

Heavenly Torah – As Refracted Through the Generations by Abraham Joshua Heschel. Edited and Translated by Gordon Tucker.
The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc. 2005.

Heavenly Torah, here translated in its complete form with a foreword by the author's eminent daughter, Susannah, was Abraham Joshua Heschel's life's work and is undoubtedly his masterpiece.

This is a massive book in every sense, some 814 pages long and divided into no less than 41 sections, covering such areas as Miracles, Torah and Life, The Language of Torah. The Torah that is in Heaven, Is the Prophet a Partner or a Vessel, How the Torah was Written, Against Multiplying Rules, Former and Latter Authorities and Interpersonal Relationships. Each section is introduced and summarised by Gordon Tucker and his collaborator Leonard Levin, and they rise magnificently to the challenge; the copious footnotes to Heschel's text are also invaluable, with references to primary source texts and other helpful information.

Heschel sets the tone for the book in his introduction which, after explaining the difference between halakhic and aggadic material makes comparisons between the exegetical schools of Rabbis Ishmael and Akiva and seeks to explain why the views and influence of the latter became more significant in the development and direction of rabbinic literature. In many ways everything that comes subsequently is influenced by this initial thesis.

Heavenly Torah is a glorious book both for students of Heschel AND of Rabbinic texts. As of the Torah one may say of Heavenly Torah – Turn it this way and turn it that for everything is in it.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh