

Who is Responsible?

Without God man is a lost soul, and it is in a lost soul that the demonic comes to life.

Ashamed and dismayed, we ask: Who is responsible?....Let Fascism not serve as an alibi for our conscience. We have failed to fight for right, for justice, for goodness; as a result we must fight against wrong, against injustice, against evil. We have failed to offer sacrifices on the altar of peace; now we must offer sacrifices on the altar of war....Where were we when men learned to hate in the days of starvation? When raving madmen were sowing wrath in the hearts of the unemployed?...Tanks and planes cannot redeem humanity. The killing of snakes will save us for the moment but not forever. The war will outlast the victory of arms if we fail to conquer the infamy of the soul: the indifference to crime, when committed against others.

But all may be guided by the words of the Baal Shem: 'If a man has beheld evil, he may know that it was shown to him in order to learn his own guilt and repent; for what is shown to him is also within him.'

From "The Meaning of This War" (1943)

The Divine Pathos

“Pathos:” from the Greek word denoting emotion, feeling, passion

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

Genesis 6:5-6 niv

slaughter
eye
extermination
genocide
wilding
blood purge
bloodthirsty
tooth

The Prophets' Sensitivity to Evil

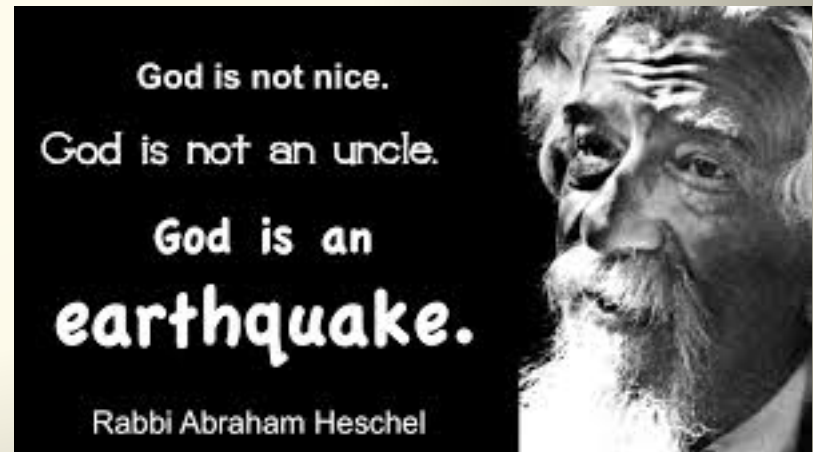


“Indeed, the sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal, as typical ingredients of social dynamics. To us a single act of injustice--cheating in business, exploitation of the poor--is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world.”

~ ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

“The prophet is a man who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon his soul, and he is bowed and stunned at man’s fierce greed.

Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. God is raging in the prophet’s words.”



Since my people are crushed, I
am crushed; I mourn, and
horror grips me. Is there no
balm in Gilead? Is there no
physician there? Why then is
there no healing for the wound
of my people?

Jeremiah 8:21-22

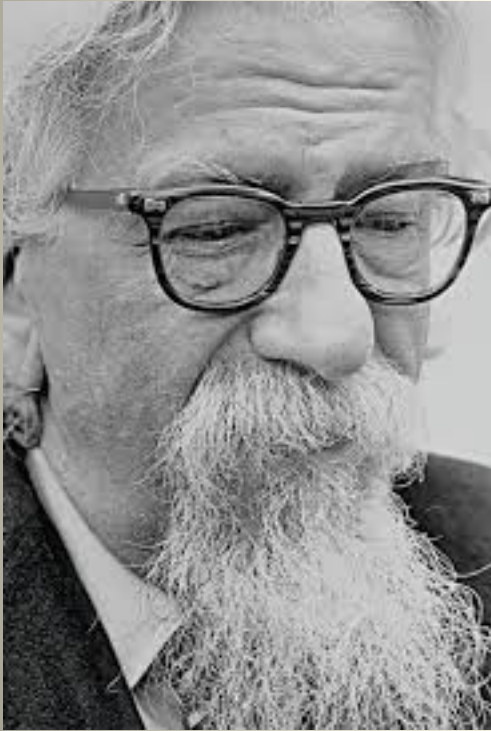
“The Holy and Blessed One
is a partner in the
suffering of His
creatures; He is involved
in the lot of His people,
wounded by their
sufferings and redeemed
by their liberation.”

R. Heschel

“Most people look at God as an ‘it’ and
not a person. They look at God as a
thing, not someone who has feelings,
not someone who can listen to the
radio and weep.”



HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?



“To live both in awe and consternation, in fervor and horror, with my conscience on mercy and my eye on Auschwitz, wavering between exaltation and despair”

“Evil is not man’s ultimate problem. Man’s ultimate problem is his relation to God...The Biblical answer to evil is not the good but the *holy*. It is an attempt to raise man to a higher level of existence, where man is not alone when confronted with evil. Living ‘in the light of the face of God’ (Psalm 89:15) bestows upon man a power of love that enables him to overcome the powers of evil.”



Chicago, January
1963

“At the first conference on religion and race, the main participants were Pharaoh and Moses....The outcome of that summit meeting has not come to an end. Pharaoh is not ready to capitulate. The exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses.”

“The tragedy of Pharaoh was the failure to realize that the exodus from slavery could have spelled redemption for both Israel and Egypt. Would that Pharaoh and the Egyptians had joined the Israelites in the desert and together stood at the foot of Sinai!”

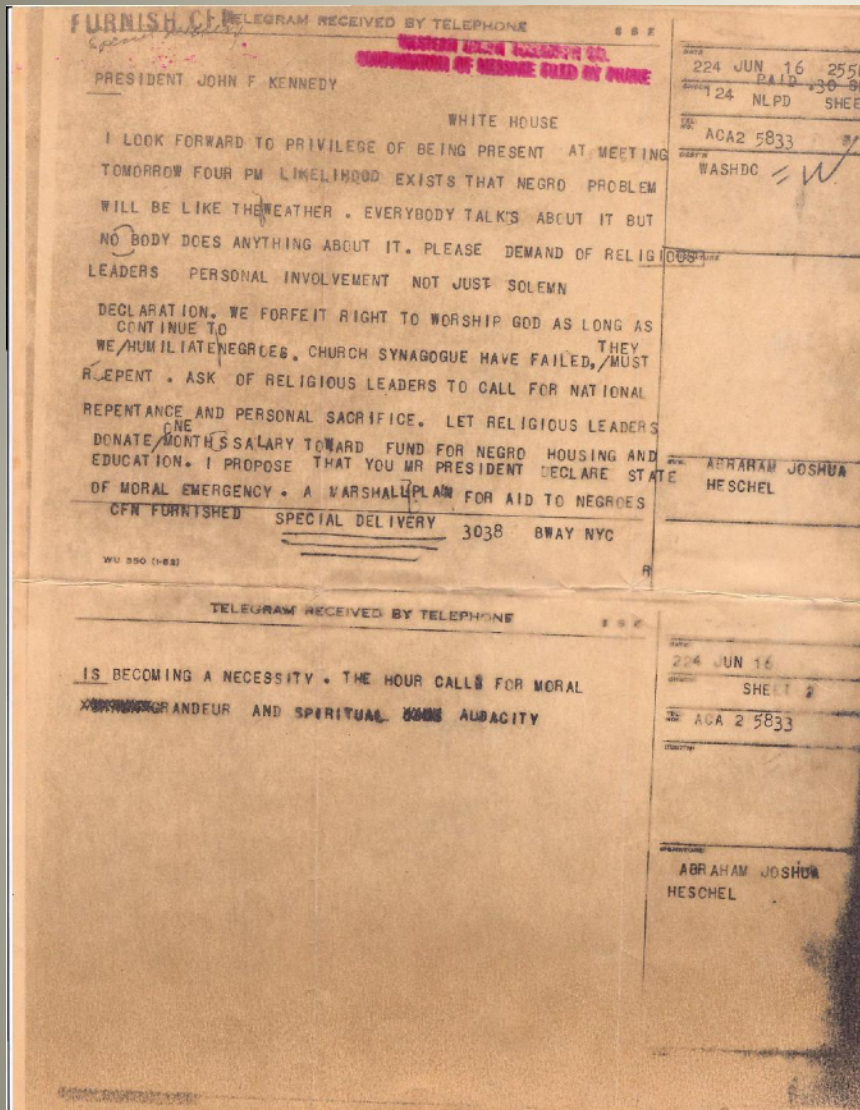
Abraham Joshua Heschel

Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World



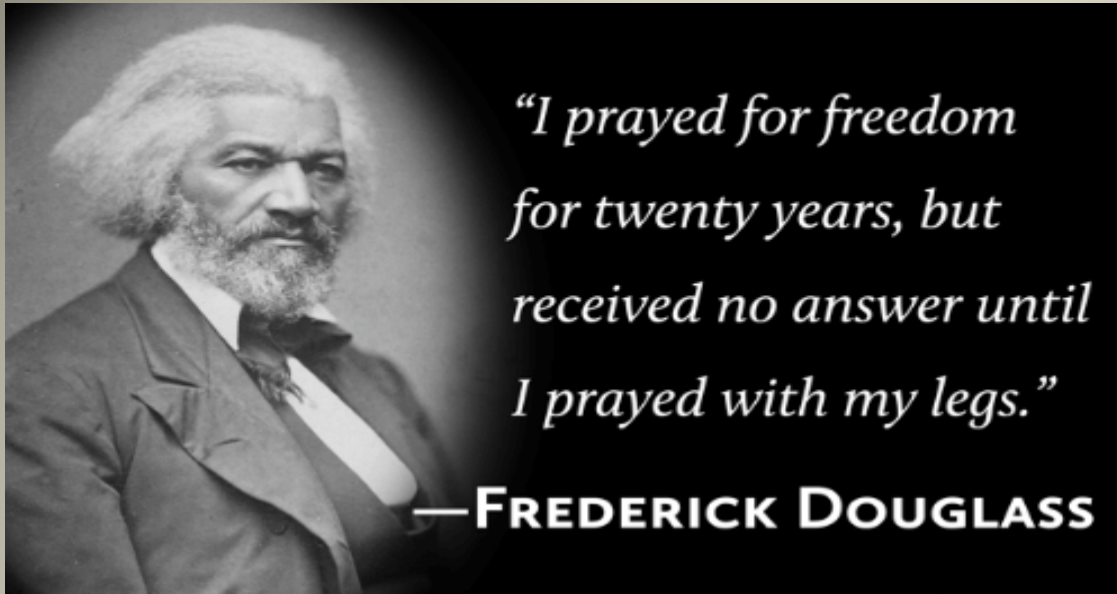
“We must believe that, morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.”

--Abraham Joshua Heschel



I LOOK FORWARD TO PRIVILEGE OF BEING PRESENT AT MEETING TOMORROW. LIKELIHOOD EXISTS THAT NEGRO PROBLEM WILL BE LIKE THE WEATHER. EVERYBODY TALKS ABOUT IT BUT NOBODY DOES ANYTHING ABOUT IT. PLEASE DEMAND OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT NOT JUST SOLEMN DECLARATION. WE FORFEIT THE RIGHT TO WORSHIP GOD AS LONG AS WE CONTINUE TO HUMILIATE NEGROES. CHURCH AND SYNAGOGUE HAVE FAILED. THEY MUST REPENT. ASK OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO CALL FOR NATIONAL REPENTANCE AND PERSONAL SACRIFICE. LET RELIGIOUS LEADERS DONATE ONE MONTH'S SALARY TOWARD FUND FOR NEGRO HOUSING AND EDUCATION. I PROPOSE THAT YOU MR. PRESIDENT DECLARE STATE OF MORAL EMERGENCY. A MARSHALL PLAN FOR AID TO NEGROES IS BECOMING A NECESSITY. THE HOUR CALLS FOR MORAL GRANDEUR AND SPIRITUAL AUDACITY

Heschel telegram to President Kennedy,
16 June 1963



*“I prayed for freedom
for twenty years, but
received no answer until
I prayed with my legs.”*

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS

“A Day of Sanctification”

21 March 1965

For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. I felt my legs were praying.

Abraham Joshua Heschel



“Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence”



Riverside Church, New York, April 4, 1967

“We have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.”

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”



**Heschel, King, R. Maurice Eisendrath (with Torah scrolls)
leading anti-war prayer vigil at Arlington National Cemetery, Feb. 6, 1968**

Silent March in Memphis

April 8, 1968



Harry Belafonte, the King family, Jesse Jackson, Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, Heschel



Civil Rights Memorial, Montgomery, Alabama