
***Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kideshanu BeMitzvotav
VeTzivanu, La'asok BeDivrei Torah. Hafoch Bah!***

Shabbtai Zvi
(1626-1676)

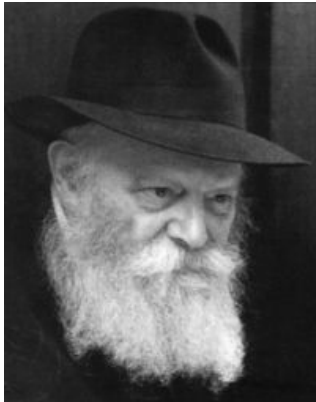


"Shabbatai Tzvi enthroned",
Tikkun, Amsterdam, 1666.

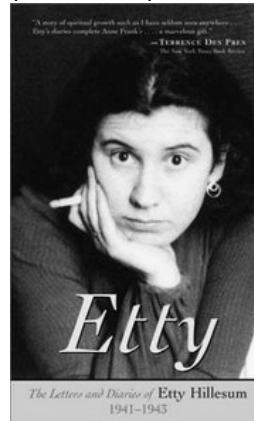
Israel ben Eliezer,
The Baal Shem Tov
(1698-1720)



Menachem Mendel Schneerson
(1902-1994)



Etty Hillesum
(1914-1943)



From the Diary of Etty Hillesum

(January 15, 1914 Middelburg, The Netherlands—November 30, 1943 in Auschwitz, Poland)

I believe I should better do it: 'fall inward' in the morning before I go to work, for half an hour. To listen to what's inside of me. 'Sich versenken'. You can also call it meditation. But that word still gives me the creeps. (...) Let this be the goal of meditation: to become like a wide open space, without that sneaky brushwood taking away your vista. That something like 'God' can enter, just like there is something of 'God' in the Ninth of Beethoven. (June 8 1941)

Inside of me there is a deep well. In it God sits. Sometimes I can reach him. But more often stones and debris block the entrance. Then God lies buried. Then he needs to be excavated.

I can imagine some people praying with their eyes raised up toward heaven. They look for God outside. But other people lower their head and hide it in their hands. I suppose they look for God inside of them. (August 26 1941)

I have by now the final remedy. It is better in a little corner to crouch on the ground and hunched like that to listen to what's inside of me. Mere thinking will never avail. Thought is a beautiful and proud occupation as study is concerned. But you can never think your way 'heraus' of difficult emotional problems. Something else needs to be done. You have to make yourself passive and listen. Get into touch with that little piece of eternity inside of you. (...) Lord, rather give me wisdom, instead of knowledge. (September 4 1941)

The fundamental principle of mysticism should be crystal clear honesty. A scrutiny of all things in their naked reality. (June 19 1942)

Selfishness

From the moment we can let go of all our demands and wishes, then we can let go of everything (July 6 1942)

To give up everything in order to do daily the thousand little things for others that remain to be done, without losing one's self. (July 7 1942)

When I pray, I never pray for myself, always for others. (July 15 1942)

Emptying One's Self

One has to free one's self inwardly of everything, of all existing representations, of all slogans, of all comforts. One has to have the courage of letting go of everything, of all standards and all conventional certainties. One has to dare taking the giant leap into the kosmos. Then, yeah, then will life be endlessly rich and overflowing, even amidst the deepest suffering. (...) One has only to *be*. (July 7 1942)

Awareness

Recently I live like there is a photosensitive surface inside of me, that registers everything unmistakably, even the smallest details. So much I am aware (...) (July 10 1942)

Surrender to God

(...) I only feel myself resting in God's arms, to state it a bit pathetically. Whether it is here at my most dear and safe desk or in a month or so in a bare room in the Jewish ghetto or perhaps in a working camp under SS surveillance, I will always feel myself resting in God's arms, I guess.

Yes, my Lord, I remain very faithful to you, through thick and thin. (...) The only human thing that still remains in these times is: to kneel before you, o God.

There are moments when I feel like a little bird, covered by a big protecting hand. (July 28 1942)

Etty Hillesum: From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Esther (Etty) Hillesum ([January 15, 1914](#) in [Middelburg, The Netherlands](#)—[November 30, 1943](#) in [Auschwitz, Poland](#)) was a young [Jewish](#) thinker, mystic and writer whose letters and [diaries](#), kept between [1941](#) and [1943](#) describe life under [Nazi](#) rule in [Amsterdam](#) during the [German occupation](#) of [World War II](#). They were published posthumously in The Netherlands in [1981](#), before being translated into [English](#) in [1983](#).

Family

Esther (Etty) Hillesum was born on 15 January 1914 in her parents' home at Molenwater 77 in the town of [Middelburg](#), where her father Levie (Louis) Hillesum had been teaching [classical languages](#) since 1911. In [Amsterdam](#), on 7 December 1912, he had married Etty's mother, Riva (Rebecca) Bernstein, who was also living in Middelburg at the time. Etty's father was born in Amsterdam on 25 May 1880, as the youngest of four children, to the merchant Jacob Samuel Hillesum and his wife Esther Hillesum-Loeza; Etty, therefore, was named after her paternal grandmother. The family lived at the time at Sint Antoniesbreestraat 31. Louis Hillesum studied classical languages at the [University of Amsterdam](#). In 1902 he took his bachelor's, followed in 1905 by his master's (both degrees [cum laude](#)). On 10 July 1908 he published his thesis "De imperfecti et aoristi usu Thucydidis" (also awarded cum laude). Middelburg was his first teaching assignment. In 1914 he began teaching the classics at the [Hilversum gymnasium](#) (grammar school), but, due to deafness in one ear and impaired vision, had trouble maintaining order in the large classes at that institution. That is why, in 1916, he moved to a smaller gymnasium in the town of [Tiel](#). In 1918 he became teacher of classics and deputy headmaster in [Winschoten](#). In 1924 he was appointed to similar positions at the gymnasium in Deventer, where he became headmaster on 1 February 1928. He remained there until his dismissal on 29 November 1940, at the request of the occupational government.

Levie (Louis) Hillesum

Louis Hillesum has been described as a small, quiet and unobtrusive man, a [stoic, scholarly recluse](#) with a great deal of humour and [erudition](#). In the lower forms he had at first experienced difficulties maintaining order and, in reaction to that, became an extremely strict teacher. In the higher forms, however, he came into his own. Although interested in [Jewish](#) identity, Hillesum was highly assimilated; he worked, for example, on Saturdays. In [Deventer](#) he was among the city's leading citizens, and even in Westerbork he maintained these contacts and cultural interests.

Riva (Rebecca) Hillesum-Bernstein

His wife Riva was born to Michael Bernstein and Hinde Lipowsky on 23 June 1881 in [Potchev \(Russia\)](#). Following a [pogrom](#), she was the first person in her family to leave [Surash](#) (Chernigol) and come to [Amsterdam](#). She moved in with the Montagnu family, at number 21 on the Tweede Jan Steenstraat. Her profession at that time was recorded as Russian-language teacher. On 29 May of that year, her younger brother Jacob, a diamond cutter, followed, and moved in with the Montagnu family as well. On 10 June 1907 her parents arrived in Amsterdam from Surash. They moved into the second floor of the house on the Tweede Jan Steenstraat. On 9 January 1913, Jacob married Marie Mirkin, who had come to Amsterdam from [Warsaw](#) on 5 May 1913. Their daughter Rahel Sarra was born on 19 October of that year. Shortly afterwards, the entire family [emigrated](#) illegally to the United States; only Riva remained behind with Louis Hillesum, to whom she had been married since December of 1912. Riva Hillesum-Bernstein has been characterised as lively, chaotic, extroverted and dominant. Etty's relationship with her mother was a difficult one in the early years, but apparently improved while they were at Westerbork. In addition to Etty, Riva Hillesum bore two more children: Jacob (Jaap), born in Hilversum on 27 January 1916 and named after Louis' father, and Michael (Mischa), named after Riva's father.

Jaap Hillesum

Jaap Hillesum completed [gymnasium](#) in 1933. He went on to study [medicine](#), first at the [University of Amsterdam](#) and later at [Leiden](#). He was intelligent, wrote poems and was attractive to women. Mentally, he was unstable: he was committed to [psychiatric hospitals](#) on several occasions. During the war he worked as an intern at the Nederlandsch-Israëlietisch hospital.

Mischa Hillesum

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Mischa Hillesum was born on 22 September 1920 at [Winschoten](#). Even as a child, he exhibited striking musical talent. In 1931 he moved to Amsterdam, where he attended the Vossius Gymnasium for three years and spent the rest of his time studying piano. His mentor was George van Renesse. Around 1939 he was committed to the institution at Het Apeldoornsche Bos and treated for [schizophrenia](#). Even after his release, he continued to be extremely unstable. Etty spent her childhood years in [Middelburg](#), [Hilversum](#) (1914-1916), [Tiel](#) (1916-1918), [Winschoten](#) (1918-1924) and [Deventer](#), from July

Early Years

1924 on, where she entered the fifth form of the Graaf van Burenschool. The family lived at number 51 on the A. J. Duymaer van Twiststraat (at present time number 2). Later (in 1933) they moved to the Geert Grootestraat 9, but by then Etty was no longer living at home. After primary school, Etty attended the [gymnasium](#) (grammar school) in Deventer, where her father was deputy headmaster. Unlike her younger brother Jaap, who was an extremely gifted pupil, Etty's marks were not particularly worthy of note. At school she also studied [Hebrew](#), and for a time attended the meetings of a Zionist young people's group in Deventer. After completing her school years, she went to Amsterdam to study [law](#). She took lodgings with the Horowitz family, at the Ruysdaelstraat 321, where her brother Mischa had been staying since July of 1931. Six months later she moved to the Apollolaan 29, in where her brother Jaap also lived from September 1933 while he was studying medicine. In November, Jaap moved to the Jan Willem Brouwerstraat 22hs; Etty followed one month later. As from September 1934, Etty's name once again appeared in the registry at Deventer. On 6 June 1935 she took her bachelor's exams in Amsterdam. At that time she was living with her brother Jaap at Keizersgracht 612c. In March of 1937 she took a room in the house of the accountant Hendrik (Hans) J. Wegerif, at Gabriel Metsustraat 61, an address also officially registered as the residence of her brother Jaap from October 1936 to September 1937. Wegerif, a widower, hired Etty as his housekeeper, but also began an affair with her. It was in this house that she lived until her definitive departure for Westerbork in 1943.

University years

Not much is known about Etty's university years. She travelled in [left-wing, antifascist](#) student circles, and was politically and socially [aware](#) without belonging to a [political party](#). Her acquaintances from this period were amazed to learn of her spiritual development during the war years, a period in which she adopted clearly different interests and a different circle of friends, although she did maintain a number of her pre-war contacts. Etty took her master's exams in Dutch Law (public law in particular) on 23 June and 4 July of 1939. Her academic results were not striking. In addition, she studied [Slavic languages](#) at Amsterdam and Leiden, but the conditions of war prevented her from completing this study with an exam. She did, however, continue to study Russian language and literature until the very end, and also gave lessons in these subjects. She taught a course at the Volksuniversiteit, and later gave private lessons until her definitive departure for [Westerbork](#). The diaries were written largely in her room on the Gabriel Metsustraat, where not only she and Wegerif, but also Wegerif's son, Hans, and a chemistry student by the name of Bernard Meylink were living.

Julius Spier

It was through this Bernard that, on Monday, 3 February 1941, Etty went to serve as "model" to the psycho-chirologist Julius Spier, at the Courbetstraat 27 in Amsterdam. Spier (who is almost always referred to in the diaries as "S.") was born at Frankfurt am Main in 1887, the sixth of seven children. At the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to the Beer Sontheimer trading firm. There he succeeded in working his way up to a managerial position. His original ambition of becoming a singer was foiled by an illness that left him hard of hearing.

Spier enjoyed moving in artistic circles and set up his own publishing house, by the name of "Iris". In addition, from 1904 on, he had a pronounced interest in chirology. Following his 25th jubilee at Beer Sontheimer in 1926, Spier withdrew from business life to dedicate himself to the study of chirology. He underwent instructive analysis with C. G. [Jung](#) in [Zurich](#), and at Jung's recommendation opened a practice in 1929 as psycho-chirologist on the Aschaffenerstrasse in Berlin. The practice there was extremely successful. Spier also taught courses. In 1934 he divorced his wife, Hedl (Hedwig) Rocco, to whom he had been married since 1917, and left the two children, Ruth and Wolfgang, with her. He had a number of affairs, but finally became engaged to his pupil, Hertha Levi, who emigrated to London in 1937 or 1938. Spier also left [Nazi Germany](#), and came to Amsterdam in 1939 as a legal [immigrant](#). After first living with his sister on the Muzenplein, and later in a room on the Scheldestraat, from late 1940 on he rented two rooms from the Nethe family at the Courbetstraat 27. There he also set up practice and taught courses. The students at those courses and their friends invited "models", whose hands Spier analysed by way of practical example.

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Gera Bongers, the sister of Bernard Meylink's fiancée Loes, was one of Spier's student, and it was through Bernard that Ety was invited to have her hands analysed during a Monday evening class. This fairly chance encounter proved formative for the course of Ety's life. She was immediately impressed by Spier's personality, and decided to go into therapy with him. On 8 March 1941 she drafted a letter to Spier in an exercise book, and began on her diary the next day, probably at Spier's advice and as part of her therapy. Little wonder then that the relationship with Spier was a major theme in her diaries. For Ety, however, keeping a [diary](#) was useful for more than [therapy](#) alone; it also fit well with her literary ambitions. The diaries could later provide material for a novel, for example. In this context, it is also worth noting that her letters contain quotes from her diary. Although his patient, Ety also became Spier's secretary and friend. Because Spier wished to remain faithful to Hertha Levi, and because Ety already had a relationship with Wegerif, a certain distance was always present in the relationship between Ety and Spier, despite its importance to both. Spier had a very great influence on Ety's spiritual development; he taught her how to deal with her depressive and egocentric bent, and introduced her to the [Bible](#) and St. [Augustine](#). Ety had been reading other authors, such as [Rilke](#) and [Dostoevsky](#), since the 1930s, but under Spier's influence their work also took on deeper meaning for her. In the course of time, the relationship with Spier assumed a less central position in Ety's life. When he died on 15 September 1942, therefore, she had developed enough to be able to assimilate his death with a certain ease - particularly because she realised as well the fate that would otherwise have awaited him as a few.

Westerbork

In the diaries, one can clearly see how the anti-Jewish measures increasingly impacted Ety Hillesum's life, even though she had resolved to follow the line of her own [spiritual](#) development no matter what. When she was expecting a summons to report to Camp [Westerbork](#), she applied - at the recommendation of her brother Jaap - for a position with the Jewish Council. Through patronage, she received an appointment to the office on the Lijnbaansgracht (later the Oude Schans) on 15 July 1942. She performed her administrative duties for the Jewish Council with reluctance, and had a negative opinion of the Council's role. However, she found useful the work she was to do later for the department of "Social Welfare for People in Transit" at Westerbork, where she was transferred at her own request on 30 July 1942.

There it was that she met Joseph (Jopie) I. Vleeschhouwer and M. Osias Kormann, the two men who would go on to play a major role in her life. Her first stay at Westerbork did not last long; on 14 August 1942 she was back in Amsterdam. From there she left on 19 August to visit her parents for the last time in Deventer. Somewhere around 21 August she returned to Westerbork, but an illness forced her to go home on 5 December 1942. It was not until 5 June 1943 that she had recovered sufficiently to be allowed to return to Westerbork. For, unlike what one might expect, she was very keen to get back to the camp and resume her work, to provide a bit of support for the people as they were preparing themselves for transport. It was for this reason that Ety Hillesum consistently turned down offers to go into hiding. She said that she wished to "share her people's fate".

Ety's departure from Amsterdam on 6 June provided definitive, for on 5 July 1943 an end was put to the special status granted to personnel at the Westerbork section of the Jewish Council. Half of the personnel had to return to Amsterdam, while the other half became camp internees. Ety joined the latter group: she wished to remain with her father, mother and brother Mischa, who had meanwhile been brought to Westerbork.

Ety's parents had moved on 7 January 1943 to the Retiefstraat 11 in Amsterdam, after having first attempted to use doctor's orders to circumvent their forced removal from Deventer. During the great raid of 20 and 21 June 1943, they were picked up - along with Mischa, who had come to live with them and transported to Westerbork. At the time this occurred, efforts were already being made to obtain special dispensation for Mischa on the grounds of his musical talent. The sisters Milli Ortmann and Grete Wendelgest in particular were behind these efforts. Both Willem Mengelberg and Willem Andriessen wrote letters of recommendation, which have been preserved. These attempts proved fruitless, due to Mischa's insistence that his parents also accompany him to the special camp at Barneveld. This was not allowed; Mischa Hillesum did, however, receive a number of special privileges during his stay at Westerbork. When his mother wrote a letter to Rauter in which she asked for a few privileges as well, Rauter was enraged and, on 6 September 1943, ordered the entire family to be immediately sent on transport. The camp commander at Westerbork, Gemmeker, interpreted this as an order to send Ety on the next day's transport as well, despite the attempts by her contacts in the camp to protect her from this. On 7 September 1943, the Hillesum family left Westerbork.

Only Jaap Hillesum did not go with them; at the time, he was still in Amsterdam. He arrived in Westerbork in late September of 1943. In February 1944 he was deported to Bergen-Belsen. When that camp was partially evacuated, he was placed on a train with other prisoners. After a journey full of deprivation and hardship, the train was finally liberated by Russian soldiers in April of 1945. Like so many others, however, Jaap Hillesum did not survive the journey.

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Etty's father and mother either died during transport to Auschwitz or were gassed immediately upon arrival. The date of death given was 10 September 1943. According to the Red Cross, Etty died at Auschwitz on 30 November 1943. Her brother Mischa died on 31 March 1944, also at Auschwitz.

The Diaries

Before her final departure for Westerbork, Etty gave her Amsterdam diaries to Maria Tuinzing, who had meanwhile come to live in the house on the Gabriel Metsustraat as well. Etty asked her to pass them along to the writer Klaas Smelik, with the request that they be published if she did not return. In 1946 or 1947, Maria Tuinzig turned over the exercise books and a bundle of letters to Klaas Smelik. His daughter Johanna (Jopie) Smelik then typed out sections of the diaries, but Klaas Smelik's attempts to have the diaries published in the 1950s proved fruitless. Two letters Etty had written, in December 1942 and on 24 August 1943, concerning conditions in Westerbork, did get published. They appeared in the autumn of 1943 in an illegal edition by David Koning, at the recommendation of Etty's friend Petra (Pim) Eldering. This edition, with a run of one hundred copies, was printed by B. H. Nooy of Purmerend under the title *Drie brieven van den kunstschilder Johannes Baptiste van der Pluym (1843-1912)* [Three Letters from the Painter Johannes Baptiste van der Pluym (1843-1912)]. The two letters were preceded by a foreword with a biography of the artist, and followed by a third letter, both written by David Koning to camouflage the true contents. The revenues from the publication were used to provide assistance to Jews in hiding. These letters have since been republished on several occasions.

In late 1979, [Klaas A.D. Smelik](#), now director of the [EHOC](#), Ghent University, approached the publisher J. G. Gaarlandt with a request to publish the diaries left to him by his father, Klaas Smelik. This resulted in 1981 in the publication of *Het verstoorde leven (An Interrupted Life)*, and in 1986 in the publication of all Etty Hillesum's known writings in Dutch. Of this Dutch edition there is now present a complete English translation. This new publication is, in Horatius' words, "a monument more lasting than bronze" to this woman who, along with so many others, fell victim to the greatest crime of the 20th century.

EHOC

On 13th June 2006, [the Etty Hillesum Research Centre \(EHOC\)](#) was officially opened as part of Ghent University with a celebration at Sint-Pietersplein 5. This newly founded Centre coordinates and stimulates research on the Letters and Diaries of Etty Hillesum, written during the period of World War Two. In the last twenty years, these valuable manuscripts received global attention and recognition. Researchers of various disciplines and different Universities worldwide, connected to the EHOC, dedicate their studies to careful analysis of Hillesum's writings. The aim of the EHOC is to create an international network of research.

The Centre is directed by [Prof. Dr. Klaas A.D. Smelik](#), who edited and published the Complete edition of the Letters and Diaries, he is professor Hebrew and Judaism at Ghent University. Staff member [dr. Meins G. S. Coetsier](#) of the EHOC carries out the daily tasks of the centre.

[\[edit\]](#) Meins G. S. Coetsier

[Dr. Meins G. S. Coetsier](#) is staff member, film director and webmaster of the EHOC. He obtained his B.A. in philosophy in 2004 and was awarded Master of Arts in Philosophy, at The Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy in [Dublin, Ireland](#) in 2006. In 2008, he was awarded Doctor of Philosophy at Ghent University (Department of Philosophy and moral sciences) with a study on Eric [Voegelin](#). Meins G. S. Coetsier is director of [EVS, the Centre of Eric Voegelin Studies](#) at Ugent and is founder of the [Flow of Presence Academy](#) (FPA). University of Missouri Press published his study [Etty Hillesum and the Flow of Presence: A Voegelinian Analysis](#)

Etty Hillesum Centre in Deventer

A monument to Hillesum is located in Deventer on the riverfront, and the local secondary school is named after her. There is also a modest museum dedicated to her memory. The Etty Hillesum Centre is housed at Roggestraat 3, Deventer, the location of a former synagogue and Jewish school. The Centre aims to pay attention to three themes: (i) the history of the Deventer Jews (ii) Etty Hillesum's life and works (iii) racism and discrimination. The Centre is to be a refuge where a wide range of activities are organised within the aims of the Foundation, such as lectures, workshops, guided tours of the Centre, a town walk along the sights and locations reminding of the lives and works of Deventer Jews, concerts, exhibitions - both permanent and changed twice a year. The Centre and the school co-operate closely on various projects. Students regularly contribute to

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exhibitions at the Centre and many of the school projects are developed in co-operation with volunteers. Apart from two regular workers forty volunteers support the work of the Centre.