

Chassidic Teachings relating to Mental Health  
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Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760): deconstructing borders within the Jewish community, between the individual and the Divine, and within the self. This approach was continued by the subsequent leaders of Chassidism and Chassidic communities.

PRIDE – a genre of Chassidic story in which the simple man's saying of Psalms has more spiritual worth than the great scholar's prayers and Torah learning. Thus, the focus on humility, rather than egotism and narcissism.

HUMILITY – AYIN – BITUL. R. Pinhas of Koretz: "If I am as small as a mote of dust, what can happen to me?"

GUILT – a) assuaging guilt. Story (in Toledot Yakov Yosef<sup>1</sup>) of woman sent by her husband to be on a boat with a sailor. Hence we say Ashamnu in the plural, because 'man and G-d have sinned together'.  
 b) Guilt transformed into a route to humility and joy.  
 וְחַטָּאתִי נֹגְדִי תָמִיד – 'my sin is always opposite me' (Ps.51:5)  
 – within view, but at a distance (Tanya<sup>2</sup>, Letter on Repentance, ch.11).

NOT BEING PERFECT. The 5 categories described by Tanya: Perfect Zaddik, Imperfect Zaddik, Benoni, Rasha with good, total Rasha. The average person is 'Rasha with good'. Does this promote depression or help a person come to terms with himself/herself?

FINDING THE CENTRE POINT: Tanya Part 1 ch.13: the goal is not to climb to a higher level, but to find the centre

<sup>1</sup> By Rabbi Yakov Yosef of Polonoye, first printed Koretz 1780.

<sup>2</sup> By Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, first printed Slavita 1796.

point of the level at which one is. This connects with all levels above and below.

**INNER REALITY OF GOODNESS** The theme of the Divine Soul and the Animal Soul. Recognising the 'animal' dimension of the ordinary self.

The Animal Soul can be traumatized, in pain, confused. Within is the Divine Soul, always whole.

JACOB and ISRAEL – a variant of this theme, from the current Parsha.

**STRUGGLE – 'WORK' –** The Divine Soul and Animal Soul are struggling: Jacob wrestling with the angel of Esau. But there are the possibilities of אתכפיא 'quelling' and אתהפכא – 'transformation'. The Animal Soul is cloaked in sackcloth but in essence is also good.

**COPING WITH SUFFERING –** Gemara Berachot 54a  
 חייב אדם לברך על הרעה כשם שמברך על הטובה... שנאמר ואהבת את ה' אלקיך.. בכל מאודך... בכל מדה ומדה שהוא מודד לך  
 "A person has the duty to bless G-d for bad just as for good. As it says 'and you should love G-d with all.. your might.. with every measure He deals out to you". Story: The disciples of Rabbi Dov Ber, the Mezeritcher Maggid (d.1772) visit R. Zusya to find out how to apply this maxim.

Tanya Part 1 ch.26: two levels of life-force from the Divine, from Yud Keh, or from Vav Keh. Hence:  
 אשרי הגבר אשר תיסרנו י-ק  
 'happy is the man who is chastised by Yud Keh' (Ps.94:12). Story of R. Mendel Futerfas (d.1995): bistu freilach?

**CONSTANT CREATION –** a teaching by the Baal Shem Tov. G-d is continuously keeping every detail of the world in existence. Hence all is continuously guided by:

HASHGACHA PRATIT, 'detailed supervision'. From HaYom Yom<sup>3</sup>, 28 Cheshvan: (paraphrase) Not only are all events by Hasgacha Peratit... but further, each event has a general relationship to the entire purpose of Creation... A person can consider: if this is so for a blade of grass, how much more so for any human being, and especially for a Jew...

TRACHT GUT VERT ZAYN GUT – affecting the world by the way we think.

MOACH SHALIT AL HALEV – the mind controls the heart. Using a thought pattern ('hisbonenus') to affect the way one feels. The common situation of feeling that one is not able to do this.

SAYING TEHILIM (PSALMS). 'My friends, we cannot rely on miracles. We must say Tehilim!'

KERIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH as relinquishing of the struggles of the day. HAREINI MOCHEL... In some prayerbooks 'Behold I forgive anyone who offended me..'

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE: From Vayetze. Jacob leaves Beersheba, wholeness, and goes to Haran (חרון אף – anger). On the way, the dream of the ladder and the angels. In Haran, struggle and being fruitful and productive. Then leaving Haran, final struggle with Laban, and going on his way, meeting angels at Mahanaim. The effect of his struggle: now he sees the angels when he is awake. (Based on teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe).

RADIANCE AND VESSELS as a paradigm of psychological well-being or its opposite. The 'breaking of the vessels' described by Rabbi Yitzhak Luria (16<sup>th</sup> cent).

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<sup>3</sup> 'From Day to Day'. Edited by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, comprising selections of the teachings of his father-in-law, the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, arranged as a diary. First published Brooklyn, 1943.

Keeping the balance of radiance and vessel. (Cf Talmud Hagigah 14b, 'Four entered Pardes'). The problem for the individual when his/her 'vessel' is weak. Perhaps damaged through trauma. The radiance is unmanageable but yet is a deeper Divine reality. The 'work' of the individual will hopefully lead ultimately to getting the balance right, and meeting the right kind of guardian angels for one's journey through life.

THE MENORA image based on Tanya Part 1 ch.35, elaborated by Rabbi Dov Ber Shneuri (d.1827). The goal of the person is to maintain the spiritual radiance shining around them as a positive aura.

THE SCENT OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN which surrounds a person, the product of their good actions. (cf. Rashi to Toledot, 27:27). The opposite when they are destructive. Trying to emphasise the power of the good.

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