

# INTRODUCTION

**Susannah Heschel**

Included in this edition, is a new biographical introduction by his daughter, Susannah Heschel, Abba Hillel Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.



Rabbi Heschel (second from right) marching with Dr. Martin Luther King for voting rights in Selma, Alabama said: *“My legs were praying.”*

My father was a unique combination of a Hasidic voice of compassion and mercy, always seeing the goodness in other people, and a prophetic voice of justice, denouncing hypocrisy, self-centeredness, and indifference. My father wasn't interested in assigning blame or claiming victimhood, but as the Bible does, he showed us a vision of who we might become. His was a voice of inspiration, not argumentation, rooted in Jewish religious thought. What he once wrote of East European Jews applies to him as well: "Jewishness was not in the fruit but in the sap that stirred through the tissues of the tree. Bred in the silence of the soil, it ascended to the leaves to become eloquent in the fruit."<sup>1</sup> So, too, Jewishness infused my father like the sap of a tree, and his eloquence was the fruit of his deep Jewish piety and learning.

Particularly extraordinary is the diversity of those who regarded him as their teacher: Catholics, Jews, Protestants, whites and blacks, liberals and conservatives, pious and secular, Americans, Europeans, Israelis. His life challenges our conventional expectations. Here is a rabbi whose books were praised by Pope Paul VI as helping to sustain the piety of Catholics; an Orthodox Jew with a white beard and yarmulke marching for civil rights and demonstrating against the war in Vietnam; an immigrant from Poland whose work is included in anthologies of exceptional English prose.

My father described himself as a "brand plucked from the fire of Europe," rescued from Poland by an American visa just six weeks before the Nazi invasion. His survival was a gift, because he became a unique religious voice in an era in which religion was in grave danger, according to his own analysis. The Hasidic Jewish world of Eastern Europe in which he was raised was far from the environment in which he wrote and taught in the United States. He came from a rebbe's family in Poland, from a Jewish civilization that was suddenly eradicated in the middle of his lifetime by the Germans, in whose universities he had studied and in whose language he had written about Jewish religious thought. Despite the horrors he experienced—the murder of his mother, sisters, friends, and relatives, the destruction of the world which had nourished him—his life continued to reflect the holy dimension he was able to evoke in his own original and unique words.

Words, he often wrote, are themselves sacred, God's tool for creating the universe, and our tools for bringing holiness—or evil—into the world. He used to remind us that the Holocaust did not begin with the building of crematoria, and Hitler did not come to power with tanks and guns; it all began with uttering evil words, with defamation, with language and propaganda. Words create worlds, he used to tell me when I was a child.

They must be used very carefully. Some words, once having been uttered, gain eternity and can never be withdrawn. The Book of Proverbs reminds us, he wrote, that death and life are in the power of the tongue.

MY FATHER was born in Warsaw on January 11, 1907, the youngest child of Moshe Mordechai and Reizel (Perlow) Heschel. His mother and father were each descended from distinguished Hasidic rebbes, a family of nobility in the Jewish world. Nearly all the great Hasidic leaders of Eastern Europe, those who inspired and led the pietistic revival that began in the eighteenth century, were among my father's ancestors. He cherished and revered them. I remember as a child how often he used to take small, fragile books from his shelf, Hasidic *seforim*, show them to me, read a little with me, and tell me with awe about the great-grandfathers who had written them. This is your inheritance, he would say. Far from feeling burdened by the greatness of his heritage, he felt gratitude, humbleness, and reverence for his ancestors. "I was very fortunate," he told an interviewer, "in having lived as a child and as a young boy in an environment where there were many people I could revere, people concerned with problems of inner life, of spirituality and integrity. People who have shown great compassion and understanding for other people."<sup>2</sup>

As a small child he was accorded the princely honors given the families of Hasidic rebbes: adults would rise when he entered the room, even when he was little, recognizing that he was a special person. He would be lifted onto a table to deliver *drushas*, learned discussions of Hebrew texts. He was considered an *illui*, a genius. His world was one of intense piety and religious observance, and he felt grateful, as he described much later, that he grew up surrounded by people of spiritual nobility. As the baby of the family, he was loved and fussed over by his older sisters, Sarah, Devorah Miriam, Esther Sima, and Gittel, and his brother, Jacob. He was teased and coddled the way youngest children of large families are. He was only three years old when his oldest sister, Sarah, married their first cousin, the Kapitshinitzer rebbe, and he remembered being at the wedding, running around excitedly among the adults. Even as a small child he took his religious obligations very seriously. He seemed amused and embarrassed when he told me that when he was sent as a five year old on an errand to a female neighbor, he would ask that the object he was borrowing be placed on a table—according to ultra-Orthodox custom, a man should not give or receive from a woman's hand.

His was a large extended family. His mother was the twin sister of the Novominsker rebbe, Alter Israel Simon Perlow, who lived in Warsaw, and there were many cousins, nieces, and nephews. The family's first tragedy came in 1916, when my father was nine years old and his father

died during an influenza epidemic. It was devastating for the family. Shortly before I turned nine, I developed a fear that the same thing might happen to me. I asked him, over and over, how he could survive such a terrible thing. He used to say, in a way that was so sad for me to hear, that he just wished he could talk to his father again, just once more, even for one hour.

As a teenager my father began publishing his first articles, short studies, in Hebrew, of talmudic literature, which appeared in a Warsaw rabbinical publication, *Sha'are Torah*, in 1922 and 1923. When he grew older, he began to read secular books, in addition to his Talmud studies. He said his mother worried at not hearing him chant Gemara while he studied, knowing that he was reading what he should not. Finally, with the approval of his family, he decided to go to Vilna to study at a Gymnasium. There he completed his examinations on June 24, 1927, at the Mathematical–Natural Science Gymnasium. He also became involved with a Yiddish poetry group, Jung Vilna, and published, as his first book, a volume of Yiddish poems, *Der Shem Hamefoyrosh: Mentsch*, written during his years in Vilna and published in Warsaw in 1933, dedicated to his father's memory.<sup>3</sup> The poems were greeted warmly in the worlds of Yiddish and Hebrew *belles lettres*; they brought him to the attention of, among others, Chaim Nachman Bialik, who wrote to him from Israel with an enthusiastic letter of congratulations.

Among my father's childhood friends from Warsaw few survived. One who did was the Yiddish writer Yechiel Hoffer, who immigrated to Israel and wrote autobiographical novels in which my father appears as a young man. Another was Zalman Shazar, a Zionist and Hebrew writer who later became President of the state of Israel. They remained good friends throughout their lives; letters from Shazar to my father, written in Hebrew, address him, "To the friend of my soul, master of joy, son of holy people." In 1970, on the occasion of President Shazar's eightieth birthday, my father wrote a tribute to him in Yiddish: "He is a Jew who lives with visions. He carries in himself a song that calls and awakens sleeping souls."\* My father also gave President Shazar a mezuzah that had once stood on the doorpost of the synagogue of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, in the little East European town of Mezibizh.

After Vilna, in 1927, my father went to study in Berlin, to participate in what he felt was the great center of European intellectual and cultural life. He enrolled at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums

\* "A brokhe dem nosi" (Greetings to President Shazar on his eightieth birthday) in *Die goldene Keyt*, Tel Aviv, No. 68 (1970), p. 26. Shazar sent a telegram to the Israel Bonds dinner honoring my father in December 1970: "To Abraham Joshua Heschel, my cherished friend . . . The descendant of so saintly a line now brings to American Jewry sparks of holiness and true radiance."

and at the Friedrich Wilhelm Universität, today's Humboldt University. On April 29, 1929, he passed examinations in German language and literature, Latin, mathematics, German history, and geography, given to foreign students by the University of Berlin, and became a matriculated student.\* He studied philosophy as his main concentration at the university, with secondary work in art history and Semitic philology. At the Hochschule he trained in the modern scientific study of Jewish texts and history. His teachers there included some of the great names of German-Jewish scholarship: Chanoch Albeck, Ismar Elbogen, Julius Guttmann, and Leo Baeck. Down the street from the Hochschule was the Orthodox rabbinical seminary, founded by Esriel Hildesheimer. The theological differences between the two seminaries could not have been greater, and it is amusing that they were located at either end of "Artillerie" Street. While most of the students and faculty at the two seminaries did not interact, my father was one of the few able to move easily between the two institutions, sustaining friendships and respect at both.

In December 1929, my father passed examinations at the Hochschule in Hebrew language, Bible and Talmud, *Midrash*, liturgy, philosophy of religion, and Jewish history and literature; and in May 1930, he was awarded a prize by the Hochschule for a paper on "Visions in the Bible." He was also appointed an instructor, lecturing on talmudic exegesis to the more advanced students. On July 16, 1934, he passed his oral examinations and was granted a rabbinical degree by the Hochschule, with a graduating thesis on "Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha and Halakha."

When I was growing up and asked my father for stories about his early life, he described the efforts of each of his professors in Berlin to convince him to write his doctoral dissertation under that professor's direction. They considered him highly gifted and each wanted him as a student. But the support he received from the university's faculty began to change after 1933.

Just three weeks after Hitler came to power, my father took his oral examinations for his doctorate at the University of Berlin, on February 23, 1933. His examiners included Max Dessoir (philosophy), Heinrich Maier (philosophy), Albert Erich Brinckmann (art history), and Eugen Mittwoch (Semitic philology). He was questioned about a remarkably broad range of topics. Dessoir and Maier asked him about Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Husserl, materialism, and metaphysics. Brinckmann focused on Italian Renaissance art, and Mittwoch asked about the prophet Amos, especially Chapter 4, and the prophet Hosea. Dessoir noted that

\* These tests were supplementary to those he passed in Vilna and granted him admission to study at a university.

my father seemed nervous and inhibited.<sup>4</sup> Not surprising, considering Hitler's accession to power.

My father's dissertation, entitled *Das prophetische Bewußtsein* (Prophetic Consciousness), was submitted in December 1932 and evaluated by his two main professors, Dessoir and Alfred Bertholet of the theology department, who held the chair in Old Testament, with an interest in Religionsgeschichte (phenomenology of religion).<sup>\*</sup> Both Dessoir and Mittwoch lost their positions at the university in 1935 as a result of Nazi anti-Semitic purges of the faculty; Bertholet retired in 1937, replaced by Johannes Hempel, an active member of the pro-Nazi German Christian Movement.

My father's doctoral degree was expected<sup>†</sup> a few months later, but there were difficulties. His dissertation had to be published in order for him to receive his degree, but he had no money for publication costs. Worse, it became increasingly difficult after Hitler came to power for a Jew to publish an academic book in Germany. For the next few years, he submitted requests every few months to the dean of the faculty for extensions of the deadline for publication; the dean granted his requests, always saluting him in the language of the day: "Heil Hitler." Finally, in the spring of 1936, the book, *Die Prophetie*, was published by the Polish Academy of Sciences, of Cracow, with costs underwritten by the Erich Reiss Publishing House in Berlin.<sup>5</sup> My father, who was otherwise not well inclined toward Poland after the war, always expressed gratitude toward the academy for that publication. Without his official degree from the university, he would have had difficulties escaping Europe. Moreover, the academy had been willing to intervene with the Polish consulate to secure governmental permission from Germany to distribute the book of a Jewish author in German bookstores.<sup>6</sup> With special permission, the University of Berlin accepted a non-German publisher as legitimate, and my father was finally

<sup>\*</sup> Max Dessoir, born in Berlin in 1867, was editor of the *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*; he became a full professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1920. Alfred Bertholet, born in Basel in 1868, became full professor of Old Testament theology at the University of Berlin in 1928.

<sup>†</sup> Dessoir's evaluation was enthusiastic, critical only of technical aspects, including organization, neologisms, and language. His comments are primarily a summary of the main argument, concerning divine pathos. He notes, for example, that divine pathos is not a predicate, a part of God's essence, but arises in response to human deeds. Pathos endows a personal God, he writes, with moral norms, gives God a chance for self-expression, and lies at the root of our own religious feeling.

By contrast, Bertholet was more restrained in his comments, criticizing the dissertation for failing to give greater emphasis to what Bertholet saw as the prophets' feeling of being threatened by God for noncompliance. The dissertation, Bertholet wrote, should have paid more attention to examples of prophecy outside the Old Testament, to what he called the predecessors of the pre-exilic prophets described in the study.

awarded his diploma on December 11, 1935, three years after completing his work.

When *Die Prophetie* finally appeared, the reviews were highly favorable. The book received notice in popular and academic journals, Christian and Jewish, in Germany and in other countries. The distinguished Old Testament scholar Otto Eissfeldt, writing in a German Protestant theology journal, praised the book, calling its understanding of the God of the Bible “correct and important,” and saying that the book “deserves the attention of Old Testament scholars as well as theologians generally.”<sup>7</sup> The evaluation in *The Philosophical Review*, published in the United States, was that the book “may well be regarded as one of the most important contributions to the general philosophy of religion that the last few years have produced.”<sup>8</sup> The positive response is even more remarkable in light of the growing calls by many Protestants in the Third Reich for eradicating the Old Testament from the Christian canon. To prove their devotion to Nazism, some Christians had called for a purging of everything Jewish, and even declared Jesus an Aryan whose goal was the elimination of Judaism from the face of the earth. As a Jewish book, the Old Testament had no place in Christian Scriptures, they argued. If the Nazis wanted a *Judenrein* Germany, they would create a *Judenrein* Christianity, and they believed that being a true follower of Jesus meant being an anti-Semite.

While such attacks against the Old Testament and against the Jewishness of Jesus had already arisen in Germany during the nineteenth century, they grew in intensity during the late 1920s and '30s with the rise of the so-called German Christian movement, a pro-Nazi group of Protestants that included bishops, pastors, professors of theology, as well as laypeople. It quickly became a powerful force within the churches. Many years later, in his 1965 inaugural address at Union Theological Seminary, my father reminded his audience that the Nazis attacked Christianity as well as Judaism, and he called for both communities to unite against the threat:

Nazism has suffered a defeat, but the process of eliminating the Bible from the consciousness of the Western world goes on. It is on the issue of saving the radiance of the Hebrew Bible in the minds of man that Jews and Christians are called upon to work together. None of us can do it alone. Both of us must realize that in our age anti-Semitism is anti-Christianity and that anti-Christianity is anti-Semitism.<sup>9</sup>

After completing his university studies, my father continued to live in Berlin. He taught at the Hochschule, as well as at the Jüdisches Lehrhaus in Berlin, and he served as reader and editor of a series of books, “Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart,” for the Erich Reiss publishing house. He witnessed Hitler’s accession to power on January 30, 1933, followed by



the burning of the Reichstag in March, as well as the book burning in April, in a large open square in the middle of the University of Berlin. His disgust at what he witnessed was expressed in an anonymously published Yiddish poem, "A Day of Hatred," which appeared in a Warsaw newspaper. My father told me the chilling story of the evening he attended a concert in Berlin and Hitler suddenly arrived. Everyone present had to rise. As soon as possible, my father left the hall. And he used to describe the abandonment he felt from Christian colleagues who did not speak up on behalf of the Jews. I can imagine how he must have felt, having completed a book on the prophets, to witness Protestant and Catholic professors of the Old Testament debating whether the Christian canon should consist only of the New Testament. Even some who spoke up on behalf of the Old Testament defended their position by arguing that the Old Testament was not really a Jewish book; Judaism, they said, was a degenerate, post-biblical phenomenon. Still, my father received help, as did many others, from the anti-Nazi Quaker community in Frankfurt am Main, whose leader, Rudolf Schlosser, became his friend. My father delivered a powerful lecture, "The Meaning of This Hour," to the Quakers of Frankfurt in February 1938 on the responsibility of religious leaders in Nazi Germany. Schlosser and his colleagues, in turn, were very helpful to my father, writing letters of character reference to the American consulate in support of his visa application.<sup>10</sup>

Most remarkable to me is how my father continued, during those years in Nazi Germany, to nurture his own religious life. For several months he rented a room from a Frankfurt Orthodox Jewish family named Simon, whose daughters recently told me that in 1937 my father never wavered in his piety, even continuing the custom of *nagel wasser* (rinsing the hands first thing upon awakening, in order to begin the day with a prayer).

Throughout the 1930s my father tried to secure a position outside Germany. He sent letters and copies of his publications to colleagues throughout Europe and the United States, seeking help. He had published several scholarly essays on aspects of medieval Jewish philosophy, as well as books on Maimonides (also published in French translation, in 1936) and Abravanel (published in Polish translation in 1937), and some shorter essays in the popular press, and they were all well received.

The offer to write a book on Maimonides came to him as a surprise. In 1935 he had visited Erich Reiss, owner of a publishing house in Berlin, to recommend the work of a friend. Reiss was so impressed by my father that he asked him to write a book on Maimonides, whose jubilee year was being celebrated, and within two weeks of feverish work, the manuscript was completed. My father was just twenty-eight years old.

The book was praised in German newspapers as "ideal," "rich," and a

“work of art.” The biography presents the historical and political context in which Maimonides lived, together with a remarkably clear summary of his thought, but it also tries to understand his personal conflicts and struggles and how they are reflected in his thought. What emerges is a complex, sensitive human being, in sharp contrast with the somewhat austere figure presented in other studies. For my father, the central issue was not how to reconcile Maimonides’s philosophical and halachic writings, or solving the extent of his rationalist, Aristotelian interpretations of Judaism, but evoking his inner, spiritual life. He shows, for example, the devastating impact of his brother’s sudden death on Maimonides’s reconsideration of the problem of evil, and concludes: “Maimonides never lost his faith in the just and meaningful working of the universe. His experience did not turn him against God but, to all appearances, against himself.”<sup>11</sup> The book also raises the question of Maimonides’s own efforts to attain prophetic inspiration, a controversial topic he discusses in far greater detail in a Hebrew essay published in 1945.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, the biography is a spiritual as well as an intellectual portrayal that broadens the image of Maimonides from a strictly rationalist philosopher to someone with profound spiritual concerns as well.

During the 1930s my father lectured frequently around Germany to Jewish groups and began to achieve recognition from scholars and intellectuals. He describes, in his personal correspondence, his enthusiasm when he met people whose work he admired. In March 1936 he spent several days in Frankfurt and began a friendship with Ludwig Feuchtwanger, Martin Buber, and Eduard Strauss, all of whom had read his book on the prophets.

In November 1936 Buber asked my father if he would be willing to become the director of the *Mittelstelle für Jüdische Erwachsenen Bildung* in Frankfurt, and after an exchange of letters, my father accepted the offer when the two men met in Berlin on January 22, 1937, just after my father’s thirtieth birthday. On March 3, 1937, he left Berlin and moved to Frankfurt. A few days later he was invited to Buber’s home, where a lively debate about *Die Prophetie* took place. In a letter dated March 26, 1937, my father wrote:

The last days in Frankfurt were lovely. Many people from throughout Germany took part in the conference of the *Mittelstelle*. Between Feuchtwanger—a very spiritual man—and me a friendship developed. We understood each other excellently and wished we could spend a few days together. Perhaps for that reason I will one day visit Munich. The most delightful was a discussion with Buber, to whom I gave my article in the *Rundschreiben* to read. He: “It’s a level too high! The part on prayer [text] is good, the part on praying [what prayer is] does not belong in the *Rundschreiben*.” I: “The assignment is not to learn to read the

text but to learn how to pray. The second is more important.” Friendly quarrel. Buber pushed Eduard Strauss into the discussion by saying, “Heschel is a lovely youngster, but so stubborn!” This discussion went on so that I long with joy for the next one . . . It went so well and I think about the next time with a happy heart.

In another letter my father described some of his differences with Buber: “In the decisive question I have to say no to him. An apotheosis of the Bible is not permissible. The holiness of the Bible is due to its origins. There is no autarky in it.”

Soon after arriving in Frankfurt, my father completed his short biography of Abravanel,<sup>13</sup> the distinguished Jewish philosopher who lived during the period of the expulsions from Spain and Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century. The book was published as part of the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of Abravanel’s birth, in Lisbon in 1437. Aware of the parallels between those experiences and the situation of the Jews in Nazi Germany, my father conceived the work as a book of comfort for his fellow European Jews. He concluded by pointing out that the Jewish expulsion from Iberia was followed by the conquest of the New World, which took place without their participation. “Had the Jews remained in the Iberian peninsula, they would certainly have participated in the actions of the Conquistadors. When the Conquistadors arrived in Haiti, there were 1,100,000 inhabitants; twenty years later there were only 1,000 remaining.”<sup>14</sup>

Just as he did in his books on Maimonides and on the prophets, my father sought to portray something of the personality and character of Abravanel. With all the tragedy he had experienced, he wrote, Abravanel identified not with Jeremiah and his lamentations over the destruction of Jerusalem but with Isaiah and Ezekiel and their optimistic promises of messianic redemption. “No Jew can read this sentence in these historic days without being moved,” wrote one reviewer in 1937.<sup>15</sup>

His desire to comfort the German Jews was accompanied by some chastisement. In a brief but extraordinary article, “Die Marranen von Heute,” published in the newspaper of the Berlin Jewish community in September 1936, my father described the German Jews as inverted Marranos.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the baptized Jews of Spain, who were Christian on the outside and Jewish on the inside, the German Jews today, he wrote, are Jewish on the outside but not on the inside. Persecuted for being Jewish, they are ignorant of Judaism and its spiritual riches, so that their inner lives are empty. Feuchtwanger wrote to him that the article “spoke to my soul” (*war mir aus der Seele gesprochen*),<sup>17</sup> and invited him to write for the Bavarian Jewish newspaper which he edited.

My father's contacts with the Christian communities of Germany were mixed. Many of his professors were Christian, and his books were generally well received by them. But he was also appalled by the lack of action on the part of Christian leaders on behalf of the Jews. He used to tell me about a Jesuit librarian who said he could not speak out against the Nazi treatment of the Jews for fear that the Nazis would close down the library. Given such attitudes, my father's later writings on the imperative for religious people to speak out against social injustice reveal a personal dimension. At first-hand he knew Christians who were anti-Semitic; later he wrote that religion cannot coexist with racism: "Racism is satanism, unmitigated evil . . . You cannot worship God and at the same time look at man as if he were a horse."<sup>18</sup>

Securing a position outside Germany was not easy. He was invited by the Society of Friends in England to teach at their school in Woodbrooke, but he was unable to obtain a visa for England. In February 1938 he received an invitation from the Jewish community of Prague to teach at a rabbinical school they were trying to establish, beginning in the academic year 1938–39.<sup>19</sup> The Jewish community in Czechoslovakia had secured a promise of support from President Edúard Beneš in April 1936, and Charles University had agreed to house the seminary in its philosophy faculty. The budget had been established and the course of study was planned, but the political crisis at the end of September brought the project to an end.<sup>20</sup> In renewed contacts during the spring of 1938, however, my father remained interested; a second letter, dated March 17, 1938, thanked him for his "expression of willingness to enter into negotiations."

MY FATHER'S TIME in Germany ceased abruptly. At the end of October 1938, Jews living in Germany but holding Polish passports were suddenly arrested and deported. He had rented a room in the large home of a Jewish family named Adler in a tiny, quiet, residential section of Frankfurt. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, the Gestapo arrived and gave him one hour to pack two suitcases. He quickly gathered his manuscripts and books and then carried two very heavy suitcases through the streets of Frankfurt to police headquarters, where he was held overnight in a tiny cell. The next morning he was put on a train packed with deported Jews. He told me he had to stand for the duration of a three-day journey to Poland. Denied entry into Poland, the Jews were held at the border in miserable conditions, many remaining for months. The local Poles refused to give the Jews food. My father was fortunate: his family soon secured his release, and he joined them in Warsaw. For the next ten months he lectured on Jewish philosophy and Bible at Warsaw's Institute for Jewish

Studies, whose stately white marble building is one of the few in Europe associated with my father that remain standing today.

He used to describe how Poles underestimated the dangers of a German threat, confident that the famed Polish cavalry would be victorious. My father continued to struggle to find a way out of Europe, and at the last moment, just six weeks before the German invasion of Poland, he succeeded in leaving Warsaw for London.

My father escaped thanks to Julian Morgenstern, the president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, who had been trying for several years to secure visas from the State Department to bring Jewish scholars out of Europe. Michael Meyer has described the terrible obstacles Morgenstern encountered at the State Department, as well as his perseverance.<sup>21</sup> He was finally given only five visas. My father's name had been recommended by several colleagues, on the basis of his publications and reputation in Germany. That he was unmarried helped; visas for spouses and children were more difficult to obtain, since the college had to take responsibility for the financial maintenance of the entire family. The formal letter from Dr. Morgenstern invited my father to serve as a Research Fellow in Bible and Jewish philosophy for two years, at an annual salary of \$500, plus board and lodging in the college dormitory. My father was first told by the American consul in Warsaw that he would have to be placed on a quota visa and wait nine months before his case was even considered. Instead, he appealed to the American consul in Stuttgart. He finally received his American visa in January 1940, and reached New York in March.

My father's deportation from Germany in the midst of the efforts to secure the visa made the process more difficult. In April 1939 he had to return from Warsaw to Stuttgart to attend to paperwork at the American consulate there. Finally, in the summer of 1939, he was able to leave Poland for England, where his brother, Jacob, was serving as rabbi to an Orthodox congregation. My father remained in London for six months, and together with other refugee Jewish scholars and the help of the Theodor Herzl Society in London, he established an Institute for Jewish Learning in February 1940. The students were refugees, many en route to Palestine. During his months in London, my father also attempted to secure work for friends who were still in Germany. He was in close contact with Arthur Spanier, who had served as director of the Judaica division of the Prussian State Library until he was fired in 1935 because he was a non-Aryan, and who subsequently worked as an instructor and librarian at the Hochschule in Berlin. In 1938 Spanier fled to Holland, and through him my father was able to send money and food to his mother and one surviving sister in Warsaw. Although Spanier struggled for years to obtain

a visa for the United States, he never succeeded. In 1942 he was arrested in Holland and he died in Bergen-Belsen.

When the Nazis invaded Poland, my father's sister Esther was killed in a bombing. His mother and sister Gittel had to abandon their apartment, and their circumstances became very difficult. They sent postcards in which they worried lovingly about his well-being and begged for news of his safety. "Each day that we receive a letter from you," Gittel wrote, "is a holiday for us." Both were ultimately murdered, his mother in Warsaw, Gittel most probably in Treblinka. Another sister, Devorah, who was married and living in Vienna, was eventually deported to Theresienstadt on October 2, 1942, and from there sent to Auschwitz, where she was murdered upon her arrival on May 16, 1944.

My father never returned to Germany, or to Austria, or to Poland. He once wrote: "If I should go to Poland or Germany, every stone, every tree would remind me of contempt, hatred, murder, of children killed, of mothers burned alive, of human beings asphyxiated."<sup>22</sup>

AFTER RECEIVING his American visa, my father arrived in New York in March 1940. He stayed at first with members of his family. His oldest sister, Sarah, and her husband and most of their children had already arrived from Vienna, and there were also other cousins from Warsaw. His position in Cincinnati was not professor but instructor. He was given a room in the student dormitory, where he also kept his own food, since the cafeteria was not kosher. The students were a disappointment to him as well, because their background in Jewish texts was much weaker than that of his students at the Berlin seminary.

The years in Cincinnati were lonely. My father struggled constantly to bring his mother and sister from Warsaw, and to save other friends, colleagues, and relatives who remained stranded in Europe. They wrote to him, begging for help. He was frustrated with the American Jewish community, which he felt did not recognize the emergency. The news from Europe became worse and worse. He continued to receive mail from his mother and sisters and tried unsuccessfully to secure visas; he learned of their murder while he was in Cincinnati. Within his immediate family, the only survivors were those who fled before the war began: his brother, Jacob, who left Vienna for London with his wife, Susie, and daughter, Thana, in 1939, and his sister, Sarah, and her husband, the Kapitshinitzer rebbe, and their children, who left Vienna in February, 1939, for New York.

Some of the rabbinical students at Hebrew Union College became his friends, helping him improve his English, and he also became friendly with members of the faculty. He particularly enjoyed Professor Abraham

Cronbach, famous for his biblical stories, with whom he visited a home for unwed mothers in Cincinnati. He wondered what the biblical message would be and was moved by Professor Cronbach's presentation of Hagar's story.

It was in Cincinnati that my father first met my mother, Sylvia Straus, at the home of Professor and Mrs. Jacob Marcus. My mother, a concert pianist, had come to Cincinnati from her hometown, Cleveland, to study with Severin Eisenberger. That evening she was asked to play the piano, and my father fell in love with her. Shortly thereafter he attended her concert at the Cincinnati music conservatory and took her out to celebrate. Within a few months, he was offered a position at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, the seat of the Conservative movement. After hearing her play, Arthur Rubinstein urged my mother to study with the pianist Eduard Steuermann, who also lived in New York. My parents were married in December 1946 in Los Angeles, where my mother's parents had moved.

It is striking that my father did not undertake major theological work until after he was married. During the early years of their marriage, he completed his most important books, masterpieces of religious thought that seemed to pour out of him: *Man Is Not Alone* (1951), *The Sabbath* (1951), *God in Search of Man* (1952), *Man's Quest for God* (1954). At the same time, he was able to give voice to his mourning for the destruction of his family and the world of East European Jews. He was asked to speak on East European Jewish life in 1946 at YIVO, the Institute for Jewish Scientific Research in New York, where he delivered an elegy in Yiddish so moving that the audience, composed mainly of secular Yiddish writers, spontaneously stood up at the end of the speech and said *kaddish*, the Jewish memorial prayer for the dead. That speech was later expanded and published in his book *The Earth Is the Lord's*.

In many ways my father's evocation of East European Jews was a description of his own personality. He writes of the sheer joy of being Jewish, the vitality, the love of learning, and also the tenderness, the gentleness, the sincerity and deep trust of other people that characterized East European Jews—and himself. His panegyric to Polish Jews is striking in comparison to the way they were usually portrayed in the work of modern historians, particularly those of Germany, who tended to view their Polish compatriots as an embarrassment for their lack of assimilation and for their mystical piety. By contrast, these German historians held up the cosmopolitan Sephardic Jews of Spain as models of Jews who were intellectually and culturally assimilated.<sup>23</sup> My father's purpose was to depict the spirituality of the East European Jews, their inner life, a precious religious civilization that was wiped out by the Nazis. He also wrote several

important scholarly articles on early Hasidism, the pietist movement of Eastern Europe that began during the eighteenth century; and he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1954 to write a biography of the movement's founder, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.<sup>24</sup> At the end of his life, he wrote two books on Hasidism—a two-volume Yiddish study of Menachem Mendl of Kotzk, a famed nineteenth century Hasidic master, and *A Passion for Truth*, a comparison of the Kotzker and Søren Kierkegaard. For my father, Hasidism was an extraordinary moment in Jewish spiritual history: “Then came Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov and brought heaven down to earth . . . In the days of Moses, Israel had a revelation of God; in the days of the Baal Shem, God had a revelation of Israel. Suddenly, there was revealed a holiness in Jewish life that had accumulated in the course of many generations.”<sup>25</sup>

How could the spirituality of Hasidism, the holiness of East European Jewish life, now utterly destroyed, be expressed in the language of postwar America? Just as his doctoral dissertation had challenged the interpretive categories of modern biblical scholarship, his first English articles were radical challenges to the conventional categories used by scholars of religion to interpret religious experience. His articles of the 1940s, reprinted in this volume, begin by contending that conventional categories used to understand piety, prayer, and holiness are reductionist and inappropriate. Instead of understanding piety on its own terms, for example, scholars too often reduce it to a psychological phenomenon, or criticize it as irrational and counterproductive. He used to say in his lectures, “Just as you cannot study philosophy through praying, you cannot study prayer through philosophizing.”<sup>26</sup> In *Man Is Not Alone* he wrote: “Evaluating faith in terms of reason is like trying to understand love as a syllogism and beauty as an algebraic equation.”<sup>27</sup> Instead, he argued that piety is a phenomenon that must be described on its own terms, as an attitude, a way of thinking in which the pious person feels God to be always close and present: “Awareness of God is as close to him as the throbbing of his own heart, often deep and calm, but at times overwhelming, intoxicating, setting the soul afire.”<sup>28</sup> Piety gives rise to reverence, which sees the “dignity of every human being” and “the spiritual value which even inanimate things inalienably possess.”<sup>29</sup> Exploitation and domination are utterly foreign to genuine piety, and possession of things leads only to loneliness. Instead, the pious person’s “affinity with God is his persistent aspiration to go beyond himself,” to be devoted to goals and tasks and ideals. For the pious person, destiny means not simply to accomplish, but to contribute.<sup>30</sup> “In aiding a creature, he is helping the Creator. In succoring the poor, he is taking care of something that concerns God. In admiring the good, he is revering the Spirit of God.”<sup>31</sup>



My father also stressed the objective nature of religion, rejecting academic studies of religion which reduce it to a response to moments of social crisis or psychological stress. Millenarian movements, for example, are conventionally understood as responses to social crises; prayer for rain in periods of drought is conventionally interpreted in functionalist terms: praying holds the community together at a time when social cohesion is threatened. To my father such approaches merely described the social consequences of religion, not the meaning of religion itself, “as if instead of describing the inner value of a work of art we were to apprehend it by its effects on our mind or feelings.”<sup>32</sup> Rather than a function of human nature, a response to an emotion or social situation, religion is an order of being, the holy dimension of existence that is present whether or not it is perceived by us.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately religion is not based on our awareness of God but on God’s interest in us. In prayer, for example, we seek not to make God visible but to make ourselves visible to God.<sup>34</sup> That gentle upheaval of the relationship is central to my father’s theology. It is not we who seek to understand God; it is God who is in search of us. Even more, it is God who is in need of us: “To be is to stand for, and what human beings stand for is the great mystery of being God’s partner. God is in need of human beings.”

God’s need of us, what my father calls “divine pathos,” is the central pillar of his theology and what makes it distinctive among Jewish thinkers. Yet it is not idiosyncratic; my father bases his understanding of divine pathos on a long, deep tradition within Judaism, most prominent in kabbalistic and Hasidic writings, but also found in the heart of rabbinic Judaism. Indeed, his three-volume study of rabbinic theology—published in Hebrew as *Torah min Ha-Shamayim b’Espakloriah shel Ha-Dorot* (*Revelation in the Mirror of the Generations*)—demonstrates that concepts supposed to have originated with classical kabbalah in the Middle Ages began to be articulated in antiquity by the rabbis who shaped halachic Judaism. In his highly original reading of talmudic and midrashic texts, my father brings forth the theological concerns and controversies that animated rabbinic discussions. He shows, for example, that *agada* is the site of intricate theological discussion and debate by the rabbis, and he traces two distinct theological schools within rabbinic Judaism. Even within the Talmud he finds belief in God’s need of human beings, and he traces conflicting rabbinic understandings of revelation, as experiential and propositional, which bear differing implications for halachic decisions.

One looks hard to find discussion of political activism in my father’s scholarly and theological writings of the 1940s and ’50s. As he later

explained in an interview, it was revising his dissertation on the prophets for publication in English during the early 1960s that convinced him that he must be involved in human affairs, in human suffering.

MY FATHER first met Martin Luther King, Jr., in January 1963 and began his long involvement in the civil-rights movement. They met at a Chicago conference on religion and race sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews and became good friends as well as colleagues. Writing, lecturing, and demonstrating on behalf of civil rights, my father was an effective figure. When the police blocked the entrance to FBI headquarters in Manhattan, it was he who gained entry to present a petition protesting police brutality against civil-rights demonstrators in Alabama.

When he joined the famous Selma march in 1965, he was welcomed as one of the leaders in the front row of marchers, with Dr. King, Ralph Bunche, and Ralph Abernathy. In an unpublished memoir he wrote upon returning from Selma, my father describes the extreme hostility he encountered from whites in Alabama, from the moment he arrived at the airport, and the kindness he was shown by Dr. King's assistants, particularly the Reverend Andrew Young, who watched over him during the march with great concern. Just before the march began, a service was held in a small chapel, where my father read Psalm 27, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"\* and Dr. King gave a sermon describing three typologies among the children of Israel in the wilderness. For my father, Dr. King's emphasis on the exodus, rather than on Jesus, as a model for the movement was important, and he invited Dr. King and his family to join us at our Passover Seder. Dr. King's assassination in April 1968 came just before Passover; we had expected him to spend the holiday with us.

For my father the march was a religious moment. He wrote in his memoir: "I thought of my having walked with Hasidic rabbis on various occasions. I felt a sense of the Holy in what I was doing. Dr. King expressed several times to me his appreciation. He said, 'I cannot tell you how much your presence means to us. You cannot imagine how often Reverend Vivian and I speak about you.' Dr. King said to me that this was the greatest day in his life and the most important civil-rights demonstration." With sadness, my father added, "I felt again what I have been thinking about for years—that Jewish religious institutions have again missed a great opportunity, namely, to interpret a civil-rights movement in terms

\* He wrote in an unpublished memoir that he had originally intended to read Psalm 15, "O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent?," but changed his mind after he arrived in Selma.

of Judaism. The vast number of Jews participating actively in it are totally unaware of what the movement means in terms of the prophetic traditions.”

About six months after the Selma march, my father, together with John Bennett and Richard Neuhaus, founded what became one of the strongest organizations opposed to the war in Vietnam, Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam.<sup>35</sup> Over and over, in speeches at universities, synagogues, and anti-war rallies, he denounced the murder of innocent people in Southeast Asia and proclaimed, “In a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.” However difficult it may be to stop the war today, he said, it will be even more difficult tomorrow; the killing must end now.

Whether or not Dr. King should speak out publicly against the war in Vietnam was a topic discussed constantly in our home during the mid-1960s. Would his public opposition to the war hurt the civil-rights movement? Which was the better political course, and which was the greater moral good? Under the auspices of Clergy and Laymen Concerned, Dr. King first spoke out publicly against the war in Manhattan’s Riverside Church in the spring of 1967. The atrocities committed by U.S. forces in Vietnam, and the obvious political futility of a war against guerrillas, were condemned by him and by my father, just as they and other war opponents were branded as anti-American subversives. But the real subversiveness, my father stated that evening, was the American government:

Our thoughts on Vietnam are sores, destroying our trust, ruining our most cherished commitments with burdens of shame. We are pierced to the core with pain, and it is our duty as citizens to say no to the subversiveness of our government, which is ruining the values we cherish . . . The blood we shed in Vietnam makes a mockery of all our proclamations, dedications, celebrations. Has our conscience become a fossil, is all mercy gone? If mercy, the mother of humility, is still alive as a demand, how can we say yes to our bringing agony to that tormented country? We are here because our own integrity as human beings is decaying in the agony and merciless killing done in our name. In a free society, some are guilty and all are responsible. We are here to call upon the governments of the United States as well as North Vietnam to stand still and to consider that no victory is worth the price of terror, which all parties commit in Vietnam, North and South. Remember the blood of the innocent cries forever. Should that blood stop to cry, humanity would cease to be.

The crimes committed in Vietnam were subversive to our values, and to our religious lives, he insisted. Someone may commit a crime now and teach mathematics an hour later. But when we pray, all we have done in our lives enters our prayers.<sup>36</sup> As he had articulated in his early essays in the 1940s, the purpose of prayer is not petitionary. We do not

pray in order to be saved, my father used to stress, we pray so that we might be worthy of being saved. Prayer should not focus on our wishes, but is a moment in which God's intentions are reflected in us.<sup>37</sup> If we are created in the image of God, each human being should be a reminder of God's presence. If we engage in acts of violence and murder, we are desecrating the divine likeness.

The anguish my father felt over the war in Vietnam was relentless; I often found him in the middle of the night, unable to sleep. The tension grew worse in the spring of 1967, as hostile Arab countries threatened Israel with a military buildup and UN troops withdrew from their peace-keeping positions. Israel's extraordinary military success in the Six-Day War was a great relief, and my father flew there immediately. The trip inspired his magnificent evocation of the land of Israel's religious significance to Judaism, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*.

Contrary to the claims of some critics, my father's Zionist writings did not begin in 1967, nor was his commitment to Israel mitigated by his depiction of Judaism as a religion concerned with holiness in time. His Zionist writings began much earlier, as indicated by some of the essays included in this volume, and even in his writings on time, he warned that Judaism teaches "not to flee from the realm of space; to work with things of space, but to be in love with eternity . . . To disparage space and the blessings of things of space is to disparage the works of creation . . . Time and space are interrelated."<sup>38</sup>

Zionism for my father was not solely a political issue, and he was critical of much of Zionist theory for its single-minded political and secular emphases. Neither statehood nor cultural nationalism, he argued, could substitute for Judaism's religious teachings. He presented these views in the United States and in Israel, often at Zionist conventions, where he warned that simply living in the state of Israel was no panacea for resolving issues of Jewish identity.

My father and mother and I made our first trip to Israel in the summer of 1957. The establishment of the state seemed like a miracle, and my father used to speak about it to me with a tone of wonder. In the summer of 1965 we spent two months in Israel, when my father was the official guest of President Zalman Shazar. He was invited to lecture throughout the country. He returned frequently in subsequent years, to lecture and to visit friends. Of the few friends he had from Europe who had survived the war, several lived in Israel, including President Shazar and the pediatrician Aaron Brand, a friend from Berlin days.

Throughout the years of his social activism, my father maintained close and constructive relationships with Christian leaders. He was invited by President John Bennett of Union Theological Seminary to serve as the

Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor in 1965–66; he served on the board of directors of organizations as diverse as the United Greek Orthodox Charities; the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change; the Committee for the Defense of William Stringfellow and Anthony Towne; Jesse Jackson's Operation Breadbasket; the Jewish Peace Fellowship; and Trees for Vietnam—among others.

His reputation as a theologian of significance within the Christian community began with a glowing review by Reinhold Niebuhr of *Man Is Not Alone* in 1951.<sup>39</sup> Abraham Heschel, Niebuhr wrote, was “one of the treasures of mind and spirit by which the persecutions, unloosed in Europe, inadvertently enriched our American culture . . . It is a safe guess that he will become a commanding and authoritative voice not only in the Jewish community but in the religious life of America.”<sup>40</sup> What a contrast between the German Protestant theologians of the 1930s, debating whether the Old Testament should be eliminated from the Christian canon, and Niebuhr's positive view of Hebrew Scripture and of Judaism. This led to further contacts between them and ultimately into a close friendship. They were neighbors and often took walks together. Niebuhr's praise and the friendship that developed between them were profoundly important to my father; for him they were hopeful signs of a new kind of relationship between Jews and Christians. Niebuhr himself asked my father to deliver the eulogy at his funeral, which he did—the text appears in these pages. Niebuhr, he used to say, understood his work better than anyone else. With all the differences in their beliefs, both had similar understandings of the role of a theologian—not simply philosophical discussion, but political activism—and they shared a deep love of the Hebrew Bible.

My father's most important achievement in Christian–Jewish relations came with his involvement with the Second Vatican Council during the mid-1960s. At the invitation of the American Jewish Committee, my father traveled to Rome, where he formed a friendship with Cardinal Bea, who directed the composition of *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican's pronouncement concerning relations with non-Catholic religions. My father met with Pope Paul VI on several occasions, as well as with Cardinal Willebrands of Holland, and he took a strong stand during the moments when it seemed the Council was weakening its declaration concerning the Jews.

In 1971 my father traveled through Italy on a lecture tour, accompanied by my mother. A private audience with Pope Paul VI was arranged for them in Rome, on March 17. Describing the visit afterward in a private memoir, my father said how pleased he was that the Pope had seen his writings as a help to Catholics to strengthen their faith:

When the Pope saw me he smiled joyously, with a radiant face, shook my hand cordially with both his hands—he did so several times during the audience. He opened the conversation by telling me that he is reading my books, that my books are very spiritual and very beautiful, and that Catholics should read my books. He expressed his blessing that I may continue to write more books. He then added that he knows of the great impact my books are having upon young people, which he particularly appreciates.

My father had close personal relationships with several distinguished Catholic theologians, monks, and nuns, including Gustav Weigl, Thomas Merton, Theodore Hesburgh, Corita Kent, and Leo Rudloff, abbot of the Benedictine monastery in Vermont, and in the anti-war movement he worked closely with Daniel and Philip Berrigan. He was often invited to speak at Catholic colleges, and his writings continue to be read by Catholics as texts for spiritual meditation. He felt an affinity with Catholics, in part based on the centrality of canon law and formal ritual within Catholicism, but also because of the deep and vibrant spiritual traditions within Catholicism. With Protestants, my father shared a training in critical biblical scholarship and a liberal theological tradition committed to social activism.

My father's closest friends did not necessarily share all of his commitments; some were Jews with differing political convictions, others were Christians involved with him in political work. Two of his best friends were his former student, the late Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, executive director of the Rabbinical Assembly, and the Reverend William Sloane Coffin, who served as chaplain at Yale University during the last years of my father's life. Both were exuberant personalities, friends who loved to tell stories, laugh, and celebrate. Wolfe and my father worked at the Jewish Theological Seminary and often walked home together; they would arrive at my father's apartment building, but in order to continue the conversation, my father would keep walking another half mile to Wolfe's building. Then Wolfe would turn around and walk my father home. Wolfe was a trusted friend, a confidant, and a source of support, and he showed his friendship by calling my mother several times a week in the years after my father died.

Bill Coffin's visits with us, often after anti-war rallies at which he and my father spoke, were moments of great celebration. There was a thrill in our household when he was about to arrive, and from the moment he walked in the door, with his big, booming laugh, the excitement began. He played the piano with my mother, traded stories with my father, and helped me with my homework. "Father Abraham" was the nickname with which he teased my father, and my father would respond by teaching him Hebrew prayers.

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“ISN’T IT A BURDEN to have a famous father?” people often ask me. But just imagine what kind of a father Abraham Heschel would be. I was only vaguely aware of my father’s fame when I was growing up; as a father, he was wonderful. Ever warm, loving, and affectionate, he was someone I could confide in and always receive a sensitive and understanding response. I was free to interrupt him at any moment; he was never annoyed, but always looked up from his writing with a big smile of delight and exclaimed, “Susie!” as though we hadn’t seen each other in ages. He loved being a father, playing with me and my friends, even making up games for my birthday parties. American popular culture was utterly foreign to our home. My father had no idea of sports, popular music, movies, or TV. I remember as a child teasing him, saying that he should Americanize himself, become “the sporty type,” wear brown sport jackets instead of gray or blue suits, and learn to play golf.

Walking with my father was not a matter of reaching a destination but of creating a private time for talk. He would stop every few feet and discuss a point, then go a little farther. He loved to take walks on Sabbath afternoons, in Riverside Park, across from our apartment building. When I was a little girl, he was always delighted to play games to keep me amused, and even corralled his colleagues to join us in Simon Says or Red Light, Green Light. And when I grew tired from the walk, he would put me on his shoulders and carry me.

From my youngest years I was aware of discrimination against women, particularly in religious circles, and complained about it to my father. He always agreed with me, supporting me when I wanted a Bat Mitzvah and an *aliyah* for my sixteenth birthday, and agreeing that aspects of Jewish observance that were unfair to women had to be changed. He even suggested that I apply to the rabbinical school at the Jewish Theological Seminary, confident that one day women would be accepted there as students.

Looking back, I find it most remarkable that my father was never moody or irritable. If he became upset or angry, the mood lasted a minute and disappeared. His warmth, hugs, and kisses were always ready; he exuded love toward me and my mother. It was extraordinary how well matched my parents were. That they loved and meshed with each other’s quite different family was remarkable, but they had the same values and the same instincts about people. My parents rarely went out for entertainment, preferring to stay home. Each evening, before bed, they would drink tea and talk, sometimes playing Chinese checkers. Watching them sit together at the dining room table, talking and laughing, is a vivid memory. Another is my mother reading my father’s lectures in the hours before they were

to be given, and how she would advise him to emphasize a certain point or take out a controversial statement that seemed too strongly worded. He always listened to her, and told her afterward how right she had been. He joined her world, too. He loved her to play the piano for him and to go to concerts with her. When my mother had chamber music at home, often weekly when I was growing up, my father would listen while he worked in his study, then join the musicians for tea and the chocolate cake I would bake while they played.

My father's book on the *Sabbath*, one of the most popular of his writings, evokes the spirit he created with my mother in our home, in which the Sabbath was both peacefully quiet and filled with celebration. The book beautifully describes the rabbinic, kabbalistic, and Hasidic understandings of the Sabbath experience; together, my parents brought the text to life.

The Sabbath was the time my parents entertained, usually at Friday-night Sabbath dinner, or at a high tea at four o'clock on Saturday afternoons. Their guests were faculty members and students from the seminary, and conversations were lively. Nearly all my parents' friends were professors who had come to the United States from Europe, and they loved to tell stories about European Jewish life, or reminisce about professors and colleagues and rabbis they had known in Europe. There was some sadness that they were describing a world that no longer existed, but their stories had such vividness that they seemed to keep that world alive.

It was on a Sabbath that my father died. We were planning to go to the synagogue together on the morning of Saturday, December 23, 1972, but he never awakened. In Jewish tradition it is considered a sign of great piety to merit a peaceful death in one's sleep, even more so to die on the Sabbath. Such a death is called a kiss from God.

MOST OF THE WORLD that my father knew no longer exists. He was, as he wrote, "a brand plucked from the fire of Europe," and he became God's gift to us. The soil of Jewish piety in which he was bred was destroyed, but through him that world did not vanish. Like the Baal Shem Tov, he brought heaven down to earth, and in his writings we have a revelation of the holiness of Jewish life.