

## Statement of Research Interests

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My current research focus, flowing from my dissertation, is on laying the intellectual groundwork for a Judaically-informed transpersonal psychology, with implications for the psychology of religion, transpersonal psychology, pastoral psychology, object relations theory, clinical psychological formulation and intervention. Essentially, I provide a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the personality changes associated with serious and sustained meditative and devotional practices that are carried out--consciously or perhaps unconsciously--with reference to an internalized God imago, or "God object representation" (Rizzuto, 1981; Spero, 1990, 1992). This work provides a useful counter-point and complement to psychological theorizing that utilizes Eastern-derived--currently mainly Buddhist--concepts (such as "disidentification")--to construct the contemporary psychology of meditation and spiritual experience. Along the way, my work also addresses an odd lacuna in the transpersonal and psychology of mysticism literatures, which have addressed and incorporated insights from Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim/Sufi, Christian, Aboriginal and other "wisdom traditions," yet have largely neglected--and (as I argue in my dissertation) distorted--the Judaic wisdom tradition.

Drawing on the work of Bakan (1993), Lobel (2007), Blumenthal (1988) and others, I begin by tracking several strands of the classical "faculty" psychology in the Western and Judaic genealogies of ideas, from Maimonidean philosophic mysticism, to other medieval rational mystics such as Bachya ibn Pakuda, the Sufis, and the Scholastics, extending historically to Franz Brentano, who instructed both Freud and Husserl (influencing psychoanalysis and humanistic psychology, respectively). This general type of psychology with its emphasis on intentionality is shown to be shared across these thinkers and movements, and shared also, on a parallel track, by later Kabbalistic and Hasidic mystics who drew heavily upon their medieval philosophic forebears when conceptualizing their meditative experiences and the latter's observed effects on personality.

Following these historical "roots" up into current psychological theorizing, we can recognize clear echoes of Maimonides and the Scholastics in object relations accounts of how the internalized representation of God (as a unique form of intentional object) lives and evolves within the psyche, and within psychotherapy. Yet these psychoanalytic theorists of the God relationship have not produced theoretical accounts of deeper or more advanced "unitive" meditative-mystical states. Transpersonal psychologists, on the other hand, *have* modelled such states and associated psycho-developmental processes and yet, as mentioned, generally rely upon Buddhist or Hindu-inspired conceptions that do not sufficiently account for the psychological implications of a personal God relationship for meditative process and outcome. Yet another group, scholars of comparative religion and mysticism, have provided additional insights into

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1. See Walsh and Shapiro (2006).

meditative-mystical experience, yet often within a more constructivist-literary, or, alternatively a philosophical approach, rather than with a psychological emphasis.

To summarize my work to date (providing the basis for a book and a series of articles currently in development): My psychological research reaches across several literatures (psychology of religion, medieval and Hasidic intellectualist mysticism, psychoanalytic object relations, the psychology of religion, and transpersonal psychology) in order to strike deep and defensible foundations for an ambitious contribution to the contemporary psychology of spirituality. The first phase of this project, represented by my doctoral dissertation, synthesizes theistic and unitive, intentional and non-intentional, relational and nondual, God-object relational and what I am calling n-Object (for “panen-Object”, or “not-an-Object”) relational elements into a depth psychological account of psychodevelopmental pathways associated with panentheistic meditation.

Another area of research interest relating to the above is my intention to expand this line of enquiry by linking it with the pioneering work of logician and psychoanalyst Ignacio Matte-Blanco, whose 1975 work *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets*<sup>2</sup> provides, I believe, an exciting potential framework for furthering our understanding of how the human mind comes to reach for, and potentially psychologically internalize Infinity. I am fascinated with the question of how this thought of Infinity is different from other thoughts, and in how the logical structure of the unconscious mind’s organization (into hierarchies of “transfinite sets”, as shown by Matte-Blanco) can help us to understand the human impulsion, and capacity, to seek the Infinite.

Another area of my overall academic project grows out of my interest in both the theory and practice of qualitative research as an expression of human science, in which I was trained and mentored by Prof. D. L. Rennie and his Research Group over the course several Research and Graduate Assistantships as well as in my theses at York University. I would like to apply qualitative research in terms of his “methodical hermeneutic” methodology (Rennie, 2000) to other topics with religious and spiritual themes, as well as to teach, train and collaborate with colleagues in other content areas of psychology wishing to adopt a methodical hermeneutic approach to psychological enquiry.

I also plan to publish based on my MA thesis, “Sharing teshuva wisdom: Judaically-informed psychotherapeutic counselling of *baal teshuva* ‘returnees’ to Judaism.” This was a modified grounded-theory inquiry into religious change processes, and how they are viewed by an ethnopsychiatric tradition in Israel.

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2. See Rayner, 1995, for an introduction to Matte-Blanco’s thought.

## References

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