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GOD'S NEED FOR MAN: A UNITIVE APPROACH TO THE WRITINGS OF ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-72) is recognized not only as the leading theological voice among North American Jews in the postwar decades, but also as a writer whose theology had an particularly passionate and evocative quality, drawing a large following, both Jewish and Christian, including many who were not regular readers of theological treatises.¹ A major element in that attractiveness lay in Heschel's ability to speak of God in deeply human terms, including especially his willingness to speak of God's need for man.² In fact, if you open Shai Held's magisterial treatment of Heschel's theology, you will find in the introduction that, "The sentence that appears in Heschel's writings more frequently than any other - one encounters it countless times in his vast corpus - is a simple one: 'God is in need of man.'" ³ While I think there may be some overstatement here, the point is clearly made. But Held interestingly goes on to say in that same paragraph: "God will not redeem the world alone, Heschel insists, but instead waits for human beings to participate in that work." A more consistent way of following the prior sentence might have read "God *cannot* redeem the world alone...but instead *needs* human beings to participate in that work." Here Held has perhaps unwittingly picked up on Heschel's own subtle hesitation about this claim, as though Maimonides' shudder at it is somehow ringing in his ears. But listen to Heschel's own more unequivocal rendition, spoken (of all places!) in an address to Jewish day school principals: "God needs man's cooperation. There will be no redemption without the cooperation of man. Omnipotence as such will not work. God cannot function in the world without the help of man."⁴

I had the great privilege of studying privately with Dr. Heschel in the years 1963-67, while I was a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary. His main assignment to me was that I read Rabbi Meir Ibn Gabbai's summary of kabbalistic teaching *'Avodat ha-Kodesh* and write a study of it. Ibn Gabbai, who lived in the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century,⁵ offers a great synthesis of

Jewish mystical wisdom in the generation immediately preceding that of Moshe Cordovero and Yizhak Luria, who were to make such great additions and changes to that tradition. The key theme of the work, repeated frequently throughout, is *ha-'avodah tsorekh gavoha* (lit.: "service is a need on high"), that worship, including the life of the *mitzvot*, fulfills a divine need. Ibn Gabbai is particularly outspoken in attacking Maimonides and the entire philosophical tradition on this question, which he considers to be at the very root of true faith. To support it, he marshals a vast number of rabbinic and zoharic sources, many of which will be familiar to readers of Heschel's *Torah min ha-Shamayim*.⁶

Ibn Gabbai is very rarely an original thinker. In this matter he is defending a term coined by Nahmanides⁷ but representing a view widely held throughout the kabbalistic world. In reflecting on this term over many years, I have come to realize that, in sending me to Ibn Gabbai, Heschel was in fact giving me a key to understanding his own oeuvre, which I consider to be of a single piece. To say it in a somewhat offhand manner, I have come to read *God in Search of Man*, the title of Heschel's theological masterwork, as a biblicalized restatement of *ha-'avodah tsorekh gavoha*, devotion to fulfill a divine need.⁸

I am here to suggest that this phrase represents an overarching theme in Heschel's work, one that binds together his investigation of the early rabbis in *Torah min ha-Shamayim*, his ongoing fascination with the Hasidic world from which he came, his own theological writings, and perhaps also, as I hope to show, his lifelong engagement with the prophets. While I have no argument with Held's most impressive demonstration that self-transcendence is key to Heschel's personal theological writings, I believe that divine need is a theme that helps to link those writings with the great effort he invested in historical theology throughout the course of his career. But no thinker as rich and multi-textured as Heschel can be reduced to a single theme. The suggestion offered here is intended to be placed alongside Held's reading and those of others, hopefully adding to our insight, rather than to replace them.

Much of Heschel's theology is constituted by his sharp distinction between the deity posited by Greek philosophical thought and the living, feeling, speaking, commanding God of Hebrew Scripture.⁹ The God of the Greeks is dispassion and detachment itself; imitation of that God leads one to detachment from this world and, so Heschel argues, to moral indifference. The God of the Bible is one of passion and pathos; the path to Him is thus one of engagement with this world and especially one of participation in God's own engagement with justice and care for victimized and wounded humanity.

The original hero of this strong assertion of Jerusalem versus Athens is of course Yehudah Halevi, a philosopher-poet who writes

in opposition to the grand tradition of rational philosophy.¹⁰ There is much that would clearly make Heschel a Yehudah Halevi Jew rather than a Maimonidean. The poetic and romantic impulse at the base of Halevi's philosophical work also might have pulled Heschel, who retained the unreconstructed soul of a poet long after he had abandoned writing poetry,¹¹ in that direction. Heschel's rather sweeping critique of philosophy as practiced in his day and his insistence that he was a true *philo sophos*, in contrast to the many who had abandoned the love of wisdom for empty mental gymnastics, also reminds one of Halevi. But he retained some hesitation about that identification. Heschel wants to address religious humanity, not just Israel. Maimonides is much more universalist than Halevi, even eschewing any mention in the *Guide* of the election of Israel.¹² On issues of Jewish nationalism and exclusivism, Heschel is much more in the Maimonidean camp (in contrast to Rav Kook, for example) than with Halevi. Because Heschel is not a kabbalist possessed of the secret doctrine about how the *mitzvot* influence the upper worlds (this is completely separate from the discussion of whether he is a *mystic* or not),¹³ he can only go so far with Nahmanides and Ibn Gabbai in their rejection of Maimonides' philosophical God.

For this reason, Heschel most often preferred to avoid explicating this sentence that he indeed did throw out quite frequently. In *Man Is Not Alone*, he offers a particularly tantalizing formulation of it: "There is, indeed, in every human being an unquenchable need for the lasting, an urge to worship and to revere... Judaism shows it is a need to be needed by God. It teaches us that every man is in need of God because God is in need of man. Our need for Him is but an echo of His need for us."¹⁴ This is a beautiful and inspiring sentence, but just what does it mean? One might well say that this is Heschel's own leap of faith. Held comments on it, saying quite rightly that here religion is responding to a deep human need. Yes, indeed Jewish *religion* does that beautifully. But religion is not God. Within the Heschelian framework, why is *God* responding? The nature of the divine need remains unexplained.¹⁵

For what might God need us? God has no reflexive concerns, as Heschel claims elsewhere in *Man Is Not Alone*, i.e., He needs nothing for Himself.¹⁶ That pulls us over just a little bit toward the Maimonidean side, toward the self-contained and perfect Aristotelian God, rather than the passionate Lover of Israel to be found in Halevi's poetry. But if God has no "reflexive concerns," how can Heschel say so repeatedly that God is in need of man?¹⁷ He needs us to act, to do His will in the context of the human and worldly realm in which we live. God needs us to redeem the world, to defeat evil, to act in history. The implication must be that God cannot do those things

without us; ours are the only hands and feet He has to act for the justice with which He is so passionately concerned. But Heschel is not usually quite so willing to say that in the unequivocal way we heard him do with those Jewish educators. A frank admission of God's dependence (is that not a proper synonym for "need"?) on man to act for goodness would open the door to two problems. Theurgy is one concern, enabling us to "bargain" with God if He is in need of us. Heschel, having seen later Hasidism at its worst as well as its best, knew how close that sort of faith can come to magic. But a much greater concern than theurgy was that of deism, perhaps in the guise of Mordecai Kaplan. Heschel assumed the role of standing firm against liberal theologies of Judaism, particularly that of his JTS colleague and rival. He did so in the name of the Bible; Heschel is revered among neo-orthodox theologians, Christian as well as Jewish, for taking the Bible and its commanding voice so seriously. How can a Jew who takes that position admit that God cannot act in history except through us? Does loyalty to a biblical faith, indeed to classical Judaism, not demand faith in a God who acts on the stage of history, even if you happen to be a Holocaust survivor?¹⁸ But if God has no reflexive needs, no needs for Himself, and could choose to act on His own to defeat evil, what need indeed has He for humanity?

A good hasidic answer to this question would be that God needs us to act in such a way that He be enabled to take pride in His creation. Humans, especially Israel, and most especially the righteous, are the ones for whose sake God created the world.¹⁹ This claim is quoted hundreds of times in the hasidic classics on which Heschel was nurtured. Yes, God could sustain that world out of pure lovingkindness and compassion. But such sustenance would come to us as *nahama de-kissufa*, bread we should be ashamed to eat, because we have not earned it. Our ability to merit divine blessing because of our goodness allows God to rejoice and take pride in His work.²⁰ It is for this that He needs us. I don't think Heschel is far from this view, though of course he would immediately universalize it and apply it to humanity, not just to Israel and Jewish *tzaddikim*. God takes great pride in His creation, especially in humans. God needs us to live up to that pride, to show Him that the enterprise of Creation is in fact deserving of God's great gifts. *Tov ha-shem la-kol ve-rahamav 'al kol ma'asav*; "Y-H-W-H is good to all; His mercies are over all His works (*Ps.* 145:9)." God's goodness is seen everywhere, throughout His creation. But the very best of His works is *rahamim*, the capacity for compassion that lies within the human heart, that indeed makes us both truly human and God-like.²¹ In acting with lovingkindness or compassion toward God's creatures, we treat God with lovingkindness as well. The Hebrew phrase is *mithassed 'im kono*.²² God needs us to be *yisra'el*

(or in Heschel's universalizing version: *ha-adam) asher bekha etpa'er* (*Is.* 49:3; "[man] in whom I take glory"), and thus worthy of creation in His image. But Heschel, again with hasidic precedent, would go beyond the matter of God's pride or glory in humanity. God *loves* man and wants him to do good. God's love, like any love, carries a degree of emotional vulnerability with it. As I open my heart to you, I allow that I might be hurt by you. Heschel's God, like Hosea's, is such a Lover.²³ God needs as a Lover needs—to have that love reciprocated; not to be rejected. Do we know a passionate love of any sort that exists in a way wholly divorced from need? Does not any real "I love you" contain a degree of "I need you to respond, to be present to me?" Heschel sees himself as a faithful descendent of Levi Yizhak of Berdichev; he wants a God who loves humanity, who is deeply involved with the life of every person, who chooses to dwell in the lowliest places in order to be accessible to us, who cares about ordinary people and is present to all their woes and joys. Like this ancestor, Heschel also needs a God with whom one can argue, to whom one can cry out. While Heschel's protest against God was finally placed in the much more angry mouth of the Kotzker, it is Levi Yizhak's vision of God and the *tzaddik's* shared love for humanity that makes it possible.²⁴ That too is part of a relationship of love. The unmoved Mover does not fit that bill.

Heschel likes to present God's search for man in the language of partnership.²⁵ The work of Creation is intentionally left unfinished so that humans may come along to complete the task. Israel is the partner of God; the life of sacred deeds, *mitzvot* in the most broadly defined sense,²⁶ is the vehicle of that partnership. Israel is also the partner of Shabbat, bringing God's own rest into this-worldly reality.²⁷ Partnership is presented as God willfully and generously extending Himself to humanity, inviting us to come along on the great journey of perfecting God's universe. But note Heschel's sometime equivocation about partnership and need: "His need is a self-imposed concern. God is now in need of man, because He freely made him a partner in His enterprise, 'a partner in the work of creation.'"²⁸ But do we really reach out for a partner if we could in fact complete the work ourselves? A very interesting and important subchapter near the end of *God in Search of Man* is entitled "God's Concern." It is where Heschel gives us the famous line, "The Bible is God's anthropology rather than man's theology." He speaks of God's care for humans, insisting that individual lives are not too trivial to be of divine concern, the Levi Yizhak theme once again. But then he makes a sudden leap from the relationship between divine concern and human greatness to end with the italicized sentence "*God is in need of man.*"²⁹ It is left hanging, with no further explanation, and is not picked up upon in the ensuing chapter. Again I have the impression there that Heschel somehow

very much wanted to say it, understood its dramatic power, but had to leave it without comment. Then we discover that he has done exactly the same thing in *Man Is not Alone*, ending his chapter on "The Essence of Man" with: "Man is needed; *he is a need of God.*"³⁰ Once again, dramatic, unexplained, left hanging. Even when he does not employ the word "need," Heschel's "*God is beseeching man to answer, to return, to fulfill.*" "Religion... is a plea of God."³¹ "Pleading" and "beseeching" are expressions of one in need.

All this confirms for me the sense that this divine need can only be described in emotional terms. To go back to the question: "Do we really seek a partner if we can do the work ourselves?" The answer is "Yes, but a love-partner, not just a work-partner." If we then choose to work together it is because we love doing so; our shared work becomes an expression of our love. As One who loves, God knows that aloneness is not the perfect state. (Here we firmly step back across the line from Maimonides to Halevi.) *Genesis 2:18, lo' tov heyiyot ha-adam levado*, "It is not good for man to be alone," is something the Heschelian God (and maybe also Heschel, the longtime bachelor?) knows from experience. As we "need to be needed," so does God. Heschel overcomes his inner Maimonidean hesitation and steps out onto the plank of risk. So does his God. The covenant with Israel is a spousal one, and Heschel loves the language, both prophetic and midrashic, that depicts it that way. He has little attraction for the kabbalistic alteration of that language in which the *hieros gamos* takes place within God, rather than between God and a human partner. Heschel's God needs *another* to love, not Himself.

Now one might argue that a divine love without need or risk is indeed possible. A precedent for it could be found in the Christian notion of agape, or in its parallels in Buddhist views of compassion. In fact the Jewish neo-Platonists, taken up by Maimonides, offer models of love as the overflow of divine bounty.³² There are passages in hasidic literature that are more Maimonidean in this way. God's love flows constantly, seeking the human recipient. It is only we who block that flow; transgression blocks its channel and leads us to separate ourselves from the One.³³ Giving love is thus a matter of divine nature, *darko shel ha-tov le-hetiv*, ("it is in the nature of the good to do good") and it does not seem to require either risk or need. But Heschel does not take up that possibility; that sort of love does not suffice for him. It is neither sufficiently passionate nor quite sufficiently human in the fullest sense. Just as we "need to be needed" by God, I would suggest that the Heschelian God "needs to be needed" by us, or that Heschel needs a God who needs us. To say it in a somewhat shocking paraphrase of traditional language, the love

of God and Israel is "a love that depends on something."³⁴ Heschel needs it to be that way.

The reader of *Torah min ha-Shamayim* alongside *God in Search of Man* feels immediately that all this talk of divine need is strongly Akivan language. He is translating *Ha-kadosh barukh hu mit'aveh li-tefilitan shel yisra'el* ("God longs for the prayers of Israel"). God is in need because He is *rokhev shamayim be'ezrekha* ("He rides the heavens with your help," a reading of *Deut. 33:26*), because Israel is called *ra'ayati* ("My shepherdess;" lit.: "my beloved," *Cant. 2:10*), which means *mefarnesati* ("My sustainer"), because *yisra'el mosifin koah u-gevurah le-ma'alah* ("Israel add to the divine strength and power"). The religious mind, as Heschel defines it in his personal theological writings, is made up in very large measure of the sensibilities he attributes to Rabbi Akiva. This is faith in the God who makes Himself vulnerable by reaching out to man, by participating in human sufferings, including the greatest of all Jewish sufferings, that of exile. *Li velakhem ha-ge'ulah* ("Redemption is both Mine and yours"), proclaims a chapter heading in a key section of *TMS*; as I take you out of Egypt—and this to the reader of hasidic sources means "all your Egypts," especially the Egypt of the mind—I will be taken out with you. Remember the dramatic closing line of the epithet on the opening page of *TMS*, volume 2: *Katnut ha-Mohim goreret ahareha galut ha-Torah*. "Smallness of mind brings the Torah into exile." In addition to being a sideswipe at his critics, including possibly his Seminary colleagues, Heschel is saying something about the need of Torah, religion, perhaps even God, to be brought forth from the exile into which narrow-mindedness has placed it. *Min ha-metsar kara'ti YaH; 'anani ba-merhav YaH* (lit.: "Out of the straits I call YaH; YaH answers me in breadth" - *Ps. 118:5*). I leave the reader to contemplate how Heschel might interpret that verse in this context.

It may be said that a major piece of Heschel's effort in *TMS* is an attempt to trace the controversy of Maimonides and Nahmanides about divine need for worship—beginning with the tabernacle and the sacrifices but carrying over into prayer and the life of the commandments—back to Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, the former saying unequivocally *lo' nittenu mitzvot ela le-tsaref ba-hen et ha-beriot* ("the commandments were give only to purify people") and the other seeing the *mitzvot* as giving something to God and having cosmos-sustaining or theurgic power.³⁵ All the "Akivan" rabbinic passages mentioned above, discussed so fully in *TMS*, are quoted by Ibn Gabbai as prooftexts to show that the true rabbinic view is *ha-avodah tsorekh gavoha*. Heschel found much of the Akiva position already laid out for him by Ibn Gabbai.

Whether Heschel succeeded in proving the consistency of those two positions I leave to the scholars of the early rabbinic period. The matter is very much complicated by questions of the lateness of many of the sources, by the clearer distinctions being made today between Tannaitic, Amoraic, and Stamaitic claims, between Palestinian and Babylonian versions of reported traditions, and so forth. But he certainly demonstrated that there is a wide range of views on these devotional questions in the early rabbinic sources, and that the rabbis were much concerned with such matters altogether. Perhaps even more broadly, Heschel shows that aggadic statements are to be read as testament to seriously held and often disputed theological positions. Over against those who saw little deep theological engagement in early rabbinic circles—because they were primarily concerned with matters of law, of course—and against the depiction of the rabbis as childlike in their naïve theological opinions (Solomon Schechter), or just expressing vague and broadly shared value concepts (Max Kadushin), Heschel's work stands, more than a half-century later, as a great encounter with the profundity and diversity of rabbinic thought through the ages, but rooted in those talmudic conversations.³⁶

My final concern here is, however, not with *TMS* but with Heschel of *The Prophets*. I have long felt that there was an unexplored link between *ha'avodah tsorekh gavoha* ("worship as divine need") and what Heschel describes as the divine pathos so powerfully perceived by the prophets of Israel. Of course, on the surface of things these seem like very different voices in the world of Jewish theology. There is something highly priestly in the assertion that prayer, replacing the original sacrifices as a form of worship, truly fulfills a divine need. The whole Akivan position regarding the tabernacle and the sacrifices, that they extend back to primordial times and in fact represent the fulfillment of God's work in creation, may be seen as deeply priestly and not something you could expect of a prophet who said so clearly, "For I did not speak with you or command you on the day I took you out of Egypt regarding offerings and sacrifices (*Jer. 7:22*)."

But Heschel has forcibly detached his own faith in human devotion fulfilling a divine need from its original highly ritualized moorings. As I have said in an earlier study,³⁷ Heschel invokes *mitzvot tsorekh gavoha* ("the commandments as divine need") first and foremost in the context of the "commandments between man and man" (i.e., the ethical rather than the ritual realm): care for the poor and oppressed and devotion to acts of justice. These are what God needs of us. This stands in sharp contrast to the hasidic context, in which it was applied primarily to certain acts of the *tzaddik* in fulfilling *mitzvot* that were seen almost as mystery-rites: blowing the shofar, waving the *lulav*, and so forth.

The question we need to explore here is the relationship between divine pathos and divine need. The God of pathos reveals Himself, "in a personal and intimate relation to the world... He is... moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath."³⁸ As we have said, it is primarily God's love of humanity that stirs Him, even leading Him to wrath. Heschel struggles mightily to insist that none of this is the projection of human emotions onto God, or anthropopathism. In a religious culture so aware of transcendence as the Bible, Heschel argues, such a move would be impossible, even blasphemous. "To speak about God as if he were a person does not necessarily mean to personify Him, to stamp Him in the image of a person."³⁹ It is in this chapter on anthropopathy that I sadly find Heschel most defensive and unconvincing.⁴⁰ I am touched, however, to find him making an interesting claim of reversal. There is indeed a point of similarity between the selfless love of God and the most refined of selfless human emotions. Heschel's explanation: "Absolute selflessness and mysteriously undeserved love are more akin to the divine than to the human. And if these are characteristics of human nature, then man is endowed with attributes of the divine."⁴¹ Or, specifically with regard to the prophet: "It is perhaps more proper to describe a prophetic passion as theomorphic than to regard the divine pathos as anthropomorphic."⁴² This is of course a well-known move among mystics, seeing the divine/human continuum as a hall of mirrors that can be viewed from either end. The Ba'al Shem Tov famously does it with regard to love. Rather than divine love being seen as a projection of human eros, all love, even that so explicitly forbidden as incest, is a pale reflection of the single continuum of love that begins in God.

In that revealing little talk to Jewish educators that we cited earlier, Heschel offers a direct link between *God in Search of Man* and prophetic pathos, "This idea [of pathos] really is an explication of the idea of God in search of man."⁴³ Of course it is. Pathos is all about God's love for His human creature, His faith in him, His hope for him. In the prophets, that love is described in metaphors of both spouse and parent, both of whom are vulnerable enough to feel betrayed. The *Zohar* expounds greatly on the spousal metaphor, taking the *Song of Songs* and its atmosphere of the love-intoxicated garden to places filled with *eros* that surely would have given a shudder to Hosea or Jeremiah.⁴⁴ Heschel's hasidic forebears were either too shy or too inexperienced to employ much of that language. Instead, they invoke a whole array of affectionate parental metaphors to describe the tender passion of God's love. God is like the parent teaching a child to walk, pulling away from her so that she will take yet another step. God is the

parent pulling a thorn out of the child's foot, or feeding the child bitter medicine that will save his life, something the child cannot understand. The parent lets the child take credit for an insight, even though it is he who planted it in the child's mind.⁴⁵ All these are expressions of love and caring that is ever-present, even when not apparent. They are also expressions of *tsimtsum*, the bigger adult mind or more mature emotional self holding back, allowing room for the child to grow. Yet sometimes, in *The Prophets* as well, Heschel tries to pull pathos away from that which could be seen as an emotional need in God, saying that pathos, "is not a passion, an unreasoned emotion, but an act formed with intention, rooted in decision and determination . . . its essential meaning is not to be seen in its psychological denotation, as standing for a state of the soul, but in its theological connotation, signifying God as involved in history."⁴⁶ Is Heschel again offering a nod to that inner Maimonidean he never seems to fully shake? Or is he trying to see in the prophets' God a more robust and in-control divine persona, one who wants to admit of a little less emotional vulnerability? Perhaps Heschel means to argue that true strength of personality lies precisely in consciously and intentionally allowing oneself to love, to take risks, to live with passion and therefore vulnerability. But love also demands *tsimtsum*, leaving room for the other to respond in his/her own way, at his/her own pace. We embrace a God who takes such a risk with Abraham, with Israel at Sinai, and with every human being, because we are free to reject His love. This would fit well with a long footnote⁴⁷ in *The Prophets*, where Heschel favorably reports a suggestion by S. D. Goitein that the name Y-H-W-H might be derived from an obscure Semitic root meaning "passionate love and devotion." Heschel then suggests that *Exodus* 3:14—*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*—could be translated, "I shall (passionately) love whom I love." What a wonderful moment that must have been for Heschel—to be able to proclaim that the divine name itself meant passionate engagement and not merely "Being!" This is Heschel the poet speaking, in a voice that all those years of theological *gravitas* thankfully could never quite still. Heschel is not a poet rather than a philosopher; he is a philosopher or a theologian who has refused to abandon his poetic muse.

To summarize: I agree with Held's assertion that the claim of divine need is found everywhere in Heschel, but I present it as a consistent and unifying theme. Once *avodah tsorekh gavoha* is liberated from the theurgic context and applied to the interpersonal and social realm, it turns out to be identical to God's need for us to act in His name in the world of human affairs, precisely the prophetic demand. There is thus a continuity of this vision of a God seeking out human partnership, needing our action in response to divine call, extending

from the prophets, through the sages, into Nahmanides, on to the hasidic masters, all of them nourishing and enriching Heschel's own theological oeuvre. But it is essentially a partnership of love; the divine need is that of being loved. God needs us as actors in history; He created us to be His loving partners in the ongoing work of redemption.⁴⁸ In the rabbinic sources as Heschel lines them up in *TMS*, Rabbi Ishmael is indeed heir to the prophets in his firm concentration on this world and the need to act within it. But the prophets' passionate cry of divine/human love is certainly carried forward by Rabbi Akiva. It is for this reason that Heschel must embrace both of them: Ishmael for his nonapocalyptic this-worldliness and Akiva for his love, his passion, and his sense of mystery and wonder. In the medieval conversation, Heschel shows great respect to Maimonides, both for his firm commitment to transcendence, a pillar of Heschel's theology, and for the sobriety of his vision. Sometimes he almost seems ready to defer to him. But ultimately Heschel is more drawn to—indeed *needs*—the God of RaMBaN and Ibn Gabbai, the God who is vulnerable and needy enough to be truly and irrevocably in search of man.

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NOTES

1. My thanks to Shai Held, Michael Marmor, and Gordon Tucker for several suggestions offered in the course of thinking about and writing this article.

2. Of course the use of "man" to indicate all of humanity is now considered somewhat dated. I have retained it because it is so central to Heschel's own language. It should be clear to the reader throughout that in both his writing and mine it is meant to embrace all humans without regard to gender.

3. Shai Held, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence* (Bloomington, 2013), p. 8–9.

4. "Jewish Theology," included in A. J. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (henceforth *MGSA*). (New York, 1996), p. 159.

5. Very little is known of the life of Ibn Gabbai other than the fact that he was born in Spain in 1481 and was among the exiles who settled somewhere in the Turkish Empire in 1492. See the treatment by Avraham Yaari in *Kiryat Sefer*, Vol. 9 (1933), pp. 388–93.

6. *Torah min ha-Shamayim ba-Aspeklaria shel ha-Dorot*. 3 vols. (London and New York, 1962–1990) (Henceforth *TMS*). Adapted English translation as *Heavenly Torah As Refracted Through the Generations* (New York, 2005). All references are to the Hebrew original.

7. See his comment to *Ex.* 29:47.

8. Heschel says as much in "Jewish Theology" in *MGSA*, pp. 158ff.

9. S. Held, *ibid.*, p. 140.

10. On Judah Halevi, see most recently Michah Goodman's *The Dream of the Kuzari*. (Tel Aviv, 2012) (Hebrew), as well as the comments by Menahem Kellner in his *Maimonides on Judaism and the Jewish People*. (Albany, 1991), p. 110, n. 16.

11. The young Heschel's poems were published under the title *Der Shem ha-Mefoirash: Mensh* (Warsaw, 1933). Translated as *The Ineffable Name of God: Man* (New York, 2005).

12. On this and related issues, see Menahem Kellner's book quoted above in n. 10, p. 90ff. See also his article "Chosenness not Chauvinism: Maimonides on the Chosen People" in Daniel H. Frank, *A People Apart: Chosenness and Ritual in Jewish Philosophical Thought* (Albany, 1993). My thanks to my colleague Barry Mesch for his help here and in n. 32.

13. See my prior discussion of this question in "Three Warsaw Mystics," in *Kolot Rabbim: The Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer Memorial Volume*, edited by Rachel Elior and Josef Dan. (Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 1-58.

14. *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (Henceforth *MNA*) (Philadelphia, 1951), p. 247f. Held notes the interesting jump Heschel makes, as we have seen, from the human need to be needed to the claim of God's need for man. "Heschel begins by establishing a human hunger to be needed, and a receptivity to be needed by something ultimate, and only then announces that we are, in fact, needed by God." Held, *ibid.*, p. 89.

15. Heschel's sometime equivocation on the degree of need, especially his statements that God has "freely" made man a partner, etc., seem to anticipate Eliezer Berkovits' critique. "Dr. A. J. Heschel's Theology of Pathos," *Tradition*, Vol. 6 (1964), pp. 67-104. The heated tone of this critique, and especially its publication in an early issue of *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, reflects the polemical tone of that era in which emerging Modern Orthodoxy needed to set itself apart from anything identified with non-Orthodox, particularly Conservative, Judaism. Neither Berkovits nor Held gives quite enough weight to this equivocation. For Berkovits, it would undercut his attempt to dismiss Heschel, which he seems to need to do at all cost; for Held, it would weaken the polarity of his own analysis.

16. *MNA* p. 143. Held, *ibid.*, p. 140.

17. See the important discussion by Held on p. 236, n. 37. See also John C. Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith* (New York and London, 1985), p. 269, n. 181.

18. I believe that both Alexander Even-Chen and Shai Held are too unequivocal in their argument about whether Heschel "in the shadow of the Shoah, came to abandon his belief in God's omnipotence (Held, p. 10)." See Even-Chen, "God's Omnipotence and Presence in Abraham Joshua Heschel's Philosophy," *Shofar*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2007), pp. 41-71. This was the agonizing question of Heschel's entire life; it cannot be reduced to a simple "yes" or "no."

19. Cf. RaSHI to *Genesis* 1:1, based on Midrashic sources. Cf. *Midrash Lekah Tov* on *Gen.* 1:1.

20. See *Me'or 'Eynayim, lekh lekha*, beginning (ed. Jerusalem, 2012), p. 33, and notes ad loc.).

21. Cf. Rabbi Yehoshua's reading of this verse in *Bereshit Rabbah* 33:3.

22. *Bahir* 128; *Zohar* 2:114b, 3:222b.

23. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 39ff.; Held, *ibid.*, p. 147.

24. Heschel dealt with the question of evil in both of his books that treated Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk, *A Passion for Truth* (New York, 1973) and *Kotzk: In Gerangl far Emesdikeyt* (Tel Aviv, 1973). Treated by Held, *ibid.*, pp. 174-97.

25. *MNA*, pp. 242-43; *God in Search of Man* (henceforth *GSM*) (Philadelphia, 1955), index s.v. "partner," esp. pp. 286ff.

26. Note Heschel's reference to the extended meaning of the word *mitzvah* in Yiddish parlance. *GSM* pp. 361-63.

27. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, 1951), p. 52. Cf. also Heschel's revealing remark on p. 60: "The idea of the Sabbath as a queen or a bride is . . . an illustration of God's need for human love."

28. *MNA*, p. 243.

29. *GSM*, p. 413.

30. *MNA*, p. 215.

31. *GSM*, pp. 291 and 287.

32. Maimonides avoids speaking, certainly in a philosophical context, of God "loving" man. This would be overly anthropopathic for him. He does not directly treat the term "love" in his extensive list of homonyms in the first part of the *Guide*. "Heart" (*Guide* 1:39) is as close as he comes, but this chapter does not reveal much. (The converse, man's love for God, including the question of obligation to love, is indeed of interest to Maimonides. See the treatment by Norman Lamm in "Maimonides on the Love of God," in *Maimonides Studies*, edited by A. Hyman, vol. 3. (New York, 1992-93), pp. 131-42.) In his treatment of prophecy (2:36-38), the overflow of the Active Intellect into the prophet's mind certainly looks like the influx that both earlier neo-Platonists and later Jewish devotional writers, influenced by Kabbalah, might describe as love, but Maimonides does not call it that.

33. *Me'or 'Eynayim, hayyey Sarah*, 66; *be-shalah*, 168.

34. The closest Jewish sources come to the eros/agape distinction is the statement in *M. Avot* 5:16 that the love of Amnon and Tamar is "a love that depends upon something" (that "something" is often read as sexual attraction, but it may refer to fulfillment of any sort of personal need), while that of David and Jonathan is not. Of course many a contemporary reader would question that view. For Heschel, the love of God for man is not sexual, but is dependent upon mutuality and the fulfillment of divine need.

35. Heschel would surely reject this word in connection with Akiva, given its magical or quasi-magical associations, but it is now widespread, due largely to the writings of Moshe Idel.

36. In 1947, the historian of Hasidism, Shmuel Abba Horodezky, published a study called *Yahadut ha-Sekhel ve-Yahadut ha-Regesh*, in which he

presented the history of Judaism as an ongoing struggle between the elitist forces of rationalist legalism, on the one hand, and emotion-laden popular religion, on the other. In ancient times this struggle was represented by that of priest against prophet. In rabbinic literature it was *halakhah* versus *aggadah*. In the Middle Ages both growing legalism and the philosophical traditions did battle against popular and mystical religion, including the *Zohar*. In more recent memory, and within the purview of Horodezky's own field of study, the struggle between *hasidim* and *mitnaggedim* was an incarnation of that same ancient tension. Heschel was surely aware of Horodezky's work. Not only were they fellow students of Hasidism, but they both belonged to the same subset of *rebbishe eynelekh*, descendents of Hasidic rebbes who had left the old Hasidic way of life and yet were still enthralled by its religious power. Heschel is a vastly more subtle and profound thinker than Horodezky, but he is also attracted to sets of radical, sometimes even overdrawn, polarities. I am suggesting that Horodezky's work had some role in Heschel's emerging thought in the early post-war years. As I have suggested regarding Hillel Zeitlin ("Three Warsaw Mystics," cited above in n. 13, p. 33), Heschel is not always good at revealing his sources of influence. This view is confirmed by Michael Marmor's important dissertation *Heschel's Rhetoric of Citation: The Use of Sources in God in Search of Man* (Jerusalem, 2005).

Heschel's *Torah min ha-Shamayim*, though presented as a study of two schools within the Tannaitic *aggadah*, is in fact a meta-history of rabbinic Judaism around two opposing poles of thought. They are not the simplistic ones suggested by Horodezky, but they do have elements of a rationalist-versus-mystic elaboration of the tradition. As any reader of the work knows, Heschel loves to quote sources late as well as early, and more than one critic has suggested that in many cases it is really the later sources, rather than the tannaitic ones, that give the polarities a more definitive cast.

37. "Abraham Joshua Heschel: Recasting Hasidism for Moderns," *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2009), pp. 62-79.

38. *The Prophets*, p. 224.

39. *op. cit.*, p. 273.

40. S. Held (p. 159) seems to agree with me in his more gentle comment: "Whether or not his strategy is fully effective. . . ."

41. *The Prophets*, p. 271.

42. *op. cit.*, p. 260.

43. *MGSA*, p. 160.

44. This atmosphere is beautifully evoked in Melila Hellner-Eshed's book *A River Flows from Eden* (Stanford, 2011).

45. These are particularly prominent in the writings of Heschel's ancestor R. Dov Baer of Miedzyrzecz. See the index to Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer's edition of *Maggid Devaraw le-Ya'akov* (Jerusalem, 1976), s.v. *meshalim*.

46. p. 231.

47. p. 306, n. 37.

48. There is rather little of what could be called messianism in Heschel's theology. In this sense I consider my own chapter on "Redemption" as a continuing human effort in *Seek My Face, Speak My Name* (Northvale, NJ, 1992) to be very much in the Heschelian spirit.