

PROPHECY AND SYMPATHY

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Dedicated to the memory of Abraham Joshua Heschel, on the tenth anniversary of his passing.

Heschel's Orientation and Method

Abraham Joshua Heschel was not a scholar in the accepted sense of the word. His approach to the topics with which he dealt — whether biblical prophecy, Aggadah and Midrash, Hassidism, the problem of man's relation to God, or questions pertaining to modern Jewish existence — cannot be defined as a personally uncommitted search for an abstract, objective truth. On the contrary, his personal involvement was the backbone of his spiritual personality. He refused to suffice with the bare historical facts, but attempted to draw upon the above-mentioned sources of the Jewish heritage when dealing with problems and questions relevant to us as human beings and as modern Jews; in short, he strove for relevance, for the living impact and meaning of the Jewish heritage to our generation. In the final analysis, his approach was that of the thinker and teacher, rather than that of the cool, detached scholar interested in knowledge for its own sake.

The danger of this approach lies in the fact that the sources often resist the attempt to have the desired solution imposed upon them. But for great teachers and thinkers this never constituted a problem; they managed to overcome this "obstacle" thanks to their interpretive intuition. Indeed, it is the art of creative interpretation, or better, re-interpretation, which has dominated the history of

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בנימין אופנהיימר, "נבואה וסימפטיה," מתוך עיונים במקרא, ספר זכרון ליהושע מאיר גרינץ. הל-אביב. תשמ"ב, ע' 17–35.

Jewish thought during two millennia, as it was foremost in the spiritual history of Christianity. However, this task has become more and more precarious with the development of the historical-critical method, which has forged the mentality of modern scholarship. According to this approach, every literary document can be expounded solely in its precise historical setting and according to the semantics of the particular period.

In the following analysis, we intend, first, to sketch Heschel's original contribution towards a new philosophical and phenomenological understanding of religious experience in general and prophetic consciousness in particular. Second, we shall take up the exegetical issue through a critical assessment of his view in light of the biblical sources themselves. The urgency of this question is evident in light of his later methodological statements (see his *God in Search of Man* [New York, 1955], pp. 176–183), in which he takes the prophetic phrase, “God spoke,” as a characteristic example of religious language, stressing that it belongs to the realm of *indicative* language, as opposed to those expressions which are *descriptive*, in the sense of there being a fixed relation between them and conventional, definite meanings. Here, the word is conceived as a clue to an idea that is not at home in the mind. “The real burden of understanding is upon the mind and the soul of the reader” (*Ibid.*). Through this distinction between descriptive and indicative language, he opens the door to a full-fledged subjectivism, tantamount to a modern midrashic methodology in which everything is legitimate. True, this romantic statement was made years after his study on prophetism, but we should bear in mind that this latter statement seems to reflect his basic mentality, which probably may have influenced his approach to the problem we are dealing with.

The first presentation of Heschel's prophetology is found in his doctoral dissertation, published in 1936 in German.¹ In 1962, an English version constructed on a broader scale, appeared.² While the German version dealt only with prophetic experience, the English one attempted to combine phenomenological analysis with historical insight, by the addition of individual chapters on each of the prophets from Amos to Deutero-Isaiah. An interesting chapter was also added on prophecy and psychosis. A comparison between the two versions reveals that he introduced only minor variations, so that, generally speaking, the English edition offers nothing really new. The historical chapters on the individual prophets are superficial and rushed and lack the analytic element which is dominant in the phenomenological discussion found already in the German edition. For this reason, the only issue we shall deal with here is that which engaged Heschel in his

1. A. J. Heschel, *Die Prophetie* (Krakow: Verlag der polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1936).

2. A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, 1962). The page numbers cited below refer to the German text, unless the English edition is explicitly referred to by the symbol: (Eng).

original work: the nature of the prophetic mind, i.e. that which makes the prophet different from other religious figures such as mystics, apocalyptic seers and manics. We shall try to understand Heschel's answer and its underlying philosophy, and then offer criticism of our own. To start, however, we must investigate Heschel's intentions and locate his position among the various philosophical schools from which he grew.

Throughout the spiritual history of the Jewish people, Jewish thinkers have grappled with the phenomenon of prophecy and divine revelation. Medieval doctrines were rooted in Aristotelian and Platonic theory, thus facilitating the apologetic stance toward Christianity and Islam that was of primary importance to medieval scholars. Their theories constituted Jewish integrations of theological questions that engaged the alien cultural and religious environment in which they lived.

Modern Jewish Bible research as it has evolved over the last generation is very much a response and antithesis to the Protestant Bible research that has been flourishing since the latter half of the 19th century. Heschel's book is undoubtedly a link in this chain, being a unique attempt to integrate philosophy and Biblical exegesis, using the philosophical jargon of the 20th century to provide a Jewish answer to the question of prophetic consciousness or experience in particular, and religious consciousness in general. The issue of prophecy was dealt with by Wellhausen himself, but the work of Gustav Hölscher has set the tone of inquiry until today. In his book published in 1914³, Hölscher states that prophecy is an ecstatic phenomenon. He attempts to base his exegetic theories on the principles of *Völkpsychologie* (folk psychology) developed by Wundt, which enjoyed popularity at the time. In this impressive work, Hölscher describes Israelite prophecy in terms of parallel phenomena known to ancient Near Eastern culture. He seeks to prove that it developed gradually from the Dionysian mass ecstasy that swept the Aegean islands and the countries along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean at the end of the second millenium BCE, following the Dorian migration. He implies that prophecy, which was introduced into Israel under the influence of its Canaanite environment, was a deviant phenomenon from a social and psychological standpoint. Since the appearance of Hölscher's book, the question of prophetic ecstasy has never left the agenda of Biblical scholarship. The distinguished scholar, W.F. Albright,⁴ has accepted Hölscher's theory in its entirety; this is also the case with scholars of the Scandinavian school, such as Mowinckel⁵

3. G. Hölscher, *Die Propheten* (Leipzig, 1914).

4. W. F. Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore, 1942; 2nd ed., 1946), p. 231 ff.

5. S. Mowinckel, "The 'Spirit' and the 'Word' in the Pre-Exilic Reforming Prophets," *JBL* 53 (1934), 199–227; *idem.*, "Experience and Rational Elaboration in OT Prophecy," *Acta Orientalia* 13 (1935), pp. 264–291; 14 (1936), p. 319 ff.; *idem.*, "Psalm Criticism Between 1900 and 1935," *VT* 5 (1955), 13–33; *idem.*, *Psalmstudien*, 6v. (Amsterdam, 1961); *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Oxford, 1962). For additional bibliography, see my article, "Prophecy" (Heb.), *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 5, 690–732.

and many others. Lindblom⁶ introduced some important changes by referring to the ecstasy of the mystics. Buber, Kaufmann, Segal, Neher and Heschel have totally rejected it.⁷ Heschel, in particular, was violently opposed to the theory of ecstasy.⁸

He not only negates this theory, but offers an alternative. Prophecy, he says, is a phenomenon of sympathy. He is content with no less than declaring the prophet a *homo sympathetikos*. In his view, ecstasy is a passing and momentary state. The ecstatic is not his own master, but is propelled about by spiritual forces over which he has no control. The *homo sympathetikos*, on the other hand, consciously directs himself toward divine pathos, toward the feelings of God. This involves an ongoing, active effort on the part of man. It is not my desire to enter into a debate with Heschel on the subject of ecstasy. I would only say this: so long as he is referring to Dionysian-style ecstasy he may be right, but this is but one of the various forms of a highly diversified phenomenon, which pervades all spheres of human creativity. True ecstasy was never the typical feature of prophecy, but it cannot be denied that prophetic consciousness contains ecstatic elements. Moreover, ecstasy is part and parcel of the psychological infrastructure of the mind of every prophet, poet and mystic. The true relationship, however, between prophecy and ecstasy can only be properly assessed on the basis of the phenomenology of ecstasy. For our purposes, we will suffice with Heschel's general distinction between sympathy and ecstasy.

In his claim regarding prophetic sympathy, Heschel goes beyond the realms of Judaic and Biblical scholarship in the limited sense, to deal with questions of modern theology and comparative religion as a Jewish scholar and thinker. He addresses himself to the German theologian, Rudolph Otto⁹, who, in the wake of Schleiermacher, described religious consciousness as a sense of total dependency, saying that man is powerless in the face of God, "the totally Other" (*das ganz Andere*). God is an "awesome mystery" (*mysterium tremendum*) who arouses in man's heart the fear of death. According to Otto, the height of religious achievement is the "unio mystica", a mystical union primarily involving the obliteration and self-effacement of man in order to unite with God. Even before Heschel, this

6. J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia, 1962).

7. Y. Kaufmann, *Toldot ha-Emunah ha-Yisra'elit* (Tel-Aviv, 1937-56), 4 v., index: prophecy, prophets, ecstasy; M.Z. Segal, *Mavo ha-Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1950-51), v. 2, pp. 229-271; M. Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York, 1949); A. Neher, *L'essence du prophétisme* (Paris, 1955). Neher's approach is an interesting synthesis of Heschel's theory and Buber's concept of dialogue.

8. pp. 26-39. For a general evaluation of Heschel's prophetology, see E. Jacob, "La dimension du prophétisme d'après Martin Buber et Abraham J. Heschel," in *Prophecy, Georg Fohrer Festschrift*, ed. J.A. Emerton (Berlin-New York, 1980), pp. 26-34.

9. R. Otto, *Das Heilige* (Breslau, 1917); English: *The Idea of the Holy* (London, 1923).

approach, which is demeaning to man, was strongly protested by Buber, who put forth his theory of dialogue as an antithesis to it. Here the theories of Heschel and Buber meet. In the course of this paper, we will discuss the similarities and differences between the two, i.e. Buber's theory of dialogue and Heschel's concept of sympathy.

Now that we have placed Heschel on the spiritual map of the early 20th century, we may proceed to the theory itself and its sources. Along the way, we will point out the spiritual transfigurations of concepts and images that Heschel derived from the Western philosophy of the time.

The Theory and its Sources

By saying that he seeks to *describe* prophecy rather than assess its inner truth, Heschel is showing his affinity with the phenomenological school of Husserl. To define his scholarly intentions, he employs the concept of "understanding" (*Verstehen*, p. 127ff.) which, according to Dilthey, refers to the sensual, intuitive perception of a phenomenon via external characteristics rather than analytical intellectual activity. Following Dilthey, who defines historical events, literary works and philosophies as "expressions" of a unique approach to life¹⁰, Heschel maintains that the prophet sees all events as an "expression" of God. The implication is that prophets are not interested in the substance of divinity or its essential attributes, as the medieval philosophers put it, but in its external facets, in the modes of its actions, i.e. in the voluntary manifestations of divine will (*Ausserung des Willens, Willenskundgebung*, p. 134–135).

The prophets of Israel act upon the assumption that their God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has pathos — in contrast to the god of the philosophers who has no feelings or perceptions, who is an "apathetic god" (p. 153–154). According to Heschel, pathos is founded on will and initiative, and not necessarily on feelings alone, as the Christian tradition claims. He rejects this exegetic tradition because emotions, affects and perceptions return to the perceptive and suffering self, while pathos denotes a transitive action which goes from God to man without returning to God (p. 135) as an emotional response, such as joy or sadness, or as a result, such as enjoyment or reward. The outward movement of pathos is an expression of God's "total disinterestedness" (*absolute Selbstlosigkeit*, p. 147), of his responsibility and active concern for the world (p. 145). By means of pathos God reveals himself to man and creates contact with him.

10. W. Dilthey, "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik," in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, V: 317 f.; E. Spranger, "Zur Theorie des Verstehens und zur geisteswissenschaftlichen Psychologie," in *Festschrift Johannes Volkelt* (München, 1918), p. 357f. (this book was not at my disposal); *idem.*, *Psychologie des Jugendalters* (Leipzig, 1924), p. 3.

We are told about divine pathos:

Pathos denotes, not an idea of goodness, but a living care; not an immutable example, but an outgoing challenge, a dynamic relation between God and man; not mere feeling or passive affection, but an act or attitude composed of various spiritual elements; no mere contemplative survey of the world, but a passionate summons.¹¹

However, Heschel's empirical starting point is not divine pathos but sympathy, a human virtue that is characteristic of the prophet, who feels the power of divine pathos. What is the nature and source of this sympathy?

The concept itself, συμπάθεια, is derived from the philosophy of the Stoics. In Aristotle's writings, συμπαθής is already an adjective denoting the suffering man feels in response to the suffering of his fellow-man, man's participation in the emotions of another. The verb συμπαθέω means to pity, to share one's grief, etc. The Stoics referred συμπάθεια to the Cosmos, which they perceived as a living being endowed with reason, in which all parts were connected in a bond of sympathy (*TWBNT* II 955). In the thinking of Poseidonius of Apameia (135–51 BCE), the concept of sympathy was developed even further. He places man in a joint emotional and perceptual network that unites all parts of the universe. He believes that man is set apart from animal by the ability to take a stand, to make a conscious decision (*RGG*³, V, Poseidonius).¹²

In the previous generation, it was the Jewish philosopher, Max Scheler, who, in the course of phenomenological analysis, focused attention on sympathy as fellow-feeling (*Mitgefühl*). He defined it as "intentional reference" (*wissentliche Bezugnahme*) to the joy or sorrow of another person; sympathy begins with orientation toward the special state of others. Thus he develops a true sense of unity (*Einsföhlung*) or the merging of I and thou. However, this ability is not limited to interpersonal relations; it includes one's attitude toward the living world, toward every living organism.¹³ Scheler states; "To be aware of any organism as alive, to distinguish even the simplest animate movement from an inanimate one, a minimum of undifferentiated identification is necessary."¹⁴

Hence, sympathy is not only emotional participation. Scheler broadens it into an epistemological category denoting man's ability to distinguish and identify the

11. p. 224. (Eng.)

12. K. Reinhardt, *Kosmos und Sympathie* (München, 1926), pp. 92–138; I., Heinemann, *Poseidonius' metaphysische Schriften* (Breslau, 1928), p. 114.

13. M. Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. from German by Peter Heath (London, 1954), with introduction by W. Stark. German original: *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*. Nathan Rotenstreich emphasizes this parallel in his illuminating article "On Prophetic Consciousness", *JR* 54 (1974), pp. 185–198. He also discusses the influence of Dilthey.

14. I am quoting this passage according to Rotenstreich.

slightest trace of life. This ability is founded on introspection, as the German poet, Schiller, put it: "If you wish to understand yourself, see how others behave; if you wish to understand others, look into your own heart."^{14a} Indeed, the basis of sympathy is man's ability to identify with his fellow-man and the special circumstances in which he may be found. However, the initial starting point is man's introspection with the purpose of understanding himself.

Heschel transposes this set of concepts to the relationship between man and God. However, while Scheler deals with identification between the self and others, Heschel's theory of sympathy is based upon the distance between God and man. Man does not identify with God, or become annulled within the Godhead; he identifies only with divine pathos, which is an autonomous compliance within the context of his human position. Here we can see the influence of Hermann Cohen, who contended that the nucleus of Judaism is correlation between God and man. Heschel expounded prophecy in the wake of this theory. However, "correlation" is a rational term referring to the imitation of God's virtues, whereas "sympathy" is a trans-rational term¹⁵ because it refers to man's spontaneous attitude toward God. It is not a matter of intellectual recognition of God's essence and virtues, but rather man's intuitive sense of the nature of God's attitude toward real situations.

Heschel says this about the role of divine pathos in the life of the prophet:

Even if in the first place the people's practical compliance with the divine demand is the purpose of his mission, the inner personal identification of the prophet with the divine pathos is, as we have shown, the central feature of his own life. Not the word and the Law in themselves, but the mode of divine involvement is the focal point in his religious consciousness. The divine pathos is reflected in his attitudes, hopes and prayers. The prophet is stirred by an intimate concern for the divine concern. Sympathy, then, is the essential mode in which he responds to the divine situation. It is the way of fulfilling personally the demand addressed to him in moments of revelation...¹⁶ The unique feature of religious sympathy is not self-conquest, but self-dedication; not the suppression of emotion, but its redirection; not silent subordination, but active co-operation with God; not love which aspires to the Being of God in Himself, but harmony of the soul with the concern of God. To be a prophet means to identify one's concern with the concern of God.¹⁷

Heschel clarifies his theory by comparing the concepts of sympathy and ecstasy. It seems that he is referring to the type of ecstasy we may call "apathetic, lethargic ecstasy" known to various forms of mysticism. The prophet remains on the plane of human consciousness, he keeps his independent stature as a man, but

14a. "Willst du dich selber erkennen, so sieh, wie die andern es treiben; Willst du die andern verstehen, blick in dein eigenes Herz."

15. See Rotenstreich's article, *op. cit.*

16. pp. 307-308. (Eng.)

17. p. 309. (Eng.)

is open to divine pathos. In contrast, the ecstatic becomes alien to himself, always striving for identification with God (p. 27). Ecstasy is a fleeting experience that reflects a momentary state — the “experience of a situation” (*Zustandserlebnis*), while sympathy is continuous — the “experience of a permanent relationship” (*Beziehungserlebnis*, p. 36).

Ecstasy is measured by the achievement itself, while sympathy is a matter of constant orientation toward something in full consciousness (p. 48): this human orientation parallels divine revelation (p. 29); the mutuality achieves actual symmetry in the concepts “anthropotropism” (God’s turning to man) and “theotropism” (men’s turning to God) (p. 115ff) — both concepts which he coined.

Revelation, i.e. God addressing man, is an act of giving, of bestowal, that bears witness to God’s attachment to those attuned to him (p. 109, 113); sympathy is the human compliance with this challenge. Propelled by divine pathos, the prophet becomes a preacher in the marketplace. In contrast to Otto’s spiritualizing orientation, which speaks of religious *experience* — an emotion sealed within man’s soul — Heschel speaks of active relationship, of concrete realization.¹⁸ Instead of what Otto, following Schleiermacher, calls man’s sense of total dependence, his sense of “creatureliness” (*Kreaturgefühl*), which is primarily a feeling of powerlessness and fear in the face of God’s omnipotence, Heschel stresses the mutuality in the God-man relationship. Being God’s partner, man becomes a factor in His existence. Heschel goes beyond the Talmudic Sages, who saw man’s mission only as the imitation of godly attributes. Thus, the tanna, Abba Shaul comments on the passage “You shall be holy” (Lev. 19:2): “What is the task of the King’s host? To imitate the King” (Torat Kohanim, Kedoshim, 1) or says elsewhere “as He is merciful and compassionate, you shall be merciful and compassionate” (Mekhilta de-rabbi Yishmael, Shira, ch. 3, p. 127)¹⁹ For Heschel, the prophet becomes God’s partner in reforming the world, due to his sharing the divine pathos intellectually and emotionally. He does not accept the classical Rabbinic outlook, according to which God has fixed, permanent attributes; in his opinion, the prophet enjoys a dynamic and spontaneous relationship with God since the sympathy he feels must be adapted to the particular situation in which God is manifested.

Sympathy and Dialogue

Heschel seems to have been overwhelmingly influenced on this point by the writings of Buber, particularly by his book *I and Thou*, which describes the

18. p. 309. (Eng.)

19. E.E. Urbach, *Ḥazal, Pirkey Emunot ve-De’ot* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 334–335; English: *The Sages* (Jerusalem, 1975), I: 382f.

mutuality of relations between God and man with great literary skill. Indeed, in this work Buber expresses his disapproval of the attempt of the Romantics, particularly Rudolph Otto, to base religion on emotion. On mutuality, Buber says:

That you need God more than anything, you know at all times in your heart. But don't you know also that God needs you — in the fullness of his eternity, you? How would man exist if God did not meet him, and how would you exist? You need God in order to be and God needs you — for that which is the meaning of your life. Teachings and poems try to say more, and say too much... The world is not divine play, it is divine fate. That there are world, man, the human person, you and I, has divine meaning.²⁰

In the following passage, Buber is explicitly debating with Otto:

The essential element in our relationship to God has been sought in a feeling that has been called a feeling of dependence or, more recently, in an attempt to be more precise, creature-feeling. While the insistence on this element and its definition are right, the one-sided emphasis on this factor leads to a misunderstanding of the character of the perfect relationship.²¹

In summing up the significance of the encounter, he asks:

What is it that is eternal: the primal phenomenon, present in the here and now, what we call the revelation? It is man's emerging from the moment of the supreme encounter, being no longer the same as he was when entering into it. The moment of encounter is not a "living experience" that stirs in the receptive soul and blissfully rounds itself out: something happens to man. At times it is like feeling a breath and at times like a wrestling match; no matter: something happens. The man who steps out of the essential act of pure relation has something More in his being, something new has grown there of which he did not know before and for whose origin he lacks any suitable words... What could it intend with us, what does it desire from us being revealed and surreptitious? It does not wish to be interpreted by us — for that we lack the ability — only to be done by us. This comes third: it is not the meaning of "another life" but that of this our life, not that of a "beyond" but of this our world, and it wants to be demonstrated by us in this life and this world.²²

It seems that Heschel derived the existentialist interpretation of sympathy from Buber's concept of dialogue, as something to be done, to be realized. Again, the theological extension of sympathy is also due to the influence of Buber, who contends that there is no essential difference between the encounter with the "eternal Thou" and that with the "human thou." It is well-known that Buber rejects the structural uniqueness of all religious experience, and by the same token, the differentiation between various types of religious experience; he rejects the Western idea of "religious experience" that is locked within the human heart. He recognizes only the encounter between man and God, which encompasses all spheres of human experience. Furthermore, this encounter is essentially not different from the encounter with one's fellow man.

20. *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1970), p. 130.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 157–159.

To go even further, any true encounter with the other, by its very essence, points toward an encounter with the “eternal Thou”; every single “thou” is a window into the “eternal Thou”, and through every single “thou”, primordial speech addresses itself to the eternal.²³ Taking this stand enabled Buber to evade the question of religious experience in the Bible — and prophetic experience, too.

In his opinion, the uniqueness of prophecy lies only in the message conveyed. Thus the Hebrew title of his book is *The Teachings of the Prophets* [*Torat ha-Nevi'im*] (1940), as prophetic experience as such was in his view not different from any other encounter of man with God. Heschel derived the element of dialogue from Buber, but he narrowed it under the influence of Scheler. Rather than an encounter between two beings in their totality, Heschel bases prophetic experience on man’s orientation toward the divine pathos.

However, in so doing, he deprives the prophet’s social actions of their spontaneity and non-intermediary character, since they are but a response and compliance with divine pathos. This brings to the fore other differences between Heschel and Buber on the nature of the experience or encounter. Buber saw the need to remove the concept “revelation” from its Biblical context as a unique historical event occurring when the people of Israel received the Torah and commandments. By saying that the “encounter” is identical to “What is called revelation”, he turns the Biblical episode into many individual encounters and strips it of all positive content. According to Buber, “Man receives, and what he receives is not a ‘content’ but a presence, a presence as strength.”²⁴ Thus, the encounter is devoid of any normative or dogmatic intent, and is primarily the flow of primordial energy into one who has been allowed to “peer behind the scenes”. This energy is not pent up in one’s soul; it gushes out, seeking realization in mutual relations with the other. The encounter is the basis for ethos. However, the primordial character of the encounter leaves the concrete content of ethos to the autonomous decision of man, whereas in revelation, according to tradition, an entire people was given explicit commandments by divine word. Actually, the god which “shines through all creatures”, as Buber metaphorically put it, has lost his personal character. Thus he can no longer command the individual, much less the many. All that is left of Him is a mere challenge to creative human spontaneity; he is like a spark that activates human choice. The commandment and normative order are thus denuded of their universal, mandatory nature, and the commandment becomes a private matter to be dealt with in the human heart. Heschel comes to restore to the God of the Bible His personal character, and to revelation, its literal meaning as a transitive act by God to inform man of His will via

23. *ibid.*, p. 57.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

explicit commandments. In this way, Heschel frees the element of commandment in revelation from the subjective interpretation given it in Buber's encounter, where man must translate the primordial energy flowing into him into the language of practical demands. According to Heschel, pathos is laden with emotional and intellectual content, and it is this which determines the nature of sympathy.

As we have explained, Heschel believes that the prophet's condemnation of society is no longer a direct human response to events according to his own sense of justice. It is a reflection of divine pathos, which is dependent on the behavior of the people. At the expense of human spontaneity, Heschel tries to preserve the living relationship with God that is played down in Buber's encounter, where God has lost his personal contours. Repudiating the idea of man's mystical self-negation within the Godhead, Buber tips the scales of the encounter in man's favor — so much so that God becomes merely a literary metaphor, an abstract presence, a source of primordial energy.

On the other hand, Buber expands the formative weight of the encounter. For him, it actualizes the potential "I" with which man is imbued at birth. The encounter is a reflective event anchored in man, in his inherent "I". It may be said that the "I" cannot be realized unless it comes into contact with a "thou". Heschel bases prophetic consciousness only on the transitiveness of the "I", on the prophet's sensitivity to the manifestations of divine feeling. He does not refer to the "divine thou" itself, but to the way it is manifested, and clarified through anthropomorphic analogy. Thus he does not attribute to this event the same formative importance for the human "thou" that Buber attributes to this encounter. We may only say this: that sympathy deepens the prophet's "understanding" of God and His feelings. Here Heschel shies away from Orthodoxy: by rejecting the traditional appeal to imitate God, he undermines the universal, mandatory nature of the normative element. He claims there is something rigid and artificial in the rationalistic view of God's permanent attributes and in the declaration that imitating them is the primary religious content of one's actions. However, sympathy, which does not refer to the unchanging side of God, i.e. His attributes, but to the ways in which He is revealed, restores to the man-God relationship a certain measure of vitality and dynamics. In trying to understand the words of the prophet as "expressions" of divine pathos, Heschel transposes Dilthey's historical theories to the realm of theology. He does the same with Scheler's idea of "sympathy" from the sphere of social psychology, which he combines with Buber's theory of dialogue to denote man's conscious orientation toward the emotions of God.

Exegetic and Theological Criticism

The crucial question is whether this theory has an exegetic basis. I believe that the two main pillars of Heschel's theory are the story of the marriage of Hosea (p.

75–84) (Hos. 1–3),²⁵ and Jeremiah's tale of the loincloth (Jer. 13:1–11). However, according to the text itself, neither were the result of the prophet's pre-conceived desire to share divine pathos. As far as the Jeremiah story is concerned, the prophet undoubtedly realized its significance in retrospect. The same holds true for Hosea, whose point of departure seems to be his own experience, i.e. his disappointment with his adulterous wife.²⁶

The truth is that Hosea 1 is written in the third person, probably by one of the prophet's disciples, and comes to supplement the personal confession of chapter 3. From a literary standpoint, chapter 1 may be classified as a prophetic tale., Only chapter 3, which appears to be autobiographical, may be taken as authentic evidence of Hosea's innermost feelings. We can see from this that the significance of his fate became clear to him only after his wife's infidelity. It is the symbolic interpretation of his fate as a mirror of God's disappointment in the unfaithful people of Israel that transforms his distress into prophetic experience. Only because of his particular existential situation can he decipher and share God's emotions—both His anger and His love and mercy toward Israel^{26a} The implication is that Hosea's point of departure is his own life. He can sense and share the raging and loving divine pathos not because he is detaching himself from the human condition, but because he is anchored in it. Hence both traditions lack the demonstrative, educational tendency of most of the prophet's dramatic allegories. They refer to the prophet himself, to his spiritual affinity with his mission. Sympathy constitutes neither the presupposition nor the psychological infrastructure of these traditions, but their goal; only when the plot unfolds does this objective become clear.

Heschel's other exegetic arguments in support of his theory are no less flawed. In the German edition of his work, he analyzes selected passages from the books of Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Chapter 1 (p. 57–67) describes the divine pathos illustrated in each book, and the following chapter, the phenomenon of sympathy (p. 67–97). The criterion for distinguishing between the two elements is stylistic: the passages in which God speaks in the first person reveal pathos, and those spoken by the prophet reveal prophetic sympathy.²⁷ However, this stylistic test does not stand up to historical and literary criticism. One of the outstanding

25. See my article "Hosea's marriage as a prophetic symbol" (Heb.), *Sefer Shemuel Din* (Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 269–279. Also see my reservations about the theories of Heschel and Kaufmann there. H.L. Ginzburg followed Kaufmann too: "Studies in Hosea 1–3" in: *Sefer Ha-Yovel le-Yehzekel Kaufmann* (Jerusalem, 1961), pp. 50–69 (English section).

26. See above, footnote 25; with regard to Jeremiah 13:1–11, see below.

26a. Indeed, the Talmud interprets the incident in this way in Pesachim 27 a-b.

27. Also see English edition, p. 309–310, footnotes 3, 4.

features of the vassal treaties in the Ancient Near East, which greatly influenced Biblical rhetoric, is the frequent shifting between first and third person. In these treaties, it is the king who is speaking: the first person lends force to his threats and promises, while the third person allows the use of the many glorious titles he has bestowed upon himself. These frequent transitions also occur in Biblical admonitions and collections of laws in the Pentateuch, as well as in the words of the prophets themselves.²⁸ Sometimes the prophet, in a storm of reproof, transmits the feelings of God, for example: "My Lord God swears by Himself: I loathe the Pride of Jacob and I detest his fortresses" (Amos 6:8) or "The Lord relented concerning this; 'It shall now come to pass', said the Lord" (Amos 7:3,6) or Isaiah 1:10–20, 21–23, 24ff. Sometimes he cites God's words directly, without expressly saying so, as if to bring out his personal identification even more; for example, Amos 5:20–27, Hosea 4:6–19; 5:1–4; 7.1ff; 9:10–13. However, in these cases the shift from first to third person is so frequent, that it would be unreasonable to insist on pathos here and sympathy there. God's words in Amos 5:20–27: "I loathe, I spurn your festivals", are the direct continuation of a passage in which God is referred to in the third person. The same is true for Hosea 5:1–4; 9:10–13, and there are numerous other examples. Thus, the stylistic aspect of prophetic speech which Heschel relies upon for his distinction between pathos and sympathy is wholly untenable. These frequent transitions are a reflection of the speaker's excitement.

Moreover, there are times when the tempest of feelings culminates in a spontaneous outburst of sorrow, joy, grief, anger, or disappointment that has no connection with God. When Moses descends from the mountain and sees the people of Israel in a state of boisterousness, he is so angry that he smashes the tablets (Ex. 32:19). This response corresponds with the wrath of God, but there is not the slightest hint in the text that Moses' feelings were oriented towards divine pathos. Was this not a spontaneous human reaction? In the classical prophets there are still some poetic passages that constitute direct evidence of such emotional outbursts. Outstanding examples are Jeremiah 4:19; 8:23; 9:1; 13:17; 14:17ff; 15:10ff., and so on. It would be absurd to claim that in these cases the prophet is attributing to himself the feelings of God, or that he is expressing them as an analogy to divine pathos. Man needs no analogy to feel anger, grief, joy or disappointment.

We may learn of the theological insignificance of the changes in gender by comparing Isaiah's political speech during the days of the Sennacherib siege (Isaiah 37) to the imaginary dialogue in Isaiah 10:5ff. Both speeches take the form of a

28. See my book *Ha-Nevu'ah Ha-Kedumah be-Yisrael (Ancient Prophecy in Israel — Jerusalem, 1973)*, p. 76ff.

discussion, one between God and the prophet, and the other between the prophet and the King of Assyria. In Chapter 37:22ff. which opens, “This is the word that the Lord has spoken concerning him,” God is referred to in both third and first person. Initially Isaiah speaks of “the Holy One of Israel” (37:23) and “my Lord” (37:24), and then he shifts to the first person without explicitly stating that he is quoting God (v. 26–29). He continues: “The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall bring this to pass” (v. 32). The last verse also opens: “Assuredly, thus said the Lord concerning the King of Assyria,” (v. 33) and ends, “I will protect and save this city for My sake and for the sake of My servant David” (v. 35). This effectively shows that the shifting of gender when speaking of God is a facet of prophetic rhetoric. Isaiah’s speech in Chapter 10 is built in the same way:

Verse 5–6: first person — “My people, My anger, My fury, I send him, I charge him.”

Verse 12: first & third person — “But when my Lord has carried out all his purpose on Mt. Zion... I was able to seize...”

Verse 16: third person — “The Sovereign Lord of Hosts will send...”

Verse 23: third person — “For my Lord of Hosts is carrying out...”

Verse 24–25: quoting the words of God — “O my people that dwells in Zion... My anger against the world shall cease.”²⁹

Verse 26: third person (direct continuation) — “The Lord of Hosts will brandish a scourge over him... and will wield His staff as He did over the Egyptians by the sea.”

Verse 33: third person—“Lo! The Sovereign Lord of Hosts will hew off the tree crowns with an ax.”

Chapter 11: third person.

The conclusion to be drawn is that only someone with a fundamentalist approach, who ignores the literary customs of the prophets, could derive theological conclusions from the shifting of gender in references to divine speech. These transitions actually mark the fluctuation of the prophet’s emotion. There is no basis for dogmatism here, for interpreting prophetic response in a generalized and roundabout way as identification with divine pathos. On the contrary, the response of the prophet is above all an expression of unchecked human spontaneity. His social protest and reproof is a direct reflection of his sense of justice.

Again, Moses smashed the tablets because he became furious at seeing the people dancing around the golden calf. Amos rose up against injustice and extortion, as did the other prophets, in an expression of social protest stemming from his own

29. According to the emendation of S.D. Luzzatto, על תְּבִילָה יָהּם; the Massorah reads: על תְּבִילָה יָהּם. See S.D. Luzzatto, *Sefer Yesha'yahu* (Padua, 1855), *ad locum*.

personal sense of justice. In the same way, Isaiah's words firstly express his own ideas about world history and its objective. Indeed, the vision of the End of Days begins: "The word that Isaiah son of Amoz prophesied concerning Judah and Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:1) — not "thus saith the Lord" or something similar. Furthermore, if these passages simply fell into the category of sympathy, there would be no place for the various historical rationales offered by the prophets, which reflect their personal temperament and individuality, and sometimes considerable emotional and intellectual conflict. On the other hand, we need not wonder at the inner continuity of their speeches. They were all nurtured on the popular religion which permeates the Bible, Psalms and wisdom literature. Several chapters in Isaiah, for instance, reflect the influence of the Exodus stories; Jeremiah shows the influence of the book of Psalms and Deuteronomy; while Ezekiel draws heavily upon Leviticus and the priestly traditions incorporated in the other books of the Pentateuch. The implication is that in their images of God, the prophets' own feelings correspond with their autonomous evaluation of historical reality, while the traditions upon which they were raised act as a formative force. In other words, the collective experience of the Jewish people accumulated in national tradition, shapes both their social judgement and their network of feelings. Heschel's pathos-sympathy scheme is an oversimplification because it ignores the autonomous attitudes of the prophets toward their environment and society, as well as the importance of national tradition.

Another assumption of the pathos-sympathy scheme is the existence of a parallel or harmony between the active consciousness of God and the consciousness of man. However, this is only partially true, because prophetic consciousness is based on the dialectic between identification with and active sharing in divine pathos, and conscious distancing of oneself from it, sometimes culminating in confrontation and opposition.³⁰ Moreover, the gap between the consciousness of God and man is a prerequisite for prayer, and it makes no difference whether the worshipper is a prophet, poet or simple believer. As one of many examples, we may cite the prayer of Moses after the Golden Calf episode: "Alas, this people is guilty of a great sin in making for themselves a god of gold. And yet, if you would only forgive their sin! If not, erase me from the record which You have written!" (Exodus 32:31–32). In this prayer, Moses is strongly dissociating himself from the anger of God who seeks to destroy his sinning people. Amos' prayer: "O Lord God, pray forgive. How will Jacob survive? He is so small" (Amos 7:2), also indicates a gap between human and divine pathos. In Jeremiah 14–15, the prophet shares in the praying community's cry of despair; the unfeeling and frightening divine reply (15:1–4) bares the chasm between the sensibility of Amos and the people, and the sensibility of God. *In prayer, it seems, man stands before*

30. For example, compare Jeremiah 4:19; 8:23; 9:9; 13:17; 14:17ff; 15:9ff.

God in all his human pathos and seeks to turn divine pathos toward himself: he demands "sympathy" from God.

In this context we may also mention the initiation prophecies which reveal the gap between divine pathos and the human mind. Most of the prophets are not willing to accept the mission imposed on them. Moses refuses time and again (Ex. 3:1–4, 17) until God forces him to accept. The willingness of Isaiah expressed in "Here I am; send me" (Isaiah 6:8) is explained by his fear of death:³¹ "Woe is me, I am lost" (Isaiah 6:5). This could hardly be called sharing in the raging pathos of God. Jeremiah also refuses to accept his calling. God puts the words into his mouth by touching it (Jeremiah 1:4–10). Sometimes Jeremiah complains of God's hand upon him and the anger of God which fills him (15:17; 23:9). God has enticed him, overpowered him (20:7); God's word makes him drunken (23:9); it is like a raging fire in his heart, like a hammer that shatters rock (20:9, 23:29). These confessions of Jeremiah show how he wrestled and fought with the divine word; they show the great tension between his consciousness and his calling, between the prophet and divine pathos. God forced him to undertake a mission he did not desire. At most, we can say that identification with divine pathos is the result of a lengthy struggle which begins with coercion on the part of God and ends with surrender and acceptance of one's fate. However, rarely does man achieve identification or internal participation as does Jeremiah: "When Your words were offered, I devoured them; Your word brought me the delight and joy of knowing that Your name is attached to me" (15:16). This is also true of Ezekiel, who flings himself to the ground at the sight of the throne and is set on his feet by the divine spirit (Ez. 1:28; 2:1ff), who is carried from place to place, who is sent to the exile community for seven desolate days (2:8; 3:24; 8:11; 40–48), and who is told to carry out strange acts (4:1–12; 12:1–16, 17–20). These acts are not a reflection of human sympathy: they are forced upon the prophet to attract public attention. They are of public-educational, demonstrative value. Similarly, Ezekiel is forbidden to mourn for his beloved wife and must keep his deepest feelings pent up inside (24:15ff). This is in total contrast to human sympathy with God. On the other hand, his historical pronouncements (Ch. 15:20; 23) reveal wholehearted participation in the raging pathos of the divine and complete detachment from his love for his people. The cruel, all-inclusive verdict he passes on all Israel from the days of Egypt until his own day indicates that on the eve of destruction, he does identify with God at certain moments. Yet the literary format detracts from the direct, personal character of his statements: we sense in them the historiosophical influence of the priestly traditions in the Bible. With regard to his allegories, the elements of coercion and sympathy are balanced. *We see that the participation of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in divine pathos is but*

31. See also my article "Isaiah chap. 6 and its Rabbinic Exegesis" (Heb.) in the J. Liver Memorial Volume, *ha-Mikra ve-Toldot Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv, 1972), pp. 18–50.

one stop along the route of suffering and conflict they traverse upon becoming prophets. Behind the variety of responses is the dialectic between surprise, alienation and distance between man and God, which is usually the spiritual point of departure of the prophet, and the striving for a close, intimate relationship with God. In all the instances we have cited, the degree of identification or affinity with divine pathos depends upon the spiritual ability or the desire of man.

This is not so in I Samuel 8:7. Here God explicitly commands Samuel to distance himself from divine feeling of pathos, from divine feeling of insult, and to crown a king of flesh and blood: “For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king.” On the other hand, the dominant feeling in the tales of Elijah is the jealousy of God, with the exception of I Kings 19:12, where God is said to appear in “a soft murmuring sound”. Thus Elijah, who jealously fought for God, learns that God also has another side: the quality of silence that is greater than His jealousy. Reading between the lines in I Kings 9–10, one senses the author’s harsh criticism of the prophets who fought with divine jealousy.³² He cannot accept the terrible bloodshed caused by the jealousy of Elijah, Elisha and their followers. His criticism is the point of departure for the classical prophets, who avoided violent military involvement in state affairs. Here the term sympathy itself becomes problematic. The expressions for divine pathos range from jealousy to charity and mercy. While Elijah feels the jealousy of God, the Lord of Hosts, Hosea experiences the God of charity and mercy, and Amos — the God of truth and justice. In the end, the theory of sympathy relies on the very theory it seeks to replace: the nature of sympathy is the product of an ethical decision within the normative framework of the divine attributes.

To go even further, the word of God relayed by the prophets is sometimes imbued with magical power: I Kings 13; the stories of Elijah, and especially Elisha;³³ Jeremiah 1:9; and the statements concerning God’s wrath in Jeremiah 23:19–24; 25:19ff; or psychological power: Jeremiah 20:7–9; 23:28–29. In these cases, the Word of God appears as an objective entity that stands by itself, completely detached from pathos, and works upon man as an external power, regardless of the extent of man’s identification. In these cases, when the Word of God is an existing commandment, free of all ties to divine pathos, sympathy is only one of a wide spectrum of human responses to an encounter with God. Indeed, Heschel senses this difficulty. Thus, in the English edition, he tries to broaden the concept of sympathy as follows: “The nature of man’s response to the divine corresponds to the content of his apprehension of the divine. When the divine is sensed as mysterious perfection, the response is one of fear and trembling; when sensed as

32. See, my *Ha-Nevu'ah HaKedumah*, *op. cit.*, p. 258 ff.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 289–292.

absolute will, the response is one of unconditional obedience; when sensed as pathos, the response is one of sympathy.”³⁴

However, it is difficult to accept the solemn announcement that the prophet is a *homo sympathetikos* alongside the admission that sympathy is only one of the possible responses to the encounter with God. It is also difficult to speak in one breath of sympathy and Isaiah’s panic, Jeremiah’s refusal and rebellion, Ezekiel’s flinging himself to the ground and Daniel’s trembling. Hosea’s identification with divine pathos, i.e. his sharing in God’s disappointment, and Isaiah’s numinous terror, are different modes of reaction. One is an active attempt by man to share God’s feelings; the other is an instinctive reflex over which man has no control — a psychological response with a causal explanation. To speak of sympathy and of a fear reflex without drawing a basic distinction between the two is to blur the inner essence of sympathy, which is actually a willed, transitive response issuing forth from man to fellow-man or from man to God.

Finally, just as ecstasy in its various forms and degrees helps to determine the psychological circumstances of the prophetic experience, so sympathy marks one of a variety of possible emotional responses without necessarily being the dominant one. Heschel is to be lauded for drawing our attention to this spiritual ingredient. Nevertheless, he exaggerated its importance by trying to make it the basis of prophecy.

Last but not least, the psychological circumstances of the prophetic mission and man’s emotional responses are of interest in the study of prophecy, but if we ignore the objective of the mission, as Heschel does, we are in danger of spiritualizing a phenomenon which is largely explainable by its social aspects. It is not how much man identifies with divine pathos that is central to the prophet, but rather the realization of his social calling. The inner path and character of each prophet is a function of the spiritual tension that often exists between himself and his mission. The gulf between divine pathos and the pathos of the human being is illustrated by prophetic prayer and protest to the heavens.

To sum up, the character of the prophets is defined by their being divine agents with a special message to Israel. But there is no common psychological denominator to their mission. The spiritual conditions fluctuate among willful detachment from divine pathos, repudiation and protest of it, and the impetuous quest of man for sympathy, dialogue and intimacy with God. It is this heartbreaking tension between man and his God which was the lot of all prophets of Israel, from Moses to Malachi.

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34. p. 307 (Eng.)