

Praying With My Legs – Project Description for Industry Roundtables

(Final Estimated Running Time: 1 hr, 52 min)

Logline:

Praying with My Legs: The Radically Amazing Life & Times of Abraham Joshua Heschel is a feature-length documentary exploring the life, thought and transformative impact of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972): scholar, mystic, devout Jew, fervent advocate for social justice and one of the most powerful voices of the American religious left in the 20th century.

Synopsis:

He was among the most widely respected Jewish thinkers of the 20th Century, author of "God In Search of Man" and "The Prophets." Yet Heschel was compelled by his religious beliefs to leave the confines of his study to fight for human dignity – immersing himself in the struggle for civil rights, the religious opposition to the war in Vietnam, and the dismantling of two thousand years of Catholic anti-Semitism at the Second Vatican Council. A pioneer in inter-religious dialogue, he taught, "We must choose between interfaith or internihilism ... no religion is an island." His call for reverence for the innate dignity of every human being is searingly relevant in our world of bitter partisanship and demonization of the other. Heschel's is a voice of conscience for all time.

Project Timeline:

An early work-in-progress was featured at Brandeis University's Heschel Centennial Conference in 2007. In 2015, a 15-minute excerpt, "Abraham Joshua Heschel and Moses" was included in a major exhibition on the biblical lawmaker at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris. A 30-minute excerpt was shown at *Cinematters: The New York Social Justice Film Festival* in 2020. The film is over 90% shot, with only two interviews and pickup materials remaining to be filmed. I currently have an 80-minute rough cut that will be enlarged to an anticipated 2 hours as I incorporate new and already shot material and re-shape the narrative accordingly. The film can be finished in 9- 10 months once the necessary completion funding is obtained.

Budget Summary:

The total anticipated budget for the film is **\$637,626**, of which **\$381,570** (60%) has been secured and expended. Major sources of funding have been the Righteous Persons Foundation (**\$25,000** direct grant plus **\$25,000** matching), the Alan B. Slifka Foundation (**\$20,000**), the Kekst Family Foundation (**\$19,000**) and the Marina and Andrew Lewin Foundation (**\$10,000**). **\$18,000** has been raised from over a hundred individual contributors, and I have personally supported the film in cash and in-kind contributions upwards of **\$150,000**. ABC News has generously donated the use of file footage, the rights to which are estimated to otherwise cost **\$100,000**. Funds needed for completion come to **\$256,056**.

Authorship/Positionality Statement:

As a multiple award-winning filmmaker whose earlier documentary on a Jewish topic, *Kaddish*, made David Edelstein's Top 10 Films list and a Sundance Award in Documentary, and with Alan Berliner as Creative Consultant on the film, I feel eminently qualified to see this film to a successful and noteworthy completion. As in my previous work, the story is character-driven, with a minimum of narration.