - *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism*, 1954

# Abraham Heschel

## ■ Works in English:

- *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, 1955
- *The Prophets*, Two Volumes, 1969, 1971
- *Who is Man?* 1965
- *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence*, 1966
- *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, 1969
- *A Passion for Truth*, 1973



# Abraham Heschel

- **1951:** he was recognized by protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who predicted “he will become a commanding and authoritative voice not only in the Jewish community but in the religious life of America.”
- **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.”

# Abraham Heschel

- **1960's until his death in 1972:** became a prominent prophetic activist, participating in:
  - Civil rights rallies.
  - Anti-war protests.
- Died the Sabbath night of **December 23, 1972.**

Heschel, 1947

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 1 from *Holiness in Words, Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety*, by Edward K. Kaplan. State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 91.

Heschel at his desk at  
The Jewish  
Theological Seminary,  
**1952**

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 2 from *Holiness  
in Words, Abraham  
Joshua Heschel's  
Poetics of Piety*, by  
Edward K. Kaplan.  
State University of New  
York Press, 1996, p.  
92.

Heschel at his desk at  
The Jewish Theological  
Seminary, 1960

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 3 from *Holiness  
in Words, Abraham  
Joshua Heschel's  
Poetics of Piety*, by  
Edward K. Kaplan.  
State University of New  
York Press, 1996, p.  
93.



Heschel and  
Augustin Cardinal  
Bea, New York,  
**April 1963**

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 4 from *Holiness  
in Words, Abraham  
Joshua Heschel's  
Poetics of Piety*, by  
Edward K. Kaplan.  
State University of New  
York Press, 1996, p.  
94.

# Abraham Heschel

- Heschel traveled to Rome and advised Cardinal Bea on Vatican II doctrines on interfaith relations.
- To Jews who criticized him, he said:
  - “Judaism is the mother of Christian faith.”
  - “Should a mother ignore her child, even a wayward, rebellious one?”
  - “Is it not our duty to help one another in trying to overcome hardness of heart, while cultivating a sense of wonder and mystery, unlocking doors to holiness, opening minds to the challenge of the Hebrew Bible, seeking to respond to the voice of the prophets?”

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 5 from *Holiness in Words, Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety*, by Edward K. Kaplan. State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 95.

Selma-Montgomery, Alabama, 1965. Next to Heschel from right to left: Dr. Ralph Bunche of the United Nations, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Rev. Ralph Abernathy.

**“When I march in Selma, my feet are praying.”**

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 6 from *Holiness in Words, Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety*, by Edward K. Kaplan. State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 96.

Heschel at anti-Vietnam war protest, **Feb. 6, 1968**. *Left to right*: the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Rabbi Heschel.

Heschel  
teaching  
Rabbinical  
Students,  
1972

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 7 from *Holiness  
in Words, Abraham  
Joshua Heschel's  
Poetics of Piety*, by  
Edward K. Kaplan.  
State University of New  
York Press, 1996, p.  
97.



Heschel at his desk,  
August 1972

(Graphic omitted)

Figure 8 from *Holiness  
in Words, Abraham  
Joshua Heschel's  
Poetics of Piety*, by  
Edward K. Kaplan.  
State University of New  
York Press, 1996, p.  
98.

# Reading Heschel

“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. Staggered, 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.”

- Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, p. 78

# Reading Heschel

- Heschel rejected that any rational method or theological system could adequately describe God's reality.
  - Disparaged the pride and audacity of the human intellect's attempt to pigeon God into understandable concepts.
- In his writing, he seeks not merely to convince our intellect, but to bring us to new ways *perceiving* existence.

# Reading Heschel

- His lush, “poetry in prose,” style, combining rational argument, metaphor, analogy:
  - “excite[s] our unconscious loves and lacks, while, at the same time, ...point[s] beyond the merely human to the God side of the verbalized intuition.”<sup>1</sup>
  - “lifts into awareness yearnings, moral and spiritual, which might otherwise remain tacit, unconscious – and uninterpreted.”<sup>2</sup>
  - Nurtures “the ‘hunger of the heart’ that many consider to be evidence of God’s presence within us”<sup>3</sup>, and “intuitions of the sacred”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Kaplan, p. 30; <sup>4</sup>Kaplan, p. 21



# Reading Heschel

## Depth Theology

- His style “trains” us in what Heschel called “depth theology:”
  - “Depth theology seeks to meet the person in moments in which the whole person is involved, in moments that are affected by all a person feels, thinks, and acts. It draws upon that which happens to man in moments of confrontation with ultimate reality. It is in such moments that decisive insights are born.”
    - Abraham Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence*, p. 119

# Reading Heschel

## Depth Theology

“Theology is like sculpture, depth theology is like music. Theology is in the books; depth theology is in the hearts. The former is doctrine, the latter an event. Theologies divide us; depth theology unites us.”

- Abraham Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence*, p. 119

# The Sense of the Ineffable. Radical Amazement

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## The Awareness of Grandeur

- Three aspects of nature command our attention:
  - Power (we exploit it)
  - Loveliness (we enjoy it)
  - Grandeur (fills us with awe)
- The awareness of grandeur, of the sublime, serves no social or biological purpose. Why do we have it?

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## The Awareness of Grandeur

“Perhaps more significant than the fact of our awareness of the cosmic is our consciousness of *having to* be aware of it, as if there were an *imperative*, a compulsion to pay attention to that which lies beyond our grasp.”\*

\*p. 4

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## The Ineffable

- The Compulsion “to draw a distinction between the utterable and the unutterable, to be stunned by that which is but cannot be put into words”\* is one of the primary characteristics of our humanity.
  - This sense of the sublime, of the unutterable, is the root of man’s creative activities

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## The Ineffable

“The stirring in our hearts when watching the star-studded sky is something no language can declare. What smites us with unquenchable amazement is not that which we grasp and are able to convey but that which lies within our reach but beyond our grasp... the ineffable.”\*

\*p. 4-5



# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## The Disparity of Soul and Reason

- We are citizens of two realms:
  - 1. in one realm we name and exploit what we call reality (the realm of reason)
  - 2. In the other realm, we sense the ineffable (the realm of the soul)
- “The tangible phenomena we scrutinize with our reason, the sacred and indemonstrable we overhear with the sense of the ineffable”\*

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## The Disparity of Soul and Reason

- “The search of reason ends at the shore of the known; on the immense expanse beyond it, only the sense of the ineffable can glide.”\*
- “It is the ineffable from which we draw the taste of the sacred, the joy of the imperishable.”\*\*

– \*p. 8; \*\*p. 9

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## Reason and Wonder

- As citizens of two realms, we look at the world with two faculties:
  - 1. reason
  - 2. wonder, radical amazement
- With reason, we try to conform the world to our intellectual concepts.
- But before we use reason to conceptualize what we see, we are *amazed*.
  - “Under the running sea of our theories and scientific explanations lies the aboriginal abyss of radical amazement”\*

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## Reason and Wonder

- “...each thing is a surprise, *being is unbelievable*. We are amazed at seeing anything at all; amazed not only at particular values and things but *at the unexpectedness of being as such*, at the fact that there is being at all.”

# The Ineffable. Radical Amazement

## Experience Without Expression

- “The world of things we perceive is but a veil. Its flutter is music, its ornament science, but what it conceals is inscrutable. Its silence remains unbroken; no words can carry it away.”\*
- “Sometimes we wish the world would cry and tell us about that which made it pregnant with fear-filling grandeur. Sometimes we wish our own heart would speak of that which made it heavy with wonder.”\*

# An Awareness of Meaning

# An Awareness of Meaning

## Universality of the Sense of the Ineffable

- All human beings are endowed with a sense of the ineffable, with “the ability to know that there is more than what he knows.”\*
- What the sense of the ineffable perceives is something *objective* and *real*.
  - “Our radical amazement responds to the mystery, but does not produce it. You and I have not invented the grandeur of the sky nor endowed man with the mystery of birth and death. We do not create the ineffable, we encounter it.”\*



# An Awareness of Meaning

## Universality of the Sense of the Ineffable

- “What we encounter in our perception of the sublime, in our radical amazement, is a spiritual suggestiveness of reality, an allusiveness to transcendent meaning. The world in its grandeur is full of a spiritual radiance...”\*
- “In moments of sensing the ineffable, we are as certain of the value of the world as we are of its existence.”\*
  - The sense of the ineffable is an *awareness of meaning*

# An Awareness of Meaning

## Universality of Reverence

- “That the sense of the ineffable is an awareness of meaning is indicated by the inner response it evokes is that of awe or reverence”\*
- We revere “only that which surpasses us,” only “the *extremely precious*, morally, intellectually or spiritually.”\*

\*p. 23

# An Awareness of Meaning

## Universality of Reverence

- Reverence is one of our answers to the presence of mystery.
  - “When we stand in awe, our lips do not demand speech, knowing that if we spoke, we would deprave ourselves. In such moments talk is an abomination. All we want is to pause, to be still, that the moment may last. It is like listening to great music; how it reaps the yield from the fertile soil of stillness; we are swept by it without being able to appraise it. The meaning of things we revere is overwhelming and beyond the grasp of our understanding.”\*

# An Awareness of Meaning

## Meaning Outside the Mind

- “We do not sense mystery because we feel a need for it, just as we do not notice the ocean or sky because we have a desire to see them.”\*
  - “The sense of mystery is not a product of our will”\*
  - The “sweep of mystery is not a thought in our mind but a most powerful presence beyond the mind.”\*
- “Meaning is something which occurs *outside the mind...* independent of our subjective awareness of it.”\*\*

# An Awareness of Meaning

## Meaning Outside the Mind

- “Things known and perceptible are charged with ... [the] heart-stripping, galvanizing meaning” of the mystery of the ineffable.\*

\*p.27-28

# An Awareness of Meaning

## Expectedness of Meaning

- We have a expectation of meaning, feel a certainty all that exists must be worth while.
  - Our expectation may not always be vindicated, for supreme-meaning is not “self-advertising like a clock.”

# An Awareness of Meaning

## Expectedness of Meaning

“...we are sure that the hidden and unknown will never turn out to be absurd or meaningless. There is a transcendent *preciousness* that surpasses our power of appreciation... The world is resplendent with such preciousness; we sense it wherever we go, with our hearts too feeble or unworthy to fathom it.”\*

\*p. 29



# Summary of Our Path So Far. The Path Ahead

# Summary of Our Path

- A sense of the ineffable is universal.
- What we encounter in our sense of the ineffable, in our radical amazement, is:
  - a spiritual suggestiveness of a greater reality,
  - an allusiveness to transcendent meaning that evokes reverence within us.
- Reality embraces more than what we normally know.

# The Path Ahead

- To think religiously, we must overcome the idea we are the subject and the world full of objects for our scrutiny.
- Humankind and matter are “equals before the mystery,” finite and mortal.
- This communion is the penultimate stage of pretheological awareness; we sense our kinship with the visible cosmos and feel its spiritual unity.

# The Path Ahead

- We can then pass from our intuition of impersonal transcendence, to a sense of:
  - a personal God who is the Subject,
  - a community of beings who are the Objects of God's concern.

# References

- **Man Is Not Alone. A Philosophy of Religion.** Abraham Joshua Heschel, Farrar Straus and Giroux, New York, 1951. ISBN 0-374-51328-7
- **Holiness in Words. Abraham Joshua Heschel's Poetics of Piety.** Edward K. Kaplan, State University of New York Press, 1996. ISBN 0-7914-2868-0