

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Torah min Hashamayim Ba-aspaklaria shel Hadorot (Theology of Ancient Judaism) Vols. 1-2, vol. 3 by Abraham Joshua Heschel; English Translation: Heavenly Torah as Refracted through the Generations by Gordon Tucker and Leonard Levin

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Torah min Hashamayim Ba-aspaklaria shel Hadorot (Theology of Ancient Judaism) [Hebrew], by Abraham Joshua Heschel. 3 vols. Vols. 1–2, London: Soncino Press, 1962–65; vol. 3, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1995.

English Translation: **Heavenly Torah as Refracted through the Generations**, edited and translated by Gordon Tucker with Leonard Levin. New York: Continuum, 2005.

I am unaware of any other scholar of the twentieth century besides Abraham Joshua Heschel who contributed to the theological understanding of the four pivotal periods of pre-modern Jewish existence: Biblical, Rabbinic, Medieval-Philosophic, and Kabbalistic-Hasidic. The first two warranted major books. For the Biblical period, *The Prophets* articulates the Divine pathos of the Most Moved Mover's involvement in the affairs of man. For the Rabbinic period, *Torah Min HaShamayim BeAsplaqariah Shel HaDorot*, traces the internal dialectic of Jewish theology throughout its history. This is Heschel's magnum opus, for it presents the understanding of the woof and warp of Judaism which informs his writings on contemporary theology. Heschel not only had an overarching thesis about Rabbinic Judaism, but adopted the strategy of exegeting it from within by writing it in Hebrew in native categories. Many of the subsections are titled with Rabbinic quotations. This reflects his understanding of the intersect between language and thought, for as words and language inform thinking so do categories structure thought. The distinctiveness of Heschel's contribution can be gauged by comparing his chapter headings with three other major works on Rabbinic thought.

Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*.

1. Introductory
2. God and the World
3. God and Israel
4. The Election of Israel
5. The Kingdom of God (Invisible)
6. The Visible Kingdom (Universal)
7. The Kingdom of God (National)
8. The "Law"
9. The Law as Personified in the Literature
10. The Torah in its Aspect of Law (Mizwoth)
11. The Joy of the Law
12. The Zacuth of the Fathers. Imputed Righteousness and Imputed Sin
13. The Law of Holiness and Law of Goodness
14. Sin as Rebellion
15. The Evil Yezer: The Source of Rebellion
16. Man's Victory by the Grace of God, over the Evil Yezer Created by God

17. Forgiveness and Reconciliation with God
18. Repentance: Means of Reconciliation

George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era:*

Introduction

1. Historical
2. The Sources

Part I: Revealed Religion

1. Nationality and Universality
2. The Scriptures
3. The Unwritten Law
4. The Perpetuity of the Law
5. The Synagogue
6. The Schools
7. The Conversion of Gentiles

Part II: The Idea of God

1. God and the World
2. The Character of God
3. Ministers of God
4. The Word of God. The Spirit
5. Majesty and Accessibility of God

Part III: Man, Sin, Atonement

1. The Nature of Man
2. Sin and its Consequences
3. The Origin of Sin
4. Ritual Atonement
5. Repentance
6. The Efficacy of Repentance
7. Motives of Forgiveness
8. Expiatory Suffering

Part IV: Observances

Part V: Morals

Part VI: Piety

Part VII: The Hereafter

Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [Hebrew], ET: *The Sages: The World and Wisdom of the Rabbis of the Talmud*,

1. The Study of the History of the Beliefs and Concepts of the Sages.
2. The Belief in One God
3. The Shekhina—The Presence of God in the world
4. Nearness and Distance—Omnipresent and Heaven
5. The Epithet *Gevura* [Might] and the Power of God
6. Magic and Miracle
7. The Power of the Divine Name
8. The Celestial Retinue
9. He Who Spoke and the World Came into Being

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10. Man
11. On Providence
12. The Written Law and the Oral Law
13. The Commandments
14. Acceptance of the Yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, Love and Reverence
15. Man's Accounting and the World's Accounting
16. The People of Israel and its Sages
17. On Redemption

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Torah Min HaShamayim BeAspaqlariah Shel Ha-Dorot*. (The chapter numbering follows *Heavenly Torah as Refracted through the Generations*.)

1. Introduction
2. Two approaches to Torah Exegesis
3. Miracles
4. The Sacrifices
5. The Abode of the Shekhinah
6. Teachings concerning the Shekhinah
7. Afflictions
8. Torah and Life
9. In Awe and Trembling
10. Duties of the Heart
11. Issues of Supreme Importance
12. Scriptural Language Not Befitting God's Dignity
13. The Language of Torah
14. Transcendental and Terrestrial Perspectives
15. Go 'round the Orchard!
16. Beholding the Face of God
17. The Torah that Is in Heaven
18. Moses' Ascent to Heaven
19. The Descent of the Divine Glory
20. Torah from Heaven
21. The Ways of the Sectarians
22. Moses Did Things on His Own Authority
23. Two Methods of Understanding "Thus Says the Lord"
24. Is it Possible That It Was on His Own Say-so
25. The Book of Deuteronomy
26. The Maximalist and Minimalist | Approach
27. Is the Prophet a Partner or a Vessel
28. "See, How Great was Moses' Power!"
29. Moses' Prophecy
30. How the Torah Was Written

31. The Maximalist Approach to the Principle "Torah from Heaven"
32. The Minimalist Approach to the Principle "Torah from Heaven"
33. Lost Books
34. It Is Not in the Heavens
35. Renewal of Torah
36. Both These and Those are the Words of the Living God
37. Against Multiplying Rules
38. Stringencies and Leniencies
39. Former and Latter Authorities
40. Theology in the Legal Literature
41. Interpersonal Relationships

The two volumes that were published during Heschel's lifetime reach chapter 33.

Schechter's work is based on four axes: God, Israel, Torah, and issues in human nature. The structure of parts one to three of Moore's book also basically is: Israel, God, Law, and issues in human nature. Parts four to six deal with the religious life and part seven with the future. The general outline of Urbach's work also reflects the order of God and the heavenly realm, Man, Torah, their interrelationship, and the future. In this sense, Urbach's work can be understood as the consummation of Schechter's project.

Even though Heschel's first two volumes were published five or so years prior to Urbach's, they made no impact on it. A glance at the chapter headings of Heschel's work shows how much his agenda differs. Two major differences are the chapters on the nature of revelation and the divine pathos, i.e., the Divine reality concerned with human destiny. The former actually takes up over half of the first two volumes. In this sense, Heschel's work on Rabbinic thought continues his work on Biblical thought. Both focus on the pathos in the divine-human relationship and how revelation results from the interaction of the Divine and human. Although the Biblical work is concerned with the prophetic understanding of the Divine and the Rabbinic work with the Rabbinic understanding of the Torah, the dynamics surprisingly overlap. *The Prophets* ends with "The Dialectic of the Divine-Human Encounter." The chapter that begins the third volume of *Torah Min Ha-Shamayim*, chapter thirty four of *The Heavenly Torah*, is entitled "It Is Not in the Heavens," and its opening subsections are "Without Sages There Is No Torah," and "The Sages are the Finishing and the Completion of the Torah" (*The Heavenly Torah*: "The Sages Finish and Complete the Torah"). As prophecy results from the encounter between prophet and God, so Judaism results from the encounter between sage and Torah.

Heschel's work differs from the others also in its modality of presentation. It is more explorative than definitive. Chapters frequently present contrasting

sides of an issue under the rubrics of R. Ishmael or R. Akiva, names used sometimes typologically or paradigmatically, sometimes historically. Chapters can stand in dialectical relationship. For example, Chapter 18, "Moses' Ascent to Heaven," contains the subsections: "Rabbi Akiva's View: Moses Was in Heaven" and "Moses Ascended to Heaven" along with "Moses Did Not Ascend to Heaven" and "How Could a Person Ascend to Heaven?" On a more mundane level, Chapter 37 contains a subsection "Against Those Who are Stringent," while chapter 38 has "Beloved Are Prohibitions." Heschel's perspective is infused with this sense of polarity. While he may advocate "a covenant between opposites" he is quite cognizant of the difficulty if not impossibility of holding both ends of a stretched rope. For those who cannot rise to such dialectical heights, entreats Heschel, that a half a loaf is not a full loaf, and no perspective exhausts reality. In this manner Heschel seeks to expand our horizons, keep alternatives open, and prevent premature closure by training us to theologize dialectically. The problem is that someone strong in one pole of the dialectic is unlikely to do full justice to the other. Each pole needs the other to correct itself. Together they exemplify the complexity and fullness of the issue. One never knows when it might be the case when, as the third volume is subtitled and chapter 36 titled, "Both These and Those Are the Words of the Living God." Sometimes, a different perspective, even a competing one, can supplement one's understanding of the truth. Such an understanding can lead to a collaborative pluralism. For a pluralism to be collaborative, however, the commonality of goals must overshadow the divergence of means. With non-finality as his watchword, Heschel invites the reader to engage in the ongoing Rabbinic quest for the meaning of revelation and of God's involvement with humanity.

Back in 1968, after Heschel had seen my essay, "Non-violence and the Talmud," he asked me to undertake the translation of *Torah Min HaShamayim*. I protested my inability. I did not see how one could translate a work in which expression after expression rang with echoes of other expressions. To translate the work would be like translating evocative poetry into dry prose or transposing a symphony into a melody. Besides the problem of mapping a polysemous Hebrew into one-dimensional English "there is," as Tucker notes in his Preface, "the matter of capturing not only the meaning of the words but the cultural bells that they ring when put into combination." The answer is, as Tucker and Levin have so well executed, an annotated translation providing the reader with the cultural bells that ring in the ears of the intended Hebrew reader.

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