Darshan Yeshiva

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Bio

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was a Polish-American intellectual, and one of the leading rabbinic figures of the 20th century. After undertaking both orthodox and liberal ordination studies, Heschel's rabbinate included teaching stints at the Hebrew Union College (Reform), and the Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative). In addition to his writings, Heschel's activism alongside Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., has ensured his legacy as a popular figure in American religion in the decades following his death.

Key Ideas

- God is a personal being with who we can have transcendent spiritual experiences.
- The pursuit of social justice is an essential component of a healthy religious outlook.
- Religion can either encourage intelligent, thoughtful personal growth, or violent, stupid conflict.
- Judaism should blend 'Halakhah' (Jewish law) and 'Aggadah' (Myth, story-telling, and ethical teachings).
- Observance of traditional Jewish law is essential, but the individual should also pursue emotional investment in Jewish practice, instead of just doing it because you're 'supposed to.'

Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.

Resources

The Sabbath is a classic work in which Heschel makes a case for a traditional Shabbat practice, outlining the historical and symbolic significance of the Day of Rest.

Heavenly Torah as Refracted Through the Generations is Heschel's masterpiece, a survey of the rabbinic differences between Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Ishmael, using this backdrop to explore his own thoughts on law and myth.

God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism is Heschel's take on the strengths and weaknesses of modern religion. In it, he also defines an image of the Jewish God and the role of Jews.

Please note: this text may not be shared or reproduced without the written permission of the Darshan Yeshiva.