

# **Abraham Joshua Heschel, Prayer and Radical Amazement**

“Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement. ....get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel**

“People of our time are losing the power of celebration. Instead of celebrating we seek to be amused or entertained. Celebration is an active state, an act of expressing reverence or appreciation. To be entertained is a passive state--it is to receive pleasure afforded by an amusing act or a spectacle.... Celebration is a confrontation, giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's actions.

Source: The Wisdom of Heschel”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel**

Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living . What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism**

“Lift up your eyes and see. How does a man lift up his eyes to see a little higher than himself? The grand premise of religion is that man is able to surpass himself; that man who is part of this world may enter into a relationship with Him who is greater than the world; that man may lift up his mind and be attached to the absolute; that man who is conditioned by a multiplicity of factors is capable of living with demands that are unconditioned. How does one rise above the horizon of the mind? How does one free oneself from the perspectives of ego, group, earth, and age? How does one find a way in this world that would lead to an awareness of Him who is beyond this world?”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism**

“Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism**

“Never once in my life did I ask God for success or wisdom or power or fame. I asked for wonder, and he gave it to me.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel**

“The primary purpose of prayer is not to make requests. The primary purpose is to praise, to sing, to chant. Because the essence of prayer is a song, and man cannot live without a song.

Prayer may not save us. But prayer may make us worthy of being saved.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel, Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays**

“Prayer begins at the edge of emptiness.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel**

“Prayer begins where our power ends.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel**

“I would say about individuals, A Individual dies when they cease to to be surprised. I am surprised every morning when I see the sunshine again. When I see an act of evil I don't accomodate, I don't accomodate myself to the violence that goes on everywhere. I am still so surprised! That is why I am against it. We must learn to be surprised.”

– **Abraham Joshua Heschel**