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The biblical approach to time in the teaching of Abraham Joshua Heschel²

Time is a very important issue in every person's life. The passage of time prompts us to ask questions: What is the essence of time? What to do to experience our time deeply? How to use the time of our life? How can we become the witnesses of eternity to those whom God puts on the path of our life? How to educate children and young people so that they treat the time of their lives consciously and responsibly? How to experience time to open up to the eternity that God gives? We can often hear the commercial saying »time is money«. However, it does not exhaust the richness of this reality, which is time, because *de facto* – »time is Love«. The question about the essence of time includes further questions about its beginning and end, its relationship with matter and its relationship with space. The key here is to notice the connection between God's saving action and time. God's Revelation takes place in time. The God of Israel is the God of events who saves man from physical and spiritual slavery, leading him to eternal freedom. Therefore, it is justified to say about the so-called theological approach to time.

Abraham Joshua Heschel distinguishes between a process and an event in human life: »A process is something that occurs regularly, according to a relatively stable pattern; the event is unusual, irregular ... Processes are typical, events are exceptional ... Man lives in the order of events, not only in the order of processes. It is a spiritual order.«³ Rabbi Heschel emphasizes that in the modern world, person loses his theological perspective on time and often remains blind to spiritual reality. Man often shapes concepts in his own image and likeness. He perceives reality in a sen-

sual way, reifying God himself. Time also seems unsubstantial and insubstantial, as if it were not real at all.⁴ Very often human being forgets about holiness that hovers over all things, that makes them look to us in some moments like objects of transcendent meditation, as if all external life were embraced by an inner life.⁵ The Bible emphasizes the truth that the source of everything that exists and happens on earth is timeless God. Therefore, all words expressing activity, related to the passage of time, have a character indicating some existential relationship to God. According to Rabbi Heschel, the Bible is more concerned with time than with space. The biblical authors pay more attention to generations and events than to countries and things.⁶

The book of Ecclesiastes distinguishes different times related to human existence:

»There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven; A time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to tear down, and a time to build up. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing. A time to search, and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep, and a time to throw away. A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; A time to be silent, and a time to speak. A time to love, and a time to hate; A time for war, and a time for peace« (Eccl 3:1-8).

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² In this English-language article, the format (footnotes and bibliography) has been left in the international citation style.

³ A. J. Heschel, *Kim jest człowiek*. Łódź 2018, p. 84–85.

⁴ A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*. Kraków 2009, 26. See also: J. Lichten, *Abraham Joshua Heschel – życie i dzieło*. In: *Biuletyn Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Teologii i Filozofii Chrześcijańskiej*, 5 (1975), pp. 61–70; A. J. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*. New York 1996, pp. 395–412; W. Szczepiński, *Abrahama Joshuy Heschela filozofia człowieka*. Lublin 2000.

In the Hebrew Bible, three most important Hebrew terms are used to designate time:

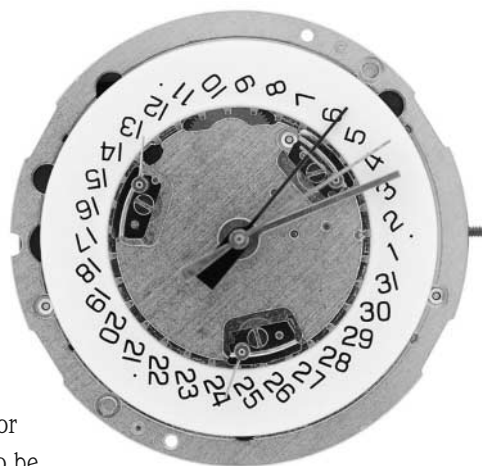
- 1/ *et* (a specific moment of time), e.g. Ecclesiastes 3:2 (»There is a time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted«). It defines an ongoing situation; indicates content and not the passage of time. The Septuagint translates this term as *kairos* and *'ora*;
- 2/ *mo'ed* (celebration time), e.g. Num 28:2: »You shall be careful to present My offering, My food for My offerings by fire, of a soothing aroma to Me, at their appointed time.«;
- 3/ *yom* (day) e.g. the day of creation – Gen 1:5 »And there was evening and there was morning, one day«.

The beginning of the creation of the world, mentioned in the first verses of the Book of Genesis, is also the beginning of time. The world has its beginning in time. God the Almighty Creator himself resides in eternity, which is beyond time. The biblical words about the creation of heaven and earth are not words that inform about something, but words of delight. The story of creation does not describe how the world came into being, but is a song about the glory of the world's creation. The biblical text expresses this well: »And God saw that it was good« (Genesis 1:25).⁷

God established time as the course of events. The changing nature of time is contrasted with the eternity and immutability of God. The Psalmist says it well: »My days are like a lengthened shadow; And I wither away like grass. But Thou, o Lord, dost abide forever; And Thy name to all generations. Thou wilt arise *and* have compassion

on Zion; For it is time to be gracious to her, For the appointed time has come« (Psa 102:12-13).

As a measure of the passage of time, God established the astronomical cycle of celestial bodies, created on the fourth day: »Then God said, »Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years.« (Gen 1:14). After each of the six days of creation there is a refrain: »And so there was evening and morning – the first day, the second day ... the sixth day« (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). After mentioning God's rest on the seventh day, this refrain ending the day is missing. There may be an indication here that the seventh day – God's day of rest – never ends, nor does God's presence among his people. The rabbi Heschel particularly emphasizes the spiritual dimension of Sabbath: »Sabbath is the most precious gift that humanity has received from the treasury of God. Throughout the week we think: the spirit is too far away and we succumb to spiritual laziness, at best we pray: »Send us at least a little of your spirit.« On the Sabbath day the spirit stands and asks: »Receive from me all perfection ...« According to Heschel, the Sabbath both preceded and culminated all creation. In this way, the Sabbath is entirely of the spirit that gives birth to this world.⁸ Only those who know



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5 Erlewine, Robert (ed.), *Thunder in the Soul: To Be Known by God* – A. J. Heschel. New York 2021, p. 13.

6 A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*, p. 29; See also: J.C. Merkle, *The Genesis of Faith: The Depth Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*. New York 1985.

7 A. J. Heschel, *Kim jest człowiek*, p. 193.

8 A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*, p. 46–47.

how to fill their time with spirit can experience eternity.⁹

The first description of the creation of the world and man ends with a mention of the seventh day of creation, which mentions God's rest: »Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made« (Gen 2:1-3).

In Genesis 2:2a, the Masoretic text mentions the seventh day: »And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done.« Important translations such as the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Peshitta contain a variant setting the time at this point as the sixth day. Some modern translations also adopt this variant. Such a correction of the text could have been caused by the intention to show God who finishes all his activities already on the sixth day and does nothing on the seventh day: Gen 2:2b: »And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.« The verb »rested« (*shabbat*) means »to stop«, »to finish«, »to rest«.

The idea of rest may be related to the idea of cessation of activity. In other words: Rest begins when activity ceases. In this approach, rest does not mean completely abandoning all activities, but it is a break from a specific activity in which a person was previously engaged. The use of the verb *shabbat* in our context does not speak of God's rest, the motive of which would be fatigue and toil, but the cessation of activity in a work

that has been completed. It is not fatigue, but the completion of the creative work that causes God's rest. Even on the seventh day, God does not dispense from dominion and commitment to the world he created. According to rabbi Heschel, who remains faithful to the tradition of the ancient rabbis, just as heaven and earth were created during six days, *menucha* (rest) was created on Sabbath. Only after its creation was the universe complete. According to rabbi Heschel, the term *menucha* means something more than just taking a break from work and activities. It is a necessary and positive reality that is created by God so that the world can be complete.¹⁰

A. J. Heschel, finding a deeper meaning of the term *menucha* in the biblical context, compares it to »happiness« in which there is harmony, rest, peace and respite. This is a state in which there is no conflict, war, fear and distrust. Job used this term to describe the state after death that he longed for: »For now I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest, with kings and with counsellors of the earth, who rebuilt ruins for themselves; Or with princes who had gold, who were filling their houses with silver. Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be, As infants that never saw light« (Job 3:13-16).

Menucha is the essence of a happy life. The Psalmist expresses it well: »The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters (the waters of the *menucha*). He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.« (Ps 23:1-3).¹¹

The seventh day, which differs from the other six days in that God completes the work of creation, is distinguished by God in a special way through blessing and sanctification: »Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it« (Gen 2:3). God blesses and sanctifies the time. The Hebrew verb *barak* means the act of blessing. In Hebrew, the root *barak* originally means »knee« and »vital force of the sexual organs«. In the biblical tradition, a blessing appears as a gift concerning the creative and vital power of God. The Greek terms »eu-logia« and the Latin »bene-dictio« emphasize the aspect of »speaking well« in the blessing. Blessing, then, can be seen as a reality that includes gift and word. The blessing transcends matter, because what it gives is not in the sphere of possession, but in the sphere of being. The source of blessing is the creative power of God that gives life and fertility. In the Hebrew Bible, the term *berakah* (blessing) is often combined with the term »shalom« (peace, prosperity, life fulfillment). Biblical authors describing the blessing in figurative language compare it to a blooming paradise garden (Sir 11:22; 40:17) and life-giving water (Gen 49:25; Sir 39:22). The psalmist emphasizes that God's blessing flows with abundance and life (Ps 65:10-14).

In the Aramaic Bible – Targum Neofiti 1 – there is a beautiful description of the blessing given to Joseph by Jacob. In this description, one can recognize various components referred to by biblical authors to blessing, such as: the Word, fertility, dew, rain, heaven, the springs of the abyss: »May the Word (*Memra*) of the God of your father be your help, and may the God of Heaven bless you with the best dew and rain falling from the heavens – from above, and blesses you with the springs

of the abyss that rise up from the earth – from below. Blessed be the breasts from which you suckled and the womb in which you were« (TN Gen 49:25).¹²

In the biblical perspective, God's blessing is always associated with some function to be fulfilled. Blessing creates communion between God and creation. God's blessing on the seventh day shows the special function of this day and emphasizes the special relationship of this time with the Creator.

The second term »holy« (*qadosh*) is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to time: Gen 2:3a: »Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it« (Gen 2:3). The term *qadosh* includes the idea of separation from the earthly and the temporal. In relation to God, this term may include the ontic dimension (God as an eternal and transcendent being) and the moral dimension (God as free from any evil). God appears as the source of all holiness. There is no holiness independent of Him who, as the prophet Isaiah says, is thrice holy: »And one [Seraph] called out to another and said, ›Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory« (Isa 6:3). In relation to people, things, places and time, the term *qadosh* (holy) means separation from the profane sphere and belonging to God who as the source of holiness, has the power to sanctify. Holiness in the biblical perspective appears as a constant process of creating community with God – the Holy One of saints and breaking away from everything that is sinful and unclean.

According to A. J. Heschel, the sacred is perceived thanks to the sense of what I sacred. According to him, to have a sense of the sacred is to feel it

¹² Wróbel, Mirosław S., Targum Neofiti 1: Księga Rodzaju. Lublin 2014, p. 500–501.



and have a sense of what is dear to God himself.¹³

According to A. J. Heschel, one of the most distinguished terms in the Hebrew Bible is the term »holy« (*kadosh*). This word can best represent the mystery and majesty of the Almighty.¹⁴ The holiness of the Sabbath is a preview of the holiness that will be experienced in eternity: »The world to come is characterized by the same kind of holiness that the Sabbath has in this world.¹⁵ Rabbi Heschel claimed that »Whoever does not learn to enjoy the taste of Sabbath while in this world... will not be able to enjoy the taste of eternity in the hereafter.«¹⁶ The rabbi connects the holy time of Sabbath with the resurrection of the soul: »Every seventh day a miracle occurs – the resurrection of the soul, the soul of man and the soul of all things.«¹⁷

In the biblical description of the creation of the world, God sanctifies the seventh day – this indicates the distinction of this day from the other six days and the special relationship that God has to this day. This day belongs to God in a special way. The earth's situation as *tohu wawohu* (disorder and desolation) described at the beginning of the creation narrative in Genesis 1:2 is rectified on the

seventh day, which is completely given over to the Creator as a day of harmony and fullness. The sacredness of the cycles established by God is expressed in the special observance of the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8-11), the new moon festival (Isa 1:13-14), the feast of firstfruits (Exodus 23:16), the 7-year sabbatical year (Leviticus 25:1-4) and the 49-year jubilee year (Leviticus 25:8-13). According to rabbi Heschel, the highest goal of spiritual life is to turn to sacred moments: »Spiritual life begins to fade away when we cease to feel the splendor of what is eternal in time.«¹⁸

The text in Exodus 20:11 refers to the seventh day of creation as God's rest. In this text, the term *shabbat* is replaced by the term *nuah*: »For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy« (Exod 20:11). The term *nuah* is used to describe rest associated with security, peace and stability. This is well illustrated by the text of Deuteronomy 12:10, which speaks of Israel's rest in the Promised Land: »When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security.« This term is used in the Hebrew Bible to mean God's resting place. This place in the history of the chosen people is first the Tent of Meeting, and then the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 6:41; Ps 132:7-14).

Intertextual contacts and parallels are visible between the text describing God's rest on the seventh day after His creative work and the text describing the construction of the Tent of Meeting:

¹³ A. J. Heschel, *Kim jest człowiek*, p. 94.

¹⁴ A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*, p. 32–33.

¹⁵ A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*, p. 123. The rabbi quotes the Mechilta to Exo 31:17.

¹⁶ A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*, p. 124–125.

¹⁷ A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*, p. 136.

¹⁸ A. J. Heschel, *Szabat*, p. 28.

Book of Genesis

Gen 2:1 *Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.*

Gen 2:2 And by the seventh day *God completed His work* which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

Gen 2:3 Then *God blessed the seventh day* and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Book of Exodus

Exo 39:32 *Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed;* and the sons of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses; so they did.

Exo 40:33 And he erected the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the veil for the gateway of the court. Thus *Moses finished the work.*

Exo 39:43 And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the Lord had commanded, this they had done. So *Moses blessed them.*

God’s transcendence, His participation in the history of the world is emphasized. The entire past of the nation of Israel is the work of God – He leads His nation (Ps 43:2). Therefore, time in the Old Testament is historical. The past must be considered so that, in a sense, it can be inhabited. The Psalmist expresses it well: »I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy doings; I muse on the work of Thy hands.« (Psa143:5). The »Lord’s Day« has a special place in the history of the chosen nation. The

The parallels regarding the completion of the construction of the Tent of Meeting and the Jerusalem temple as God’s place of rest with the creative action of God who rests after his work may indicate the connection in the Jewish consciousness of these fundamental events in the life of humanity and in the life of the chosen nation.

Apart from time indicating cyclical returns (movements of the stars, the Sun, the Moon, seasons or holidays), there is time as a linear course of history. The history of human history is the discovery over time of God’s eternal plan for man and the world. After the Fall, God Himself first gave people the promise of a Savior coming into the world. This fact directs all human history, gives it purpose and meaning. In addition to

prophets speak of it as the last day, the day of final judgment, after which there will be a new relationship between man and God (Isa 11:1-9).

In the biblical pages, a distinction is made between *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos* means the continuous flow of time. It is used to specify a point, a place on the timeline in which something important happens, e.g. years, days, hours. *Kairos* means the saving action of God in the history of salvation. This saving action of God is experienced within the framework of chronologically flowing history. No two hours are the same, because each one is unique, unique and precious – given at this very moment. A. J. Heschel taught that in a technological civilization time is used to acquire space. However, »having more« does not mean »being more«. Time de facto becomes the heart of existence.¹⁹

19 A. J. Heschel, Szabat, p. 23.

Biblical time also contains an eschatological dimension as a time of waiting for the end of history. In the Jewish context, Passover celebrated every year is the embodiment of freedom from Egyptian slavery. The exodus becomes real during the celebrated holiday. One can see here the experience of anamnesis – the realization here and now of time experienced in the past. In the Christian context – God's Incarnate Word placed the salvation of the human race in time. The risen Christ, appearing to the disciples, said: »And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age« (Matt 28:20).

In the light of the Bible, we can see the great task for every person to fill our time with the spirit, to transform the time given to us by God on earth into eternity. Spiritual life disappears when a person ceases to feel the splendor of what is eternal in time. The Bible understands the diverse nature of time. No two hours are the same. Every moment is unique and only given once in our lives. Every moment is unique and infinitely precious. In life, we may feel a constant rush in the fight against time. But also in life, when we open ourselves to spiritual values, we can often stop and experience eternity.

By going deeper into our spiritual life, we can experience that God has implanted eternity into the life of each of us. Eternity is accessed by those who fill the time given to them with spirit in their lives! By touching eternity, we can experience that it is the moment of resurrection of the dormant spirit in our souls. Thoughts and words then become too small to express this experience of eternity in our lives – the *kairos* of the coming God who descends from Heaven to earth.

People of the 21st century very often believe that the earth is our mother, that time is money, and profit is our inseparable friend. Meanwhile, the Word of God teaches us that God is our father, that time is life, and our inseparable friend is spirit.²⁰ Time is God's gift to humanity. Time is a grace thanks to which we can discover the face of God as a loving Father. Time, according to Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, remains a constant challenge for humanity: »Time is the greatest challenge for man. We are all part of a procession through his kingdom that will never end, but we are unable to gain a foothold in it. His reality is separate and distant from us.«²¹

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Antisemitismus und Bildung

Antisemitische Kontinuitäten in Bildern

Der gegenwärtige Antisemitismus speist sich aus jahrhundertealten Feindbildern. Häufig wird er aber gar nicht erkannt, da er über Umwege kommuniziert wird. Das gilt vor allem für den israelbezogenen Antisemitismus. Mit diesem Buch aus der Reihe „Antisemitismus und Bildung“ werden die Wandlungen und die Beständigkeit des Antisemitismus anhand von Bildvergleichen und -analysen veranschaulicht. Dabei werden Motive und Mechanismen der antisemitischen Feindbildkonstruktion aus der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart rekonstruiert. Für die pädagogische Auseinandersetzung wird aufgezeigt, wie sich Antisemitismus dechiffrieren und begegnen lässt.



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In der Reihe „Antisemitismus und Bildung“ erscheinen empirische, didaktische und theoretische Analysen zur Aufklärung und Prävention von Antisemitismus in Bildungskontexten. Die Reihe wird herausgegeben von Dr. Marc Grimm und Prof. Dr. Stefan Müller.