

The evolution of consciousness in Chassidic contemplative meditation

by
Yaacov Lefcoe, Ph.D

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Correspondence to: yaacovle@gmail.com

Hitbonenut, Contemplative Meditation

- In-depth study and contemplation of *bishtalsbelut*, *baolamot*, the "downchaining of worlds", a "hierarchic ontology" (Rothberg).
- Forces the mind to *sustain paradox* to grasp the material. "A paradoxical ascent to God" (Elior).
- Initial studious engagement, to inner "contemplation", to "gazing", to "deepening."
- *Bittul*; self-nullification in *unio mystica* or *deveikut*. (contra Scholem, Stace, Katz).
- Key texts: The *Tract on Ecstasy*, and the *Tract on Contemplation*, by R. Dov Ber of Lubavitch.

Basic Assertions:

- There is a lacuna in the psychological literature with respect to Jewish meditation.
- Chassidic meditative teachings can contribute in a number of important ways to psychology of religion and transpersonal psych (TPP) theorizing.
- Significantly: Chassidic writings address not merely meditation, but the *psychology of* meditation, with rich and discerning descriptions of psychospiritual states and developmental pathways.

Stages of 'Ecstasy' (*Hitpaalut*)

(Stages of global, cultivated, personality change)

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|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 6. Simple will | <i>Ratzon pasbut</i> |
| 5. Intention in the heart | <i>Kavana be'lev</i> |
| 4. Ecstasy in the heart | <i>Hitpaalut ba'lev</i> |
| 3. Good thought | <i>Machshava tova</i> |
| 2. Acknowledgment (cold thought) | <i>Hoda-a (machshava kara)</i> |
| 1. Intention towards ecstasy | <i>Kavana le'hitpaalut</i> |
| Strange fire | <i>Eish zara</i> |

The Chabad School of Chassidism

- Early 19th Century White Russian Chassidism, continues to this day (even in the "Bay"!)
- "Wisdom, understanding, knowledge": Judaic, intellectual mysticism, a "path through the intellect" (Leshan).
- A late synthesis of Lurianic Kabbalah and Maimonidean Jewish Philosophy.
- "Modern" and "humanistic" trends: Anti-hierarchical, "vividness and authenticity of personal experience" (Blumenthal).

Eish Zara, "Strange fire"

(alluding to Leviticus 10:1)

- An entirely inauthentic meditative involvement, an "artificial ecstasy" (Yiddish: *a gemachte hispaalus*).
- Absence of a meditative focus or concept. Non-intellective.
- 'Direct' arousal of pseudo-spiritual 'enthusiasm', a "feeling oneself", even a "self-worship": "There is I and none else" (Isaiah, 47:8).
- *Tract*: "Anyone with any genuine meditative experience.." will have a visceral "aversion" to this phenomenon.

Stage 1: *Kavana le'hitpaalut* Intention towards ecstasy

- Complex, unresolved motivational profile that undermines the meditative process.
- The desire for a pleasure state *associated with* union, rather than union itself.
- 3-level psychological formulation: 1) Imagined self-ascribed motive; 2) 'Actual' active motive, and 3) Deeply unconscious ("*ba'he-elim meod*") motive.
- Issues of maturity, "meditation readiness," the need for a "melancholic disposition."
- This "quasi-stage" is discerned by appearance of post-meditative behaviour bespeaking an increased "self-feeling" ("*yeshus*").

Stage 2: *Hoda-a* Acknowledgement

- Critical, transitional stage: Emergence of non-conflicted motivation towards *deveikut*. (union).
- "A poor man contemplating the wealth and splendour of a King." A nascent appreciation; no feeling of personal connection, rather: distance.
- With aspects of self no longer the focus, true progress towards *deveikut*. (union) begins.
- Discerned when following upon meditation the person is *less* focused on his *yeshus*, "somethingness" (personal pleasures, standing among others, role and identity).
- I.e., an attitude of "*Nishtkeil*", "nothingness."

Stage 3: *Machshava Tova* "The Good Thought"

- A felt, numinous contact at the leading edge of the meditation: the concentrating mind. An intellectual ecstasy (*hitpaalut*).
- The person is "moved" (*bazaza*) on the way towards *bittul* (self-nullification) becoming "set" in the psyche. Structural personality change.
- A state of pervasive "preoccupation" (*tirida*) is induced.
- The meditative field, and associated numinous feelings, remain "impregnated in the mind", and are not yet "born into the heart."

Stage 4: *Hitpaalut balev* Ecstasy in the heart

- Deepening meditative experience, fuller immersion and internalization, such that ecstasy now reaches the person's emotional centre.
- "True *hitpaalut*" effects a major re-organization of the entire system of wants and desires. 'Insight with catharsis'.
- An enduring impact on emotional life and outer behaviour, whereas earlier there were discontinuities and "crisis of duality" (Boorstein) phenomena. No longer.
- The meditative field of awareness contracts, descends as *Mochin shebamiddot*, "the mind in the emotions" that drives the "Ecstasy in the heart."

Stage 5: *Kavana balev* Intention in the heart

- Full trance immersion. No contraction of the meditative vista ("*bechaim*."") to enclathe in emotions, rather emotions are suspended as they are suffused with the fully "unabridged" intention, the *kavana*.
- "He cannot yet bring it into his heart emotionally because his mind and heart are completely preoccupied..." (*Tract*).
- Ever-deepening degrees of "nullification and absorption" (*bittul ve'hitcalelut*.) of the psyche (*nefesh*) into the Object.
- Consciousness expands to the state of *Mochin de'gadlut*, "Great" or "Matured Mind"

Stage 6: *Ratzon pasbut* Simple will

- Arrival at an "...essential and simple will, due to which, and from which, the intellect was born and branched out..." (*Tract*). Stable transrational mind. A permanent state.
- "Simple" not "compound" will: A will without an Object. Intention-less intention.
- 'Fact' of *bittul* (nullification) experienced and lived naturally. A "Dualistic Mystical State (DMS)" (Forman)?
- A Pure Consciousness Event (PCE)" (Forman)?

Part II: “n-Object relations”

(Lefcoe, 2011)

- A TPP theory of meditative psychodevelopment on a panentheistic spiritual path, inspired by the Chassidic psychology of meditation, integrating object relations theory and the psychology of religion literature.
- An approach to the psychology of meditation offering additional tools to those emergent from the dialogue of Buddhism and psychoanalysis.
- Addresses meditation born and sustained in a relational matrix with an “Object” understood to subsume the self and cosmos; a “panen”-Object; a “not-an-Object”. Hence “n-Object.”

Moshe Ha-Levi Spero

- Writes about the God representation evolving developmentally through Mahler et al's separation-individuation stages.
- Autism, symbiosis, differentiation, practicing, rapprochement, emotional object constancy.
- I align these stages with the two “pre-stages” of *hitbonenut*, namely the “foreign fire” and “intention towards ecstasy.”
- “Emotional object constancy” vis a vis God parallels closely to the *hitbonenut* stage of Acknowledgement, *boda-a*.

A Fusion of Horizons

- I argue that the object relations school and the Chassidic tradition share intellectual roots in a classical “faculty” psychology that is “intentional.”
- *Hitbonenut*: An evolution in the internalized God representation, the *shiura*, or “measure of God in the heart” (*Zohar, Tanya*).
- Synthesizing this with psychoanalytic theorizing on the God relationship; the God representation that lives and evolves in the psyche (Rizutto, Spero). Argued to be universal in the West.

Anthropocentric vs. Deocentric “god” or “God” representations

- Spero presents his separation-individuation scheme as describing “anthropocentric” God representations that are fundamentally **projective**, and (developmentally) **narcissistic**.
- He states that once these stages are traversed the individual is “...on the road to experiencing a relationship with God” that is “deocentric” rather than anthropocentric.
- Spero does not develop his deocentric category, which is plainly a *transpersonal* category. I propose to join Spero's anthropocentric God Object stages with the Chabad n-Object stages to complete a full-spectrum account of panentheistic religious psychodevelopment.

God imago

God concept

n-Object

Table 2: God-object, n-Object integrative model

God-object Relations (Spero): Chabad *hitbonenut*: Explanatory notes:

Anthropocentric Relating:

1. Normal autism | Foreign fire ——— Ergotropic self-stimulation
2. Symbiotic phase

3. Differentiation | 1. Intention to ecstasy ——— Complex, unresolved motivational sets
4. Practicing
5. Rapprochement

Transitional Stage:

6. Individuation (emot. obj. const.) | 2. Acknowledgement ——— God Object crystallizes

Emergence of n-Object

Deocentric Relating:

“...direct internalization of an ideal divine representation.”

3. Good thought ——— Intellective numinosity (extrovertive)
4. Ecstasy in the heart ——— Emotional numinosity (extrovertive)
5. Intention in the heart ——— Nascent introvertive absorption
6. Simple will ——— Consummate introvertive absorption

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Correspondence to:

Yaacov Lefcoe, Ph.D

- Psychotherapy.
- Psychological assessment.
- Meditation therapy and training.
- Transpersonal counselling.

c/o Andrew Shaul Psychology,
421 Avenue Rd., Suite 1,
Toronto, ON, M5N 1A4
416-780-1791 ext. 303
yaacovle@gmail.com