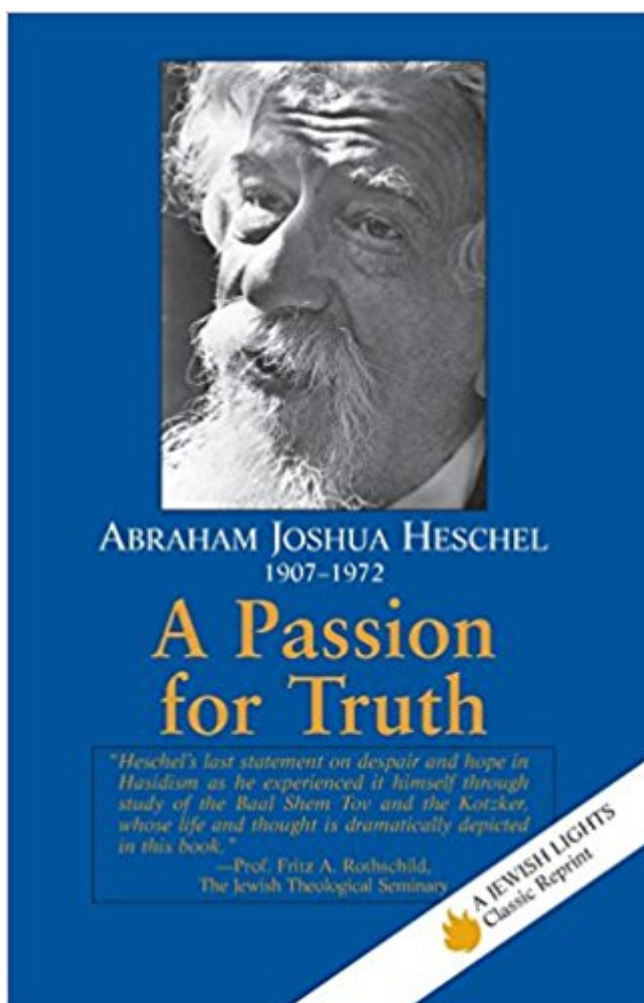


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# A Passion For Truth (Jewish Lights Classic Reprint)



## Synopsis

It is comparatively easy to preach joy and fervor, but to demand Truth is like shaping marble without tools. And so [the Kotzker] went looking for a few surging people and called loudly upon their souls to bend their conceit and see the Truth beneath the soil.... This was not a philosophical inquiry into the nature of Truth but a scrutiny of men's lives in relation to Truth. Religion, the Kotzker maintained, was not simply an act of adopting a system of beliefs and certain modes of conduct; test and trial were needed, and one had to ascertain through introspection whether one's beliefs were genuine or not, and whether one acted out Truth or lived a life of pretense....

Kierkegaard made it his task "to reintroduce Christianity into Christendom." The Kotzker sought to reintroduce authenticity to Jewish life. Kierkegaard's posthumous impact has been powerful. But has the Kotzker affected Jewish self-understanding? From A Passion for Truth

## Book Information

Series: Jewish Lights Classic Reprint

Paperback: 366 pages

Publisher: Jewish Lights; F First Edition Used edition (April 1, 1995)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1879045419

ISBN-13: 978-1879045415

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 11 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #876,703 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #92 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Hasidism #470 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Kabbalah & Mysticism #532 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Mysticism

## Customer Reviews

LJ's reviewer asserted that at the time of its publication this was "probably the best book on Hasidism to appear in the English language." Though it is not for the casual reader, those who undertake it "will be charmed by the work's depth of feeling and comprehensive scope" (LJ 8/73). Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

A Passion for Truth presents a surprising parallel study of two figures, the Hasidic tzaddik (righteous

man, spiritual leader), Reb Menachem Mendl of Kotzk (1787-1859), and the Christian mystic, father of existentialism, Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)...Rabbi Heschel is never heavy and all that he presents in this aphoristic, quotable book is cast in terms that touch all our lives. -- Edmund Fuller, The Wall Street Journal Probably the best book on Hasidism to appear in the English language. -- Library Journal, September 15, 1995, and August 1973

As much autobiographical as it is a biographical search for the dual roots of Hasidism, the reader is taken with the Baal Shem Tov to the forest to read poetry to bears and birds in one breath and then to the brooding existentialism of Rebbe Mendl where nothing matters more than speaking the truth, no matter what. Heschel's A Passion for Truth is a work of art.

This is a magnificent study of the life of the Kotzker. There was a bit too much about the life of Kierkegaard included but it was interesting nevertheless. One odd thing is that the book makes reference in several footnotes to a work of AJ Heschel's solely on the Kotzker that I don't believe was ever published due to Heschel's sudden death. There should be an editor's note explaining this to readers. I have searched and searched for it and can't find it so I can only imagine that he died before it was published. But if you are interested in the life and times of the Kotzker, definitely buy this book - it will move you immensely.

The book analyses the thoughts of the Kotzker Rebbe by contrasting and comparing him to the Danish theologian and philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. Few men could ever have conceived and written such an incisive work; no one else could have approached it with such an inner feel for the Hasidic tradition and yet, with a mind open to the teachings of Christian theologians. Every thought resonates with Heschel's major "popular" statements of religion and Jewish philosophy, "God in Search of Man", and "Man is not Alone". It is obvious from reading this work that Heschel's own philosophy drew heavily on the Kotzker Rebbe's teachings - strip away the adornments and seek the essence and truth. It is quite unfortunate that Heschel's major work on the Kotzker was never translated from the original Yiddish. Until such translation is published, this book alone provides both an incisive look at theological radicalism and a sense of the misdirection of most modern theories of religion.

This book examines the accounts of two men one a Jewish Rabbi and one a Christian theologian message which calls attention to apathy and a lack contrition in not seeking Truth and an intimate

relationship with God allows the reader to examine the intricacies of faith and the societal downfall of mankind to present day.

Great!

This book reads as one who loves Heschel would want it to read. Every topic is critical to the construction of a spiritual consciousness.

Can't find a better formulation of the ideas of the Kotzker. Great legacy.

This book is built around two sets of comparison. In the first the Baal Shem Tov is compared to Menahem Mendl of Kotzk. The sharp contrasts between the two are highlighted. The Baal Shem came to the world to bring it light and blessing. He raised the spirits of the disheartened and depressed Jewish people, and gave them a new hope, a new sense of joy, a new sense of their own value a new sense of their love of God and God's love of them. The Kotzker came into the world in search of truth. The expansive generous all - inclusive spirit of the Baal Shem is contradicted by the harsh truth- seeking sarcastic and often bitter soul of the Kotzker. As the Baal Shem opens worlds the Kotzker closes them. The Baal Shem spread joy and the Kotzker lived the last twenty years of his life in the seclusion of his own depression and disappointment. The second part of the book compares the Kotzker with Kierkegaard. Putting doctrinal Jewish and Christian differences aside Heschel focuses on the great similarities between these two truth- seekers. Sarcastic at times, filled with irony towards themselves and humanity they each in his own way seek a religion of Truth. They both seek a religion of higher purity. Kierkegaard condemns Christendom as making little room for the true individual inward subjective Christian- the Kotzker cuts himself off from the masses seeking his guidance, and searches for truth by himself alone. These two individuals each of whom praises a kind of solitude and solitary quest for truth set themselves apart from the mass of mankind. Kierkegaard's renunciation of ordinary married life, his rejection of his fiancée Regina , are paralleled by the Kotzker's withdrawal into his own study away from the ways of the world. Still there are strong differences between the two. The Kotzker does not deny the importance of family life, is not devoid of friends and supporters. Still what fascinates Heschel is the integrity of the two truth- seekers, their uncompromising search to find the true way in worship of God. Heschel writes this book with astounding clarity and beauty. It is clear in his largely loving tone to all the major figures that he himself bears the Hasidic spirit of his grandfather , the Apter Rebbe,

who was called 'The Lover of Israel'. I found this to be a profound study which at the same time was clear and beautiful. A holy book from a holy writer.

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