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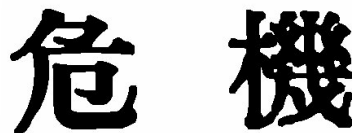
INTRODUCTION

Spiritual crisis - danger or opportunity

Whilst one dare not generalise, it is probably fair to say that it is often the need to respond to some personal crisis or trauma that stimulates one to become involved in any authentic form of spirituality - whether it be that found in Judaism, Yoga, Christianity, Buddhism or any other discipline.

There comes a point in the unconscious spiritual evolution of each person, when the ego is brought face to face with the recognition of its own limitations and its state of disintegration. This is of considerable psychological importance, for if such a crisis is responded to, rather than evaded, it will stimulate the process of growing into spiritual maturity in which our awareness is focussed upon the **Self**. This is the central quality of being of our humanity, with the attributes of truth, compassion and harmony.

There is much wisdom latent in the Chinese pictogram for that word "crisis". This is shown as a double symbol whose two components remind us that it can be a time of danger, or alternatively one of opportunity.



Often it is our Guardian Angel (Maggid) who, not only protects us from harm but, also arranges crises in order to precipitate us into the growth process and afford us the opportunity to respond. In the section on Guided Meditation, a technique is described in which it is possible to obtain the guidance of our Maggid.

The existential response

The creative response to the existential crisis is exemplified in the prayer of the great Chassidic Rabbi, Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, who died 200 years ago, shortly before the birth of Soren Kierkegaard who traditionally has been regarded as the founder of modern existentialism. He prayed:

Master of the Universe!

I do not beg you to reveal to me the secret of your ways - that would be too much for me - I could not bear it.

But show me one thing, show it to me ever more clearly and more deeply. Show me what this, which is happening to me here and now, means to me. What it demands of me. What it is that you, Lord of the World, are telling me by way of it.

Oh! it is not why I suffer that I wish to know, but only whether I suffer for your sake.

In these words, 18th century Chassidism, founded upon the ancient Kabbalah, made the paradigm shift in mystical thought from the occult to the existential.

Nevertheless, it is the understanding of those models of reality which are some of the products of occult thought, namely the Tree of Life and Jacob's Ladder, which will be introduced in this booklet and which provide the key to understanding the place of meditation in existential therapy.

Levi Yitzchak's existentialism is echoed in the musical "Fiddler on the Roof", where Tevye the milkman explained his philosophy that "*because of our traditions, every one knows who he is, where he stands and what God demands of him*". The spiritual crisis (or existential crisis as psychologists call it) occurs when one loses touch with this simple precept. It forces us to think very seriously about:

- Identity What sort of being am I?
- Meaning What is the purpose of my life?
- Destiny What must I do to fulfil that purpose?

Learning from other disciplines - The treasure under the hearth

Why should I, a committed Jew, have explored the spiritual philosophy and techniques of an oriental tradition such as Yoga?

Judaism has always taught that a sympathetic examination of another people's ideas and beliefs can challenge one and stimulate a heightened insight into one's own faith. Indeed, it was traditional amongst the Rabbis that they used the sciences of other peoples to verify the wisdom of the Torah. For example, Rabbi Elijah, the Gaon of Vilna, who was one of the greatest spiritual teachers and Kabbalists of the eighteenth century, taught:

When the light of the Torah came into the world, it split. One part went directly into Torah and one part went into the various wisdoms of the world. And the time will come when the light that went into the other wisdoms will come back and interact with the light of the Torah, revealing dimensions in the Torah that were not revealed to us before. According to how much a man lacks knowledge of the other wisdoms, correspondingly he will lack knowledge of Torah wisdom.

Similarly, Rabbi Loew - the seventeenth century Maharal of Prague - taught:

The other wisdoms are ladders upon which we may ascend to the wisdom of Torah.

And, in our own time, the saintly Rabbi Leo Baeck used to tell his Rabbinic students:
Let Judaism be your home and not your prison.

There is an archetypal story that is told in every tradition in one form or another. Amongst Jewish legends, it takes the following form:

There was an impoverished little Jewish peasant of Minsk who one night had a dream. It told him to go to Warsaw and search under a particular column of a bridge, and that he would find a treasure there. He journeyed to Warsaw, located the bridge and the column, but found that it was guarded by a detachment of troops under the control of an officer. Day after day he waited, often making conversation with the troops. Eventually, the officer, who had noticed him, asked him why he was hanging around. He seemed a decent sort of chap and the peasant told him about the dream that had drawn him to the place. The officer roared with laughter and said. "I have already searched the foundations for anarchist bombs and found nothing except a rusty old key. If that is your hidden treasure, you are welcome to it. If I followed my dreams, I would not be here now. Why! Only last night I dreamed that I went to the hovel of a poor Jewish peasant in Minsk and discovered a treasure under his hearth". The Jew thanked him, went home, dug, and found a locked box. The key that the officer had given him fitted perfectly and inside the box he found the hidden treasure.

There are several lessons that can be drawn from this story:

- The first is the most obvious - that there is spiritual treasure always to be found within one's own tradition.
- But then we observe that one may have to leave home and go on a journey of exploration to foreign places in order to gain experience before one can return to one's own hearth to find the treasure.
- Finally, it may be necessary for one to enter into a dialogue with others, in many ways alien to oneself, before one can learn where to seek.

What can we learn from Yoga

Yoga has various roles to play in the advancement of human progress. On the one hand it is a therapeutic and integrative technique for spiritual, psychic and physical health (**Hatha Yoga**). On the other, it is a science and a technology of spiritual growth and psychic consciousness.

In the latter context, Vivekananda clarified the significance of the four classical paths to Yoga, each suited to a different temperament, and none superior to the other. He taught:

Each soul is potentially Divine.
The goal is to manifest this Divine indwelling by controlling
Nature - internal and external.

Do this either by Work or Worship, by Psychic control or Philosophy.
By one or more or all of these and be free.

Work (Karma Yoga) is the way of altruistic action and appeals to the person who expresses himself through activity in the world. It demands that one's work should be devoted to the higher needs of humanity rather than to one's own personal wants and desires. It is also concerned with the laws of cause and effect in regard to actions, and with the teaching purpose of life.

Its equivalent in Judaism is the doctrine of *Tikkun Olam* - the redemption (or repair) of the World and all its creatures, and the restoration of the unity of the Holy One and its presence in the World, through holy action.

Worship (Bhakti Yoga) is the way of personal devotion and appeals to the person who has emotional sensitivity. It uses the emotions to go beyond their limitations and to surrender the ego in love.

Its equivalent in Judaism is the doctrine of *Devekut*, which might be translated as: cleaving to or at-one-ment with the Holy.

Psychic control (Raja Yoga) is the way of mastery of the thought processes of the mind and of the senses through meditative techniques. It appeals to the person who has intuitive faculties that they wish to develop. The codifier Patanjali presented the practice of Raja Yoga in eight steps. Of these, the first seven are the foundation for meditation in all the branches of Yoga.

In each of Patanjali's traditional eight steps, there is a precise correlation to be made with a corresponding concept in the Jewish meditative tradition. Only the eighth of these is untypical of Judaism.

Philosophy (Gnana Yoga) is the way of understanding the meaning of life and the true nature of the Self. It appeals to the person who values reason and is intellectual by nature but who wishes to transcend reason in order to obtain a totally objective viewpoint.

The mystical element of Gnana Yoga is matched in Judaism by the tradition known as *Kabbalah*.

Gnosis and Prophecy

It can be shown that every one of the higher religions of humanity is based on a combination, in varying degrees, of two fundamental elements. These are **Mystical Gnosis** and **Existential Prophecy**. In different religions either one or the other dominates. Yoga itself is not a religion, but in its role as a science of spirituality, it explores these two foundations. It discerns between them and defines their capacity for establishing a path of living.

Gnosis places its emphasis on **Raja** and **Gnana** - the mastery of the thought patterns of the mind and the intuition of humanity's place in the Universe. Its goal is the Self-realisation of the individual. In the Indian Yoga tradition, its 'Bibles' are the Sutras of Patanjali and the Upanishads.

Prophecy places its emphasis on **Karma** and **Bhakti** - the creative fulfilment of one's personal destiny through consecration of one's work, devotion to spiritual ideals and to development of compassion of the heart. Its goal is the redemption of the world through social justice. In the Indian Yoga tradition, its 'Bible' is the Bhagavad-Gita.

Judaism, whilst depending for its fullness upon the supporting elements of Raja, Gnana and especially Bhakti, is nevertheless primarily a Karma oriented faith whose goal is *Tikkun Olam* (the repair of the World).

Why do we meditate?

Inherent in the human heart is the feeling that there is a spiritual dimension, which transcends our material nature. Often this is accompanied by the urge to experience something of its essence. The higher religious disciplines and philosophies direct this urge into creative channels by maintaining the fine balance between spirituality and discernment that is essential for harmony, or what the Buddhists would call the middle way.

Before a child is born, a light is held behind its head with which it can see from one end of the World to the other, and they teach it the whole of the Torah. But at the moment of birth an angel touches it on the lips, and it forgets all. So all of life is spent remembering what we once knew.

(Based on Talmud - Niddah 30b)

It is said that sometimes the angel does not quite do its work completely and the soul is haunted throughout its life in the body by a faint memory of something that transcends its normal experience of the world - something for which it hungers without any real certainty of what it really is. Maybe there is some truth within this legend, and maybe these are the souls who are driven to meditate in order to recover that haunting memory.

One of the objectives of authentic spirituality is to help such people, who are engaged in a serious inner search, to find their spiritual answers.

What is meditation?

Meditation may be defined in a number of ways, each appropriate to its purpose and to the specific needs of a particular type of person:

- As thinking in a controlled manner. The mind thus becomes concentrated instead of diffuse.
- As a way of reflection:
Meditation is to learning as digestion is to food, the way to get life out of it and to absorb its essence. Reading gives us information and suggests ideas, but it is in meditation that we form our judgments.

Rabbi Louis Finkelstein

- As using the fine detail of daily activity as a means of focussing the attention of the mind.
- As a way of immersing the mind in the precise flow of movement of the body. This is observed in Chassidic and Sufi dance, in Tai Chi and in Hatha Yoga.
- As a preparation for prayer, and as a way of making prayer more meaningful.
- As a means of entering an interior silence.
- As a healing of the fragmented personality so that it may function more joyfully and efficiently, and with greater awareness of the nature of the universe in which it has its being. This way, of integration, is usually in the form of a guided meditation.
- As a means of achieving mystical union with the Holy (***Yichud***).

What are the aims of meditation?

Many have heard that meditation is one of the routes to spiritual growth, but too often this is accompanied by a misunderstanding - that the fruits of meditation will be an ecstatic and spectacular expansion of consciousness. This is what attracts some people to those psychic development cults that promise so much and so deceptively. In reality, meditation is a long hard slog with little to show for it except a gradual maturing of the personality and an ability to control the mind and emotions. Through it we can become more human, but not super-human; more wise, but not omniscient; more compassionate, but not more powerful.

One cannot afford to play games with meditation, for its purpose is to promote the understanding and transformation of the personality structure so that spiritual growth may occur. If meditation is an expression of the genuine needs of the heart, it will bring an answer of guidance. If it is a product of an unwholesome curiosity, it will bring answers of fantasy. If one seeks stimulation and uses meditation in the pursuit of psychic experience, one reduces it to the level of a psychedelic drug.

A good meditation ends with profound inner silence, a feeling of great peace, of being at home with and in love with the universe and its Creator, and refreshed for the work demanded of one. It does not end with a cosmic fireworks display.

THE POWER OF THE MEDITATIVE STORY

There is a bridge between Time and Eternity
and that bridge is the Atman - the Spirit in Man
(from the Hindu classic - the Chandogya Upanishad)

Time is one dimension of reality, the phenomenal dimension, and the events of time are known as History, which is the drama of the outer life of Man in the conscious world of events, and of relationship with the things of the outer fabric of creation.

Eternity is another dimension of reality, the archetypal dimension, and the events of eternity are known as Myth, which is the unconscious, or rather pre-conscious, drama of the inner life of Man, both in the secret world of the psyche and its relationship with the inner fabric of creation, and with the Divine ground of Being.

The spiritual truths of the events of eternity have to be clothed with the language of the events of history in order to make them accessible to human consciousness. The Hebrew Bible, in common with the Bhagavad Gita and the scriptures of all religions, has its archetypal myths in which eternal spiritual truths are made accessible through the use of allegorical drama. To dismiss myth as no more than a fairy story is to miss its whole purpose as an aid to spiritual enlightenment. The converse, that is, taking a myth and crediting it with historic literalness is equally to miss understanding its purpose.

Some of the great religious archetypal myths are vital to the understanding of the human condition and its problems. Used correctly, they have a tremendous potential for healing. The great dramas of the Bible: the encounters between the Holy and the Patriarchs, Moses, Job, Jonah, and in particular between Jacob and the Angel, are expressed in the language of history, but all demand an interpretation other than a literal one if they are to say anything that will be meaningful in the light of our real spiritual needs. The same is true of their counterparts in the Bhagavad Gita, as will be shown.

Jacob and the Angel

The saga of Jacob is that of a man who is complex and troubled. He has deceived his father at his mother's instigation, and stolen the birthright from his first-born twin brother by a subterfuge. His name means "Heel" and this was because when he was being borne, he grasped the heel of his brother Esau as the latter preceded him through the birth channel. But in English, the name "Heel" also implies a cheat which, in his untransformed state, he undoubtedly was.

In Genesis 25 we read that "*Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the fields and Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents*". The story tells how Esau came in from the hunt ravenously hungry to find Jacob cooking pottage. Esau asked for a portion. In the words of the King James version, "*Let me swallow of this red pottage, for I am faint*". However the accurate translation from the Hebrew original is not "swallow" but "guzzle", and this gives the essential clue to Esau's character and lack of spiritual potential. Jacob offers him the portion of pottage in exchange for Esau's birthright. The latter thoughtlessly accepts the bargain, and in the words of the Bible "*So Esau despised his birthright*".

Genesis 27 tells how the deceit is compounded when his mother persuades Jacob to disguise himself in order to obtain Isaac's blessing. Jacob flees from his brother's wrath and in chapter 28 we read about Jacob's flight and his dream of the "*Ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven . . . and, behold, the Lord stood beside him and said . . . I am with you and will keep you withersoever you go . . . for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep and said . . . How full of awe is this place. This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven*".

In the following chapters, Jacob endures the deceit of his uncle Laban, but wins his beloved Rachel for his wife. Then he is commanded by God to "*Return to the land of your fathers, and to your kinsfolk; and I will be with you*". Jacob goes back sending conciliatory messages and presents to Esau. Inevitably he fears that Esau will treat him savagely, maybe even kill him. On the eve of his meeting with Esau, the spiritual crisis comes to a head. Jacob lies down to sleep and he has his second great dream.

And Jacob was left alone; and a being with the likeness of a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the being saw that he could not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Then



the being said: "let me go, for the day is breaking".

But Jacob said: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me".

And he said to him: "What is your name?" And he replied: "Jacob". Then he said: "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have contended with God and with men and you have prevailed".

Thereupon, Jacob asked him: "Pray tell me your name?". But he replied: "Why is it that you ask my name?". And then and there he blessed him.

Jacob named the place Peni'el, saying: "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been preserved.

Genesis 32 v 24-30

This critical event is the turning point. The ego centred Jacob experiences the awe that one feels when one is overwhelmed by the Holy and compelled to wrestle, not only with God and Man but also with one's lower nature, that one may recentre one's consciousness and be transformed into the Self realised Israel. In this new state of awareness he goes to meet his brother Esau, makes his peace with him, and the two are reconciled.

The Bhagavad Gita

The Gita is one slim volume within a much larger series of books about a dynastic war between the forces of good and evil. It is a dialogue between Krishna (the immanent personification of the Divine) and Arjuna (the human prince and leader of the forces of good) which serves as a vehicle of instruction in the spiritual values and essence of Yoga. However the event that initiates the dialogue and that, indeed, is its justification, is the sudden and complete failure of nerve of Prince Arjuna when he is subject to a very profound existential crisis on the battlefield.

Arjuna . . . was overcome by grief and despair, and thus he spoke with a sinking heart.

Life goes from my limbs and they sink, and my mouth is
sear and dry; a trembling overcomes my body, and my hair
shudders in horror; . . . I am no longer able to stand,
because my mind is whirling and wandering. . . .

Thus spoke Arjuna in the field of battle, and letting fall his bow and arrows he sank down in his chariot, his soul overcome by despair and grief. Then arose the Spirit of Krishna and spoke to Arjuna, his friend, who with eyes filled with tears, thus had sunk into despair and grief.

Whence this lifeless dejection, Arjuna, in this hour, the hour
of trial? Strong men know not despair, Arjuna, for this wins
neither heaven nor earth.

Fall not into degrading weakness, for this becomes not a
man who is a man. Throw off this ignoble discouragement,
and arise like a fire that burns all before it.

Arjuna replied:

In the dark night of my soul I feel desolation. In my self-pity
I see not the way of righteousness. I am thy disciple, come
to thee in supplication: be a light unto me on my path of
duty. For neither the kingdom of the earth, nor the king-
dom of the gods in heaven, could give me peace from the
fire of sorrow which thus burns my life.

When Arjuna, the great warrior, had thus unburdened his heart,
“I will not fight, Krishna”,
he said, and then fell silent.

That is the moment when Krishna initiates the counselling process. During the course of the remainder of this remarkable book, Arjuna is taught the essentials of Yoga in general and of Karma Yoga in particular.

Krishna smiled and spoke to Arjuna - there between the two armies the voice of God spoke these words: . . .

They all attain perfection when they find joy in their work.

. . . A man attains perfection when his work is worship of God, from whom all things come and who is in all.

Greater is thine own work, even if this be humble, than the work of another, even if this be great. When a man does the work that God gives him, no sin can touch this man.

And a man should not abandon his work, even if he cannot achieve it in full perfection; because in all work there may be imperfection, even as in all fire there is smoke.

Offer in thy heart all thy works to me, and see me as the End of thy love, take refuge in the Yoga of reason, and ever rest thy soul in me.

If thy soul finds rest in me, thou shalt overcome all dangers by my grace; but if thy thoughts are on thyself, and thou wilt not listen, thou wilt perish. . . . I have given thee words of vision and wisdom more secret than hidden mysteries.

Ponder them in the silence of thy soul, and then in freedom do thy will. . . . Hast thou heard these words, Arjuna, in the silent communion of thy soul? Has the darkness of thy delusion been dispelled by thine inner Light?

Arjuna learns his lessons well and at the end of the book is able to reply:

By thy grace I remember my Light, and now gone is my delusion. My doubts are no more, my faith is firm; and now I can say “Thy will be done”.

THE SPIRITUAL DIALECTIC IN JUDAISM

The Nature Of Models

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night.
God said "Let Newton be" and all was light.
It did not last, the devil, crying "Ho!"
Said "Let Einstein be", and restored the status quo

The first two lines of this couplet are attributed to Alexander Pope, the second to the ubiquitous Anon.

At regular intervals, there are major paradigm shifts in the history of mankind's growth in understanding. If we react with intellectual and spiritual integrity to these as they occur, we are forced to change our view of ultimate reality, whether that be from a spiritual or scientific angle. In particular, if we are to understand the complexities of human consciousness, a radical re-appraisal of our psychology and philosophy is essential in order to make comprehensible that which we call the underlying realities.

Material science can neither understand nor explore human consciousness adequately, for it regards consciousness as no more than the product of biological processes in the body. The spiritual sciences start from utterly different premises, regarding consciousness as the primary phenomenon and the biological processes as secondary. They offer keys to understanding consciousness through direct experience by using techniques of meditation.

When one explores the unknown regions and contents of one's own consciousness, using meditation as a tool and practising its disciplines, one can be helped by using an effective map.

Reality eludes us, whatever our viewpoint, and when we endeavour to express our intuitions, we come up against the problem of language and our inability to articulate the unspeakable. In responding to these paradigm shifts, we are forced to create new models or analogues to give expression to our understanding, and devise theories to explain it. Thus we have to create maps, symbols and metaphors to serve as representations of Reality, onto which we then try to fit our experiences.

Our world view is conditioned by our experience, and is reflected in the model that we create for understanding the world that we live in, and of which we have a limited knowledge, whether it be scientific or religious. Yet, in a way, our openness to experience is itself conditioned by the model that we are willing to accept as valid, or by means of which our mind-set has been indoctrinated. Far too often we fall into the error of forgetting that the map is not the country, and looking at a map is not the same as experiencing the terrain.

When one regards the model of reality as if it were reality itself rather than as a signpost, one is guilty of the sin of idolatry. This phenomenon is well known in the field of religion. We do not always recognise how often it occurs in the field of science. Scientists are less than true to themselves when they defend their theories against data that do not fit it, rather than continue the search for truth. And the same must be said for the practitioners of religion.

If we want a visual symbol for progress, it might be that of a spiral staircase, where, at every half turn, we not only rise to new heights, but also stand for a moment over the historical experience of the other pole of being.

The essence of progress is twofold:

- Firstly, adapting to time and place, yet being aware that the result of our efforts is not necessarily more valid.
- Secondly, being willing to maintain old paradigms only until such time as they can no longer contain new evidence and account adequately for new experience.

And so we come up against one of the facts of life - that objectivity is an illusion. One cannot separate the experimenter from his experiment nor the theorist from his theory. In each, the first is bound to the second by the strength of his emotional attachment, and all observation is in the end subjective. If we could be honest about this, it would save all the suffering caused by both religious and scientific dogma. For our maps, models, symbols and metaphors too easily become idols which we worship as though they were the immutable truth, and castigate healthy sceptics and iconoclasts as heretics.

Those who have been conditioned to limit themselves to a rationalist world view, inevitably reject, as absurd or irrational, those phenomena that transcend our normal perceptions and which their model cannot accommodate. This includes all those phenomena that come under the heading of extra-sensory-perception, ie knowing by means other than those of the five senses or of any logical process.

However, if our minds are open and willing enough to use it provisionally as an experimental tool, a skillfully designed model, such as the Jacob's ladder with its four Trees of Life, can accommodate such phenomena and place them accurately on the map.

Torah And Talmud

The word Torah may be translated as Instruction or, as Rabbi Leo Baeck once suggested, Life task. The Jewish tradition teaches that in the revelation on Mount Sinai 3500 years ago, Moses was given two Torahs: one that was written down during the Biblical period as the Sepher Torah, the scroll or book of the Law, as the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch) were called, that clearly and concisely set out the task - and the oral Torah, that was handed down by word of mouth to expand the insights of the

written Torah to give it new life and relevance in every age. Eventually, during the Rabbinic period, this was committed to writing.

The written Torah became part of the Bible, the central core of the Jewish tradition. It gave it the stability of a firm moral code, accessible to all, and serving as the foundation upon which the religion could develop.

The oral Torah gave the religion continuity, for it was the means by which the original revelation could be continually reinterpreted to meet the needs of every age with their changing circumstances.

Within the oral tradition, another polarisation emerged and became of the utmost importance:

Firstly, Halachah, which is the fabric of the law for everyday living; the whole great code of detailed conduct in personal, ritual, social and commercial behaviour, which is so fundamentally essential for a genuine civilisation based upon the inalienable rights and obligations of Man.

In time, that part of the Halachah known as Mishnah, and the later commentaries on it known as Gemara, were codified into the Talmud, the great body of writing upon which Rabbinic Judaism developed. And in each successive age, more was written down to meet the needs of that age in keeping alive the spirit of the tradition in the everyday life of the community. Since then, Jews have maintained an inheritance of dialectic which has encouraged a culture of incessant enquiry. We have acknowledged the wisdom of uncertainty. It is the peculiarity of the Talmud that it is the only sacred book in the world that not only permits, but even encourages its students to question everything. Perhaps this is responsible for the Jewish characteristic of incessant self-criticism, the untiring search for truth and alternative paradigms.

Secondly, Aggadah, the spirit of the law, which illuminates it and gives it life. Aggadah is the legend that swells up out of the soul of the community of Israel in every age; and that given shape by its history and its longings, finds living expression in symbols, poetry, art and folklore. And just as the visionary senses these dream symbols and, unselfconsciously brings them to life, so does the sensitive and sympathetic scholar, who is moved by them, take them lovingly and re-interpret them for his own age.

Halachah rationalises living; it defines, specifies, sets measure and limit, placing life into an exact system.

Aggadah deals with man's ineffable relations to God, to other men, and to the world.

Halachah deals with the law - Aggadah with the meaning and spirit of the law.

Halachah without Aggadah is dead - Aggadah without Halachah is wild.

from God in Search of Man by Rabbi A. J. Heschel

Aggadah has two distinct aspects:

- The exoteric (readily accessible) ie that which could be apprehended by the intellect. This was embodied in the Midrash.
- The esoteric (mystical and occult) ie that which could only be apprehended by the intuitive faculties.

The esoteric strand stems from the concept of a supernal Torah that preceded creation and that was the “blueprint” from which all creation emanated. This supernal or esoteric Torah continues its subtle existence in the writing between the lines of the revealed Torah, and is the domain of Jewish mysticism.

Judaism has always been subjected to the creative tension between opposing polarities such as Halachah and Aggadah, reason and intuition, prophecy and mysticism, tradition and experience, learning and meditation. Where one pole has become excessively dominant, as has happened with the rationalism of the past two centuries, the other pole, in this case the intuitive, has to be rediscovered and made relevant to the spiritual needs of the modern age in order to effect a balance.

Kabbalah

One can neither speak of Jewish mysticism nor occultism without mentioning Rabbinic or dialectical Kabbalah. In its origins, it was concerned with the mystery of creation and the mystical commentary on the Torah. It may be defined as the esoteric aspects of Aggadah in which the mystical and meditative teachings of Judaism are found. It is closely linked with the general course of development of Jewish philosophy and religious experience, and its major books (in particular the Sefer Ha Zohar) are in essence a theosophical commentary upon the Torah.

If one takes the Bible, one sees line upon line of writing clearly visible to the eye. Kabbalah is that which is to be read between the lines. However:

The things that are hidden belong to the Lord your God.
The things that are revealed belong to you and your children for ever that you may do all the words of this Torah.

Deuteronomy 29.28

The word Occult means hidden, and it is very clear from the above quotation that these things were hidden, not because they were in themselves evil, as so many suppose, but rather because they were too holy for man to profane. The Torah was to be a guide for action rather than for speculation.

Yet there was always a certain longing for a direct and experiential intimacy with God amongst mystically inclined Rabbis that drove many to “tear through the veils”, sometimes with the same tragic results that afflict dabblers in the occult today.

An important element in sincere occultism is the doctrine: As above, so below. This is a statement that the whole of creation is a unitary and organic whole and that everything affects everything else, even though in a subtle way.

We see this too in particle physics, for as Fritjof Capra commented:

The further we penetrate into the sub-microscopic world, the more we shall realise how the modern physicist, like the mystic, has come to see the world as a system of inseparable, interacting and ever moving components, with man as an integral part of this system.

How should one regard, and utilise, Kabbalah? The following words which the author Chaim Potok put into the mouth of one of his characters in his novel "The book of Lights" represents a philosophical and psychological approach that is meaningful and enlightening

There was a time when no-one believed it necessary or possible to make of Kabbalah a scientific discipline. The Talmudists disapproved. The Kabbalists disapproved. To this day they disapprove. To the former, Kabbalah is nonsense. To the latter, it is an untouchable sanctity. But it is neither nonsense nor untouchable. It is the heart of Judaism, the soul, the core.

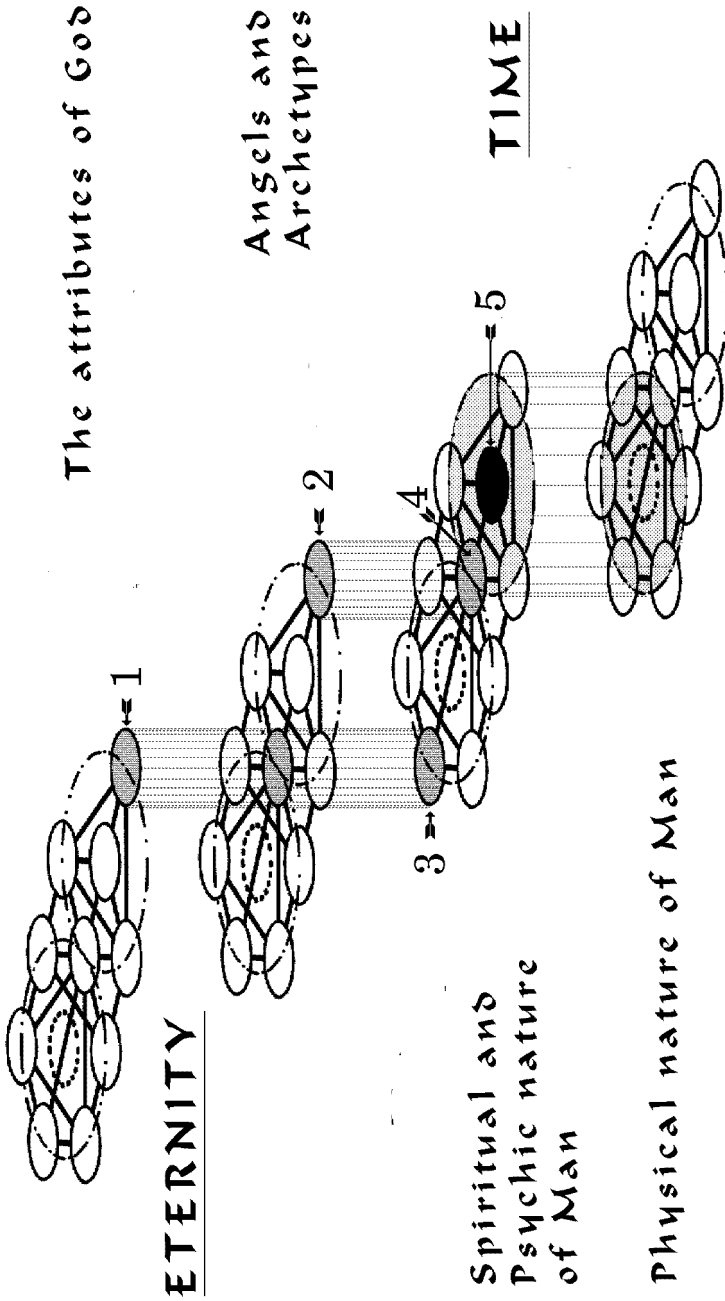
Talmud tells us how the Jew acts. Kabbalah tells us how Judaism feels, how it sees the world.

We are western secular beings today, rational, logical and so we are embarrassed by Kabbalah which is so irrational and illogical. But the tradition was not embarrassed, for nearly 2000 years it was not embarrassed. Great Talmudists were also great Kabbalists and produced dozens of commentaries to Kabbalist works all through the centuries.

I am told that it is an embarrassing and archaic form of thinking. I do not tell you to believe it, I ask you only that we understand it, that it be not lost to scientific enquiry.

What right does any Talmudist have to consign to oblivion 2000 years of a Jewish way of thinking? Will someone tell me - What right?

The esoteric science of Kabbalah presents the occult as an -ology, a system of speculative enquiry. This is akin to the theological and cosmological aspects of the religious tradition which are expressed as meta-physics and meta-psychology. It is the systematic nature of this aspect of the occult that is attractive to those of a turn of mind who are interested in the nuts and bolts of the hidden side of creation. It is the systematic study of the mystery of the Holy and the acquisition of experiential knowledge of the hidden nature of God's universe. The impulse and morality is essentially scientific and is the same as that which drives the research physicist who investigates, and endeavours to master, cosmology, radio astronomy or particle nuclear physics. The only difference is that the natural scientist is concerned with the energy and structure of the phenomenal universe, while the Kabbalist scientist is concerned with its underlying spiritual counterparts and, most importantly in the present context, with its stream of consciousness.



PUTTING SPIRITUALITY ON THE MAP

My Son! If you take my words to heart and lay up my commands in your mind,
 Giving your attention to Wisdom and your mind to Understanding, if you summon Discernment to your aid and invoke Discrimination,
 If you seek her out like silver and dig for her like buried treasure, then you will understand the Fear of the Lord and attain to the Knowledge of God, For the Lord bestows Wisdom and teaches Knowledge and Understanding.
 She is a Tree of Life to all who hold her fast and all who cling to her are secure,
 Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her Paths are Peace.

from the Proverbs of Solomon. Chapters 2 and 3.

Genesis

In common with other spiritual sciences, the Judaic mystical tradition, known as Kabbalah, postulates a continuum of consciousness in which the human form and physical being are the ultimate products of thought patterns that originate in the supreme, infinite and eternal super-consciousness of the domain of the Holy. Furthermore, it teaches that this continuum is in the form of a number of discrete worlds of being. The spiritual energies within each of these are reflected in those manifested in the one below, but they are increasingly differentiated in the process as they become involved in the world of matter and the sphere of physical action.

According to Kabbalah, in the beginning there was the Nothingness of the utterly transcendent and unknowable Divinity. This Nothingness, referred to as **Eyn** - literally the void (dimensionally infinite and eternal) - contracted into itself to make a space and a time for the phenomenal universe to come into existence. It then made itself manifest in the universe as a series of powers, forces and attributes known as the sefirot (the singular is sefirah). These are all that any human being can possibly know of God.

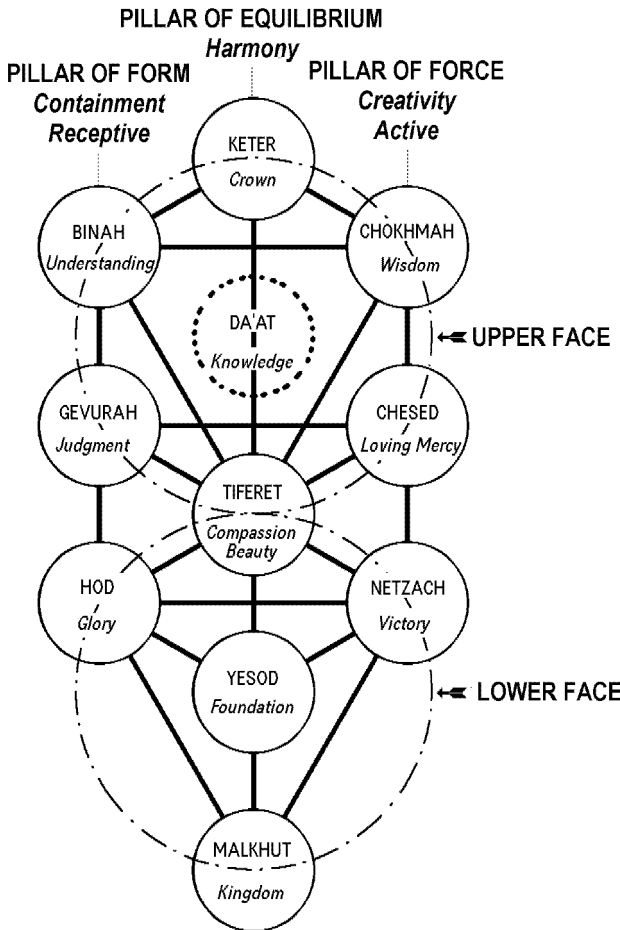
There is a remarkable similarity between this and the scientists' concept of the Big Bang theory of creation. The Nothingness - **Eyn** of the Kabbalist seems to be remarkably akin to the singularity that preceded creation in the scientific theory.

The Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life is a symbolic representation of the evolutionary process and is a distillation of the wisdom of the Kabbalah. It tells of the relationship between God, creation and man.

There are ten of the sefirot and they form the first manifestation of what is known as the Tree of Life. There are a number of symbolic representations of the Tree. The earliest known portrayal was the Menorah, the seven branched candelabra used in the Temple in Jerusalem. Subsequently, other models were used including ones with concentric circles, reminiscent of the modern understanding of the structure of the atom. The present geometrical representation, as shown in the illustration, emerged between 1500 and 1000 years ago and is the form that is universally used nowadays.

The construction of the Tree is illuminating. The two large chain dotted circles in the illustration symbolise the upper and lower faces. Overlaying these two faces are the three pillars that provide the framework for the dialectical process.



The two outer pillars symbolise the polarities to which all life is subjected:

That on the right is the expansive, energising and driving force that is ascribed to the masculine element.

That on the left is the containing, nurturing, patterning and structuring form that is ascribed to the feminine element.

The central pillar is the balancing effect of harmony which manifests itself as Truth, Beauty and Consciousness.

On these three pillars are sited the ten sefirot which, apart from the first and tenth, are arranged in triads.

In creating the Tree, each of the groups of triads is generated in turn, with the right hand member (active), preceding the left hand member (passive) and the two elements harmonising to produce the third. The Kingdom or Divine Presence in the Universe at the foot of the Tree is the final stage of this process in which the enigma of the philosopher becomes the Holy Presence in the historical life of existential man.

One can think of the Tree of Life as though it were an octave on the keyboard of creation, repeating itself as the vibratory rate becomes slower and slower, less spiritual and more material. Beyond the keyboard, beyond all images of octaves, is the utterly transcendent *Eyn* - eternal, infinite and unknowable, embracing all, at rest and at peace. Then, in love, it withdraws to make room for creation and makes itself known in creation through its attributes - the sefirot, in the highest octave of creation. These emanations of primary thought and energy through which the attributes of God were manifested in the Universe constituted the first world, or Tree, of emanation known as *Atzilut*.

The sefirot of this first world were reflected into the second, that of *Beri'ah* - the creation of those focal points of energy that guide the stars in their courses and, through the primordial unconscious known as Adam, mould our own spiritual being and our personal existence. These energies were called Angels by the ancients, and given names. Spiritually aware psychologists now use the word Archetypes to describe them. They are the preconscious patterns that mould and form our own psychological processes. These archetypal energies are the source of all the great myths, the psychological expressions of spiritual truth in allegorical form, on whose foundations cultures and civilisations have grown.

And then in descending octaves, one sees how the second world was reflected into the third, that of *Yetzirah* - the formation of the processes within the human spirit and psyche, and the evolution of Man from pure spirit, through thinking, relating, and willing being into the foundation of its phenomenal life - the ego. Finally into the fourth and final world, that of *Asiyah* - the making of the formative force field with its energy centres and the gross physical body.

It must be appreciated that the undifferentiated singularity of the Eternal One cannot be represented in any diagram, and its utter transcendence and unfathomable nature is not counted amongst the Trees. Some writers do speak of it as though it were a fifth Tree without attempting to represent it symbolically.

Each octave is a replica of the Tree of Life. The statement that Man is made in the image of God means that in Man are mirrored the sefirot as the qualities that mark his potential for spiritual growth. The return of Man to spiritual being is a retracing of the steps of evolution, and only by a true insight into the processes of evolution and by a spiritual fulfilment of the moral laws is it possible to return to the source.

Jacob's Ladder

Jacob's Ladder is a means for describing the continuum described previously that links every dimension of consciousness from that of the humblest cell to That which is Holy and which is the source of all consciousness. It illustrates the relationship between the four Trees described above, each of which represents a dimension of consciousness: Divine, Archetypal, Psychological and Physical. These are not separate but overlap so that the upper face of one Tree is overlaid by the lower face of the one above it. The diagram on the right shows the integrated ladder and that on the opposite page shows how the individual Trees are combined and related to one another.

It will be noted that five of the Sefiroth are highlighted and numbered. Their special significance is as follows.

1 and **3** The crown of the upper face of Yetzirah is overshadowed by the foot of the Tree of Divine attributes and thus illustrates the perfected Human Being standing in the Presence of the Holy.

1 Malkuth in Atzilut is known as the Shekhinah or Presence of the Holy in the phenomenal world

3 Kether in Yetzirah is known as the Crown. It is the highest peak of human attainment, which only the true prophet or mystic can reach briefly in his moment of enlightenment. In the Book of Genesis, it is manifested in such men as Abraham, who walked with God, and Moses who went up into the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments.

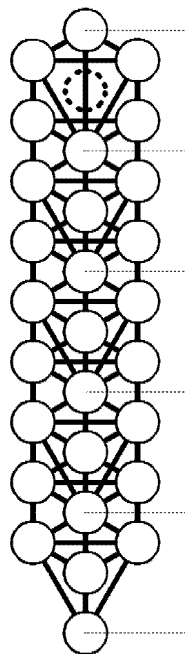
2 and **4** The centre of the Tree of Yetzirah where upper and lower face meet, coincides with the foot of the Tree of Archetypes and thus illustrates the Self open to the guidance of the Guardian.

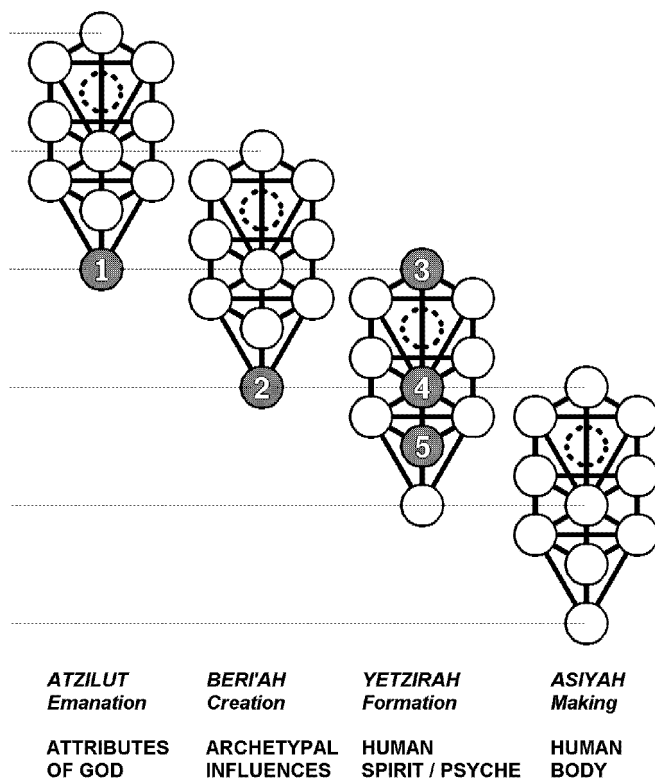
2 Malkuth in Beri'ah is known as the Maggid or archetypal guardian. In the Hebrew tradition it is the Guardian Angel.

4 Tipheret in Yetzirah is known as the Self at the heart centre. Jacob stands here when he is transformed to Israel.

4 and **5** In the lower face of Yetzirah (The Psyche), the Self and the ego enter into their relationship..

5 At the centre of the Psyche is the ego complex. This is our normal conscious self, with all its complexes, problems and limitations.. Yesod in Yetzirah is known as the ego at the foundation centre. This is where Jacob stands at his moment of existential crisis when he represents unredeemed everyman.





The **1 3** relationship can be manifested in two different ways:

- Mystically in the oceanic experience of Yichud in which all sense of personal identity is completely lost. (In Yoga, this is the Samahdi experience that Patanjali describes in his Sutras as the goal of Raja Yoga).
- Existentially as an “I and Thou” encounter in which personal identity is retained. It is the latter that is paralleled in the Jewish experience of the prophetic style of relationship between the Holy One and such outstanding men as Abraham and Moses. (In Yoga it is the encounter with the transcendental aspect of Krishna that so completely shatters Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, which is essentially a treatise on Karma Yoga).

The **2 4** relationship, on the other hand, is open to everyone who is willing to accept the discipline of spiritual growth.

The Twofold Nature of Personality

The illustration to the right shows the third Tree (Yetzirah). It shows the relationship between the psyche and the spirit, that is the personal and transpersonal aspects of personality. In common with all the Trees, it has two faces:

The upper face (spirit) is a manifestation of all that is potentially Holy in our being. It is often called the spark of Divinity in us, and in the language of spiritual psychology it is termed the transpersonal Self.

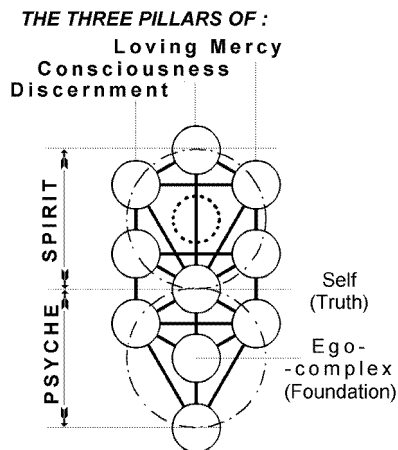
The lower face (psyche) corresponds to the individual self. It must be emphasised that the individual self, whose ego lies at its centre, is equally an essential part of our being. In Kabbalistic terms it is often called the foundation, for there can be no complete biological existence without it. It is indeed its foundation, for a person with no individuality would have no ability to ground the spirit in the world of action, essential for the fulfilment of our destiny. A person without an ego is, psychologically speaking, in the vegetable state, completely dependent upon others for survival. In the language of spiritual psychology it is termed the personal self.

It must be appreciated that these allegories and graphic illustrations must not be mistaken for representations of discrete entities. Spirit and Psyche are qualities of awareness in which the human unity may elect to take its stand: either by being egocentric and denying its potential, or by taking responsibility for becoming truly human and opening itself to the Holy.

Although the ego is an essential part of our total humanity, it has within it a potential for psychic disaster if it assumes a central position in the personality, that is if one becomes ego-centric. It is this ego-centricity that has to be overcome and not the ego itself.

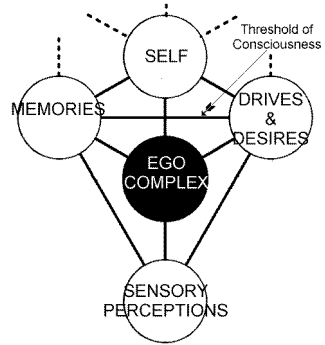
The personal self has within it the potential for growth into maturity if it can establish an authentic communion with the transpersonal Self. The first task of spiritual development and integration of the personality is to become aware of the reality of the nature of the transpersonal Self.

When consciousness is centred on the lower face, one is subjected to the laws of causality and determinism that are the hall marks of nature. But when it is re-centred on the Self at the meeting point of the lower face and the upper face, one transcends nature and exerts the truly human faculty for free will, giving it the ability to choose the good and express one's integrity whatever the cost.



When consciousness is centred on the ego, there is no communion with the higher Trees. In meditation, when awareness is re-centred in the heart centre on Truth, communion can be made with the archetypal Guardian at the foot of the second Tree.

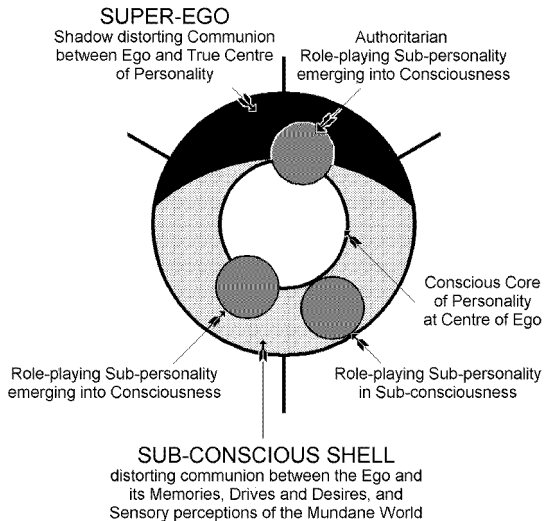
The second illustration, to the right, shows the Psyche in greater detail and, in particular, how the Ego complex relates to the memories, drives and sensory impressions that shape it in the world of action.



The third illustration, at the bottom of the page, focuses on the ego-complex and its problems. The ego is the sense of personal identity. It may be strong and simple or it may be weak and complex. In the former case, (that is when it is well integrated), it knows both itself and its limitations and is content to take its rightful place. However when it is weak and complex, it plays roles that are not truly its own.

If we meditate upon the nature of our being, we find that within our ego complex there is a spark of conscious personality constrained within a prison. This spark is the natural child within us that needs to become open to the intuition of the transpersonal self in order that it may become the natural adult with a potential for clear intellectual thought, emotional feeling, and sensitivity.

The prison is the subconscious shell (sometimes called reactive shell) which masks the individual self from reality by obscuring, distorting or colouring all incoming messages:- from our sensory perceptions, from our memories and instinctual drives, and also from our Self, the gateway to our transpersonal self and our highest aspirations.



Within this shell is the web of neurotic memories, frenetic desires, sensory impressions and imposed authoritarian indoctrination that condition its thoughts, feelings and reactions to life.

Looking at these in greater detail, they manifest as:

- The neurotic memories that are the recollections of the little hurts of past events, not seen in their true perspective, that distort our true memories. They should have been evaluated and digested as teaching lessons, but instead are continually regurgitated to deform and discolour our emotions, thus serving as the foundation for bearing the grudges that haunt and destroy us.
- Frenetic drives stemming from the desire for glamour and sensation; the covetings and ego-centric demands of the petulant child within the personality that colour our energies.
- Distortion of the sensory impressions of events in the mundane world that colour them and prevent them from being perceived for what they are.
- The authoritarian element is known as the superego, or shadow. This is the immature parent within the personality structure that puts up a barrier of prejudice and guilt built upon indoctrination - that is, all the dogmatic instruction imposed upon the personality by authoritarian parents, teachers, cults, peer groups and books. Its biggest danger is that it may appear at times to be the voice of conscience; but it is bogus, for the true voice of conscience resides in the transpersonal self. The shadow stands in opposition to the natural child that is in all of us, and which, all too often, is bruised, hurt and repressed from its past experiences at the hands of parents and teachers, themselves haunted by their own unhappy childhood experiences. This is the cause of tensions that in many cases initiate problems in meditation. In many ways, it is the most destructive of all the elements of the ego, for it may be used to project onto our neighbour all those faults that we fear to recognise in ourselves.

The most common problem with the superego is the guilt complex. In this situation there is an inner tension between an element of the superego that contains all the energies left by an over critical and moralising parent or other adult during childhood, and a repressed sub-personality in which are embedded all the childhood fears and lack of self esteem.

In normal healthy consciousness, we can be helped to recognise these elements of ourselves for what they are, and through meditation we can reconcile them to the central core of our personality.

The energies within this shell seem to have a life of their own and take the form of role playing sub-personalities. They are in many cases the residues of the petulant child within us that is the antithesis of the natural child. They populate our subconscious and inhibit our true self-expression. Some of them emerge partially into our field of consciousness and it is possible by reflective meditation to recognise them. Those others that are buried deeper in the subconscious need us to go into a deeper state of meditation.

At the core of the ego-complex is the fully conscious core of personality that has the potential for growth. Any therapeutic process that uses guided meditation will develop in this core the ability to bring into consciousness the content of the shell and

recognise the role playing sub-personalities for what they are. Having done so, it can discover the potential positive qualities underlying their negative behaviour patterns and energies, transmute them, and above all redeem the shadow. Then with the guidance of the archetypal guardian that oversees the Self, it can integrate itself and become strong and simple.

Some of these sub-personalities may, at first, cause us great embarrassment, for we see in ourselves characteristics of which we may be heartily ashamed. Others may be recognised as false glamours but, in each case, they need to be acknowledged and accepted as parts of our selves before any step on the path of integration can take place. In guided meditation, these are brought into the light of consciousness so that they may be recognised and redeemed, for every negative quality has the potential for being converted into a positive and redemptive energy.

Destructive tensions are created not only by the role playing sub-personalities individually, but also by virtue of the fact that in the weak Ego complex, they are in conflict amongst themselves.

Redemption of the evil impulse (Yezer Ha'Ra)

A man cannot find redemption until he sees the flaws in his soul, and tries to efface them. Nor can a people be redeemed until it sees the flaws in its soul and tries to efface them. But whether it be a man or a people, whoever shuts out the realisation of his flaws is shutting out redemption. We can be redeemed only to the extent to which we see ourselves.

18th century Chassidic teaching

Within all of us, there is a continuing competition between two impulses: that towards the good and that towards the evil. We can train ourselves to say:

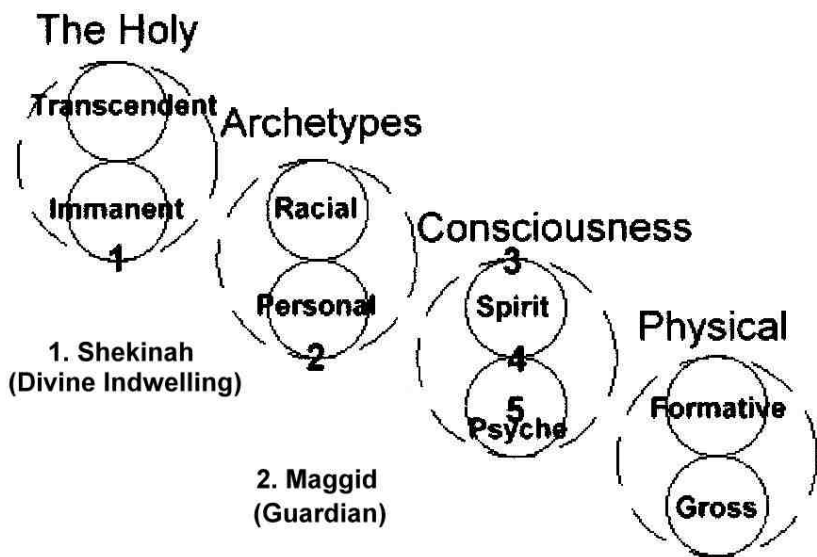
I acknowledge and recognise this evil impulse that is within me and that is part of my being, but I also recognise that it can and must be redeemed so that its dynamic (or Libido) may be transmuted to good.

In doing so, we express the fact that, underlying every negative quality, there is a positive energy that has something of value to offer. If, however, we refuse to recognise our own potential for evil as well as for good, we may fall into one or other of three traps:

- Our shadow may project its own evil impulses onto others and see in them what we refuse to recognise in ourselves. This leads to intolerance and hypocrisy.
- We may bar an integral part of ourselves from redemption.
- We may suffer from a lack of self-esteem.

If healing means to be made whole, then those aspects of our personality that we fear are neither to be suppressed nor cast out. Rather must they be redeemed; for redemption can only come when the whole person is redeemed, warts and all. Moreover, only by accepting and loving ourselves can we learn to accept and love others.

If we can redeem our shadow and turn its negative qualities into positive energies, we can shatter the shell of egocentricity that bars true communion between the core of personality in the ego and the heart centre of the Self. This communion, when it is achieved, produces the spiritually matured person who sees the spiritual potential in everyone that they encounter, and who loves so much and so truly as to feel their pain in his or her heart.



3. Mystical or Prophetic state

4. Self in Meditation

5. Ego - Centred

THE ANATOMY OF MEDITATION

The Kabbalist model of the four worlds, (see the illustration opposite, which is a greatly simplified version of that shown on page 23), affords a useful model of the events in meditation. Each of the four worlds has an upper and a lower face, and the lower face of a higher world overlaps the upper face of a lower world and has a special relationship with it. The principle events are numbered and a key provided. They are explained in the text that follows.

Physical

Gross Body: We are accustomed to thinking of the physical body of Man in simple terms; but in reality there are a number of 'bodies' interpenetrating each other and supporting each other's functions. At the grossest level there is the skeletal body - of which the fossilised remains are all that survives many years after death. Then there is the muscular body - responsible for all movement and powering various functions; the digestive and eliminative body; the circulatory and respiratory bodies and the organic body.

But after we have considered all these, we become aware of two other bodies more subtle in their nature. The first of these is the chemical body : the endocrine system whose hormones influence our metabolism, moods, mental energy levels, immunising response to disease and our response to stress conditions. The second is the electro-chemical body: the nervous system whose sensory components serve as gatherers of information about the internal and external world, transmitters of consciousness and triggers of activity throughout the structure of the body. All these bodies are accessible to study by physiologists.

Formative Body: There is, however, one more body, even more subtle in its nature, that must be considered. This is the formative body (or force field). Its reality has been scientifically demonstrated through Kirlian photography. This suggests that it is probably a manifestation of an electro-magnetic phenomenon. Pre-scientific thinking that relied on intuition for its concepts, and metaphors for its expressions, called it the aura or etheric counterpart. Those in whom extra-sensory-perception is well developed, and who are clairvoyant, describe this aura as a shimmering coloured cloud of luminescence around the gross physical body, with striations of pattern concentrated in certain areas. Others, who are clairsentient, (and this facility is far more common than clairvoyancy) can sense it with their hands. All healing by the laying-on-of-hands is dependent on this faculty.

The formative body serves also as the interface between the psyche and the gross physical body, and is the means by which body and mind are inter-related. When it is temporarily ruptured, the phenomena of out of body or near death experiences occur. It is, of course, permanently ruptured at death. When it is distorted, disorientation is experienced.

This formative body moulds its more solid counterpart by providing the life force, energies and patterns that maintain cell metabolism and govern growth and healing. Yoga physiologists describe both the energy field and the organising patterns of the formative body's structure in detail. They give the name “**chakras**” to the latter. Many of the attributes ascribed to them are metaphorical rather than actual, and have no relevance to human physiology, but there are two vitally important functions that must be mentioned:

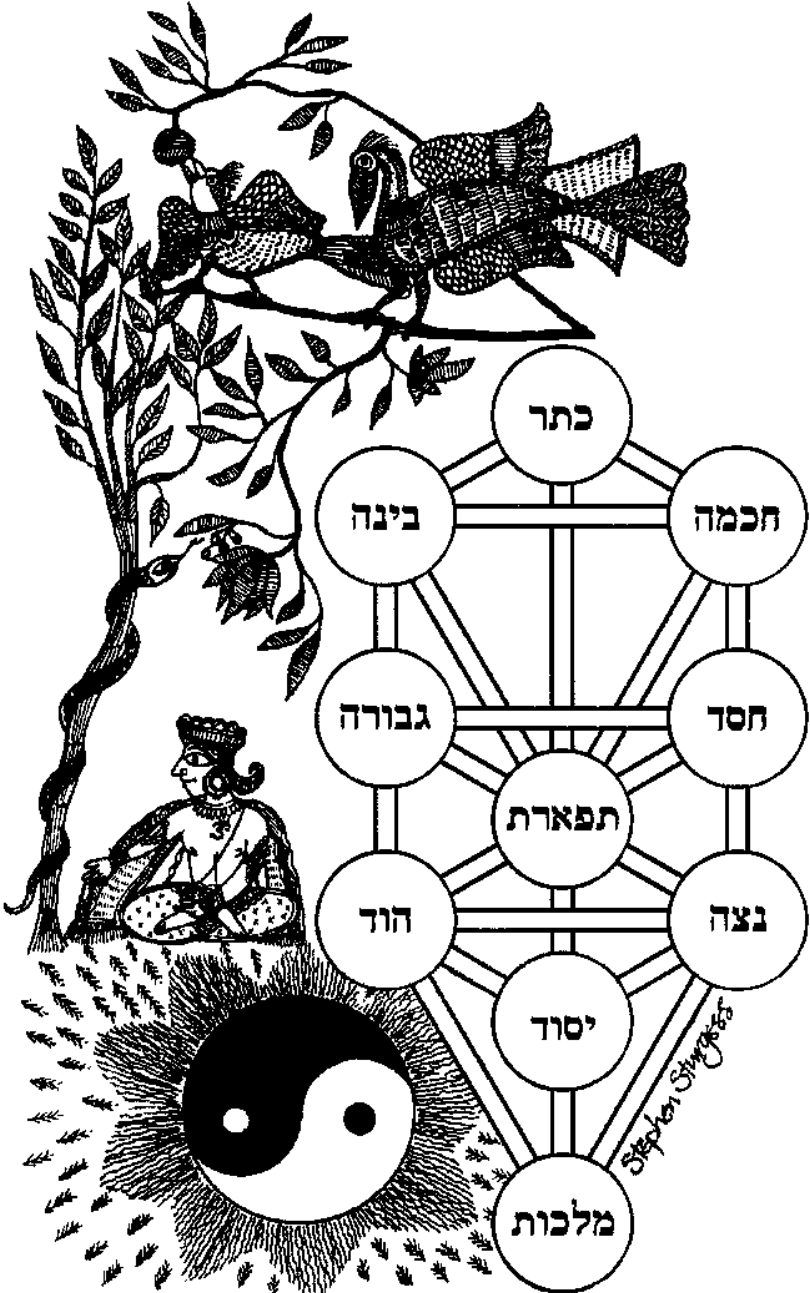
- They give structure to the subtle energies of the formative body and are essential for the self-healing processes of the components of the gross physical body. Yoga physiologists correlate the seven principle chakras with specific nerve plexi and endocrine organs (the producers of hormones), and suggest that the chakras take an active part in the normalisation of the functions of these organs and nerve plexi in order to ensure physical and emotional health. This underlies the rationale of the Yoga **asanas** in Hatha Yoga.
- The chakras also have a filtering function which controls the influence of the forces of the unconscious upon the mind. They are metaphorical gateways that can be open or closed. In the closed state of normal consciousness, they protect the mind against invasion, so that we may not be subjected to stress-making psychic noise. It is highly possible that it is failure of the chakras to act in this manner that causes psychic derangements such as schizophrenia. In meditation they may become partially and spontaneously open to give a heightened awareness of the superconscious. Normally they close of their own accord at the end of meditation and during the return to normal consciousness, when they revert to their normal filtering function. However, in the case of the psychically sensitive and, thus vulnerable, person, this may not spontaneously occur. Hence the importance of ‘grounding’ at the end of any meditative or healing work. To avoid even a minor sensation of feeling disoriented or strange, or the danger of an euphoric “high”, it is wise to perform a symbolic exercise to assist in closing the chakras. This is described in greater detail at the end of the section on ‘Meditation technique - The eight steps of Raja Yoga’ (pp 39-40)

Consciousness – Psyche and Spirit

“Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual self and the immortal Self are perched on the branches of the self same tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes.

The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the Divine Self - bewildered by his Ego - grieves and is sad. But when he recognises the worshipful Lord as his own true Self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no more”.

from the Mundaka Upanishad.



Spirit

The calm and observing bird, referred to in the Upanishad on the previous page, is a metaphor for the immortal (or Divine) Self and is a manifestation of all that is potentially Holy in our being. It is often called the spark of Divinity in us, and in the language of spiritual psychology it is termed the transpersonal Self.

Psyche

The bird who tastes of the fruits is a metaphor for the personal or individual self whose ego lies at its centre.

As has already been stated on page 23 (which should be read again very carefully), the ego is an essential part of our being. In Kabbalistic terms it is often called the foundation for there can be no complete biological existence without it. It is indeed its foundation, for a person with no individuality would have no ability to ground the spirit in the world of action, essential for the fulfilment of our Karmic destiny. A person without an ego is, psychologically speaking, in the vegetable state, completely dependent upon others for survival. In the language of spiritual psychology it is termed the personal self.

It must be appreciated that these allegories and graphic illustrations must not be mistaken for representations of discrete entities. Spirit and Psyche are those qualities of awareness in which the human unity may choose to centre its consciousness: either by being egocentric and denying its potential, or by taking responsibility for becoming truly human and opening itself to the Holy.

Archetypes

The Archetypes are those primal forces that govern our psychology. An earlier age called them Angels, but they still have their power over us for good or evil. The one that is of primary importance in meditation is the 'Guardian' (in the diagram) at the foot of the lower face (Personal archetypes), which our ancestors called the Maggid and which spiritually aware psychologists call the Wise Counsellor .

When consciousness is centred on the ego (in the diagram), there is no communion with the higher Worlds. In meditation, when awareness is re-centred on the transpersonal Self (in the diagram), communion can be made with the Guardian.

The Holy

At the foot of the lower face (Immanence of the Holy) is the Shekinah - the Divine Presence in the life of Man (in the diagram). This is the aspect of the Holy that is sought in Mystical Union (Yichud) when consciousness is centred on the Crown (in the diagram). This is the ecstatic state of consciousness achievable by Prophets and Mystics.

MEDITATION TECHNIQUE

THE EIGHT STEPS OF RAJA YOGA

Raja Yoga

Although the forms of meditation presented in this booklet are directed towards the Jewish equivalents of Bhakti and Karma Yoga, a knowledge of some of the techniques used in Raja Yoga is helpful. Strictly speaking, Raja is the mastery of the thought processes of the mind and of the senses through meditative techniques. However, in these meditations, the final stage is personal encounter in an “I and Thou” relationship with the Holy, as distinct from the goal of Raja which is Samahdi, the oceanic experience of absorption into the “All”.

Not only is there a meditative tradition in Judaism corresponding to Raja Yoga, but in each of Patanjali's traditional eight steps, there is a precise correlation to be made with a corresponding concept in the Jewish tradition. The first two steps - “Dedication to Spiritual aims” and “Preparation of the Body” are an essential preparation for any meditative or healing discipline, but steps 5, 6 and 7 of these correspondences are specifically relevant to the forms of meditation that are presented here. These will now be studied in detail.

Dedication to spiritual aims

This is vital to all meditation for it establishes our spiritual integrity and is the best insurance that meditation will be free from harm

None of the forms of meditation mentioned earlier is likely in itself to cause problems. But the reasons why the first two steps of Raja Yoga are so important as a prelude to all forms of meditation is that the practice of Yoga in general, and of meditation in particular, enhances what is latent in the personality. Development of the intuitive faculty may also encourage psychic abilities, and unless there is an unwavering spiritual integrity and discipline, these can place powerful distractions, such as the magical temptation to manipulate, in the student's path. In extreme cases these could lead to Schizoid conditions or even Demonic possession

1. **Yama** This is concerned with the laws of personal restraint that govern our relationships with others, viz abstention from: harmfulness, falsehood, theft, incontinence and greed.

2. **Niyama** This is concerned with obedience to the spiritual laws governing mastery of the instincts and emotions, viz: purity, contentment, simplicity, study and devotion to God.

Their counterparts in the Jewish tradition are to be found in the Ten Commandments and the Priestly Code (Leviticus 19) - the laws of human conduct and spiritual integrity.

Preparation of the body

This is essential in order that body, mind and spirit may be in tune with each other.

3. **Asana** In Raja Yoga, Asana means to adopt a posture that is relaxed and that ensures an erect spine. The cross-legged position or tailor posture is suitable provided it does not curl the lumbar region. This demands a flexibility of the hips such that the knees go down towards the floor. If, as is so often the case, this flexibility is lacking, then the lumbar spine may be straightened by lifting the buttocks off the floor using a firm pad, about 2 - 3 inch thick.

The classic Lotus posture, although ideal for achieving a straight spine, should only be adopted if the knees can rest flat on the floor when the simple cross-legged posture is used. If the Lotus is attempted when this is not the case, the result will be severely damaged knee ligaments, due to the fact that the knee is a hinge joint and not a ball and socket joint.

An alternative position, that many find preferable, is kneeling and resting the buttocks on the heels. If this is found to be uncomfortable due to the load on the fold of the ankles, the pressure may be relieved by supporting the buttocks on a low stool in the form of a sloping saddle or kneeling bench. However, it is perfectly acceptable to sit on a comfortable, straight-backed, flat seated, armless chair, with shoes removed and with feet flat and firmly on the ground. If the legs are short, the feet should be rested on a block so that they may rest flat on the floor.

The eyes may be fully closed, or the upper lids may be lowered so that the floor can be no more than faintly seen. In all cases, the hands should be placed on the lap (the back of one hand resting in the palm of the other) or the backs of the hands should be rested on the knees. This gently draws back the shoulders to open up the chest.

Emphasis should be directed to stretching the neck upwards, keeping it in line with the rest of the spine and dropping the shoulders while drawing them slightly back. By imagining a pigtail growing from the crown of the head, and a hand from above grasping it and pulling it upwards, the back of the neck will stretch, the spine will automatically straighten, and the chin will drop slightly downwards.

4. Yoga Breathing and Pranayama

Pranayama is derived from two Sanskrit words:

- **Prana** which means life force, creative energy or breath.
- **Ayama** which means direction, discipline or control

Taken in conjunction, they may be defined either as 'control of the breath' or as 'direction of the life force'.

In the context of meditation, this does not refer to the variety of breathing exercises used in conjunction with the asanas of Hatha-Yoga, but rather to the one specific disciplined breathing technique used as a means of achieving the meditative state. The processes involved in the Yoga science of breath are described in the following pages.

The Hebrew counterpart of Pranayama is suggested in a significant prayer from the Sabbath morning service of the prayer book used in the Synagogue. This commences with the words: “***Nishmat Kol Chai***”, and the prayer is translated as:

The **breath of life in every creature** shall bless you, Lord our God, and the spirit of all flesh ever recalls your beauty and your greatness.

- ***Nishmat*** is the construct form of ***Neshamah***, which means soul or breath, and therefore can be translated as either “the breath of” or “the soul of”.
- ***Kol*** means “all” or “every.”
- ***Chai*** can be an adjective meaning “living”, but is used in the present context as a noun meaning “living being” or “living creature”. It is closely related to the word ***Chayyim*** which means **Life**.

The implication is clear that the concept of a **Life Force** is also inherent in the Hebrew. [In passing, it is of interest to note that the oriental concept of **Chi** (or **Qi**) used in Acupuncture and Chinese medicine, also implies **Life Force**.]

The Yoga Science of Breath

In breathing, there are two aspects to be considered:

- **Yoga respiration.** This is concerned with the most efficient way of satisfying the cardio-vascular needs of the gross physical body. This involves filling the lungs with air, and calls for a balanced proportion of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood stream. (Paragraphs 1-4 below)
- **Pranayama.** This directs the healing energies of Prana to promote the energising of the Formative body. (Paragraphs 5-6 below)

It might be said that the physical breath is the vehicle, and that Pranayama is its driver who gives the formative breath its thought, direction and energy.

1. Restriction

Our breathing tends to be dominated by our emotions. Yoga teaches that there are various means by which the breath may be controlled in order to render it much slower, smoother and calmer than in normal breathing.

The simplest technique is achieved by partial closure of the glottis (the valve in the throat) so that a quiet hiss is heard at the back of the throat on both in- and out-breaths. When retaining the breath, the glottis may be closed completely. The glottis control may be used without limitation. Indeed it should become second nature so that, eventually, it is used all the time.

2. Inhalation and exhalation

Yoga shares with advanced western techniques the recognition of the importance of the complete physical breath. This means that inhalation takes place at three levels in succession:

- Diaphragmatic (or solar plexus) breathing. The diaphragm is the curtain of muscle that separates the thorax from the abdomen. It moves downwards during inhalation, and the solar plexus area, two inches above the navel, is seen to expand forward. This is known as deep breathing. (but see also 'Control of the abdominal muscles' below)
- Thoracic (or rib cage) breathing. During inhalation, the rib cage expands outwards in all directions, whilst the solar plexus contracts inwards to support it. This is known as mid breathing.
- Clavicular (or collar bone) breathing. During inhalation, there is a lifting forward and upwards of the ends of the collarbones nearest the throat, but not the shoulders. This is known as high breathing.

The exhalation is performed in a similar manner but in reverse order. There should be a slight contraction of the gut muscles at the end of the exhalation.

3. Retention

The Yoga complete breath involves not only inhalation and exhalation as described above, but also retention of the breath after each of the two dynamic phases. This pause in breathing is known by the Sanskrit word **Kumbhaka** and many Yogis regard it as the most vital part of the process. At the superficial level it ensures that there may be time for a fully effective substitution of oxygen in place of the carbon dioxide, water vapour, and other waste products of energy production. Far more important however is the fact that, by slowing down the breathing, deep though it may be, the amount of oxygen absorbed is actually reduced. Oxygen is essential for the combustion of blood sugars in the muscles in order to provide energy. However, a modest level of carbon dioxide is essential as a buffering agent to ensure the correct absorption of oxygen. Excess oxygen in the blood forms unstable free radicals that can damage healthy cells around them and bring disease in their wake. Hence uncontrolled deep breathing is actually harmful to the body, as is also rapid and shallow hyperventilation.

4. Control of the abdominal muscles.

It is unfortunate that some teachers of breathing technique advocate the slackening of the abdominal muscles during the diaphragmatic stage of inhalation, thus allowing the abdominal wall to inflate or balloon outwards.

Yoga breathing teaches that it is essential to avoid any tendency to do this. Instead, there should be a gentle contraction of the abdominal muscles so that the lower abdomen and thorax remain still and under control. The principal benefit from this is that the combined action of the lowering of the diaphragm and the control of the abdominal muscles increases the inner abdominal pressure. This has a profound tonic

effect on the neuro - muscular system, stimulating the internal electric activity of the nerve plexi (the distribution systems for the nerve systems) and is essential for the optimum health of the human organism. If the abdomen is allowed to inflate, there is no resistance and hence no electrical stimulation.

This contraction should also be maintained during exhalation (where it also assists in the efficient expulsion of oxygen depleted air from the lungs), and during the two retentions after inbreath and outbreath.

An additional benefit is that the visceral organs are massaged and strongly invigorated. This is essential for their health. Otherwise they become congested with an abnormal quantity of blood with the result that the circulation and other biological processes are slowed down.

5. Direction of energy

As was explained previously, the meaning of **pranayama** is the 'direction of the life force'. The energising activity of pranayama is essential for the health of the formative body with its energies and patterning structure.

Energy, or life force, follows thought, and when concentration is applied in the form of visualisation, pranayama can be used to promote healing within the formative body and, through it, the gross physical body.

Typically such a visualisation would be of a flow of energy entering the crown of the head during inhalation and passing down the spine to the chakra corresponding to the sacral plexus (also referred to in the other oriental healing and martial arts traditions as the **Tanden** or **Hara**); and from there, during exhalation, either:

- passing to the specific area of the body requiring healing, or
- radiating energy throughout every fibre of the body, or
- continuing downwards and carrying away all the poisons, toxins and distress out through the feet.

6. Meditative Breathing and Pranayama

All the techniques so far described would be incorporated.

The retentions should be extended so that the next breath (whether in or out) will only be taken when it feels right to do so. The retention with breath held out might then be experienced as an emptiness; that is a preparation to receive. The retention with breath held in might be experienced as a pause before surrendering the ego. Inhalation and exhalation may be experienced as complete mental silence.

Alternatively, and particularly in the early stages of meditation, each in- and out-breath may be accompanied inwardly by one of the two syllables that together constitute a mantra (see page 41 ff). The time taken for each stage should be as long as is comfortable.

Meditative pranayama also includes visualisation techniques such as awareness of a flow of energy or light, up the back of the body from the base of the spine to the crown during the in-breath, and down the front of the body during the out-breath. This could be visualised as a fountain of light.

If used therapeutically, the effect of such meditations will be a reduction of stress levels. However, it should be stated that meditation may be contra-indicated in certain types of depression and anxiety states. If the effect of meditation seems to make such conditions worse, it should be discontinued.

Preparation of the mind

This is where disciplining the mind to be one-pointed is seen to be an objective of meditation.

5. **Pratyahara** This signifies withdrawal of the senses from the influence of external stimuli and turning them inwards.

Its Hebrew counterpart is **Hitbodedut**. Translated literally, this means Self - isolation. If one uses it in the external sense of the word, it means going into a private place where one will not be disturbed. However in the internal sense, it means isolating the mind from all external stimuli, sensation and extraneous thought so as to fill the mind with the subject of the meditation. This is called **Hit-pash'tut ha-gashmiyyut**, the stripping off of corporeality (of awareness of the material world).

6. **Dharana** This implies concentration of the senses on a single target. This may be a physical object, an image held in the mind, a symbol (one of the Yantras used in Yoga), a mantra or an abstract idea.

Its Hebrew counterpart is **Kavvanah**, from a root meaning to direct. Normally it is translated as concentration or devotion, but in meditation and meditative prayer it implies directed consciousness. It can also mean: clearing the mind of extraneous thought and concentrating totally on the action in hand.

Transcendence of the mind

7. **Dhyana** This refers to expanding the intuitive faculty.

Its Hebrew counterpart is **Hitbonenut**. Translated literally this means self-observation or reflection. However, in meditation, it implies understanding oneself in the light of created things, of the universe, and ultimately of the closeness of God.

As Martin Buber expressed it:

I am that which has to know itself, purify itself, not for the sake of its temporal happiness nor for the sake of its eternal bliss, but for the sake of the work that it has to do upon the world.

It might be said that in the course of meditation: **Hitbodedut** and **Kavvanah** enable one to cross the threshold of individual consciousness, while **Hitbonenut** centres one's awareness in the Higher Self.

8. Ecstasy or Market place - the final steps

It has already been pointed out that there are two forms of religion: Gnosis and Prophecy. The former is concerned with ultimate truth and the **Knowledge of the Nature** of God. The latter is concerned with acceptance of and **Fulfilment of the Task** that God has set upon Humanity. In Yoga, the disciplines of Raja and Gnana emphasise Gnosis, while those of Bhakti and Karma emphasise Prophecy.

In many religions, particularly those based upon the principles of Gnosis, **Samahdi** is the supreme objective of spiritual endeavour. This means passing beyond normal meditation into a state of contemplation and complete identification with the object of one's attention. In the ultimate state, where one is meditating on God, **Samahdi** is the ecstatic condition of bliss where one becomes as one with the God-head. However, the danger arises when this goal is based upon a philosophy that regards the mundane world as one of 'appearances' or, in the extreme case, even of 'illusion'. The oriental mystic calls this **Maya**, and insists that it be rejected in favour of a 'Real' world that is purely spiritual.

In Judaism, (essentially a Prophetic rather than a Gnostic tradition) the search for a state of ecstasy is comparatively rare, and as shown in my companion booklet '*Caring for the Psychic Casualties*', fraught with danger. It is true that there is a Hebrew word for it - **Yichud**, Unity. Jews who follow the ecstatic path see in God the most perfect Unity possible. **YHVH** is One. They experience in **Yichud** the ultimate goal of ecstatic meditation, where in totally unconditional and unconditioned love, the true mystics lose their sense of separateness and become as one with God in their unity with the Holy. Totally absorbed.

However, in Judaism, there is another word - **Devekut**, which means cleaving to, and that implies a perpetual being-with-God or at-one-ment. The difference between **Yichud** and **Devekuth** is beautifully expressed in a poem by Rabbi Albert Friedlander, of which the following is a pertinent extract:

We pause in reverence before the mystery of a presence:
 The near and far reality of God.
 Not union but communion is our aim.
 And we approach the mystery with deeds.
 Words only lead us to the edge of action.
 But it is deeds, which bring us close to God and Man.

Ending the meditation

Grounding – Closing the Chakras

There are various possible symbols that one can use at the end of the meditation, when one has started to regain consciousness of one's physical body and one's surroundings. In each case, the routine must be performed, in turn, over the area of the body associated with each chakra starting from the top. Some examples out of the many possible are as follows:

- Imagine oneself drawing with one's finger a circle and cross of light.
- Visualise the bolt of a door being shot home into its keep.
- Visualise a fully open (coloured) flower closing into a tight little bud.

In the class situation, the teacher would give this as an instruction: For example, in the third suggestion, it might be given as . . .

Visualise an open flower gently closing into a tight little bud in turn over each of the energy centres that act as interfaces between mind and body:

Over the crown of the head	a violet flower
Over the forehead	an indigo flower
Over the throat	a blue flower
Over the heart	a green flower
Over the solar plexus	a yellow flower
Over the sacral plexus	an orange flower
Over the groin	a red flower

After that, it would only remain to check that there were no residual feeling of disorientation amongst any of the participants. A powerful earthing movement such as stamping the feet or clapping the hands might be useful. In the rare event of real problems, healing hand rotation over the Chakras would be necessary.

“Riding the bull back into the market place”

The Chinese tradition emphasises that grounding the spiritual experience in the common place or the everyday is the ultimate objective of meditation - a down to earth philosophy that is truly in accord with the Hebrew prophetic tradition of bringing intuition down to earth so that it might hallow the mundane.

Discernment.

This is essential in order to assess the fruits of meditation and to determine whether the intuition is compatible with reason. It is quite right for reason to say:

“Ah yes, I had not looked at things that way before,
but now that it has been brought to my attention,
it feels right”.

But it is also right for reason to be suspicious and to ask whether it is truly intuition directed through the transpersonal self, or whether the super-ego has been usurping the role that is the rightful responsibility of the wise counsellor, and deceiving one with a false glamour.

SILENT PRAYER AND MANTRA MEDITATION

Many prayer books, offer scope for periods of silence. How should these moments be used? Congregants are often uncomfortable with silence and seek an escape from it. Yet silence offers opportunities for spiritual refreshment that are particularly valuable during worship. Many of us will interpret them as occasions for expressing our own personal prayers, but the silence of which we speak is not the mere silence of words thought inwardly and without sound. It is the silence of prayer on the borderline of meditation: the silence of listening rather than uttering. Out of that silence arises the possibility of balancing the intellect by redeeming, and making creative, the hidden and neglected intuitive side of our Being.

Truly silent prayer demands a very high degree of *Kavvanah* (attentiveness) where one is totally alert, not sleeping nor lethargic, not thinking but completely receptive and totally aware. The gateway to entering the silence is through relaxing into the alpha wave state of consciousness. It is so difficult to achieve this for even a brief moment without the invasion of the voices within, that we need a technique that we can use to focus all our attention. One very popular and well-known example is the silent **mantra**. There is no precise English translation, but this Indian word has passed into common usage through the popularity of Oriental disciplines such as Yoga and Transcendental Meditation. It is derived from the Sanskrit root words: **Man** meaning Mind, and **Tra** meaning To free, and denotes the continuing repetition of a word, generally of two syllables.

Brain Waves And The Alpha Rhythm

The mind, the non-corporeal generator of consciousness, is a very complex aspect of our being.

The complexity of the mind is mirrored in the complexity of the brain, the transmitter of consciousness, which is divided into two hemispherical lobes, each with its individual function. Their electrical activity can be monitored.

During normal consciousness there is a large difference in behaviour between the left (intellectual) lobe and the right (intuitive) lobe. In those relaxed states where one crosses the threshold of individual consciousness, the brain rhythms slow down, the amplitudes in the two lobes become identical and reduced. This state is known as alpha rhythm. The effect is not only relaxing but also spiritually healing, as it brings into balance the two sides of our nature: masculine and feminine - intellectual and intuitive. It is into this state that we enter during meditation and silent prayer.

The Use Of The Mantra

To master the art of silent prayer and meditation, firstly, we need to give considerable attention to concentration on the breath. This is in itself an exercise in *Kavvanah* (attentiveness), but leads further when we perform the mantra of the breath.

The technique of mantra has been used from ancient times in Jewish meditation. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, in his two books: '*Jewish Meditation*' and '*Meditation and the Bible*', tentatively suggests that there appear to be references to its use even in the Bible. He mentions that, according to the 12th-century linguist David Kimchi, the Hebrew verb **Hagah** denotes the continuing repetition of a word. In the second book, he gives much useful information on the concept of **Hagah** and its relevance to mantra. He explains that repetition of a mantra habituates the mind to it and eventually one can say it without the words registering consciously. By then one has formed the habit of erasing all thought from the mind during its recitation. The mantra, in clearing the mind of mundane thought, opens it to transcendental experience. If the mantra has spiritual power in its own right, it puts the meditator into a mood conducive to accomplishing a specific spiritual goal or task.

The mantra was certainly used by the mystics in the Talmudic period 2000 years ago, and at the Kabbalist centre of Safed in Northern Israel during the 16th century in the form of repetition of a Biblical verse or of such prayers as the Amidah. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, at the end of the 18th century, used it as a preparation of the mind for prayer. The phrase that he advocated as an introduction to the method was **Ribbono Shel Olam** (ie Master of the Universe).

The Shema As A Mantra

The daily scriptural reading known as the **Shema**, which commences – 'Hear O Israel, **YHVH** is our God, **YHVH** is One', is the primary declaration of faith in the Hebrew liturgy. Its first word - **Shema** - means 'Hear', but is better translated as 'Hearken' (a more truly active process). It has a very long history of use as a mantra.

There are three letters in the word **Shema**: **SHIN** which has a 'Sh . . .' sound, **MEM** which has a 'Mmm . . .' sound and **AYIN** which is treated as though it were silent, and is a preparation for a vowel sound. In Hebrew, the vowels do not have letter equivalents.



Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan points out that the **SHIN** has the sound that, of all the letters in the alphabet, is closest to that of white noise. On an oscilloscope it would appear as a totally unstructured jumble. Fittingly, it is symbolic of chaos.

The **MEM** has the sound of a hum. It is a pure harmonic note that, on the oscilloscope, would appear as a perfect wavy line. It is thus symbolic of harmony. Rabbi Kaplan mentions that the early mystical text book, the **Sefer Yetzirah**, translates the still small voice (*I Kings 19:12*) as a fine humming sound, and adds that the 'Mmm . . .' sound was associated with prophecy. It is interesting that in the oriental mantra **AUM**, the 'Mmng . . .' sound [obtained whilst breathing out and using the vocal chords, whilst simultaneously closing the lips (humming) and touching the middle of the top of the

tongue to the roof of the mouth (**singing**)] is widely used in meditation to promote tranquillity.

If, in the sitting or kneeling position, one breathes in using the glottis to slow down the breath, one hears the sound of **SHIN**. Then, if after a brief pause, one breathes out and with lips initially closed one makes a humming sound at the pitch that seems right, one produces **MEM**. Finally, near the end of the outbreath, one opens one's lips to make **AYIN**. This is repeated for a period of up to 20 minutes. The spiritual significance will be apparent.

Rabbi Kaplan, in his seminal book on Jewish meditation, mentions an exercise in which one alternates the sound of **SHIN** and **MEM** on the outbreath. These two letters are referred to as Mother Letters. The third Mother Letter is **ALEPH**, which is the sound of the silent inbreath. So, the sequence in the exercise is as follows:

Inbreath **ALEPH** - Outbreath **Sh** . . . Inbreath **ALEPH** - Outbreath **Mmng** . . . - Repeated continuously whilst visualising the letters



mem



aleph



shin



aleph



The Personal Mantra

Many secular and religious meditative disciplines teach a form of mantra, and the Yoga tradition, in particular, has a rich repertoire. In Judaism, as in most other mystical traditions, these include the repetition of one of the Names of the Holy. There is no reason why one should not choose a meaningful phrase like **Shalom** or **Amen** if, as is possible, one has reservations about the potentially magical implications of invoking the Name.

The Transcendental Meditation movement's teachers give each of their students a Sanskrit mantra. They claim that it is specially chosen for them. However, it seemed to me that if, in a mood of total dedication and sincerity, one opened oneself to the direction of one's **Maggid** (the archetypal overseer or guardian angel) by means of a simplified form of the guided meditation, that would be a better way of receiving the personal mantra appropriate to the present stage of one's spiritual development.

The technique that I developed used the alpha state of deep relaxation to become aware of the natural mantra made by the sound of the two syllables heard in the inbreath and the outbreath during slow breathing with partially closed glottis. In using such a technique to receive the personal mantra, one must remember that:

He who knows the breath of the Spirit trespasses
if he desires to obtain power over the Spirit
or to ascertain its nature and qualities;
but he also is disloyal who fails to give thanks.

Martin Buber

The Technique For Receiving One's Personal Mantra.

Text for a group leader to read aloud

Please take up a posture in which you are comfortable.

Each one of you has a personal and unique mantra, a natural vibration that, through your breath, links you with the Holy world of pure Being.

I am going to guide you into a deeper state of relaxed consciousness. There you will become aware of the subtle sound made by the inbreath and outbreath, which is your own mantra. You will bring it back into normal everyday consciousness and be able to use it as a focus for silent prayer whenever you wish.

Using the mantra, the whole being pulsates and resonates in tune with the Universe. In taking the inbreath, we remind ourselves that our breath is the physical manifestation of spirit as it comes to us from the source of our being. As we breathe out, we surrender ourselves in trust to that same source. Thus in both in-breath and out-breath there is a continual flow between Man and the Holy.

In a moment, I shall take you into deep relaxation. First however, as one's attitude to relaxation is a concentration on the Here and Now, on our existence and on our relationship with the Eternally Present One, the utterance of a short meditative prayer may have a profound effect.

A personal favourite of my own is an extract from Psalm 131:

Lord - my heart is not proud nor are my eyes haughty.
 On things beyond my scope no more I brood.
 But I have calmed and quieted my Soul
 Like a child at its mother's breast.
 My soul is like a comforted child.

And now you breathe gently and quietly, aware that your breath is a communion between your Soul and the Holy. In a moment I am going to count down from 10 to 0, and as I do so your relaxation will deepen and your awareness will be enhanced as you identify yourself with your higher Self, listening to and remembering the free flow of the music of the syllables that well up from out of the depths of your superconscious.

10..9 Relax your solar plexus . . . 8..7 Your forehead relaxed and pleasantly cool . . . 6..5 Going deeper - your throat quite relaxed and all unspoken thoughts stilled . . . 4..3 Your breath calm and slow . . . 2..1 Going deeper - your heart and pulse quite regular . . . 0 at peace and in harmony with the universe . . . (PAUSE). You have withdrawn your attention from all external sound except that of my voice. Your faculty of

observation of the inner rhythms of your soul is enhanced, A free flow of the music of your inner being is able to swell up from the unconscious elements of your personality under the guidance of your Guardian . . . (PAUSE) . . .

Now you are centred completely in your higher self, using the mind as an instrument to form, by an act of will, a receiver for the music of the universe as it plays upon your breath. Observe your body, and as it breathes in and out, listen to the prayer that your breath is making as it receives the breath of the Holy on the in-breath and surrenders it on the out-breath. Listen to its sound, for it is the mantra by which the Holy One will reveal itself in love to you, and by which you may surrender yourself in love to that love, so that you may do its will. The mantra will come as you relax and as you remain alert and receptive . . . but it will come in its own time.

There is now a period of total silence while the participants remain in total relaxation. Then the final note of direction:

The mantra that you have received is relevant to your personal growth process now. On a later occasion it may be repeated or replaced by another. You can, at any time you wish, deliberately conjure it up in your mind as a focus for silent prayer, at home or in the Synagogue, for now it is your very own.

After a few more moments of silence, the return to normal consciousness may be commenced:

It is time to come back. As I count from 0 to 10, you will return to normal awareness.

0..1..2 becoming aware of your heartbeat and pulse - steady and relaxed . . . 3..4..5 becoming aware of the pressure of your body on the floor . . . 6..7..8 becoming aware of your hands and feet, stretch out your fingers, clench your hands and then wriggle your toes . . . 9..10 become fully aware of where you are.

Finally there should be a thorough grounding and closing of the Chakras

Note on subsequent use in silent Prayer and meditation

It should be emphasised that once the mantra has been revealed, it may be used at any time where silent prayer is indicated, as a means for quietening the mind in preparation for pure attentiveness. All that is required is the taking up of the alert sitting

position, breathing in the prescribed manner, and concentrating on uttering inwardly the mantra in rhythm with the breath.

It may be used during worship at the appointed places. It may also be used for extended meditation (15 - 20 minutes) as a daily routine (say on rising in the morning). As such, it commences with a will to concentration that is in itself a spiritual discipline. From there one passes on to self observation which is a salutary experience of how unruly the mind really is, with a multitude of thoughts continually bubbling up. As one continues concentrating the attention on the breath and the mantra of its sound, one becomes conscious of a reduction in the thought bubbles and a growing sensation of clarity that is the forerunner of two possibilities:-

The first, a profound feeling of a lifting of the spirit;

The second, an opening to insight - that is, intuitive ideas of value.

This by no means exhausts the direction that experience in meditation may take. Background reading on the subject will help relate personal experience to traditional interpretation.

A Word Of Warning

The use of the mantra for brief periods in 'Silent Prayer' is perfectly safe. However, the same technique can be used in full meditation. While extended periods of mantra meditation present no problems for those whose mental health is reasonably stable, it can be disturbing for those who are not well grounded or who cannot face the truth about the flaws in their own souls, which may be revealed in meditation. It can be positively dangerous to those with latent schizoid or schizophrenic tendencies and who are thus vulnerable to the forces of the unconscious.

A Thought for Reflection

Buber talked about the twin dangers of magic and gnosis that have to be overcome. Magic in this context is the secret knowledge of the name of the god so that he may be conjured and coerced. Moses expected the people to demand to know the name of the god in whose name he carried the message. God replied with ***EHYEH ASHER EHYEH***, but Buber suggests that the "I am that I am" of the theologian and metaphysician is not the answer that the people need, but that it should be translated and made meaningful as:

I shall be there as I shall be there - that is, you need not conjure me, for I am here, I am with you; but you cannot conjure me, for I am with you time and again in the form in which I choose to be with you time and again; I myself do not anticipate any of my manifestations; You cannot learn to meet me; you meet me when you meet me.

A SIMPLE REFLECTIVE MEDITATION

This is intended to bring alive the meaning of the commandment “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19). The text that the guide might use is as follows:

Look around you, at the other people meditating with you in this room - your neighbours. Recognise them for what they are - people like yourself, each unique, each with their hopes and fears - and each with their potential for growth .

Close your eyes and relax. Turn inwards and quieten your mind. Listen to the still small voice of your intuitive self . . .

Think of someone whom you know very well, not necessarily in this room, but someone whom you dislike - whose company grates upon you. Hold the image of their face very clearly in your mind. Concentrate all your attention on that person . . .

What is it that you dislike about him or her? . . .

Now think very carefully - What is it **IN YOU** that creates that antagonism? Do you see something that reminds you of a facet of your self that you would sooner push down deep into the shadows of the basement of your mind and bury out of sight? . . .

But is the 'something' that you see the **REAL YOU**, or is it something on the periphery of your personality? . . .

And by the same token, is the 'something' that you dislike in him or her the **REAL PERSON** or something on the periphery of the personality? .

..

Look deeper into the heart of your neighbour . . . Look for all their good points - and list them in your mind . . . This may take some time . . .

Now look again and penetrate into their fears and hang-ups . . . Feel those fears and hang ups in yourself . . .

You are beginning to understand your neighbour. And in understanding your neighbour, you are beginning to understand yourself - **AND TO ACCEPT YOURSELF.**

You are learning to love your neighbour - and in loving your neighbour - **YOU ARE LEARNING TO LOVE YOURSELF.**

Remain still for a little while with gentle breathing, and finish with a good stretch to close the meditation.

THE USE OF GUIDED MEDITATION

The significance of the myth has been explored by a number of therapists, Notable amongst these is Dr Roberto Assagioli, who developed the technique of Psycho synthesis. In it he uses the concept of the guided daydream or guided meditation, and this demonstrates how a therapist, standing firmly in his own religious tradition, can universalise the principles of its myth and use them to help another person, whatever his faith, find healing from within.

Dr Roberto Assagioli achieved world wide fame as founder of the art of Psychosynthesis - a very powerful form of spiritual or transpersonal psychology for human integration and growth. Not so well known is the fact that he was also the founder and spiritual mentor of the Liberal Jewish community in the Italian city of Florence, and contributed to the conferences of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. His Jewish writings demonstrated that his secular thoughts in creating Psychosynthesis were profoundly influenced by Kabbalist concepts when he looked deep into the inner structure and complexities of the ego mind.

The outer aspect of a healthy human body gives a sense of beauty deriving from the harmony of its proportions which respond to definite geometrical laws. This means that the body has been built according to a definite pattern by a higher creative Mind. The same directive and creative intelligence appears to regulate - giving clear evidence of a purposeful plan, aiming at the manifestation, preservation, and increase of life. Such a plan reveals the action of an intelligent and loving Being, whom we call God. This is in full agreement with the teachings of Jewish tradition, according to which man's figure, the microprosopus, is built in close analogy with the Macroprosopus, the Great Cosmic Being, the Ancient of Days.

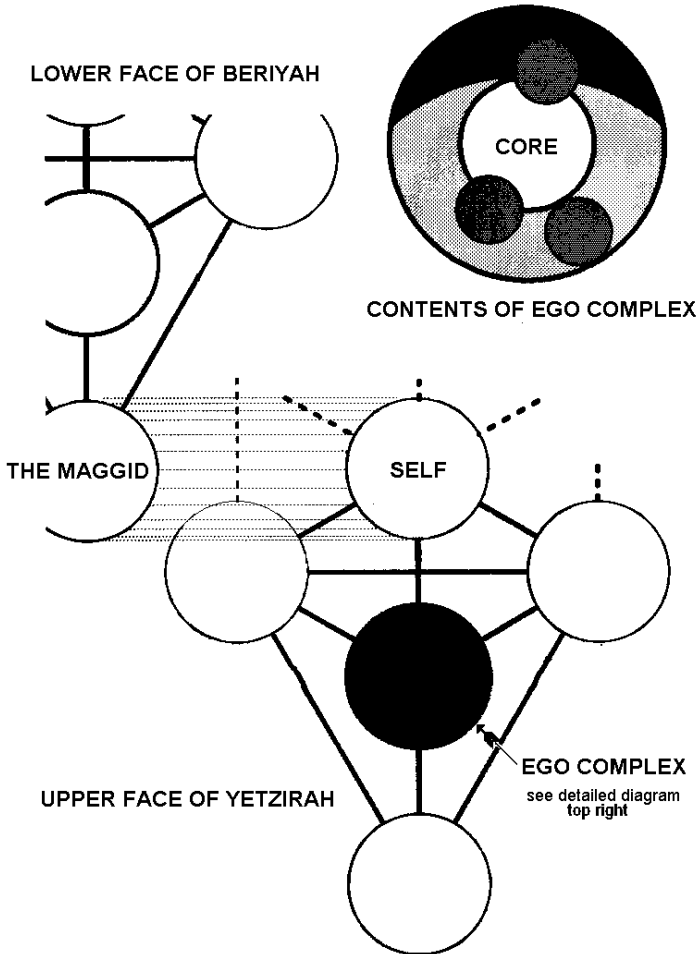
Roberto Assagioli

There are many references in the Bible to the significance of dreams and their interpretation. Anthropologists have described how important they are in the life of tribal communities. Jungian and Freudian psychologists have demonstrated the therapeutic value of natural dreams by asking their clients to record them immediately after they occur, and then analysing them during consultation. All these use the abilities of the human sub-conscious to express its problems in dreams.

Psychosynthesis, however, gave the dream a new therapeutic potential that is both diagnostic and integrative in its nature. The guided daydream stands between meditation and normal dreaming in that it is structured by turning it from a passive phenomenon into an active one. It uses relaxation to enable the brain to enter the Alpha state, and meditative techniques to bring the dreaming condition under the control of the core of individual consciousness, so that the dreamer can report on the content while it is

developing. The dream can be guided by a professional counsellor or even, after gaining experience, by the person meditating.

Unlike transcendental forms of meditation where the ego is completely surrendered and consciousness is re-centred in the Self, the meditation used in Psychosynthesis is an active relationship involving the core of the ego and the Self within Yetzirah, and the Maggid within Beriyyah. It is designed, not to surrender the ego but to integrate it and strengthen it by making it the willing disciple of the Self under the supervision of the Maggid. (This is illustrated in the diagram below which is derived from those on pages 23 - 25) Thus it is possible to centre the personality on the Self so that it is no longer egocentric. It should be emphasised that the answers to problems are not mediated by the interpretations of an outsider (as in Psychoanalysis) but are drawn from the higher wisdom within that is one's own true essence.



A Guided Day Dream for Problem Solving

This Guided Day Dream takes the meditator into a deeper state of super consciousness than the simple one described earlier.

There are three modules: Preparation - Core - Return and Grounding.

Preparation

The guide would initiate the inward journey with a total relaxation of the participants' minds and bodies. The meditators would then be asked to create the image of a flight of steps which they would visualise themselves descending, one at a time, going into a deeper state of total relaxation at each step. At the bottom of the steps they would be asked to create the tranquil image of a meadow (symbolising the lowest level of consciousness in the Psyche)

Core

This example is called "The Sanctuary". The text might be as follows:

You are walking along a path that leads across the meadow to a little house. You go to the door, open it and enter the sanctuary within . . . It is very peaceful. You sit on one of the chairs to rest for a while, looking around and observing everything in the room . . . There is a table, and on it stands an object - a talisman - that you realise has a special significance for you. Walk over to it and examine it, its shape, colour, scent, and try to guess its meaning. (Long pause).

The door opens and someone enters. You recognise that he or she is the 'Guardian'. There are many questions that you wish to ask. One might be about those aspects of the talisman that you do not understand.

Frame your first question . . . ask it . . . and listen very carefully to the reply. (Long pause). Ask any other questions, one at a time, and after each, listen to the reply.

Finally, the "Guardian" gives you a blessing. You offer your thanks, and, with the talisman that you have been given, take your leave. You walk back across the field to the steps and ascend them, returning to the point from which the journey started.

Return and Grounding

After the completion of the Core Module, there is a short period of total silence while the participants remain in total relaxation. Then the return to normal consciousness may be commenced. This will include a recovery of awareness of the body, stretching it with the hands raised over the head and heels extended:-

Finally there should be a thorough grounding including the very essential technique of "Closing the Chakras".

THE AMIDAH AS A MEDITATION

Prayer itself may be used as a reflective meditation. An excellent example is the Amidah, which is one of the most important and meaningful of Jewish prayers, and is about 2200 years old. It is used each day: morning, afternoon and evening, and consists of 19 blessings.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, in his seminal book on Jewish meditation, considers that the Amidah was originally composed with the specific intention that it be used as a meditation, although other scholars question this. He recommended that the first blessing be used in this manner to set the mood for using the remainder as prayer in the normal manner.

This first blessing is a most explicit statement of Jewish belief in God and the relationship between God and humanity. In its compass there are layers of meaning to uncover. Before each word or phrase one should slowly breathe in, using control of the glottis to slow down the breath, and at the same time making oneself aware of the interpretation of the word or phrase. Then breathing out one would whisper aloud or quietly utter the word during the whole of the extended outbreath, while reflecting on the deeper significance of its meaning and feeling one's reactions to its emotional significance within.

The blessing commences with the words:

Blessed are You, **YHVH**, Our God and God of our fathers.

It is this fragment that will be presented as a subject for meditation on the following pages.

But first please note that with regard to **YHVH**, the word **Adonai**, which literally means "Lord", is traditionally spoken in place of the not-to-be-pronounced Holy Name **YHVH**. In Hebrew the consonants

Heh  Vav  Heh  Yad  ←

are written with the vowel signs of **Adonai**, as the true vowels are no longer known. The common English Christian pronunciation, **Jehovah**, is a misconception due to faulty understanding of this fact by the translators of the Bible in the reign of King James I. It has no meaning or significance in Judaism.

Baruch

ברוך

Blessed

This means that God's immanent presence is the source of all blessing and that God is very close to us. In saying the word Baruch, we become aware of the presence of God pouring itself into the deepest recesses of our souls.

There are two words containing the letters *brchh*. ברבה

The only difference is in the vowel points beneath the letters that affect the spoken pronunciation:

B:ra^ˆchah ברבה a blessing

B:re^ˆchah ברבה a pool of water or a flowing spring

They are not necessarily connected but it does suggest that, with a little bit of poetic licence, one might visualise *B:rachah* as a pouring down of holy energy and also use the potent imagery of flowing water as a cleansing and healing agent. Hence, when one pronounces the word *Baruch*, one might meditate on the imagery of blessing as being a healing or hallowing energy flowing down upon one from a source on high.

Attah

אתה

(Are) You

This brings our attention to the I - Thou relationship that we have with God. It reminds us that we are addressing the Eternal Thou whom we perceive faintly reflected in the temporal thou that we encounter in every authentic I - Thou relationship which is centred upon our higher self.

In using the word *Attah*, we talk to God as a 'Thou', we do not contemplate God as a 'That'; and this underlies the essential difference between the existential encounter with God in Judaism, as against the dispassionate contemplation of the philosophers.

YHVH (Adonai)

יהוה

Eternal One (Lord)

We acknowledge the unutterable transcendence of the Holy and Infinite 'Who was, is, and ever will be'. (In the words of the hymn known as the *Adon Olam* – 'without beginning, without end').

In **YHVH**, the past, present and future become One in the dimension of Eternity.

The unutterable holy Tetragrammaton, or four letter Name, as **YHVH** is called, is related to the past, present and future tenses in Hebrew of the verb To be: **Hayah**, **Hoveh** and **Yihyeh** - 'was, is and will be' - all at once. For this reason **YHVH** has been translated as 'Eternal One', which is a shortened form of what really should be translated as the rather wordy 'Who was, is, and ever will be'.

Eloheynu

אלהינו

Our God

God is not only utterly transcendent, but through an act of love is also manifested to each of us uniquely as the God of personal relationship. We are also reminded that, during worship, we are opening our individual selves to the God of the whole community.

V' Elohey Avoteynu

ואלהי אבותינו

(&) God of our fathers

This reminds us that our search for God is in the context of our traditions, and that these go back to our earliest ancestors.

In these last two phrases we are reminded of the way that spirituality and religion balance each other.

Our God

refers to the personal spiritual experience that is the driving force that inspires and motivates us.

God of our fathers

refers to the religious heritage that is the stabilising and containing form that conveys the wisdom of generations of teachers, mystics and philosophers.

Without the discernment of the latter to balance it, the former would lead to a dangerous exuberance and spiritual conceit.

Without the adventurous spirit of the former to balance it, the latter would lead to sterility of thought and to fundamentalism.

The great founder of modern Chassidism, Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov, in a commentary on this phrase, taught:

Why do we say: 'Our God and God of our fathers'?

There are two sorts of people who believe in God. The one believes because his faith has been handed down to him by his fathers; and his faith is strong. The other has arrived at faith by dint of searching thought. And this is the difference between the two:

The first has the advantage that his faith cannot be shaken, no matter how many objections are raised to it, for his faith is firm because it has been taken over from his fathers. But there is a flaw in it: it is a commandment given by man, and it has been learned without thought or reasoning.

The advantage of the second man is that he has reached faith through his own power, through much searching and thinking. But his faith too has a flaw; it is easy to shake it by offering contrary evidence.

But he who combines both kinds of faith is invulnerable.

That is why we say: 'Our God', because of our searching, and 'God of our fathers', because of our traditions.

THE GOAL OF TRANSFORMATION

“One must begin with oneself,
but one must not end with oneself”.

The concept of ‘Tikkun Olam’ is usually, and literally, translated as ‘The Redemption of the World’. However it may be translated as ‘The Task of Healing’.

This expression needs a word of explanation. According to the mystical cosmology of Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, there was a primordial accident during the act of creation in which the unity of God was shattered. This was the origin of suffering both in Man and in the very existence of God. It was seen, as his task, that Man was created in order to repair the primordial damage.

It follows then; that if Man is created ‘in the image of God’, the healing of his own disturbed and disintegrated nature is the therapeutic counterpart of his religious and redemptive task of ‘Tikkun Olam’. It is both a personal and a communal task, but it is more than that. It is a cosmic responsibility. And in fulfilling that responsibility, Man either does what he can in this life and then hands on the responsibility to others, or else he returns to take the unfinished work further. In this latter respect, Jewish and Oriental concepts of reincarnation differ subtly from each other.

To the Oriental, Reincarnation is what must continue until the Soul frees itself from the bonds of attachment.

To the Kabbalist Jew in the Lurianic tradition, ‘Gilgul ha Nefesh’, the Transmigration of the Soul, is what must continue until the destiny of the individual Soul in contributing to the work of repair has been accomplished.

In Conclusion

Many of us start with high ambitions and, later on, have to come to terms with our limitations.

Rabbi Zusya told the story of how, in the ‘World to Come’, the great Judge would ask him:

Not : “O Zusya, Why were you not more like Moses?”
But rather “O Zusya, Why were you not more like Zusya?”

And in the Bhagavad-Gita of the Yoga tradition, we read:

Greater is thine own work, even if this be humble,
Than the work of another , even if this be great.
When a man does the work God gives him, no sin can
touch this man.
And a man should not abandon his work, even if he cannot
achieve it in full perfection;

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

God is not an Uncle

By Bill Heilbronn

available direct from the author

ISBN 0 9530156 0 2

Jewish Mysticism

By Dan Cohn - Shertock

One World

ISBN 1 85168 104 3

Soul Searching - Studies in Judaism and Psychotherapy

Edited by Howard Cooper

SCM Press

ISBN 0 334 02339 4

God-wrestling

By Arthur Waskow

Schocken

ISBN 0 8052 0645 0

Practical Kabbalah - A guide to Jewish wisdom for everyday life

By Rabbi Laibl Wolf

Three rivers

ISBN 0 609 80378 6

Meditation from the heart of Judaism

Edited by Avram Davis

Jewish Lights

ISBN 1 879045 77 X

Minding the Temple of the Soul - Balancing through Prayer, Movement & Meditation

By Tamar Frankiel and Judy Greenfield

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