

“THE PILGRIMAGE TO MANY TRUTHS”

“One who is blind in one eye is exempt from the pilgrimage.” This law of the Talmud exempts those who suffer this disability from the three yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem. But as Rabbi Gordon Tucker points out in his magnificent new translation of A.J. Heschel’s “Heavenly Torah,” Heschel sees this law as a greater spiritual principle.

Some people are spiritually blind in one eye -- they look at the world with a single perspective. They lack parallax spiritual vision. Some focus on Jewish law and deride Jewish spirit, legend, theology. Others are wrapped up in the narrative and disregard the importance of law. If you are blind in one spiritual eye, you cannot reach Jerusalem.

Heschel set himself against those who insist Judaism is only about one thing. It is not only about God, or only about human beings; only about faith or only about worthy deeds; only about the future, or only about the past. Judaism is a tradition of parallax vision.

Heschel’s masterwork is, as Rabbi Tucker notes, “an impassioned argument for theological pluralism.” “Heavenly Torah” is a deeply learned, eloquent and extensive demonstration of the richness of a tradition that cannot be captured by one idea, movement or approach. In a world imperiled by theological fanaticism, Judaism’s deeper message is urgently required.