

# Jewish Spirituality

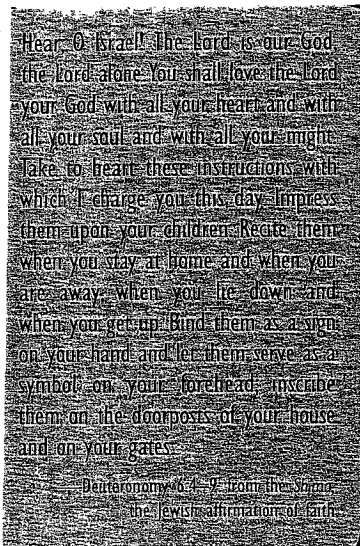
All Jewish spirituality centers on Torah, the accumulation of several thousand years of Jewish wisdom. As Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, a leading authority on prayer and liturgy, describes it, Torah "is synonymous with learning, wisdom, and love of God. Without it, life has neither meaning nor value." Usually identified with the first five books in the Bible (the Five Books of Moses), Torah, in a larger sense, means "way of life." If Judaism is the spiritual tradition that best matches your Spiritual Identity you will find that the purpose of life and meaning of God find their supreme expression in Torah.

Judaism is one of the more difficult of spiritualities to describe easily. It is a living tradition that includes religious rituals and beliefs as well as a code of ethical behavior. It also incorporates and reflects the ancient and modern history of the Jews as a people with rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations. Its adherents today include people of every race and most nations—and every Spiritual Type.

Several movements exist within Judaism today, and each represents a particular attitude toward ritual, liturgy, theology and tradition. Each movement ordains rabbis ("teachers," or spiritual leaders) and has temples or synagogues in all major cities in North America.

An important belief in Orthodox Judaism is that the Torah used today is the same as the Torah that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai; as divine revelation, its requirements are not meant to be reinterpreted in any fundamental way in light of later events. The other three Jewish movements view a human component as being present in Torah, thus making it valid to reinterpret Torah for each era. Each of these three movements—Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform—places different emphases on the impor-

tant Jewish concepts of God, Torah, and Israel (the Jewish community)



## A Jew You Should Know:

### Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972)

Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in Poland, a descendant of a long line of rabbis of the mystically inclined Hasidim, a spiritual movement within Judaism that began in Eastern Europe in the early eighteenth century. He studied Talmud, Hasidic teachings, and *kabbalah* as a youth, and attended the University of Berlin. Emigrating from Nazi Germany in 1938, he ultimately settled in the United States, where he became professor at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and then at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. Heschel taught that God is passionately concerned with all creation, and the nature of true religion is humanity's response to God's bond with it. The root of Jewish observance is in human response expressed with love and devotion. One of Heschel's most beloved books, his 1951 *The Sabbath* (Noonday Press, 1996), focuses on the holiness of time, an important principle for all Judaism. Since Judaism had not given the world any holy places outside the Land of Israel—such as special temples or enormous cathedrals—he wrote, its Sabbath and various holidays created palaces in time, temporal refuges from the pressures of the world.

## Books

- Gillman, Neil. *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990.
- Green, Arthur. *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life*. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath*. New York: Noonday Press, 1996.
- Kertzer, Rabbi Morris N. *What Is a Jew?* Revised by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman. New York: Macmillan, 1993.
- Kushner, Lawrence. *The Book of Letters: A Mystical Hebrew Alphabet*. Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1990.
- Wouk, Herman. *This Is My God: The Jewish Way of Life*. New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1992.

## Periodicals

- Lilith
- The Independent Jewish Women's Magazine  
250 W. 57th St., Suite 2432

There are two poles of *how* we believe that are measured here. All of us range between:

- > *Faithful-Skeptical*
- > *Contemplative-Rational*

Are you more *faithfully* inclined or *skeptically* inclined, *contemplatively* inclined or *rationally* inclined? Here is a brief summary of each of the four Spiritual Type possibilities. Read about the type that includes the two poles toward which you tend and see if you agree:

#### FR: Faithful-Rational

Often the most self-assured and vocal of all the Spiritual Types, the *Faithful-Rational* person believes with great confidence and is ready to explain to naysayers why what (s)he believes is true. FRs usually rest their faith on the promises to be found in scripture and tradition. They often can quote scripture from memory and see scripture as divine truth. The FR's spiritual life is strengthened most through study, and (s)he usually craves conversation with others to stimulate ideas. Often dynamic leaders, FRs can find great benefit in belonging to a religious community and may even see taking a leadership role in one as an obligation.

#### FC: Faithful-Contemplative

The *Faithful-Contemplative* person believes sometimes even in the face of evidence that (s)he cannot explain away and that (s)he often doesn't care to explain away. Often the most devout and devotional of the Spiritual Types, FCs can be the most dedicated of spiritual practitioners—devoted to daily prayer or meditation, for example. Also the most visionary of the Spiritual Types, FCs believe so strongly in their hearts that they have little interest in dogma or spiritual teaching that seems too intellectual and irrelevant. They can create fascinating spiritual conversations, if you can get them to share their thoughts with you. The FC's relationship to the Divine can sometimes be like a relationship between lovers—intimately personal and also volatile, as FCs can feel at times slighted by the Divine because their relationship is so personal.

#### SR: Skeptical-Rational

The *Skeptical-Rational* person has little time for spiritual matters. SRs do not believe that dwelling on spiritual things accomplishes much in life. But they often focus on improving the planet, themselves, or their communities with a spiritual zeal. The rarest of the four types, SRs can be very knowledgeable of religion and spiritual traditions, but they do not view that knowledge as offering any evidence for belief. Often the most transitional of the Spiritual Types, many SRs grew up as FRs but have since changed perspectives. Similarly, many SRs go on to become SCs. The most common spiritual practice for SRs is found in their neverending effort to actualize their own full human potential, as well as that of others.

#### SC: Skeptical-Contemplative

The fastest growing of the Spiritual Types, the *Skeptical-Contemplative* person may not be completely sure what (s)he believes about spiritual things but is interested in discovering what there might be to discover. SCs often do not adhere to any one spiritual tradition exclusively, and they rarely join spiritual groups. They find a variety of spiritual practices and religious traditions stimulating. If they worship, they often do so on their own terms—sometimes participating in religious services but holding on to their own personal convictions in matters of faith. There is an underlying mystical strain in a percentage of SCs as they are intellectually skeptical of all spiritual teaching, but at the same time hold great faith in the guidance of the spirit within them to find the truth.

F	FR	FC
S	SR	SC
	R	C