

Abraham J. Heschel's *HEAVENLY TORAH*

1. This book gives Heschel's systematic exposition of the "Aggadah" as expressing the theological outlook of the rabbis.
2. Heschel organizes the rabbis' aggadic teachings into two "schools": the quotidian-rationalist (Rabbi Ishmael) and the ecstatic-mystical (Rabbi Akiva). Each, though rooted in the rabbinic aggadah, extends over the next 1500 years of Jewish thought.
3. In addition to their general theological outlook, Heschel gives extended systematic treatment to their views of the nature of the Torah and the process of divine revelation.
4. The book may be read in three parts (corresponding to the three volumes of the Hebrew original):
 - a. Part I: The general methods and outlooks of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva (Chapters 1-16)
 - b. Part II: Their methods and outlooks on the doctrine of "Torah from Heaven" (Chapters 17-33)
 - c. Part III: The application of these approaches to halakhic practice (Chapters 34-41)

INTRODUCTION TO HEAVENLY TORAH

Abraham Joshua Heschel was concerned for his whole life with the essence of the Jewish tradition as an ongoing dialogue between God and the Jewish people, in which God voices God's will and concern for humanity, and we respond by serving God in worship and righteous living. Heschel's vision of this totality was informed by his original Hasidic upbringing, by his study of the Bible (especially the prophetic books) and the later traditions of Judaism, especially the rabbinic and Hasidic legacies. In the 1960s he wrote the first 33 chapters of this work in two volumes in Hebrew under the title *Torah Min Ha-Shamayim ba-Aspeklaria shel ha-Dorot* ("Torah from Heaven in the Lens of the Generations" – English title "Theology of the Rabbis"). He sought in it to focus especially on how the rabbis of the Talmudic period interpreted the doctrine of "Torah from Heaven," but more broadly, what was the larger theological outlook of the rabbis in which this doctrine played a central role. In the original two volumes, Volume I (Chapters 1-16) presented the general theological outlook of the rabbis, and Volume II (Chapters 17-33) focused more specifically on their elaboration of the doctrine of "Torah from Heaven." The later chapters of this book focus on the application of this doctrine for halakhic practice, and were published as Volume III after Heschel's death.

Chapter 1: Introduction.

This is going to be a book about Aggadah. First of all, Heschel gives an apologia for aggadah. Aggadah has generally come in as a distant second behind halakhah in prestige in traditional Jewish studies, but this ought to be corrected. Aggadah is the royal path to reflecting on the nature of God. It expresses the outlook that alone makes the practice of Judaism meaningful.

Second, Heschel indicates that he is going to teach aggadah through a new method. He will do so systematically, topic by topic – this has occasionally been done before. But – unprecedented – he will present the entire range of aggadic teaching as the crystallization of two distinct outlooks and approaches within rabbinic thought, the earthly-based, somewhat rationalistic approach of the school of Rabbi Ishmael, and the ecstatic, mystical approach of the school of Rabbi Akiva.

Chapter 2: Two Approaches to Torah Exegesis.

Heschel starts his exposition of the two aggadic methods by examining the style by which each of these teachers interpreted the Torah to derive halakhah. Rabbi Ishmael's approach is

famous through the 13 principles that have entered the prayer book. Examination of these will show how they exemplify logic: the *a fortiori* argument, the analogy (*gezerah shavah*), the logical progression from particular cases to general rules (*kelal u-ferat*), etc. But Rabbi Akiva used the method of *ribbui* and *mi'ut* (see Glossary) which was more arbitrary: using an extra *vav* or *et* to add cases, or *ak* and *rak* to exclude, etc. in wild-card fashion, without any clear guidelines of which cases to add or exclude. In general, Rabbi Ishmael's midrashic style inclines toward cool and methodical reasoning, Rabbi Akiva's to more extravagant stretching of the meaning of the text. These different styles are indicative of different conceptions of the nature of the Torah text: for Rabbi Ishmael "the Torah speaks in human language" whereas for Rabbi Akiva the Torah text is divine and contains infinite layers of meaning that can be uncovered only by radically transcending the ordinary canons of human understanding.

The "Jewish mind" is profoundly shaped by both these approaches – the shrewd realism of the Ishmaelian approach, and the profundity of the Akivan approach (whose repercussions may be seen even in a post-religious guise in the interpretative style of Freudian analysis).

Chapter 3: Miracles.

In Rabbi Ishmael's view, the natural order of things is itself the greatest miracle. God revealed the Torah and created the world, and endowed each with its own autonomous nature and logic. The Torah follows the canons of human discourse; the world follows its natural course. Human beings can understand both with their natural reason.

Where Rabbi Ishmael sees natural order, Rabbi Akiva sees miracles. The more miracles, the better. Every word in the Torah is a divine utterance containing unique and infinite levels of meaning; every event in the world is similarly a unique disclosing of divinity, with layer upon layer of reality not immediately apparent to reason.

Chapter 4: The Tabernacle and the Sacrifices.

Rabbi Ishmael teaches "religious conventionalism": ritual serves human needs, and can take one form or another depending on what will best serve that purpose. Originally there was no need for the Tabernacle and sacrifices; but after Israel worshipped the Golden Calf, the need became apparent and God instituted them.

Rabbi Akiva teaches “religious essentialism”: ritual serves God’s need as well as humanity’s. The Tabernacle reflects the essential order of things (the earthly Temple is a counterpart of the heavenly Temple); every detail of the ritual is intrinsically desired by God and is therefore unchangeable.

Chapter 5: The Abode of the Shekhinah.

Rabbi Ishmael teaches that God is strictly speaking everywhere and not present more in one place than another. The notion of God’s presence being concentrated in the Temple or other sacred place is conventional, a symbol meeting human needs.

Rabbi Akiva teaches that God does indeed prefer some locales to others – God’s presence in the Temple is real, and other things being equal, God prefers to dwell in the West. We must not dilute the sense of God’s presence by saying it is only “symbolic”!

Chapter 6: Teachings Concerning the Shekhinah.

Rabbi Akiva teaches that God is intimately present in human happiness and woe. When Israel is redeemed, God is redeemed; when Israel is in exile, the Shekhinah is in exile. God is “immanent” – emphatically present in the world.

Rabbi Ishmael stresses that God is “transcendent” – infinite, totally Other, inscrutable. We relate to God through ethical action – when we perform ethical good, we are carrying out God’s will in the world. We relate to God, but indirectly.

Chapter 7: Sufferings.

Rabbi Ishmael interprets suffering on the “peshat” level: suffering sucks, pure and simple. He protests, like Job: “Who is like You among the mute, O Lord, who sees His children’s suffering and is silent!”

Rabbi Akiva goes for the “midrashic” understanding: though not obvious on the surface, even in our suffering we can experience God’s hidden compassion. “This, too, is for the good” was his motto. We must continue searching for the meaning in events that seem absurd on first grasp.

(Maybe both approaches, in turn, can be helpful!)

Chapter 8: Torah and Life.

Rabbi Ishmael taught the values of “*derekh erez*”: this world has value in itself; the pleasures of life are to be valued; the Torah sometimes teaches good manners and the common code of worldly conduct; martyrdom is usually to be avoided in favor of preserving life.

Rabbi Akiva taught that this world is but a vestibule before the next world: the pleasures of this world are suspect; the values of Torah are not worldly but supernal; martyrdom can be a vocation (and he went to his martyr’s death saying the Shema).

Chapter 9: In Awe and Trembling.

Rabbi Akiva was a maximalist, and a perfectionist. We are called on to fulfill the entire law. When we fall short (as inevitably we must), woe to us, for we have sinned!

Rabbi Ishmael was more of a moderate. We are called on to fill as much of the law as we can; if our good deeds outweigh

our sins, that is enough. He addressed himself not to the pious elite, but to the average Jew.

Chapter 10: Duties of the Heart: How do we achieve “devekut” (cleaving to God)?

Rabbi Ishmael sees God as remote. We have our marching orders, and we “cleave” to God symbolically, by performing ethical good deeds.

For Rabbi Akiva, the experience of closeness to God is real and of the essence of religious life (especially necessary after the feeling of sinfulness in Chapter 9). Rabbi Akiva interpreted the Song of Songs as a love-poem between Israel and God, and lived out this love-relationship with the divine in many ways.

Chapter 11: Issues of Supreme Importance.

A miscellany of differences:

Rabbi Ishmael: The world is ruled by God’s decrees; Rabbi Akiva: The world is ruled in mercy.

Rabbi Ishmael: Mistrust Messiahs. Rabbi Akiva: Seize the Messianic moment! (Rabbi Akiva endorsed Bar Kochba’s messianic revolt against Rome in 132-135.)

Chapter 12: Scriptural Language Not Befitting God’s Dignity.

Rabbi Ishmael: Can such a thing be said? You must interpret anthropomorphic texts symbolically! (Give it a rational twist.) Rabbi Akiva: Had the text not said it, it would be outrageous for us to say it; but the text does say it, and so we can seize on it as a token of the divine mystery! (Give it a mystical twist.)

Chapter 13: The Language of Torah.

Rabbi Ishmael: The Torah speaks in human language; the Torah uses euphemism, hyperbole; the Torah does not follow strict chronological order. Plain-sense (peshat) interpretation is preferable. The fruit of midrashic interpretation is given only “rabbinic” (i.e., lesser) status in comparison with the actual word of the text.

Rabbi Akiva: The Torah is replete with layers of meaning (midrash, allegory, mystical allusion) every one of which counts. Nothing is accidental. Everything (including the juxtaposition of one topic to another) calls out for interpretation. Even the fruit of midrashic interpretation is to be deemed sacred as an integral part of the text.

Chapter 14: Transcendental and Terrestrial Perspectives

Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva are interpreted as differing on the basic issue of Platonic dualism: are there heavenly prototypes of important earthly entities? This difference is expressed in their stand on the following issues:

The sanctity of human life: Rabbi Akiva says whoever takes a human life diminishes the divine image; Rabbi Ishmael says, he destroys an entire world (for the human being is a microcosm).

The symbolism of the Temple: Rabbi Akiva says the earthly Temple corresponds to the heavenly Temple; Rabbi Ishmael (and Philo and Josephus) say it symbolizes the world.

The symbolism of the mitzvot: Rabbi Akiva says they exist for having direct communion with God and give God gratification and power; Rabbi Ishmael says they symbolize aspects of human reality and serve to sensitize human beings to be better.

The reality of Torah: The transcendental view posits that there is a Torah in heaven that is the prototype of the earthly Torah: it predated creation; it was the blueprint of creation; it is studied in the heavenly academy. Heschel does not describe an alternative "Ishmaelian" view to this belief, but we can only fill in ourselves: if not from a heavenly prototype, the Torah must have been written in earthly form only, in response to earthly needs.

Chapter 15: Go 'round the Orchard!

The Akivan-Ishmaelian symmetry is harder to unravel in this chapter. Heschel discusses three topics: mystical speculation and experience in the rabbinic literature, the apocalyptic visions of Enoch and other Apocryphal literature, and prophetic experience. The first two are explicitly Akivan; the third is implicitly Ishmaelian by contrast with the second ("the apocalyptic sees, the prophet hears"). Heschel was an avid student of Jewish mysticism and his valuation of the Akivan mystical journey is implicitly positive. He points out, however, that two Akivan prototypes of Torahitic revelation – the ascent of Moses to heaven, and the existence of a book in heaven – are anticipated in the apocalyptic literature.

The contrast between the apocalyptic and the prophet grows out of the transcendental-terrestrial dichotomy: the apocalyptic wants to ascend to heaven; the prophet wants to further God's will on earth. As JTS professor of mysticism and author of *The Prophets*, Heschel obviously had an investment in both of these religious paths.

Chapter 16: Beholding the Face of God

The mystical quest, examined in Chapter 15, culminates in the desire to see God's face directly. One's attitude toward this quest will be revealed in one's interpretation of historical events such as Moses' revelation, the Israelites' experience at Sinai and the experience at the splitting of the Sea. In all of these, Heschel assembles a lineup of views corresponding to the Ishmaelian-Akivan basic disagreement: by the Akivan view they did indeed see God, by the Ishmaelian view they did not (or in the case of the elders and Nadab and Abihu who "saw God and ate and drank" at the sealing of the Sinaitic covenant in Exodus Chapter 24, their "seeing God" was a sin).

Chapters 14-16 may be seen as a summary of the argument of Part I and a transition to Part II. Given that the human ability or inability to commune directly with God is conceived one way or another, what will follow as to the quality and content of the experience of the revelation of Torah at Sinai?

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

Part II of this book may be regarded as an extended commentary on the following Mishnah:

"All Israel have a portion in the world to come...But these have no portion in the world to come: (1) One who says "the resurrection is not from the Torah, (2) one who says, "there is no Torah from heaven, and (3) the Epicurean." (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1)

What precisely does this mean – especially the second clause (*ha-omer ein Torah min ha-Shamayim*)? In Part II, Heschel argues that the Jewish doctrine that "there is Torah from heaven" does not have one univocal meaning, but was disputed in every one of its parameters by the rabbis. These disputes focus on three kinds of issues:

Narrative: What exactly happened in the revelation of Torah? Was there a pre-existing "book"? Did Moses ascend to heaven? Did God descend to earth? What was spoken? Who heard? Who saw – and what did they see?

Divine and human roles: What are the roles of God and the human partner in revelation or prophecy? Is the prophet active or passive – a vessel in which God pours His message, or a partner in shaping the message?

Content: What was the content of the message of revelation at any given time? Were all 5 books of the Torah given at Sinai, or a smaller "book of the covenant," or just the Ten Commandments? What about the Oral Law – was it given at Sinai with the Written Law – in whole, in part, or in concept? Did revelation continue through the Biblical period? Did it continue through the rabbinic period? Does it continue today?

Chapter 17: "The Torah that is in Heaven"

There is widespread acceptance of the doctrine that Torah in some form or other was in existence from before the creation of the world. The rabbis conceived many midrashim on Chapter 8 of Proverbs, where Wisdom speaks in the first person: "The Lord created me at the beginning of His course...I was with Him as a confidant." A pun on *amon* [confidant] = *omman* [artisan] yields a view parallel to Philo's "Logos" doctrine, namely that the Torah was the primordial wisdom providing the blueprint for the creation of the world. What was this primordial Torah? Views ranged from its being heavenly tablets (maybe the Ten Commandments? Or the pre-destined history of all humanity? The "book" of *u-netaneh tokef* in which all past deeds are written and the future is decreed?) to the entire 5-book Torah that became Israel's sacred document, white fire on black fire.

Chapter 18: "Moses' Ascent to Heaven"

While the idea of a heavenly wisdom or heavenly Torah was generally accepted, there is controversy surrounding the next part of the doctrine: that Moses ascended to heaven and came down, bringing the heavenly Torah to earth. According to Heschel, the idea of a human being serving as a channel between earth and heaven developed in the late Second Temple period, and is found, for instance, in the apocalyptic (pseudepigraphic) literature in books like the Book of Enoch. By the prestige of Rabbi Akiva, this view eventually colored the dominant rabbinic version of the Sinai narrative. But it is important to record the dissenting view, articulated by Rabbi Yose and others, that Moses only came as far as the top of Mount Sinai, not to heaven.

Chapter 19: "The Descent of the Divine Glory"

As the Sages were divided whether Moses ascended to heaven, so they disagreed also on whether God descended to earth during the Sinai theophany. This debate ties in with the earlier debate (Chapters 5-6) whether it makes sense to speak of the Shekhinah – God's presence – as having a localized location. The abstract view of Rabbi Ishmael (and of Maimonides in the Middle Ages) was against localizing God in this way. But a strong stream of pious sentiment, including Rabbi Akiva, Judah Halevi, and the mystics (including Heschel) insists that the religious experience of God's presence demands this affirmation.

Chapter 20: "Torah from Heaven"

The source of this chapter's title (and the book's Hebrew title) is from Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1, which says that whoever denies belief in "Torah from heaven" has no portion in the world to come. This is thus one of Judaism's central dogmas from rabbinic times on. But what does it mean? "Torah" can mean anything from "some instruction or other" to "the Ten Commandments" to "the 5 books of Moses" to "the Bible" to "all Jewish tradition, both written and oral Torah." And "from Heaven" can mean "from the celestial realms" or, more figuratively, "from God (the Heavenly One)."

In this crucial chapter, Heschel shows that the rabbinic interpretation of this central dogma did indeed have a wide range of interpretation. Rabbi Ishmael expressed the minimal concept: that only the general principles were revealed at Sinai, and the details of the Torah later in the Tent of Meeting; or that "he has spurned the word of the Lord" refers to one who rejects Judaism completely and worships idolatry. But the doctrine of revealed Torah broadened gradually to encompass first the whole written Torah, then to condemn anyone who says that even a single verse (or a single word) was spoken by Moses on his own authority (as opposed to by divine mandate), and finally to encompass the Oral Law in all its particulars. Maimonides, who is liberal, philosophical and abstract (i.e., Ishmaelian) in many of his other pronouncements, decided here to draw a firm line in the sand and declare that the whole written Torah, down to the last word, is sacrosanct.

Chapter 21: "The Sectarials"

Dogma and heresy are flip-sides of the same coin: whoever defines heresy, implicitly defines what dogmas must be held sacred. Presumably the "heretics" of rabbinic times were members of sects in competition with rabbinic Judaism, especially Gnostics and Christians. The four deviant views discussed here are: (a) that there is no divine Torah at all, (b) that only the Ten Commandments were given to Moses at Sinai, (c) that Moses initiated some commandments on his own, and (d) that Moses forged the Torah. Some midrashim attribute to the wicked king Manasseh subversive views, such as that the passages dealing with racy stories (like the incest of Reuben or the similar allusion in the case of Timna, mentioned in Esau's genealogy) did not properly belong in the Torah. It is possible that by raising these as "heretical" views the rabbis were giving vent to their own doubts, and Heschel mentions these matters in the last chapter of Part II of *God In Search of Man*, where he seems to sympathize with the doubters.

Chapter 22: "Moses Did Things on His Own Authority"

Did Moses indeed initiate nothing on his own? But the Torah itself depicts him as doing certain crucial things of his own volition – shattering the Tablets, separating from his wife, and extending the two-day period of preparation at Sinai to three days! On these and similar points, there is again disagreement among the Sages: Rabbi Ishmael taught that Moses acted on his own initiative, while Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues taught that God instructed him what to do in each case.

Chapter 23: Two Methods of Understanding "Thus Says the Lord"

What does the locution "Thus says the Lord" mean? Does it mean that the words that follow came word-for-word from God to the prophet? Or does the prophet paraphrase God's intention and put it into his own words? According to the school of Rabbi Akiva, the reported words are the literal description of God's communication; according to the school of Rabbi Ishmael, the word "Thus" introduces the prophet's paraphrase of the divine intention. Again, the school of Rabbi Ishmael gives more autonomy to the human participant in the event of revelation.

Chapter 24: "Is It Possible That It Was on His Own Say-So?"

More instances are given where Moses (according to some of the Sages) acted on his own initiative: He ascended Mount Sinai on his own initiative (Exodus 19:2-3); he set aside the three cities of refuge in Trans-Jordan (Deuteronomy 4:41); he pitched the Tent outside the Israelite camp (Exodus 33:7). By some views, God confirmed his action; by another view, God did not. Did he draw a logical inference from God's explicit word, and attach divine sanction to the inference of his own mind? Similar issues would recur well into the history of the Jewish tradition.

Chapter 25: The Book of Deuteronomy

Whereas the first four books of the Torah are replete with explicit divine utterances ("The Lord spoke to Moses saying..."), the naïve reader of Deuteronomy has good warrant for saying that it reports the speeches that Moses made of his own volition to the Israelites in the last year of the wandering, in the steppes of Moab. Interestingly, a number of rabbinic opinions can be found saying that Moses spoke selected portions of Deuteronomy, or even the whole book, of his own volition – a much greater grant of human initiative than the previous! Again, there are contrary rabbinic opinions that condemn such a view as heretical. This dispute is related to the prior basic dispute (Chapter 20): was the entire Torah revealed at Sinai and repeated a second time in the wilderness and a third time in the steppes of Moab? Or were the utterances recorded as occurring at a later time spoken for the first time at that later time? Was the "Torah" given all at once, or in stages over time – and with what degree of human initiative?

Chapter 26: Is the Prophet a Partner or a Vessel?

This is one of the most central questions in the whole book. If the prophet is a mere vessel of God's word, then the Torah that comes to us is wholly divine. If, however, the prophet adds something to the message – his personality, literary style, etc. – then the result is "the word of God and the word of man" (to use a phrase from *God In Search of Man*).

Chapter 27: "See, How Great Was Moses' Power!"

Was Moses extraordinary or ordinary? And what difference does this make in the issues of this book? It actually cuts across the issue of the previous chapter. It can be argued, for instance, that the more extraordinary was, the more it was his heroic achievement to shape the Torah. Maimonides indeed credits Moses with extraordinary understanding, but also insists that the Torah is totally God's doing. (Secretly, however, Maimonides may have held otherwise.) If Moses was ordinary, we might think that he was a passive vessel to receive God's message. Yet some rabbis cited in this chapter reconcile the ordinariness of Moses with his playing an active partnering role with God.

Also discussed in this chapter is the legislative power of post-Mosaic authorities. By what right did Elijah abrogate the Deuteronomic prohibition against "sacrificing outside the precincts" when he offered a demonstration sacrifice on Mount Carmel? By virtue of what charisma does the court have the power to declare the New Moon, thus determining on which days the festival occurs and work is forbidden? The courts decide law – does that make them prophets? (Heschel implies: Yes!)

Chapter 28: Moses' Prophecy

This chapter is a miscellany of different views on the specifics of Moses' prophecy: how did Moses receive God's message? Did the Shekhinah speak from within his voicebox (a kabbalistic and Hasidic view)?

Chapter 29: How the Torah Was Written

The rabbis were similarly curious on the details of how the Torah was written. Did Moses copy it from an original, or receive oral dictation from God? Was it written on small clay tablets, or engraved in large stone stelae? Did God write it, or did Moses? (One view has it that Moses wrote out 13 complete copies of the Torah on the day he died – an incredible feat!)

Chapter 30: The Maximalist and Minimalist Approaches

A number of technical objections were raised to the maximalist theory (that the entire Torah was given to Moses at Sinai): what, then, of the various occasions recorded in the Torah that Moses had to ask God for legal advice in mid-journey? Didn't he have all the laws in hand? Why are some laws (specifically those without scriptural basis, such as the mode of crafting tefillin) called "halakhah from Moses at Sinai" if *all* the laws were from Moses at Sinai? To raise a totally different problem: on what basis was the Scroll of Esther included in the canon after prophecy had ceased? What is the magic line dividing canonical from non-canonical – or is the line arbitrary? Were the rabbis allowed to come up with new insights on their own, and what standing did these have? What does it mean that "things not revealed to Moses were revealed to Rabbi Akiva"? Does revelation ever cease?

Chapter 31: The Maximalist Approach

As we saw, the maximalists held that every word, every letter was sacred, from Sinai. The Masoretes counted the words and letters in the holy scriptures, and instructed which letters should be written larger or smaller than normal. However, anomalies seem to have crept into the text. One tradition has it that the words with dotting over them are doubtful. There are occasional discrepancies between the received tradition of the Torah text and the Talmud's spelling of certain words. The

Talmud itself enunciates that the reading of the Septuagint (Greek translation) differed from that of the received Hebrew version, yet was considered sacred.

Chapter 32: The Minimalist Approach

The midrashic literature cites a view that the last eight verses of the Torah (describing Moses' death) or the last twelve (starting from his ascent to Mount Nebo) were written by Joshua (as opposed to the alternate view that Moses wrote about his own death in a kind of prophetic dictation). According to other views, Joshua wrote the portion of the "cities of refuge," or completed the poem "*Ha'azinu*". Other later rabbis raised various questions about the dating of various passages, most famously Abraham Ibn Ezra, who pointed to discrepant passages that helped lay the foundation for modern historical scholarship of the Biblical text.

Chapter 33: Lost Books

Several wild midrashim suggest extraordinary possibilities: for instance, that Eldad and Medad, the two elders who prophesied in the camp, wrote their own books that have been lost. These speculations point to the larger question: is the Torah coterminous with everything that has been revealed? Maybe Moses himself only gave us a small portion of all that was revealed to him!

PART THREE: APPLICATIONS

The remaining chapters (34-41) address the question: If we conceive of the nature of Torah in one way or another (as discussed in the earlier chapters), what effect will this have on our applied practice? Among the many insights that Heschel shares here, I offer the following for special consideration:

- In Chapter 39, Heschel retells the famous story of the sages' debate over the Akhnai Oven, in which Rabbi Joshua countered Rabbi Eliezer's many miracles and conjuring of a heavenly voice with the simple quote: "It is not in the heavens." Heschel comments: "[Here] was born the idea that the Sages are the inheritors of the prophets, and that the voice of the Sages outweighs an echoing voice from heaven." (p. 661)
- Also in that chapter, Heschel stresses the ambiguous significance of Deuteronomy 5:19: "a mighty voice, and no more" or "a mighty voice without end." Revelation is continuous.
- Chapter 36 stresses "both these and these are the words of the Living God" – as applied to the dual outlooks in this very book, the truth is to be found not in the one or other exclusively, but in the complementarity of the two.
- Though the rabbis famously recommended to put a buffer (or "hedge") around the law, they also warned against the dangers of too many buffers. If Adam had not extended the prohibition of the "Tree of Knowledge" from eating to touching, Eve might not have erred and a great tragedy might have been prevented! (p. 722)