"One Ought to Pray, Day and Night, for the Thousands": Etty Hillesum's Approach to Prayer and Hasidic Thought

Silvia Richter

Etty (Esther) Hillesum's (1914–1943)[1] diaries, published in the Netherlands for the first time in 1981, have since been translated into 18 languages and received worldwide attention. Nevertheless, the academic study of her thought is still far from exhausted. In particular, the influence of Jewish thought on her work has been little studied. One reason for this is the fact that, apart from the Bible, she herself does not cite any explicitly Jewish sources, but rather Rilke, Augustine, and Dostoevsky, whose influence has been well studied (cf. Woodhouse 2017; Grimmelikhuizen 2016; Gérard 2007; Bercken 2010). In contrast to comparisons between her work and that of other Jewish thinkers – such as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas (cf. Coetsier 2014) – this chapter, based on the quoted sources Rilke and Augustine, would like to direct special attention to Hasidic concepts that up to now have not been associated with Etty Hillesum's spirituality and her approach to prayer. This new theoretical approach reveals a hitherto undiscovered aspect between Jewish thought and Etty Hillesum's philosophical and spiritual quest.

Although at first glance prayer does not play a prominent role in her diaries – between the descriptions of everyday life under the occupation, her daily routine with its worries and hardships, her impressions of reading and reflections on her friends – it becomes more and more important over time. Through the pages of her diaries and letters, a great spiritual quest shines through, which finds expression both in her writing and in her life. However, it is obvious that Etty Hillesum is not a "Jewish thinker" in the classical sense. She came from an

1 I am indebted to Prof. Daniel Krochmalnik (School of Jewish Theology, University of Potsdam), who first introduced me to the life and work of Etty Hillesum, for his inspiring discussions and comments on this work at various stages.

assimilated household and grew up far from practicing Judaism, although her paternal grandfather played an active role in the Amsterdam Jewish community (Koelemeijer 2022: 48–49). At school, she also studied Hebrew and occasionally "attended the meetings of a Zionist young people's group in Deventer" (Smelik 2018: 25); a recently published study highlights her interests and involvement in communist circles as well (cf. Beuker 2020). And yet, driven by her own spiritual search and the circumstances of the time, she increasingly found her way to an individual approach to prayer and even to a personal dialog with God. Similar to Augustine in his "Confessions," who consistently addresses God in the second person singular ("Great art *Thou*, O Lord […]," cf. Augustine, Book 1, I.1., emphasis added), Etty also addresses God directly. Furthermore, she sees herself inspired by Augustine not only in style, but also in his spiritual attitude, as she points out on October 9, 1942: "I am going to read Saint Augustine again. He is so austere and so fervent. And so full of simple devotion in his love letters to God. Truly those are the only love letters one ought to write: *love letters to God*." (Hillesum 2014: 880, emphasis added)

In order to find access to God, however, she must first discover a way to access her inner herself and to find an inner peace. This is one of the reasons why Etty Hillesum started writing a diary in the first place: on March 9, 1941, most likely on the advice of her therapist – the German-Jewish emigrant Julius Spier (1887–1942), a psychoanalyst trained by C.G. Jung – Etty Hillesum took up the practice of writing a diary, which she would continue from then on (Pleshoyano 2010: 45). Her diaries start with a letter written in German to "Lieber Herr S.!" (Hillesum 2014: 1) – also in the following, Spier will only ever be addressed as "S." – and also become a space for dialog with herself. Family life was chaotic and destabilizing for her (Woodhouse 2009: 6–13). As she came from a dysfunctional family that did not allow her to grow into a stable young woman, she sought refuge in writing, to have a focal point for her feelings and thoughts. Her pen became a compass that led her further and further inside herself. She expressed this using a term from Rilke's poetry ("*Weltinnenraum*," inner universe) at various points in her diary: "A few lines from *Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus allen Dingen*: Durch alle Wesen reicht der *eine* Raum: Weltinnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will, ich seh hinaus, und *in* mir wächst der Baum." (Hillesum 2014: 444; cf. Rilke 2004: 878; Schrijvers 2018: 319)

The feeling of inwardness and, at the same time, a deep connection with the whole environment, especially with nature, is reflected from very early on in her diary. After the first few months of writing, she notes her turn to what

she calls a kind of "quiet hour." Every morning, she wants to withdraw from everything for a while to find her inner peace: "I think that I'll do it anyway: I'll 'turn inward' for half an hour each morning before work, and listen to my inner voice. Lose myself. You could also call it meditation. I am still a bit wary of that word. But anyway, why not? A quiet half-hour within yourself." (Hillesum 2014: 94) Nevertheless, she is aware that the desired calm does not come in the blink of an eye, as she points out: "It has to be learned. A lot of unimportant inner litter and bits and pieces have to be swept out first. Even a small head can be piled high inside with irrelevant distractions. […] So let this be the aim of the meditation: to turn one's innermost being into a vast empty plain, with none of that treacherous undergrowth to impede the view. So that *something of 'God' can enter you*, just as if there is something of 'God' in Beethoven's Ninth. So that something of 'love' can enter you too." (ibid: 94, emphasis added)

This opening to transcendence and finding a conscious and intense focus for prayer is a central point of what is called *kavanah* in Jewish thought (cf. Enelow 1913; Krochmalnik 2023). To emphasize just a few nuances of this rich term, it can be translated, depending on the context, as "preparation, direction, intention, orientation, motivation, attention, concentration, meditation, introspection (inwardness)" (Krochmalnik 2023: 495). In fact, Maimonides is very strict regarding *kavanah* when it comes to prayer, as he points out: "Any prayer that is not [recited] with proper intention (*kavanah*) is not prayer." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ahawa 4,15) It is therefore of great importance to prepare very carefully for prayer in order to make the body and mind receptive to it, as Louis Jacobs points out:

> Preparation (*hakhanah*, plural *hakhanot*, "preparations") for prayer occupies an important role in Hasidic life. Precisely because prayer had so important a role to play it should not be engaged in, taught the Hasidim, without eager anticipation beforehand. Prayer had to be preceded by a period of preparation during which the mind would be cleared of unworthy thoughts and the body cleansed of impurities. (Jacobs 1978: 46)

For Etty Hillesum, what is careful preparation for prayer in the Hasidic context was to find a gesture and attitude that made her *receptive* to prayer. One could say that for her the gesture was there even before the prayer: that is, first she found a form (kneeling) – and then the content (prayer). It is interesting to see that, coming from an assimilated household, she at first had no idea what it

meant to pray: what happens when a person prays and how does it actually work? She did not hesitate to ask her mentor and therapist Julius Spier:

> […] shameless and brazen as always, wanting to know everything there is to know, I asked, "What exactly do you say when you pray?" And he was suddenly overcome with embarrassment, this man who always has clear, glass-bright answers to all my most searching and intimate questions, and he said shyly: "That I cannot tell you. Not yet. Later." (Hillesum 2014: 294)

This did not, however, prevent Etty Hillesum from discovering her own personal approach to prayer. This happened, first, in finding a form that came suddenly, without her consciously looking for it. At the very beginning of her diary, on Sunday, March 16, 1941, we find a first reference to the gesture of kneeling and the feeling of peace that it gives her – a kind of unconscious, spontaneous healing from within: "As I sat there like that in the sun, I bowed my head unconsciously as if to take in even more of that new feeling for life. Suddenly I knew deep down how someone can sink impetuously to his knees and find peace there, his face hidden in his folded hands." (ibid: 42) At the end of the same year, on December 14, 1941, the gesture of kneeling is no longer just a random, spontaneous act, but becomes a regular habit and, moreover, something that she is forced to do, as she highlights:

> Last night, shortly before going to bed, I suddenly went down on my knees in the middle of this large room, between the steel chairs and the matting. Almost automatically. Forced to the ground *by something stronger than myself*. Some time ago I said to myself: "I am a kneeler in training." I was still embarrassed by this act, as intimate as gestures of love that cannot be put into words either, except by a poet. (ibid: 294, emphasis added)

It is interesting to mention in this context, that Simone Weil, only a few years earlier, had a very similar experience of being forced to kneel down, as she points out in a letter to her spiritual advisor Father Perrin:

> In 1937 I had two marvelous days at Assisi. There, alone in the little twelfth-century Romanesque chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli, an incomparable marvel of purity where Saint Francis often used to pray, something stronger than I was compelled me for the first time in my life to go down on my knees. (Weil 2009: 26; cf. Bowie 1995)

For Etty Hillesum, however, the gesture of kneeling down is not something purely "spiritual," but it can rather be characterized as "bodily prayer" (*leibliches Beten*, cf. Bühler 2014), as she emphasizes on April 3, 1942: "It has become a gesture embedded in my body, needing to be expressed from time to time. And I remember: 'The girl who could not kneel,' and the rough coconut matting in the bathroom." (Hillesum 2014: 516) By "the girl who could not kneel," she actually means herself: she intended to give her inner experience and spiritual development a literary form (for example, a novel) when she had time for it one day and this was the intended title. This literary elaboration tragically did not come about due to her murder by the Nazis in November 1943 (cf. Clement 2019).

To come back to our question of what Etty Hillesum's act of kneeling has to do with Hasidic thought and why it is so important to emphasize this gesture: firstly, I believe it is the key to Etty Hillesum's personal approach to prayer, and secondly, it opens up two other aspects associated with Hasidic thought: the concept of *hitbodedut* (literally: seclusion, loneliness, isolation) of Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav (1772–1810) and the individuality of personal belief that Hasidism emphasizes – an approach that has an echo in Etty Hillesum's spirituality. As she was well aware, kneeling is not particularly part of the Jewish religious tradition, and yet it gives her the strength she needs to get through difficult times, as she observes on October 10, 1942:

> I think that I can bear everything life and these times have in store for me. And when the turmoil becomes too great and I am completely at my wits' end, then I still have my folded hands and bended knee. A posture that is not handed down from generation to generation with us Jews. I have had to learn it the hard way. (Hillesum 2014: 880)

Kneeling in prayer provides her with a "safe space" to gather herself and build herself up. While the Jewish community in the Netherlands was exposed to increasing persecution and legal restrictions, Etty found refuge in her prayer. While the outer social space may increasingly disappear and dissolve, the inner space that prayer opens up for her becomes a wealth that no one can take away from her. She therefore compares prayer to a kind of portable "monastery cell" (*kloostercel*, cf. ibid: 583) into whose seclusion she can retreat when the outer world vanishes. With this in mind, she writes in her diary on May 18, 1942:

> The threat grows ever greater, and terror increases from day to day. I draw prayer round me like a dark protective wall, withdraw inside it as one might

> into a convent cell and then step outside again, calmer and stronger and more collected again. Withdrawing into the closed cell of prayer is becoming an ever-greater reality for me as well as a necessity. That inner concentration erects high walls around me within which I can find my way back to myself, gather myself together into one whole, away from all distractions. I can imagine times to come when I shall stay on my knees for days on end waiting until the protective walls are strong enough to prevent my going to pieces altogether, my being lost and utterly devastated. (ibid: 584)

Although being alone and living in segregation is generally an ideal among mystics in various religious movements, the Bratzlaver Hasidim stress particularly the ideal of *hitbodedut*. This concept goes back to the work "Likkutei Moharan," written by the founder of the Bratzlav Hasidic movement, Rabbi Nachman (cf. Buber 1988), a great-grandson of the founder of Hasidic Judaism, the Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760). According to Rabbi Nachman,

> to be in solitude is a supreme advantage and the most important ideal. This means that a man sets aside at least an hour or more during which he is alone in a room or in the field so that he can converse with the Maker [one's Creator] in secret, entreating and pleading in many ways of grace and supplication, begging God to bring him near to His service in truth. (Jacobs 1976: 63)

One should address God in one's mother tongue and speak to him as we would to a friend. Thus, it is not an asymmetrical relationship, but rather one at eye level, just as Etty Hillesum addresses God in her diaries. It has been pointed out, however, that it is in a way a "very unsophisticated approach to prayer" (Jacobs 1976: 64). However, Rabbi Nachman is today considered one of the most influential Hasidic rabbis in history: "The interest in his works and the pilgrimages to his grave in Uman are only partial indicators of how influential he has become." (Leshem 2014: 59)

In my view, Rabbi Nachman's ideal of *hitbodedut* and the "meditative technique in which the Hasid engages in free dialogue with God in his own language" (Leshem 2014: 60; cf. Mark 2009: 131–147) shows clear parallels with Etty Hillesum's approach to God. The boundary that prayer erects around her as a shelter and refuge is, however, never a barrier to the outside world – on the contrary. Her isolation in prayer did not result in an existence in an ivory tower, but rather in a special turning towards others, something she described in her diaries using a particular term:

> *Hineinhorchen* – I so wish I could find a Dutch equivalent for that German word. Truly, my life is one long hearkening unto myself and unto others, unto God. And if I say that I hearken, it is really God who hearkens inside me. The most essential and the deepest in me hearkening unto the most essential and deepest in the other. God to God. (Hillesum 2014: 830–832)

The inner dialog is thus not only expanded to the outer world, to nature and the fellow human being, but is actually acknowledging the *Shekhina* ("Divine Presence") in the world and in the relationship among men (Jacob 1978: 23; cf. Clement 2018).

Another aspect of Hasidism that I find strikingly echoed in Etty Hillesum's spirituality is that of the individuality of personal beliefs. Etty Hillesum did not care about religious authorities or how things were done according to the rules – she simply did them her way. It is precisely in this way that she remains so inspiring and groundbreaking for us today, as Patrick Woodhouse points out: "This makes her a woman for our time, when institutional religion is in decline and yet the hunger for authentic spirituality is more keenly felt than ever." (Woodhouse 2009: xiii) Regarding Hasidism, Martin Buber emphasized, especially in his work "The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism," the uniqueness of each individual human being, which results from the infinite richness of God's creation. This makes it impossible to prescribe a universally valid path to spirituality – everyone has to find their own way:

> Rabbi Baer of Radoshitz once said to his teacher, the "Seer" of Lublin: "Show me one general way to the service of God." The zaddik replied: "It is impossible to tell men what way they should take. For one way to serve God is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting, and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his heart draws him to, and then choose this way with all his strength." (Buber 1967: 15)

In this sense, Etty Hillesum was aware that she had to find her own way and she called this her own "rhythm," as if there were a melody deep within us that is only drowned out by the noise of the outside world and that we have to find again in order to be able to live in harmony with it and with ourselves. On December 12, 1941 she wrote in her diary:

> If only I listened to my own rhythm, and tried to live in accordance with it. Much of what I do is mere imitation, springs from a sense of duty or from pre-

> conceived notions of how people should behave. The only certainties about what is right and wrong are those that spring from sources deep inside oneself. (Hillesum 2014: 286)

In the same way that Buber highlights the uniqueness of spiritual beliefs, bound to every single human existence – "All men have access to God, but each man has a different access" (Buber 1967: 17) – Etty Hillesum sought and found her own personal prayer rhythm, her unique *nigun*, which, even in the transit camp Westerbork and in the face of death, tunes into the prayer of the whole world when one reads her dialog with God against the background of Hasidic spirituality: "Rabbi Nahman believes that every tree and every leaf and every blade of grass say their own prayers to God. Only the dead don't pray." (Wiesel 1996: 5)

The emphasis on Hasidic joie de vivre, not only when praying but in every little activity in everyday life (cf. Jacobs 1976: 62), is another parallel to Etty Hillesum's approach to spirituality. She was not only a deep thinker but also a life-affirming young woman, as evidenced by her numerous affairs with men, her intellectual open-mindedness, and her courage to go her own way even in difficult times. She felt connected to her environment and not only had a feeling for the *hitbodedut*, but also a strong sense of community (cf. Gur-Klein 2018).

Even in the Westerbork transit camp, where she was interned with her family, she did not lose her faith and did not blame God – on the contrary, she thanked him for the wealth and abundance he had given her. Even there, she was still able to pray, as she wrote in one of her last letters from Westerbork to her friend Henny Tideman on August 18, 1943, citing her own dialog with God:

> You have made me so rich, oh God, please allow me to share out with full hands. My life has been transformed, in a continuous dialogue with you, my God, one great dialogue. Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on your soil, my face turned toward your heaven, tears sometimes run down my face, tears of my emotion and inner gratitude looking for a way to express itself. At night, too, when I lie in my bed and rest in you, my God, tears of gratitude run down my face, and that is my prayer. […] I am not challenging You, oh God; my life is one great dialogue with You. I may never become the great artist I would really like to be, but I am already secure in You, God. Sometimes I wish to write down few words of wisdom, and some short and fascinating stories, but I always end up straight to the

> same, and single word: "God." And that word contains everything, and I do not need to say anything else. (Hillesum 2014: 1050)

Her life had turned into one long, "existential prayer": "One ought to pray, day and night, for the thousands. One ought not to be without prayer for even a single minute." (ibid: 876)

Finally, I would like to address a messianic perspective, which for me is reflected in Etty Hillesum's life and work. In the last pages of her diary, her existence takes on an almost Eucharistic attitude when she writes, on October 13, 1942: "I have broken my body like bread and shared it out among men. And why not, they were hungry and had gone without for so long." (ibid: 886) This attitude reflects an ethical sovereignty that no longer needs words to pray, but praises God in silence (cf. Borgna 2024: 43–47). Even the bodily gesture of kneeling is no longer necessary, nor is the communication of words. She takes responsibility for everyone and courageously writes in her diary about the situation:

> Of course, it is our complete destruction they want! But let us bear it with grace – […] At night, as I lay in the camp on my plank bed, surrounded by women and girls gently snoring, dreaming aloud, quietly sobbing and tossing and turning, women and girls who often told me during the day, "We don't want to think, we don't want to feel, otherwise we are sure to go out of our minds," I was sometimes filled with an infinite tenderness, and lay awake for hours letting all the many, too many impressions of a much-too-long day wash over me, and I prayed, "Let me be the thinking heart of these barracks." And that is what I want to be again. The thinking heart of a whole concentration camp. (Hillesum 2014: 874)

In conclusion, going beyond the perspective of Hasidic thought, I would like to draw attention to Emmanuel Levinas' Talmudic readings in light of Etty Hillesum's aforementioned statement. In "Difficult Freedom," in his commentaries on the final chapter of *Tractate Sanhedrin*, Levinas points out:

> Messianism is no more than this apogee in being, a centralizing, concentration or twisting back on itself of the Self [*Moi*]. And in concrete terms this means that each person acts as though he were the Messiah. Messianism is therefore not the certainty of the coming of a man who stops History. *It is my power to bear the suffering of all.* It is the moment when I recognize this

> power and my universal responsibility. (Levinas 1990: 90, emphasis added; cf. Krochmalnik 2022)

In fact, Levinas defines selfhood as "the fact of not escaping the burden imposed by the suffering of others"; being an I means "bearing all the responsibility of the world" (Levinas 1990: 89), similarly to Atlas, the figure in Greek mythology, who bears the whole world on his shoulders. In my opinion, Levinas' philosophical interpretation outlines a "messianic subjectivity," of which Etty Hillesum can give us an impressive example and lasting legacy in the extreme poverty and misery of the camp.

As Hetty Berg, Director of the Jewish Museum Berlin, points out, Etty Hillesum's writings remain up to today "one of the most important first-person documents on the deportation and internment of Jews from the Netherlands" (Berg 2023: 8). It is to be hoped that the complete translation of Etty Hillesum's work in German, which has only recently, in March 2023, been published, will provide new insights for research, also taking into account concepts from the field of Jewish thought that have received less attention to date but, as this essay has shown, can be fruitfully linked to her rich and innovative spirituality (cf. Hillesum 2023).

Bibliography

Augustine, The Confessions of Saint Augustine, transl. by E. B. Pusey (Edward Bouverie) (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm).

Bercken, Wil van den (2010): "Etty Hillesum's Russian Vocation and Spiritual Relationship to Dostoevsky." In: Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum. Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008, Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 147–171.

Berg, Hetty (2023): "Vorwort." In: Etty Hillesum, Ich will die Chronistin dieser Zeit werden. Sämtliche Tagebücher und Briefe 1941–1943, ed. by Klaas A. D. Smelik/Pierre Bühler, transl. by Christina Siever/Simone Schroth, München: C. H. Beck.

Beuker, Chris (2020): Etty Hillesum, verwevenheid met het communisme, Soesterberg: Uitgeverij Aspekt BV.

Borgna, Eugenio (2024): In ascolto del silenzio, Turin: Einaudi editore.

Bowie, Fiona (1995): "Modern Women Mystics: Etty Hillesum and Simone Weil." In: New Blackfriars 76/892, pp. 175–187.

Buber, Martin (1988 [1906]): The Tales of Rabbi Nachman, transl. by Maurice Friedman, with a new introduction by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Ze'ev Gries, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

Buber, Martin (1967 [1948]): The Way of Man According to the Teaching of Hasidism, New York: Citadel Press.

Bühler, Pierre (2014): "Leibliches Beten bei Etty Hillesum." In: Hermeneutische Blätter 2, pp. 91–99.

Clement, Marja (2018): "*Hineinhorchen* and Writing. The Language Use of Etty Hillesum." In: Klaas Smelik/Gerrit Van Oord/Jurjen Wiersma (eds.), Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influence of a Visionary Author, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 51–77.

Clement, Marja (2019): "The Girl Who Could Not Kneel. Etty Hillesum and the Turn Inward." In: Klaas Smelik (ed.), The Lasting Significance of Etty Hillesum's Writings. Proceedings of the Third International Etty Hillesum Conference at Middleburg, September 2018, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 139–155.

Coetsier, Meins G. S. (2014): The Existential Philosophy of Etty Hillesum. An Analysis of Her Diaries and Letters, Leiden/Boston: Brill.

Enelow, Hayman Gerson (1913): "Kawwana. The Struggle for Inwardness in Judaism." In: David Philipson (ed.), Studies in Jewish Literature Issued in Honor of Professor Kaufmann Kohler on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, Berlin: Georg Reimer, pp. 82–107 (https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/freimann/content/pageview/804606).

Gérard, Rémy (2007): "Etty Hillesum et Saint Augustin: l'influence d'un maître spirituel?" In: Recherches de Science Religieuse, 95/2, pp. 253–280.

Grimmelikhuizen, Frits (2016): Etty Hillesum leest Rainer Maria Rilke: de invloed van Rainer Maria Rilke op het kunstenaarschap van Etty Hillesum, Deventer: Uitgeverij Oorsprong.

Gur-Klein, Thalia (2018): "From Separation to Communitas. Etty Hillesum, A Jewish Perspective." In: Klaas Smelik/Gerrit Van Oord/Jurjen Wiersma (eds.), Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 333–360.

Hillesum, Etty (2014 [1986]): The Complete Works 1941–1943, Bilingual, Annotated and Unabridged, 2 vols., ed. by Klaas A. D. Smelik/Meins G. S. Coetsier, transl. by Arnold J. Pomerans, Maastricht: Shaker Publishing House.

Hillesum, Etty (2023 [1986]): Ich will die Chronistin dieser Zeit werden. Sämtliche Tagebücher und Briefe, 1941–1943, ed. by Klaas A. D. Smelik/

Pierre Bühler, with a foreword by Hetty Berg, transl. by Christina Siever/Simone Schroth, Munich: C. H. Beck.

Jacobs, Louis (1976): Hasidic Thought, New York: Behrman House.

Jacobs, Louis (1978 [1972]): Hasidic Prayer, New York: Schocken Books.

Koelemeijer, Judith (2022): Etty Hillesum: Het verhaal van haar leven, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Balans.

Krochmalnik, Daniel (2022): "Der Messias im rabbinischen Judentum." In: Walter Homolka/Juni Hoppe/Daniel Krochmalnik (eds.), Der Messias kommt nicht. Abschied vom jüdischen Erlöser, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, pp. 73–167.

Krochmalnik, Daniel (2023): "Kawwana. Sieben Bemerkungen zu einem Zentralbegriff der jüdischen Religiosität." In: Barbara Schmitz/Thomas Hieke/Matthias Ederer (eds.), Vor allen Dingen: Das Alte Testament – Festschrift für Christoph Dohmen, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, pp. 495–504.

Leshem, Zvi (2014): "Pouring Out Your Heart: Rabbi Nachman's Hitbodedut and Its Piaseczner Reveberations." In: Tradition. A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought 47/3, pp. 57–65.

Levinas, Emmanuel (1990 [1963]): Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism, trans. by Seán Hand, London: Athlone Press.

Maimonides, Moses (1170–1180): Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ahawa 4,15 (https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Prayer_and_the_Priestly_Blessing.4.15?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en).

Mark, Zvi (2009): Mysticism and Madness. The Religious Thought of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, London/New York: Continuum.

Pleshoyano, Alexandra (2010): "Etty Hillesum und Julius Spier: A 'Spirituality' on the Fringe of Religious Borders." In: Klaas A. D. Smelik/Ria van den Brandt/Meins G. S. Coetsier (eds.), Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum. Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, November 2008, Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 43–74.

Rilke, Rainer Maria (2004 [1957]): Die Gedichte, Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag.

Schrijvers, Piet (2018): "Etty Hillesum in Jewish Contexts." In: Klaas Smelik/Gerrit Van Oord/Jurjen Wiersma (eds.), Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influences of a Visionary Author, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 315–331.

Smelik, Klaas A. D. (2018): "A Short Biography of Etty Hillesum (1914–1943)." In: Klaas Smelik/Gerrit Van Oord/Jurjen Wiersma (eds.), Reading Etty Hillesum in Context: Writings, Life, and Influence of a Visionary Author, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 23–30.

Weil, Simone (2009 [1950]): Waiting for God, transl. by Emma Craufurd, New York: Harper Perennial.

Wiesel, Elie (1996): "Prayer and Modern Man." In: Gabriel H. Cohn/Harold Fisch (eds.), Prayer in Judaism. Continuity and Change, Northvale, NJ/London: Jason Aronson, pp. 3–11.

Woodhouse, Patrick (2009): Etty Hillesum: A Life Transformed, London: Bloomsbury.

Woodhouse, Patrick (2017): "The Influence of the Work of Rainer Maria Wilke on the Mind and Heart of Etty Hillesum." In: Klaas A. D. Smelik/Meins G. S. Coetsier/Jurjen Wiersma (eds.), The Ethics and Religious Philosophy of Etty Hillesum. Proceedings of the Etty Hillesum Conference at Ghent University, January 2014, London/Boston: Brill, pp. 285–298.