



# A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

## RADICAL AMAZEMENT

∞ *Facilitators' Guide* ∞

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**Illustrations by Maria Radacsi**

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## WELCOME

Welcome to the “spiritual check-ups” designed and written for Hillel’s Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning by Rabbi Aryeh Ben David, Director of Spiritual Education at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem.

In the same way that we all look after our *bodies* by having physical check-ups, these “spiritual check-ups” are designed to help students take care of their *souls*, and think about the things that give meaning to their lives.

These workshops are ready-made activities for use on campuses of all kinds. We hope that they will spark conversations, enrich the students with some experience of studying Jewish thought and help them feel connected to their Jewish identities.

All the workshops have been tested many times and run successfully on campuses all over North America and in Israel.

The spiritual check-ups in the series are:

- The Inner Voice
- Body and Soul
- Radical Amazement
- Preparing for Passover

They can be used in many ways; as a whole series focused on Jewish spirituality (the order in which you do the workshops is not important); as a curriculum for a retreat (choose 2 or 3 workshops over a Shabbat); as a one-time evening activity. They can also be broken up and the parts integrated into other activities. More ideas for how to adapt these activities is at the end of this document.

## BEFORE THE SESSION

### *1. Marketing and Targeting the Spirituality Check-Up*

- a. Which students would you like to participate in this session? Do you want your student board and other empowered students to have the opportunity to think deeply? Or are you going to use the topic of spirituality to attract students who don’t usually come to Jewish events? Have you thought about partnering with organizations on campus who are interested in spirituality?
- b. Some students are attracted to the word “spirituality”, some are turned off. Make sure that you think about the words you use on the publicity. Don’t forget to tell people that this is

For the sake of clarity and convenience, each Spiritual Check-Up includes the **Facilitator’s Guide**, **Student Guide** and **Experiential Exercise**. The Facilitator’s Guide is the same for each Check-Up. Background on the **history and philosophy** of these guides may be found at the end of this packet.

a workshop that requires their full participation for the whole time (usually 3 hours). It is very disruptive for the whole group if people come late and leave early.

- c. As with all Hillel events, students will be much more likely to come to this event if they have had personal contact with someone involved. Think about sending personalized invitations in advance, or calling people personally. This is the kind of event that requires the personal touch. You could also advertise that there will be dinner served, which makes it into a whole evening program.

## *2. Selecting a Location*

Who are the students you are targeting? Where are they? Which location would be the best for them? Sometimes hosting events at Hillel will deter unaffiliated students from coming. Think about the best place to host the event, remembering that it should be comfortable and with a relaxed and quiet atmosphere.

## *3. Preparing the Room*

- a. **Most importantly – make sure that it doesn't resemble a classroom.** Is the setting friendly? Are the chairs in a circle? Can you pull a couch into the circle? Are there pillows on the floor to sit on? Students walk into a classroom and automatically go into an academic mode of detachment. We want a warm, inviting atmosphere to help them unwind, and maybe even open up their hearts.
- b. How is the lighting? Don't try to make it too moodful or dark. They'll just fall asleep.
- c. Is the room clean? Are there any newspapers, magazines, or flyers lying around? Coffee cups or candy wrappers? Get rid of them. We don't want any distractions.
- d. Do you have name tags? This is very important. Hopefully there will be some new faces and they won't know each other. It eliminates the feeling that there are "insiders" and "outsiders."
- e. Will you need a white board or an easel with markers that work? Double check.
- f. How about pens and paper for the writing exercise? Or are they readily available?
- g. Do you have the booklets copied and ready? If you don't have enough, are there enough to share?
- h. Snacks? Not essential but create a friendly atmosphere.

## ☞ DURING THE SPIRITUALITY CHECK-UP

### *1. Preparing to be the Facilitator*

Nervous? Relax. Remember - it's not about you.

- ☞ You don't have to dazzle them with your erudition or charisma.
- ☞ You don't have to be funny.
- ☞ You don't have to know everything.
- ☞ You don't have to have an answer for every question. Remember that at the Pesach Seder we start off by asking four questions. Then we read the *Haggadah*. We only answer three of the questions, one of the questions we never answer.

You just have to be personal and sincere. Your job is to:

- ☞ Guide them through the booklet and facilitate the writing exercise in order to bring them to the personal *chevruta* (one-on-one dialogue) at the end, which always works, because it's completely dependent on them.
- ☞ Make sure that the evening keeps moving. Don't let it get bogged down. Don't let anyone monopolize the evening.
- ☞ Try to bring in people who appear to be on the outside, without drawing attention to the fact that they are an outsider, or that it is their first time.
- ☞ Encourage people to ask questions, and help to make them inclusive so that everyone understands and can participate.

You can do it. So relax and enjoy it. If you are transformed by the workshop, then for sure it will work for everyone else.

### *2. The Welcome*

Are the students seated comfortably? Can you make eye contact with everyone?

- ☞ Find the people who chose to sit on the outside. They're nervous. They're not sure if they really want to be here. They're checking things out. They're not just sitting on the outside; they're emotionally on the outside. They're the most likely to leave.
- ☞ Give them a big smile and bring them into the circle. Start a conversation with them.

Everyone seated? Let's get them talking. Ask someone: "Why did you come here tonight?"

Just point and shoot. Ask someone else. Try to bring in the people who are looking distant. It will help warm them up. It should give you a feel of the crowd.

The students are coming from all different places – classes, sleeping in their rooms, exercise, coffee shop, etc. Your job now is to bring them together and to help them focus on the

program. For this program to work, everyone will need to concentrate. Look serious. Even better, be serious.

### *3. Get Personal*

**You, the facilitator, now have to set the tone by saying something personal about yourself.** If you don't lead the way, then they will not fully engage.

1. Talk about why this is an important subject for **you**. Try to be as specific as possible. Offer a moment – positive or challenging – that has affected your spiritual life. It's a great opportunity to deepen the bond you have with the students, and to show new students that you can create an engaging and welcoming space for them to discuss meaningful issues. Most of their professors do not share their personal side.
2. You're giving them permission to bring their hearts and souls (not just their minds) to the activity.
3. Don't (!) talk too long. Three minutes is plenty. Remember, it's not about you. It's about them. You're just the catalyst.

#### 4. Timing and the Components of the Session

The program is relatively long, but each piece is crucial. You may need to tell students that they have to commit to staying the whole time. If they come late or leave early it will distract the whole group.

Think of the program as two 75-minute parts. (If there are less than 10 participants it will take less time.)

These are the elements of the program:

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <p><b>Introduction</b><br/>The introduction is read by the participants; just follow along in the <i>haggadah</i>.</p>   | 15 minutes         |
| <p><b>Learning and Review of the Sources</b><br/>in small groups of 4 or 5. All you need to do is divide the participants into these groups, tell them to follow the directions in their <i>haggadah</i>, and the discussion will run itself.</p>  | 60 minutes         |
| <p><b>Break (optional)</b><br/>You might want to add a short game to lighten the mood and get people moving.</p>   |                    |
| <p><b>Experiential Component</b><br/>An art or writing exercise which you facilitate (see the document entitled “experiential exercise” at the end of this facilitator’s guide) and which is then followed by sharing in small groups of 4 or 5. These need not be the same groups as the previous part.</p> | 30 minutes         |
| <p><b>Personal Chevruta</b><br/>One-on-one dialogue between two participants. Encourage the participants to choose a partner from among the people they know the least.</p>  | 30 minutes         |
| <p><b>Closing words</b><br/>(the <i>afikomen</i> and anything else you want to add)</p>  | 15 minutes         |
| <p><b>Total</b></p>  | <b>150 minutes</b> |

Your most important responsibility is to continually check the time. Work backwards. Figure out what time you want to finish. Then subtract 15 minutes for closing words. Then subtract 30 minutes for the personal *chevruta*. Then subtract 30 minutes for the writing exercise and sharing. Then subtract 5 minutes for a break. That means that the second half of the program (writing, personal *chevruta* and closing) is 75 minutes. So you can’t get bogged down during the first half of the program (introduction, *chevruta* on sources, and reading of booklet’s analysis of

sources). Remember - if you shorten the personal *chevruta* at the end the whole evening will be diminished. That's almost always the most powerful part of the evening. It works well to have dinner for them beforehand. Then the whole evening becomes 3 hours. Typically we ran it from 6:30 – 9:30. Don't serve dinner in the middle; the program will lose its flow.

### After the Session

One of the most important parts of these workshops is what you do *afterwards*. How are you going to capitalize on the success of the workshops? How can you involve these students in future activities? How can you build on their interest and energy? Even before the session starts, invest some time in thinking about what will happen afterwards. Here are some ideas of how to continue the connection with the students who participate.

### *Ideas for Follow-Up*

- a. Invite all those who participate to have coffee with a Hillel staff member in the week following the workshop. Call them up and make a date to talk about their interests and how this workshop affected them.
- b. Encourage the students to start meeting on a regular (perhaps once a month), informal basis to learn and discuss issues of spirituality. They could meet in a dorm room and study together.
- c. Invite other religious leaders in the campus community to join you for similar activities in the future. They make good partners for future events.
- d. Think about planning a retreat based on similar activities, later in the year.
- e. Encourage the students who participated this time to bring a friend to the next workshop, and to help organize and publicize.
- f. Involve your Jewish student board, and lay board, in activities of this type. Brainstorm ways to integrate pieces of these spiritual check-ups into regular Hillel events (personal *chevruta* at a Friday night dinner or other events, etc.)

### ADAPTING AND “TWEAKING” THE SPIRITUAL WORKSHOPS

The spiritual check-ups are written in a “*haggadah*” format, meaning that they are ready to use and don't require any additional material. You simply take the “*haggadah*”, make copies for the participants, and start!

But, you should also feel free to take the material and adapt it to suit your needs, your students and your own personal style. Make it personal, add individual touches, and do whatever you need to make it work. The following are some ideas taken from things that other Hillel professionals have already done to make these workshops work for them.

- a. Begin the whole evening with a moment of reflection. You could end with one too.
- b. Dim the lights and have candles and chocolates to create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere. You could also have pillows on the floor and soft music to start (although you won't want it to distract you during the workshop itself).





# RADICAL AMAZEMENT

## EXPERIENTIAL COMPONENT WRITING AND MEDITATIVE EXERCISE FOR THE FACILITATOR

### ☞ *Supplies needed:*

Pens for everyone. Blank sheets of paper should be in the *haggadah* booklet.  
Raisins or grapes for everyone.

Of the three exercises listed below, the third one is the most important. It is the most physical, and most likely to be remembered afterward.

1. **Warm-up:** Look around the room. Look deeply. Are there objects of “wonder” in this room? Objects that when you pause and regard them more carefully you see that they are “amazing.” Pick something in this room. Write 5 words to describe it.
  - a. Call on some people to share what they chose and their words. If time permits, have people try and guess which object they chose.
  - b. Goal of exercise: to more deeply experience the common things that we continually disregard.
  - c. Mention that if you had asked them they probably would have been to find 10 objects of wonder in the room. How would that have affected their future experiencing of the room?

2. **Walk around the room.** Pick something else. Sit down next to it. Write a letter from it. Begin the letter from the vantage point of the object you chose. Begin with the sentences: “I am so glad that you chose me. Let me tell you why I am amazing.” It’s a personal moment between you and this thing. It’s your “wonder” thing. Ask people to share what they wrote.
3. **Only if there is time.** Give everyone a few raisins or grapes. Look at them. Ask them to eat one. Then ask them to take another and to take 10 minutes to eat it. Smell it, touch it, and experience it. Eat it as if it’s the first time that you’ve ever tasted this fruit.
  - a. Ask them: what was the difference between the two times that they ate? Did the slowing down affect their experience? Their level of appreciation? Their happiness? How?
  - b. The *bracha* (blessing) we say before eating a raisin is “Blessed ...Creator of the fruit of the tree” (*Borei pri ha’etz*) “*Borei*” reminds us of the first word of the Torah – “*Bereishit*.” The *bracha* wants to remind us that this raisin is connected to the creation of the world. It is a direct descendent from creation. Human beings cannot create fruit or seeds. It came from a seed which came from a vine which came from a seed – all the way back to creation. Wow. How many people and work had to go into the history of this raisin?
  - c. If time permits you can do the following:
  - d. Some people go through life sleep-walking, not really focusing on what they are doing at each moment. Heschel would say that moments of wonder come to the person who wants to experience more than just sleep-walking through life. It’s not “just a raisin”. Look at the raisin and write your own *Kavanah* for eating it. A *Kavanah* (literally an “intention”) is a personal meditation or prayer that you will read or hold in your mind when you do a particular thing.

What would you write? Go around the group asking people to share what they wrote (in small groups of 6).



# A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

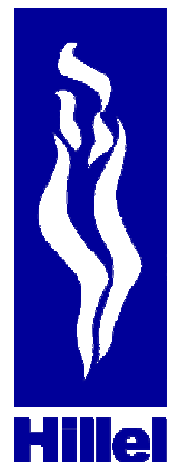
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∞ STUDENTS' GUIDE ∞

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☞ *First Reader:*

## ☞ HISTORY OF THIS WORKSHOP

Aryeh Ben David, the writer of this workshop, explains what brought him to think about this subject:

*I was in Milwaukee for my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, spending Shabbat with the Hassidic Rabbi, Michael Twersky. I mentioned to him that it was a special day for me, that turning 40 was a kind of rite of passage. He asked me how I was going to celebrate this special birthday. I told him that all of my friends had told me the same thing. “You’re turning 40, you have to be responsible. It’s time to get a ‘physical.’” Rabbi Twersky looked at me and just smiled. I wasn’t sure what he was thinking.*

*Finally he said to me, “Do you know what I think people should do when they turn 40?”*

*“I have no idea.”*

*“I tell people. It’s a rite of passage, an important time. It’s time to get a ‘spiritual.’ You’re right to go get a physical. You should take care of your body. But you also have a soul. You also need to take care of your soul. Go get a ‘spiritual’ too.”*

*I had no idea where to go or what to do to get a “spiritual.” But I had a sense that he was right.*

Tonight, we’re going to give each other a “spiritual check-up.”

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ GUIDELINES FOR THE READING OF THE BOOKLET

These booklets are modeled after the *Haggadah* of the Passover Seder; the book that we use to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

Just like the *Haggadah*, this text will be read by the participants of the evening.

Just like at the Seder, if anyone has any questions or comments on what is being read, please share them with all of us. It’s our evening.

Guidelines for Readers:

1. Try to read loudly and slowly.
2. Try to add a bit of life to what you’re reading. Relax and enjoy it. Have some fun.

At the ☞ *Next Reader* sign, pick the next reader of your choice.

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ READING OF THE BOOKLET

*There was a time in our history when we were strangers in a strange land.  
Today, we are often strangers to our own souls.*

The very first question asked in the Torah is God's question to Adam after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil. God asks Adam "Ayeka? Where are you?" Adam doesn't answer. He hides. Adam goes into denial. Eventually Moses will offer the correct answer to God's question. Moses answers, "*Hineni*. Here I am." This is considered a paradigm for all of us. We need to ask ourselves the question "Where are we?" We shouldn't hide. We are all in different places, but we all need to be fully present. We all need to answer "I am here."

We may never have answers to questions like: "Why do bad things happen to good people? Where was God in the Holocaust? Is there an ultimate truth?" But those are not the questions for tonight. Tonight we're looking inward, into ourselves. Tonight, the primary question for each of us is "Where am I?"

We give so much attention to our bodies. We use our minds. But we're often strangers to our own souls. The goal of these evenings is to take small steps to become more aware of our own souls. To become more of the person that we would like to be.

So, let all who are interested in having a "spiritual check-up" come and participate.

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ ORDER OF THE EVENING

How is this workshop going to be different from all others? It will have 3 components:

1. *Neshama* – a learning component
2. *Nefesh* – an experiential component
3. *Ruach* – a personal component

There are three words in Hebrew for soul: *Neshama*, *Nefesh*, and *Ruach*. Three voices of the soul. *Neshama* – the intellectual voice. *Nefesh* – the physical voice. *Ruach* – the emotional voice. Tonight we are going to try to listen to all three of these voices.

But first we have to prepare ourselves appropriately. Just like on *Pesach* (Passover) when Jews traditionally get rid of all *chametz* (leavened products), so too, tonight we must get rid of something in order for this workshop to be meaningful. Tonight, our *chametz* is our cynicism or sarcasm. For the duration of this workshop we will be functioning in a cynicism-free zone. Why? It's very hard for one person to raise the mood of a whole group, but it is very easy for one person to bring down the mood of the whole group. Tonight, we'll have to work together to make this evening productive.

We have all been in a group setting in which someone makes a very personal remark and another person rolls his/her eyes. Everyone sees the eyes rolling. It only takes a second but at that moment, everyone else in the room shuts down. No one is willing to become the next target of rolling eyes.

Just like we replace *chametz* with *matzah*, so too tonight we're going to replace cynicism with tolerance and support. No judging each other. No criticizing each other. No attacking each other. We may have talked about a lot of things together, but I'm not sure if we've shared with each other where we are regarding our souls. This can be a very personal subject. Keep in mind that people may be in very different places, and that we have to maintain mutual respect for each other for this to work. So let's celebrate the diversity of this group.

Okay, let's start. Two reminders:

1. Please turn off cell phones.
2. All participants need to stay until the end of the workshop. The workshop is one whole unit. You won't understand it unless you stay till the end. Also, leaving in the middle will be a distraction to others. For anyone who doesn't feel that he or she can stay until the end, we will understand if you have to leave now.

☞*Next Reader:*

## ☞ GETTING STARTED

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was one of the most fascinating Jewish figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A descendant of a hassidic dynasty, he traveled in Reform, Conservative and Orthodox circles. The Catholics and Protestants both revered him. He was a philosopher, poet, scholar, and leading social rights activist in the 1960s, marching hand in hand with Martin Luther King.

Tonight we will go on a journey. Abraham Joshua Heschel will be our guide. The beauty of this trip will not be in the things that we see. The depth and beauty will reside in how we see things. He will show us how to penetrate into the life around us. He will show us how we can allow our souls to be touched by what we see around us. Along the way we will also witness how faith and holiness may become daily events.

What we are going to do now is very unusual. It is rare for Jews to get together to talk about issues of faith and belief. We like to talk about a lot of things. We talk about – food, Israel, social action, food, relationships, sports, business, Jewish movie stars, and food. But we rarely devote an evening to such a personal and sometimes difficult subject as God's presence in this world.

Heschel knew this. He knew that Judaism had retreated from the challenging and essential topics of life. He wrote:

It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it

became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid . . . when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion – its message becomes meaningless.

*Religion is an answer to man's ultimate questions.* The moment we become oblivious to ultimate questions, religion becomes irrelevant, and its crisis sets in.

The central thought of Judaism is *the living God* . . . .

These are very provocative words. Rarely do we hear a rabbi pass such a harsh judgment on the state of Judaism. Tonight we will accept Heschel's invitation. We will focus on ultimate questions. Tonight we will follow one thinker's path to belief.

☞*Next Reader:*

## ☞ LEARNING OF THE SOURCES

Instructions for learning the sources:

1. One person reads them aloud (the most tired person should read). Take turns.
2. Often the first tendency is to challenge or disagree with a new idea. Heschel is tackling provocative subjects. Try to keep an open mind. Before criticizing or questioning what is written, first summarize the idea and make sure you understand it.
3. Don't be afraid to brainstorm together, to say what you understand and what is unclear to you. Work together, listen to each other. Help each other clarify what the sources mean.
4. Think of yourself as a team. Refrain from being confrontational. Usually it's just not productive.
5. Try to make sure that everyone in your group has a chance to talk. No one should monopolize the conversation.
6. At the end, appoint a spokesperson to summarize your thoughts to the whole group.
7. Let's break up into groups.

## ∞ Sources ∞

From Heschel's *Man Is Not Alone*

### I) Wonder and Radical Amazement

Among the many things that religious tradition holds in store for us is a legacy of wonder. Wonder goes beyond knowledge. Wonder is a state of mind in which we do not look at reality through the perspective of our memorized knowledge; in which nothing is taken for granted.

The surest way to suppress our ability to understand the meaning of God and the importance of worship is to take things for granted. Indifference to the sublime wonder of living is the root of sin.

Modern man fell into the trap of believing that everything can be explained, that reality is a simple affair which has only to be organized in order to be mastered.

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder almost necessarily declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. **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.

Science does not try to fathom the mystery. It merely describes and explains the way in which things behave in terms of causal necessity.

**Wonder or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious person's attitude toward history and nature. . . Is wonder the same as curiosity? Wonder is a form of thinking. It is not the beginning of knowledge but an act that goes beyond knowledge; it does not come to an end when knowledge is acquired; it is an attitude that never ceases.**

We are struck with an awareness of the immense preciousness of being; a preciousness which is not an object of analysis but a cause of wonder; it is inexplicable, nameless, and cannot be specified or put in one of our categories. Yet, we have a *certainty without knowledge*; it is real without being expressible. It cannot be communicated to others; everyone has to find it by himself . . . We may be skeptical as to whether the world is perfect. Yet, even its imperfection admitted, the preciousness of its grandeur is beyond question.

**Wonder, rather than doubt, is the root of all knowledge. There is no answer in the world to radical amazement.**

#### Guiding Questions:

1. What does it mean that something goes "beyond knowledge?"
2. Why do you think that Heschel connects living a life full of wonder with our level of happiness?

∞*Next Reader*

## II) Awe, Sources, Continued:

Wonder is the beginning of awe.

**Awe is the awareness of transcendent meaning, of a spiritual suggestiveness of reality (a sense that something lies behind and created the moment of wonder).**

**Awe, then, is more than a feeling. It is an answer of the heart and mind to the presence of mystery in all things, an intuition for a meaning that is beyond the mystery, an awareness of the transcendent worth of the universe.**

If the world is taken for granted, then all we need to know is its cause; but if the world is a mystery, then the most pressing problem is, what does it stand for? What is its meaning? Where did it come from?

It came from the ineffable (the realm beyond words, beyond expressing, beyond even knowing). By the ineffable we are not talking about things that are unknown today but may be known a thousand years from now. By the ineffable we mean that aspect of reality which by its very nature lies beyond our comprehension; and is acknowledged by the mind to be beyond the scope of the mind. The ineffable, then, is a synonym for hidden meaning rather than for absence of meaning.

In thinking on the level of the ineffable, we do not set out with a preconceived idea of a supreme being in our possession, trying to ascertain whether He is in reality the way He is in our minds. The awareness which opens our minds to the existence of a supreme being is an awareness of a divine presence. **Long before we attain any knowledge about His *essence*, we possess an intuition of a divine *presence*.**

This is where the approach through the ineffable differs from the approach through speculation. Speculation proceeds from an idea of His essence to a belief in His existence, while in the approach beginning with a sense of the ineffable we proceed from an intuition of His presence to an understanding of His essence.

The world is a mystery, a question, not an answer.

### Guiding Questions:

1. How is awe different from wonder?
2. How does one come to “possess an intuition of a divine presence?”

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ REVIEW OF THE SOURCES

Our tour guide tonight is Abraham Joshua Heschel. The tour is a journey from our regular lives, to lives full of wonder and radical amazement, to lives replete with awe, to the seeds of faith and acts of holiness. This tour involves a different kind of seeing, an inward seeing. Everyone is capable of this kind of seeing, though rarely do we actually do it.

Heschel often spoke the praises of another tour guide. He was known to have said that if someone visits Jerusalem, they have to see it with Rabbi Pinchas Peli. The first time that Heschel visited Jerusalem after the Six-Day War his guide was Rabbi Peli, professor of Talmud at the Ben-Gurion University in Beersheba. When Rabbi Peli was asked later on what he did that was so remarkable, he replied, “I took Heschel up to the Mount of Olives and said one word: ‘look.’ Then I took him to Mount Scopus and said one word: ‘look.’ Then I took him to the Western Wall and said one word: ‘look.’ I didn’t explain anything. I didn’t tell any stories. I didn’t do anything extraordinary. It was an amazing tour because Abraham Joshua Heschel had the awesome ability to see deeply into things and life.”

We have five senses with which to experience the world. Most of us are blessed with sight. Yet we all witness life at different depths. Some people, like Heschel, grasp beyond what the eye records. Tonight we will talk about people who see and people who see deeply.

☞ *Next Reader*

**Wonder. Radical Amazement.** Words that Heschel brought into the Jewish vocabulary. How would you describe a moment of radical amazement? Have you ever had a moment of wonder? A “wow” moment that defies words, that defies comprehension. How would you describe it?

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| <p><b>Instructions to the Reader:</b> Ask participants if they have ever had a “wow” moment of wonder. Choose a few people to share their moment.</p> |
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Is a moment of wonder necessarily a “religious” moment? Is it theological?

Wonder, the first stop on Heschel’s journey, does not have to be connected with faith, God, or religion. Somehow we sense, we see, something beyond what our vision detects. We are stunned and speechless. It’s as if we are seeing something for the first time. A “wow” experience. A moment that is real yet virtually impossible to describe to someone else.

The moment is powerful, but does not necessarily have to be connected to a greater being or reality. It is simply a “wow” moment. Often it is inspired by breath-taking scenes or events in nature. But the person who sees deeply can discover objects or moments of wonder in the smallest daily occurrences.

Wonder is not only about developing a new way of seeing. It is really about cultivating a new way of thinking and interacting with the world. It is less dependent on “what is being seen” than the attitude of “who is doing the seeing.”

☞ *Next Reader*

**Awe.** Was the moment of wonder – by chance? Was it random? Perhaps significant in and of itself but pointing to no greater meaning? “Wonder is the beginning of awe.” Awe is the second stop on this journey. Some people will get off at the first station, the wonder station, choosing not to connect the wonder to awe. Awe begins with questions: “how did that moment of wonder occur? Why did it happen? What brought about that feeling of wonder that I just experienced? I just had a moment that made me go “wow.” Did something create that experience? Where did it come from? Was it just by chance?

Awe looks into the mystery of the universe, the mystery of my life. It regards the moment of wonder as an invitation to discover the meaning behind or beyond the moment. Is some meaning being suggested? Is there some message for me in this moment? Was the moment of wonder some kind of gift that is inviting me to look for its giver? Did something create this moment for me to experience?

Awe connects the wonder to the source of the wonder. We may apply many different names to this source – God, the Beyond, the Transcendent, the Spiritual, the Divine. Heschel would say that at the deepest level, all names are insufficient. The “Source of all wonder” is beyond human words.

**Instructions to Reader:** Ask if anyone has ever felt that God was in a moment of wonder that they experienced.

☞ *Next Reader*

Heschel writes that “Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation.” Almost 500 years ago the Kabbalists (mystics) of the city of Tzfat in Israel originated the custom of saying “*modeh*” (*modah* in the feminine) as the very first word that a Jew says upon waking up in the morning. “*Modeh*” – similar to the word “*toda*,” whose meaning is “thanks.” Before even opening one’s eyes there is an expression of appreciation on one’s lips. Appreciation for living, for life.

**Instructions to Reader:** Ask if anyone know what the word “Jew” means.

The words “Jew” and “Judaism” come from the word “Yehuda,” which stems from the same idea as “*toda*,” of thanking. Perhaps the definition of a Jew could be “one who is grateful.” And this approach to life is “the beginning of our happiness.” Notwithstanding the challenges and trials every life endures, a person who is genuinely grateful for life will tend to lead a happier life. We may complain from time to time, but it is simply hard to be cranky when one feels blessed.

☞ *Next Reader*

What happens after the moment of wonder recedes? Does it just all fade away? Does life go back to normal? Return to the routine? Do those moments become warm and sentimental memories of nostalgia? Do we just wistfully look back and remark “aahhh. Remember when...”

How many of us have albums of photographs gathering dust on some bookshelf? Is this the fate of moments of wonder and awe? What happens the moment after? How do we express these moments months or even years later?

“Religion consists of God’s question and the human being’s answer.” The process of weaving together the moments of wonder and awe is the creating of a personal faith in the transcendent, in God. Faith is the state of mind that says, “even though at this moment I am not experiencing awesome moments of wonder, nevertheless I realize that the Source of all wonder still exists. I still maintain the relationship.”

Perhaps it is similar to maintaining a loving relationship during the moments when the sparks of love have faded. Some relationships falter the moment that the “sparkage” diminishes. Others remain “faithful,” and continue until the sparks eventually return. The moments of wonder and awe also eventually return.

Out of a sense of wonder – then awe – then faith – comes holiness. For Heschel, acts of holiness are the human responses to encountering the Divine. We respond to these moments of wonder with wondrous acts of our own. In the end, our being radically amazed by the wonder of life is the springboard for our own radically amazing acts of wonder.

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ BOTTOM LINE

**Wonder is a natural response to the world which causes me to transcend the mundane, the daily, the insignificant.** A moment which causes me to stop and say, “wow,” that’s amazing. Religiously and spiritually neutral, I can be an atheist and still have moments of wonder.

**Awe.** I begin to create a minimal expression of theology. What is behind this “wow” moment? Is it just by chance, or does it suggest something beyond? Is there “something” bringing this moment into existence?

**Faith.** These moments now expand to become a whole approach to life, a philosophy of life that affects all other moments. An awareness that even if at this moment I am not having a “wow” episode, that life and the existence of the world, at its essence, a “wow” experience.

**Holiness.** Bringing wonder, awe, and faith into a life of action. The human response of creating a life full of actions reflecting wonder, awe, and faith. Living in the appreciation and celebration of life.

## ☞ FIVE-MINUTE BREAK

## ☞ WRITING EXERCISE

We said that there were going to be three parts to the evening. We used our minds. Now is the time to do something physical – some writing exercises.

Don't get nervous. We are not writers. We're not interested in the quality of the writing. We're not going to examine the grammar or syntax. This is not English 101. We're not going to compare or judge. The writing exercise is simply a form to express ourselves. Let's enjoy it.

First, let's divide ourselves into groups.

Facilitator – you're on.

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| The Facilitator will now take over to run the writing session. Use the space on this and the next page. |
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## ☞ WARM-UP EXERCISE

✎ WRITING EXERCISE

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ PERSONAL *CHEVRUTA* (ONE-ON-ONE DIALOGUE)

Okay. Stage #1 - We used our minds and learned some new ideas. Stage #2 - We've written something. Now comes the last and most important part of the evening.

We're going to divide into pairs. In a moment, everyone should get a partner.

We're going to give each other a "spiritual check-up." It's very similar to a physical check-up.

These are the ground rules:

1. **Confidentiality.** Just like with a doctor, everything that is said between the two of you stays between the two of you.
2. **Total respect.** No judging or evaluating each other. No giving advice. We're not trying to fix each other. We're trying to create a "safe space" so that each of you can sincerely express where you are holding spiritually.
3. **Deep listening.** Focus on each other. Most people today just listen, but don't deeply listen. There are some people in the world who are blessed to be exceptional listeners. When someone deeply listens to us that enables us to deeply listen to ourselves.
4. **Reflective Questions:** If you ask your partner a question, make sure that it is a reflective, open-ended question. Not a question in which you are looking for a certain answer. Examples of reflective questions: "How long have you felt like that?" "How does that make you feel?" Examples of non-reflective, non-open-ended questions: "Why don't you do this . . . ?" "Have you ever considered doing this . . . ?"

Take turns. Listen to each other. Let's split into pairs and here are your questions.

☞ *Next Reader:*

## ☞ THE FOUR QUESTIONS

1. Do you identify with Heschel's idea of wonder?
2. How would your life be different if you had a greater sense of wonder? How would it affect your level of happiness or gratitude for life?
3. It is always possible to deepen our awareness of wonder and awe. What do you think is holding you back from having a greater sense of wonder and awe?
4. Have moments of wonder ever brought you to connect to God or to spirituality?

☞ *Next Reader:*

☞ *AFIKOMEN*

This workshop is coming to a close. The reading of the *haggadah* is almost over. Hopefully we have gained, individually and collectively, from this experience.

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| <b>Instructions to Reader:</b> Ask if anyone has any reflections on the evening. |
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At the end of the Passover Seder we look for the *afikomen*. It is the last piece of the Seder, which leaves us with a final “taste”, a summing-up of what we have done. How appropriate. In the end, we are always searching. Searching for our true selves.

We are always seeking to return to the Garden of Eden, to rediscover paradise. Kindred spirits yearning for more. In a sense, every time we understand a bit more about our true selves we come closer to paradise. Let’s continue to help each other search. Let’s continue to inspire each other to keep on seeking, to fill our lives with radical amazement and wonder. To encourage each other to appreciate life more fully, with greater happiness. To allow this celebration of life to stir us to create our own relationships and acts that are full of wonder. With our minds, hearts, and bodies.

*Good night*

# RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Heschel was born on January 11, 1907, in Warsaw. He was named after his grandfather, a hassidic leader, also known as the Apter Rebbe. He received a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin in 1927, writing a dissertation on the phenomenology of prophetic consciousness. Heschel spent a short amount of time in a displaced persons camp in 1938-9, and then escaped “only weeks before the disaster began” (his words). He taught at the Reform Movement’s Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati for a number of years and then moved to the Jewish Theological Seminary of the Conservative Movement in New York in 1945.

Heschel was in many ways a loner. He took flexible positions regarding ritual obligations that many Orthodox Jews considered to be controversial or inauthentic. He was too traditional for most Reform Jews and too intent upon inwardness for many adherents to any Jewish denomination. His increased media visibility in the 1960s caused some to question his humility, for the public could be overly impressed by his beard, his flowing white hair, and his lush oratory. Protestants and Catholics saw in Heschel a Hebrew prophet and some skeptics felt that he derived too much pleasure from being called “Father Abraham.” His profound involvement with the anti-Vietnam War movement aroused the anxiety of some Establishment leaders.

Heschel masterfully articulated our most intimate yearnings. He stressed the universality of religious insights, although he insisted on the divine authority of the Hebrew prophets. He most successfully addressed religious moderates, Christian and Jews, open-minded people receptive to spirituality, as well as agnostics touched by hunger for the holy. He had an open reverence for the Bible and shameless passion for God. His attachment to God was equaled only by his endless striving to sanctify all humanity.

He passed away in 1972.

Suggested reading by Abraham Joshua Heschel:

1. *God, in Search of Man*
2. *Man is not Alone – a Philosophy of Religion*
3. *The Sabbath*

For more information, see:

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/H/Heschel.asp>;  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham\\_Joshua\\_Heschel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Joshua_Heschel)



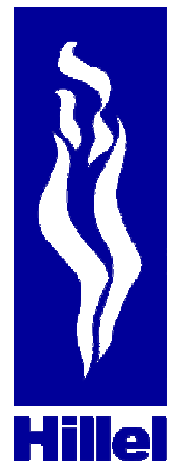
# A SPIRITUAL CHECK-UP

## HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

By Aryeh Ben David  
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This series of “spiritual check-ups” were written for Hillel’s Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning by Aryeh Ben David. Aryeh is an Israel-based educator who has taught for many years at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies.

These workshops are a partnership between Hillel, Pardes and the Nathan Cummings Foundation. In this document Aryeh describes the philosophy and rationale behind them.

## INTEGRATED AFFECTIVE LEARNING

I have been involved in Jewish education for over 20 years now teaching full-time Torah, Talmud, Jewish philosophy, prayer, interpersonal ethics, and other seminars. I come from an academic type of family, and felt at home sitting with books for seemingly endless periods of time. I have thoroughly loved the challenge and process of teaching. I have been very comfortable with it in every way.

But after a number of years in the classroom it began to feel too comfortable. I have felt in the last number of years a particular shortcoming in the classroom. We were learning well. Information was being conveyed. But something was missing

I felt that not enough was happening within the students’ beings. And not enough within myself also. The learning remained either in our heads, or in our notebooks. Restlessly, I carried these thoughts with me for a number of years. I experimented with different ideas and approaches in the classroom, some things worked, and some things didn’t.

The approach now adopted in these seminars emerged out of my learning kabbalistic sources during the last few years. According to the *Kabbalah*, we have three primary voices of the soul within us. In Hebrew they are called: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. The *neshama* is considered to be our intellectual voice, the voice of our mind. The *ruach* is considered to be our emotional voice, the voice of our heart. The *nefesh* voice is considered to be our physical voice, the voice of our body.

I reflected on this idea and came to the conclusion that if this indeed was the case, then Jewish education should reflect this understanding, this deep wisdom. Programs were then designed to include these three components: for the mind, the heart, and the body.

Each of these workshops contains these three elements. First we learn sources and use our minds. Then there is an experiential element, usually writing or art, for our bodies. Listening to the voice of our bodies does not necessarily mean dance or exercise, but rather the process of creating something physical. Allowing what has been heretofore internal to take on its own being, its own reality. The third part of the workshop is the “personal *chevruta*,” which offers expression to our emotional side. In the personal *chevruta* the students are invited to take a partner and in strict confidentiality to speak to each other from their hearts.

These workshops have now been run for over 3,000 participants, with overwhelmingly positive results. Not only have the students internalized the ideas discussed, but the sharing and bonding between the participants has helped to foster language and an environment conducive to the further contemplation of the subjects at hand.

## ☞ THE HAGGADAH APPROACH

The second innovation arose while contemplating the most feasible method for Hillel professionals to facilitate the workshops. Originally I wrote a “facilitators’ guide.” This included sources, trigger questions, ideas to incorporate, metaphors, stories, and tricks to maintain the focus of the students. After looking at this guide I came to a single irrefutable conclusion: it wasn’t going to work! It really is very difficult to teach someone else’s sources. Secondly, the degree of preparation required plus the pressure to control the discussion would have made the whole endeavor too difficult. At the Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning we’re very aware that the professionals in the field are already working 110% and sometimes don’t have the time to start preparing something from scratch.

So I went back to the drawing board and contemplated how we can make this potentially great workshop feasible.

I tried to think of the kind of programs that Jews already run themselves, with an easy-to-use format. The answer was obvious – the Pesach Seder. Most Jews know the *Haggadah*. It gives us the instructions and runs itself. Of course, we can always add more. We can be creative and insert ideas, stories, and experiential elements. But the basic Seder also can be run straight from the *Haggadah*. And it works! At least it seems to me that it works. Growing up in my family we pared the *haggadah* down so that Seder would run about 15 minutes. Yet it was still important and memorable.

So I wrote *haggadot*. Word by word, including instructions to the readers. Now, the program virtually runs itself. The major points can’t be missed. Now there is much less of a concern regarding the facilitating of a discussion of the sources. The *haggadah* runs the discussion. Now there is much less worry over someone either monopolizing the conversation, or of someone being left out. And most important, the time of preparation and pressure to facilitate the program has been cut to a minimum.

We discussed this approach at the Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning and honestly we were all a bit skeptical over whether it could work. It seemed a bit contrived. It seemed overly structured, too limiting, too stilted. But we decided to try it out and see.

The first guinea pigs were University of Maryland, American University, U.C. Berkeley, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Indiana University, and University of Wisconsin (Madison). And the results were – “wow.” They liked it! They said that they liked it. The *haggadah* format felt familiar to them. They liked being in charge. They liked reading from it and choosing the next reader. They even liked “hamming it up” at times. And they liked that when the program was over they had something in their hands to take home (with additional reading suggestions).

