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Report on the Rabbinic Thesis
by Daniel M. Cohen
entitled
Levels of Awareness of Self and Divinity
as Manifest in *Amud HaTfilah* from *Sefer Baal Shem Tov*

Grafted into the discussion of *parasha Noach* in *Sefer Baal Shem Tov* is a self-contained anthology of Hasidic teachings on meditative prayer titled, *Amud HaTfilah*. The unknown author of this little jewel assembles some of the most theologically daring and spiritually insightful Jewish teachings about the prayer experience ever arranged. Mr. Cohen has read and (I believe) correctly understood most of it.

Of particular fascination to him are the frequent allusions to "levels of awareness" or "worlds," especially and principally those attributed Dov Baer, the *Maggid* of Mezritch, a second generation Hasidic teacher and heir to the *BeShT* himself. Mr. Cohen, as set out to understand these "worlds" and, in so doing, record a map of inner psychic and religious space.

In 101 pages of text, notes, and appendices and 3 pages of bibliography, the author traces the notion of four "higher worlds" to a 16th century Lurianic teaching. He identifies these levels of awareness as: *Olam HaAsiyah*, the World of Making, *Olam HaYitzirah*, the World of Formation, *Olam HaBeriah*, the World of Creation, and *Olam HaAtzilut*, the World of Emanation. Drawing on the insights of psychology, mysticism, as well as classical Jewish theology, the author considers such corollary themes as *kavanah*, attachment to the *otiyot*, loss of self-consciousness, involuntary speech, *katnut* and *gadlut*, and nothingness.

My only disappointment (and this is a function of the primary material itself and not of the thesis) is that distinctions between the second and third worlds, indeed, even by what names they are called, is frequently blurry. We are left with a sharp sense of an ordinary, everyday consciousness or the bottom world and a top one wherein the worshipper loses self-awareness and seems to meld with the object of his or her devotion, but what happens in between, remains in doubt. Throughout the essay, Mr. Cohen approaches his material, not as critic, but as a would-be traveler and friend. He has obviously been rewarded with some important insights as to the meaning of and relationship between self and divinity.

It is therefore with great pleasure and appreciation that I recommend to the Faculty of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion the acceptance of Mr. Cohen's thesis "in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination."

Lawrence Kushner, *Referee*

LEVELS OF AWARENESS OF SELF AND DIVINITY
AS MANIFEST IN AMUD HATFILAH FROM SEFER BAAL SHEM TOV

DANIEL M. COHEN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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Referee: Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis was conceived upon my introduction to a collection of prayer teachings culled from a number of the classical works by the early Hasidic masters. The collection, entitled עמוד התפלה - Amud HaTfilah, The Pillar of Prayer is one section in an anthology of teachings which are attributed to the founder of the Hasidic movement, Israel ben Eliezer, The Baal Shem Tov. It is widely recognized that the Baal Shem Tov, also known by the acronym the Besht, never wrote down any of his teachings. Rather than having the Besht's own words and thoughts, then, we have his teachings as filtered through his students and cited in their works. Sefer Baal Shem Tov, and more specifically Amud HaTfilah, are less the teachings of the Besht himself than they are the thoughts of the next generation of teachers- those individuals who were inspired and taught by the Besht and who took his teachings and developed them.

I began by translating numerous pages of the text. As I did, I noticed that many of the prayer texts dealt with two related dimensions. On the one hand, the texts dealt with the external spiritual reality of the world. How might we understand and experience the spiritual structure of the existence? Is God's presence equally manifest everywhere and at all times? The texts indicate that this is not the case. On the other hand, the texts seemed to describe a mundane internal process of human self-consciousness. What does a person know about himself and the world? Is this uniform and consistent at all times,

or do we undergo changes in our own awareness? Again, the texts indicate that at different times consciousness differs. The science of psychology was many years from its beginnings when these texts were written. Yet these texts reflect an understanding that people function in different ways at different times. With these changes, moreover, their experience of existence changes as well. Reflected in these teachings was something which has become commonly accepted in recent years; that psychological processes and spiritual experience are largely inter-related phenomena. As our thought processes change so too does our experience of the spiritual.

Many of these prayer texts describe different levels of human awareness. Today, we take the existence of a sub-conscious for granted. We assume at least two levels of awareness to our being; conscious and unconscious. Much of modern psychology is, in fact, based on this structure of the human mind. If we take the time to consider the differences between our conscious mind and our unconscious mind, we will have no difficulty with the concept that what we are aware of and what we experience differs on these two levels. Yet despite all this, we cannot prove the existence of either.

The early Hasidim did not have the understanding of this structure of the human mind nor the insight into the human psyche which modern science has provided. Yet in their own way they came to a similar structuring of the inner human self. They too spoke of different modes or levels of awareness; beginning with total consciousness and moving deeper into the recesses of the self. However, they added an additional dimension, as

well. At each of these levels the experience of God's presence was different. Thus, these levels are described in terms of stops along a mystical path of ascent. As an individual moved toward a more internal state, the ability to encounter God was heightened. In some of these teachings, these levels are described in terms of four mystical worlds. These worlds represent a four stage path which a person must travel in order to ascend toward God. Through prayer an individual moves from one world to the next.

Here too, however, the mystical and the psychological are intermingled. For in the descriptions of these four stages, there are also hints describing the changes a person undergoes with regard to conscious awareness. These texts not only deal with the process of mystical ascent, but with what happens within the human being during the process of prayer, as well. What happens as a person begins to pray? What does a person know? What does a person experience? How does that individual's relationship to himself change? How does it change with regard to divinity?

While various sources on hasidic prayer touched on these questions with anything from a sentence to a page on the subject, the majority of the secondary texts are primarily concerned with the mystical dimension of this awareness and ascent from one world to the next. What is the mystical dimension of this particular world? What is the relationship between this mystical level and the sephirot? To a great degree, this conception of levels of mystic ascent was intellectualized. However, many of these texts suggest another, equally valid approach. This thesis is an attempt to explain these teachings on a level

which uncovers their human "experiential" dimension. As a person moves from one realm of awareness to the next, from one world to the next higher world, what changes does he/she¹ encounter?

Unless noted otherwise, the teachings in this thesis are from Amud HaTfilah. In the process of translation and selection for the thesis, however, it became apparent that an overwhelming majority of the relevant teachings are attributed to Dov Baer. A few words on Dov Baer are therefore in order.

While the Besht was the founder of the Hasidic movement, he never succeeded in making Hasidism wide-spread. One of his students, a rabbi and preacher named Dov Baer Friedman, The Maggid (Preacher) of Mezhirech, did. Dov Baer was a contemporary of the Besht's but became part of the Besht's circle of students and followers. After the Besht's death in 1760, Dov Baer combined his learning and spiritual approach with his institutional and organizational skills in order to spread the movement throughout Eastern Europe.

Like the Besht, Dov Baer, the Maggid, (1704-1772) left no writings of his own.

Rather, his writings were recorded by his disciples. The dominant theme of the Maggid's

¹ In general, these texts were written by men for men. That the Jewish community at that time was male dominated is reflected in the use of male pronouns throughout the texts. In the translation process every effort has been made to be gender inclusive. However, for the sake of clarity, the pronoun he will be used at times. The author hopes that it will be understood that this refers to an individual, rather than a gender specification.

teaching was that God is present in all things at all times. The material world is a sort of robe worn by God's indwelling presence.² If God is the inner presence, then this presence is surrounded by the material world which hides it from us. The spiritual quest is to reveal this inner presence, thus reuniting it with the rest of creation. By focusing on the inner spiritual dimension, and removing the layers of physical and conscious distraction which separate us from it, we become a channel for releasing this inner spiritual dimension. In the teachings of the Maggid, this is accomplished by the individual becoming nothing. "Such a person has become selfless, he has transcended his ego and became part of God, but in that act of renunciation of self he has risen to the highest reaches which is attainable by man."³

Prayer played a central role in the spiritual teachings of the Maggid, as well as the other early hasidic masters. Through prayer, the individual would achieve this state of transcendence and there encounter God.⁴ According to Joseph Weiss, "In the school of the Great Maggid...prayer serves as an occasion for, and as a means of, contemplation and

² Ben Zion Bokser, The Jewish Mystical Tradition (Pilgrim Press, New York, 1981.) p184

³ Bokser, p184-185

⁴ Louis Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America and Schocken Books, 1972) p35

Jacobs further states that the case has been made that Hasidic prayer was intended to appeal to the untutored and uneducated, thereby leading to an anti-intellectualism and malaise. This is indeed not the case. "It is nowhere suggested that the Hasid with spiritual aspirations dare rest content with simple, untutored prayer. On the contrary, as we have seen, Hasidic prayer belongs to the group of mystical exercises of a most rigorous nature through which the self is transcended.

ecstasy. Prayer becomes here a kind of special vehicle of the main contents of the contemplative life."⁵ If, then, as the Maggid taught, all of the material world has hidden within it a spiritual dimension, then prayer "is a guide for breaking out of nature towards the spirit. From this point of view prayer is essentially spiritual; its means are meditation and intellectual concentration on the spiritual element which is embedded in the natural world." In prayer an individual encounters both the various spiritual worlds and the many layers of the self. According to Rivka Schatz,

the aim of true prayer was to divest oneself of the material world, to rise above nature and to achieve unity with the divine "nothing".⁶

This thesis is an attempt to address the human component of this process. Its vehicle, is the very teachings which discuss the process of movement from the material world to the full encounter with divinity.

⁵ Joseph Weiss, "Contemplative Mysticism and 'Faith' in Hasidic Piety" (in Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism. Ed. David Goldstein. Oxford University Press, 1985) p50

⁶ Rivka Schatz, "Contemplative Prayer In Hasidism" (in Studies In Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem. Jerusalem, Israel: Magnes Press, 1967) p209

THE DOCTRINE OF THE FOUR WORLDS

One of the central images employed by early Hasidim when speaking of the various levels of awareness in prayer is the depiction of four worlds of existence. In translation these may best be referred to as "modes of being", since the term refers to both internal and external states.⁷ The movement of an individual at prayer from one world or mode to the next represents a spiritual ascent toward increased awareness of and connection to divinity. These worlds are commonly referred to by the names, Olam HaAsiyyah- The World Of Making, Olam HaYitzirah- The World Of Formation⁸, Olam HaBeriah- The World Of Creation⁹ and Olam HaAtzilut- The World Of Emanation. Each world, or mode, represents a greater manifestation of the divine presence, and an increased human awareness of this presence, than the last. While they are mentioned in various Hasidic prayer teachings of the 18th century, their origins are earlier, drawing on the esoteric literature of the early Kabbalists.

⁷ The stages of the mystic's ascent in prayer are thus described in terms of the four worlds which, in fact, are mirrored in his own soul." (Arthur Green and Barry W. Holtz. Your Word is Fire: The Hasidic Masters On Contemplative Prayer. (New York: Schocken Books) p13

⁸ This is also referred to as the World of Speech

⁹ This is also referred to as the World of Thought

Earliest References to the Doctrine of the Four Worlds

One medieval philosophical tradition conceived of three worlds. In the highest world dwelt angels of greater and separate intelligences. The middle world was the world of heaven, and the lowest world was the realm of nature and humanity.¹⁰ According to Gershom Scholem, however, the medieval tradition of worlds was not the model for the development of the doctrine within Kabbalah. Rather, he postulates, The Jewish mystical doctrine of four worlds finds its origin in the statement from the Biblical book of Isaiah

בל הנקרא בשמי ולבבדי בראתיו יצרתיו אף-עשיתיו

"All who are linked to My name, Whom I have created, formed and made, for my Glory."^{11 12}

Drawing on the rabbinic tradition that Scripture contains neither redundancies or irrelevancies, these three terms "created", "formed" and "made" are interpreted as referring to three different aspects of God's creative process. The three words which are used in progression here, בריא - beriah, יצירה - yetzirah and עשיה - asiyah, are understood by the Jewish mystical tradition as references to progressive stages of divine activity and human encounter with divinity, moving from the most highly and purely spiritual to the

¹⁰ Gershom Scholem, "The Four Worlds" (Encyclopaedia Judaica, Keter Publishing, Jerusalem, Israel, 1971, Vol. 16.) p641

¹¹ Isaiah 43:7

¹² The usage of this verse in the kabbalah gives tremendous weight to Scholem's assertion.

more material and tangible.^{13 14 15} From these words originate the first three levels within the doctrine of the four worlds, עולם העשיה - The World of Making, עולם היצירה - The World of Formation, and עולם הבריא - The World of Creation.¹⁶

The Doctrine of Worlds Within The Zohar

The Zohar, the 13th century seminal book of Jewish mysticism, speaks of at least two different systematic divisions of creation. In the literature these various divisions are referred to by the word עולם - world. One division, found in numerous references, separates existence into an upper and a lower world. The upper world is the realm of divinity, and a lower world is the realm of humanity in which all of the physical universe

¹³ Scholem, "The Four Worlds" p641

¹⁴ It should not be overlooked that the origin of these three terms is a verse describing God's relation to humanity. It is humanity, not the world, which was created, formed and made according to the verse. Without overtly stating the case, the entirety of the doctrine of the four worlds is built upon the connection between the reality of humanity and the reality of divinity. As we will see later, it is through an interning during prayer that one begins the encounter with divinity.

¹⁵ Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan suggests a different origin for the source of this concept in Judaism. Kaplan cites the Biblical story of Jacob's ladder as one possible source. A Midrash suggests that Jacob's ladder possessed four rungs, each representing one level of mediational or spiritual involvement. In the mystical literature, Kaplan suggests, these four rungs come to represent, action, speech, thought, and "the level above thought" which is "nothingness". (Aryeh Kaplan, Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide (Schoken Books, New York, 1985) p132

¹⁶ As will be examined later, these terms are also interpreted to apply to three distinct levels of humanity's soul. These three levels within the human being are then said to mirror the form of a higher, divine realm.

exists. While these two realms are distinct they are still connected and interdependent; one parallels the other. Thus the Zohar states,

אמר ר' יצחק לרבי יהודה הא תנינן דכד ברא קבייה עלמא עבד עלמא תחא כנוונא
דעלמא עלאה וכלא דא לקבל דא ואיהו יקריה לעילא ותתא.

Rabbi Isaac said to Rabbi Judah, 'We have learned that when the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world He constructed the lower world on the pattern of the upper world.¹⁷ One parallels the other in everything, and this is His glory both above and below.¹⁸

This text indicates two distinct modes of existence. One mode is represented by the term "lower world" and is the realm of the physical cosmos. The other mode is called the "upper world" and represents the mystical realm of the sefirot and divine presence. While clearly separate, one world mirrors the other. The statement "One parallels the other in everything, and this is His glory both above and below", makes it reasonable to presume that not only is God's presence found and experienced in both, but that the patterns found in one are repeated in some form in the other. As we will see, this mirroring of the higher and lower worlds becomes extremely significant in Hasidism.

The degree to which the upper and lower worlds parallel each other is further emphasized in another text from the Zohar. It states that the creation and continued

¹⁷That is, the physical world was patterned after the sephirotic realms.

¹⁸ Zohar I 205b

existence of the two worlds represents two halves of a unified whole rather than two distinct entities.

אמ"ש אוי להם לבריות שאינם משניחים ואינם יודעים בשעה שעלה במחשבה לפני הקדוש ב"ה לברא עולמו כל העולמות עלו במחשבה אחת ובמחשבה זו נבראו כולם הה"ד כלם בחכמה עשית¹⁹ ובמחשבה זו שהיא החכמה נברא העולם הזה והעולם של מעלה. נטה ימינו וברא העולם של מעלה. נטה שמאלו וברא העולם הזה הה"ד²⁰. אף ידי יסדה ארץ וימיני טפחה שמים קורא אני אליהם יעמדו יחדו. וכלם ברנע אחת (ובשעה אחת נבראו) ועשה העולם הזה כנגד העולם של מעלה וכל מה שיש למעלה כדונמתו למטה. וכל מה שיש למטה כדונמתו בים והכל אחד.

Rabbi Simeon said, Alas for humanity, for they do not see and they do not understand. When it arose in the thought before the Holy One blessed be He, to create His world, all the worlds arose in one thought and with this thought they were all created. This is the meaning of "with wisdom have you made them all"²¹. And with this thought, which is wisdom²², this world and the world above were created. He stretched out His right hand and created the world above. He stretched out His left hand and created this world. This is the meaning of "My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand has spread out the heavens. I call to them. They stand up together"²³. They were all created in a single moment, at the same time, and He made this world to match the world above, and whatever exists above has its counterpart in the sea, and all is one."²⁴

Not only were both worlds created through divine thought, or wisdom, but they were created at the same moment through the same act of thought. This text is based on an

¹⁹ Psalm 105

²⁰ Isaiah 55

²¹ Psalm 104:24

²² This refers to the sefirotic realm of Hokhmah or malkhut which is often called "wisdom"

²³ Isaiah 4:13

²⁴ Zohar II 20a

understanding that the upper and lower worlds are separate yet distinct parts of the same totality of creation. In the words of our text, "They stand up together." Thus, as we find elsewhere in the Zohar we learn, "The whole world is constructed on this principle, upper and lower, from the first mystic point up to the furthest removed from all the stages."²⁵

In the text of Zohar II 20a it is unclear how many worlds are discussed. Rather than saying "both worlds arose in one thought" our text states "all the worlds arose in one thought and with this one thought they were all created," leaving open the possibility that there are more worlds than the two mentioned in the previous texts. Elsewhere in the Zohar the division of existence is a division into three worlds rather than just two.

תלת עלמין אית ליה לקב"ה דאיהו גניז בנוייהו. עלמא קדמאה ההוא עלאה שמדא דכלא דלא אסתכל ב'ה ולא אתידע ביה בר איהו דאיהו גניז בנוייה. עלמא תניינה דאידו קשיר בההוא דלעילא ודא הוא דקב"ה אשתמודע מניה כמה דכתיב פתחו ל' שערי לייק²⁶ ודא הוא עלמא תניינא. עלמא תליתאה ההוא עלמא תתאה מנייהו דאשתכח ביה פרודא ודא הוא עלמא דמלאכי עלאי שריין בנוייה וקודשא בריך הוא אשתכח ביה ולא אשתכח.

The Holy, One Blessed be He, has made three worlds, and he is hidden within them. The first world is that supernal world concealed from all, which cannot be seen, and cannot be known except by Him who is hidden within it. The second world, which is connected to the one above it, is the one from which the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is known, as it is written, "Open for me the gates of righteousness,"²⁷ "This is the gate of the Lord"²⁸ The third world [is] the world that is below them, where separation exists.²⁹

²⁵ Zohar I 19b

²⁶ Psalms 118

²⁷ Psalm 118:19

²⁸ Psalm 118:19

This is the world where the angels on high dwell, and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, is there, and is not [there]. He is there now, but when they wish to look upon and know Him, He removes Himself from them, and is not to be seen, so that they all enquire "Where is the place of His glory?"³⁰ "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place."³¹ This is the world where He has no continuous presence.

Thus, there is one division of existence into two worlds or realms, and another division which separates existence into three worlds. In this structuring of existence, each level is differentiated by the manifestation of the divine presence at that level. In the lowest level, divinity has "no continuous presence", while in the highest level, God's presence is so manifest that it "cannot be known except by Him, who is hidden within it."

In each division of creation, be it into two, three or four worlds, the two extreme positions are identical. At one extreme is the physical world where the divine presence is hidden and may appear entirely absent. At the other extreme is the domain of the purely spiritual, the realm of divine "nothingness". The goal of the spiritual seeker known as the mystic is two-fold in regard to these worlds. First, the individual strives to uncover the divinity hidden in the lowest, physical world, where the divine presence is least apparent and thus most difficult to encounter. Second, the mystic seeks to experience the higher realms where this presence is more apparent and more "pure"; that is, less hidden. The division of existence into worlds indicates that divinity is not present or encountered

²⁹ This refers to separation from the mystical Godhead which is the realm of pure divinity also known as Ain Sof- divine nothingness.

³⁰ Taken from the Musaf Kedushah.

³¹ Ezekiel 3:12

only in this world or only in the spiritual realm, but in both the upper and the lower realms.

Levels Within Humanity

The pattern of creation and the design of humanity are the same. Just as the text of the Zohar divides the world into three levels,³² so too is the structure of each human being divided into three levels. These levels are known as the nefesh, ruah and neshamah. The Zohar states,

תלת שמהן אינון לנשמתא כנוונא דרזא עלאה נפ"ש ר"ח נשמ"ה.³³

There are three levels that comprise the soul. Therefore the soul has three names, on the pattern of the mystery above: nefesh, ruah, and neshamah.

The patterns within humanity are modeled "on the pattern of the mystery above". Thus the importance of the Zohar's description that the upper and lower worlds mirror each other cannot be understated. This internal structure of humanity, and the related mirroring of the structure of the cosmos against the structure of humanity is made abundantly clear in the following quote from the Zohar. The quote combines the mystical division of upper and lower worlds with this distinction of three levels within humanity.

³² "The Holy, One Blessed be He, has made three worlds, and He is hidden within them."

³³ Zohar I 205b-206a

בראתיו יצרתיו אף עשיתיו³⁴ כחקונא עלאה ועל דא הואיל ואדם איהו בארעא ואית ליה לחקנא ההוא כבודי עבדיחביה חקונין דכבוד עלאה דאית ביה אופי הכי בריאה לעל דא בראתיו. בההוא כבוד עלאה אית ביה יצירה ועל דא יצרתיו. חקונא דא יהבית ביה באדם למהוי איהו בארעא כנוונא דההוא כבוד עלאה. בההוא כבוד עלאה אית ביה עשייה ועל דא אופי הכי כבר נש כתיב עשיתיו למהוי איהו כנוונא דההוא כבוד עלאה דמתקן וברוך לכבוד תתאה. ... כבוד עלאה אי ביה תלת אלין. אדם לתתא אית ביה תלתאלין. ולא תכללא ההוא כבוד תתאה מעילא ומתתא למהוי שלים בכל סטריין.³⁵

Therefore, "I have created him, I have formed him; indeed, I have made him,"³⁶ like the disposition on high. Consequently, since man is upon the earth and it is his obligation to restore "My glory," I have placed in him the dispositions of the upper glory,³⁷ which also contains creation- hence "I have created him"; and in the upper glory there is also formation- hence "I have formed him"; and in the upper glory there is also making- hence, in the case of man also it is written "I have made him". I have put all this in man so that he might be a model of the upper glory, restoring and blessing the lower glory....The upper glory has these three; man below has these three, in order to complete the lower glory from above and from below. so that it might be perfect on all sides.

This statement reflects the aforementioned division of the world into an upper and lower realm. Within each of these worlds, however, there are three distinct levels. Rather than referring to these levels as nefesh, ruah and neshemah this text uses terms drawn from the aforementioned verse from Isaiah

כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו יצרתיו אף-עשיתיו

³⁴ Isaiah 43:7

³⁵ Zohar II 155a-155b

³⁶ Isaiah 43:7

³⁷ The layers of the upper world are mirrored within humanity.

All who are linked to My name, Whom I have created, formed and made, for my Glory.³⁸

As explained previously, there are three spiritual levels within human beings. In this text, however, these levels are known by the names; beriah, yetzirah and asayah.³⁹ Moreover, the text continues, these levels mirror the spiritual realm; "I have put all this in man so that he might be a model of the upper glory." This is the case since, through perfecting oneself spiritually, the spiritual realm is perfected as well.⁴⁰ This is the meaning of, "The upper glory has these three; man below has these three, in order to complete the lower glory from above and from below, so that it might be perfect on all sides." While this text does not expound on how a person is able "to perfect" himself, it is plausible to consider that one step in this process is the consciousness of and the encounter with each of these various layers. As we will see, Hasidic prayer represents the contemplative introspection of meditative in-turning with the goal of spiritual ascent and thus roots itself in exactly this type of consideration. Through prayer the individual reveals levels both within the self and within the spiritual realm of the upper world.

³⁸ Isaiah 43:7

³⁹ The names are derived from the hebrew words for "created", "formed" and "made"; which are the three actions God took with regard to humanity.

⁴⁰ In a way this sounds quite similar to sympathetic magic in which earthly activities affect the divine realm, as well.

Worlds in the Lurianic Kabbalah

The unified doctrine of four worlds is rooted in these earlier traditions. The development of a four stage postulation in which there is a direct vector from one world to the next as an individual moves toward a more fully spiritual realm is the result of an intermingling of Jewish, Aristotilian and Neoplatonic principles of creation and existence.⁴¹ The Lurianic Kabbalists of 16th century Safed drew from this⁴² and developed their system of worlds. They developed a model of creation in which there are four worlds; one higher than the last. According to the Lurianic Kabbalah, the four worlds, referred to by the same names as before, (asiyah, yitzirah, beriah and atzilut) were originally entirely spiritual in nature. During the breaking of the vessels- shevirat hakelim, the spiritual energies of the higher realms made their descent to the lower realm/s and intermingled with the klipot- the shells or husks of material existence. The result was the creation of the world of matter. In this world there is a total lack of the spiritual, but access to the three higher worlds is always open.⁴³

⁴¹ Moshe Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988) p119

⁴² As early as the 13th century there is a division into four worlds. In chapter two of his book "The Book of Faith and Reliance" the 13th century kabbalist Rabbi Jacob ben Sheshet Gerona states, "All creation may be divided into four parts: The first part is the throne of Glory; the second is made up of the angels; the third constitutes the spheres, stars, and constellations; and the fourth is the sublunar world." (Daniel Matt, The Early Kabbalah (Paulist Press, New York, 1986) p133

⁴³ Idel, Kabbalah p119

In this expanded understanding, the highest world, Atzilut, is the realm of divine nothingness⁴⁴. The next world, Beriah, is the world of creation- the realm of the divine throne, the mystical chariot and the higher angels. The third world, Yetzirah- the world of formation is the realm of angels. The final and lowest world, Asiyah- the world of making is understood as, "the spiritual archetype of the material world of the senses."⁴⁵ It is believed that each world emerged from the world above. Thus, Olam Ha-Beriah (the world of creation) is not only lower than Olam Ha-Atzilut (the world of emanation) but it derives from and emerges out of it.⁴⁶ Moreover, between each of the four worlds there is, in Luria's theory, a curtain which divides one world and the next. This curtain both bends and directs the divine light from above,⁴⁷ as well as, filters the divine power from above. This, in turn, becomes the material or substance for the existence of the next world.⁴⁸ In the Lurianic Kabbalah the four worlds function as the means for understanding divinity's immanence. Consequently, one of the goals of the mystic was to gain a deeper understanding of the interrelation between, and the inner workings of, these four mystical worlds. Through this understanding the mystic gained an awareness of, and an appreciation for, the unity within divinity.

⁴⁵ Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing, 1941.) p272

⁴⁶ Louis Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer (The Jewish Publication Society of America and Schocken Books, New York, 1972) pg 78

⁴⁷ En-Sof

⁴⁸ Scholem, Major Trends pp272-3

WORLDS AND AWARENESS IN THE HASIDIC PRAYER TRADITION

Worlds and Awareness in Hasidism

In 18th century Hasidic mysticism these worlds of existence took on new meaning.⁴⁹ The Hasidic prayer tradition interpreted and adapted this system to fit their own approach to mysticism. Eventually,⁵⁰ the division of four spiritual worlds came to represent an internal human spiritual process of ascent.⁵¹ The basic distinction that there is a lower physical realm and a higher spiritual realm was maintained. One of the terms used to describe the physical world and its limitations is *גשמיות* - the material or physical side of existence. Separate and above this is the realm of *רוחניות* - the spiritual mode of existence. The three higher worlds are included in this higher, spiritual realm. Common to all of the Hasidic teachings on various spiritual levels is the understanding that there is a distinction and separation between the physical and the spiritual. The goal of mystical ascent is to move from the physical toward an awareness of the spiritual by stripping away the layers of *גשמיות* and exposing the *רוחניות*, which is ever-present, but hidden.

⁴⁹ In the Hasidic context the term "modes" might be the better translation of *עולם* since we really begin to deal within internal process rather than external reality.

⁵⁰ This is the case to some degree in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, and to a much greater degree in writings of his disciple Dov Baer of Medzritch.

⁵¹ Although it must be kept in mind that elements of this were already present in the Zohar. As previously cited, Zohar II 155a-155b refers to a doctrine that there are three levels within each human corresponding to three levels in the upper world.

The more fully developed Lurianic structure of four worlds finds its way into various aspects of Hasidic mysticism. While the Lurianic Kabbalah dealt with the comprehension of the theosophic structure of creation, however, Hasidism dealt much more with the layers of a person's soul or psyche. Daniel Matt observes that the Hasidic transformation of the doctrine of the four worlds shifts the doctrine's focus so that "the emphasis is not longer on the sefirot, the inner workings of divinity, but on how to perceive the world mystically and how to transform ego."⁵² The ability to understand the four worlds and the inner dynamics of the divine realms becomes secondary to the desire to uncover these inner layers and to transform an individual's awareness. Rather than comprehend the workings and relations of the four worlds, the Hasidic mystic sought to look deeper and deeper inside himself. This Hasidic approach is based on the concept that there are levels, referred to in the mystical tradition as "levels of the soul",⁵³ which an individual might contemplate, discover and there encounter Divinity.⁵⁴ By reaching inward, toward the depths of the soul, a person also has the experience of ascending to the highest realms of the "upper world", which mirror the internal human patterns. In the process, the individual has moved from one world to the next, moving ever closer to the

⁵² Matt, "Ayin" p46

⁵³ Either referred to as the nefesh, the ruah and the neshamah or as the beriah, yetzirah and the assiyah.

⁵⁴ This is reminiscent of Zohar II 155a-155b which describes the internal layers of the soul as the means of perfecting the layers of the spiritual realm.

realm of divine "nothingness" referred to as "ayin". This is the realm of divinity about which nothing can be said.⁵⁵

Neither the Baal Shem Tov nor Dov Baer Friedman of Mezheritsk, denied the theosophical structure of creation postulated by the Lurianic kabbalah. However, they were both primarily concerned with Divinity's presence in this world and in each person, rather than the intellectual comprehension of the structure of Divinity's presence.⁵⁶ Through their approach to mysticism the focus now became the individual and his relationship to divinity as encountered in the various spiritual worlds. This shift might be seen as a shift in focus from cognitive understanding to experiential awareness and encounter. Rather than looking out at the theosophic structure, the mystic now turned inward through prayer, with the goal of a personal transformation of awareness.⁵⁷ Daniel Matt refers to this Hasidic shift in the approach toward prayer, the understanding of prayer, and the related re-interpretation of the doctrine of the four worlds, as a "recasting and psychologizing" of the material.⁵⁸ Similarly, Moshe Idel states that "it remained for

⁵⁵ Daniel Matt describes the use of the word "nothingness" in describing divinity in this way, "...what the mystic means by divine nothingness is that God is greater than any thing one can imagine: it is like no thing." (Matt, "Ayin" p43)

⁵⁶ Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives p151

⁵⁷ In In Search: Psychology and Religion James Hillman makes the case that what religious thinkers refer to as the soul is very much akin to that which we modern call the mind or the psyche. Thus when the mystics refer to "layers of the soul" they might be referring to the layers which we refer to as levels of consciousness.

⁵⁸ Matt, "Ayin" p46

Hasidic mysticism to reinterpret the Zoharic and Lurianic theosophical systems as referring to psychological processes"⁵⁹.

This move toward psychologizing spiritual ascent and, as we will see, relating it to the doctrine of the four worlds, was a natural outgrowth of earlier traditions on worlds. The basis for such an approach was set down in the previously cited text of Zohar 205b-206a in which the layers of divinity are said to be mirrored within the human being. The layers within humanity mirror the layers within the very framework of creation. In addition, events or transitions which happen in one are paralleled in the other. Thus, the process of revealing the deeper layers of the self corresponds to a mystic ascent in which the more hidden layers of the spiritual realm are revealed and encountered. The following prayer teaching combines the importance of the multiplicity of worlds with the internal component of prayer.

צהר תעשה לתבה ואל אמה תכלנה מלמעלה ונו', ריב"ש אמר, צהר תעשה לתבה, תהיה התבה שאדם מדבר בתורה ובתפלה תציר, כי יש בכל אות עולמות ונשמות ואלהות, ועולים ומתקשרים ומתייחדים זה עם זה, עם אלהות, ואחר כך מתייחדים ומתקשרים יחד האותיות ונעשה תיבה, ואחר כך מתייחדים ייחודים אמיתיים באלהות, וצריך האדם לכלול נשמתו בכל בחינה ובחינה מהנזכר ואז מתייחדים כל העולמות כאחד ועולים ונעשה שמחה ותענוג גדול עד אין שיעור, וזהו תחתיים שניים ושלישיים וכו', דהיינו עולמות ונשמות ואלהות, תלת עלמין אית ליה וכו'⁶⁰, וצריך לשמוע בכל תבה מה שאומר, שהשכינה עולם הדיבור⁶¹ מדברת

⁵⁹ Idel, *Kabbalah* p150

⁶⁰ זוהר פ' שלח דקנ"ט ע"א

⁶¹ זוהר פינחס דר"ל ע"א

והוא שושבינה לה, צחר, שחצא בבהירות, ולעשות נחת רוח ליוצרו, אמונה נקרא ח"ו⁶² גרנן מפריד אלוף, ואל אמה תכלנה מלמעלה, היינו אמא, או יש לומר אחר שיצא התבה מפיו אין צריך לזכות אותה להלן, והענין שלא יראה שהולכת למקום גבוה, דוגמא שאין יכול לראות בשמש, וזהו תכלנה מלמעלה, ובמה אתה יכול לעשות כן, בא אתה וכל ביתך אל התבה היינו בכל נופך וכחותיך תבא אל התבה.⁶³

"Make windows in the ark"⁶⁴, Ribash said, "Make the word clear"⁶⁵, for behold the word, (that a person speaks of in Torah study and in prayer) should be illumined.⁶⁶ In each letter there are worlds, souls and Divinity, and they rise up draw close and bind themselves to one another, and with the Divine. Afterwards the letters become united and draw together and create a word, and afterwards they become one with the unity and truth of the Divine. And a person must perfect his soul⁶⁷ in each and every stage⁶⁸ of the aforementioned, and then all of the worlds become as united as one as they rise up and create joy and great rejoicing without measure. This is the lowest, the second, the third and so forth. We have worlds, souls and Divinity, thus there are three worlds of existence.

According to this teaching, prayer affects changes both internally and externally.

Externally, the words of prayer and the soul of the individual rise from one spiritual level

⁶² במשלי ט"ז

⁶³ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ח ע"ב

⁶⁴ Genesis 6:16. These words were spoken to Noah in reference to God's command that he build an ark for himself, his family and the animals which would repopulate the world after the flood.

⁶⁵ תבה

⁶⁶ Here, the Maggid (Dov Baer) makes a play on the words זוהר and תבה. In the Biblical context the word תבה refers to the ark which Noah builds. In this context of this teaching the word is used to refer to the words of prayer. Thus Noah, who is each person at prayer, is told to prayer the words of prayer in a particular way.

⁶⁷ Inner-most self

⁶⁸ The are stages of "perfecting the soul" and ascent which may be analogous to the various "stages of awareness" which are referred to as "worlds".

to the next. Internally, an individual's soul is "perfected"⁶⁹ and made whole at each stage of ascent.

Consciousness and Spiritual Ascent

The connection between reaching inward and spiritual ascent is made, and perhaps clarified, by a surprising text from the Zohar. In this text, mystical ascent is not related to prayer or contemplation, but rather to the hours of sleep. The text states:

נפשא דב"נ כד סליק לערסיה נפקת מניה וסלקא לעילא. ואי חימא דכלהו סלקאן. לאו כל חד וחד חמי אפי מלכא אלא נפשא סלקא ולא אשתאר בה בהדי נופא בר חד רשימי דקסטא דחיותא דלבא ונפשא אזלא ובעיא לסלקא. וכמה דרגין לרגין לסלקא שטאת.

Man's soul leaves him when he goes to bed, and it ascends on high. But do all [souls] really ascend? No. Not every one sees the countenance of the king. But the soul does ascend, and nothing remains in the body but a certain impression of life in the heart, and the soul goes, trying to ascend. And it goes up through many levels.

According to this teaching, during sleep the soul may make its ascent toward the divine realm. While not all souls are able to rise all the way to the uppermost world, each soul does attempt to move toward another, higher level. Moreover, the journey from the lower world (that is from the physical conscious body) toward the divine realm (what we

⁶⁹ A person encounters and comes into contact with all of the various layers within his soul.

might call higher states of consciousness) takes place by the soul passing "through many different levels".⁷⁰

The statement that sleep is one of the times that spiritual ascent takes place is particularly striking because of the connection between sleep and levels of consciousness. Sleep is a time when we naturally turn inward. This is the time when an individual has relaxed and has become increasingly oblivious to the outside world and the daily physical reality. During sleep images and thoughts buried deep within ourselves finally have the opportunity to surface in the form of dreams. In essence, sleep is an altered state of awareness. During sleep an individual is no longer conscious of the world in the same way as during the waking hours. Instead, we encounter a variety of altered states of consciousness. Modern science has shown that there are various levels of consciousness and awareness which a person encounters during sleep. One such level is described as the REM cycle and is encountered at various times throughout any period of sleep. However,

⁷⁰ James Hillman makes the direct parallel between what religious thinkers refers to as the soul and what modern psychology refers to as the psyche. He refers to the innermost part of our being as the soul. Because the soul has neither intellect or ego, because the soul does not seek connection or think, there is nothing in our soul which might separate us from achieving total connection with divinity. Through revealing the layers of our soul we make accessible total connection (what we might refer to here as ascent to the higher worlds.) However, the soul is amorphous and undefinable, particularly for moderns, and it is therefore not easily accessible to most people. In his analysis of pastoral relations, Hillman notes that in their desire to uncover the soul and create access to God, many pastors have turned to the souls "neighbor, the closest thing to soul" (James Hillman, InSearch: Religion and Psychology. (New York: Scribner, 1967) p44) the mind. In this statement Hillman correctly notes that it is through the mind and various levels of consciousness that we can reach our inner spiritual depths. "The unconscious is the door through which we pass to find the soul." and it is in the soul that we meet God.

all of them differ from the state of being awake. In fact, researchers have identified four different stages of brain activity during sleep.⁷¹ Stage One is the lightest level of sleep and closely resembles waking consciousness. Stage Four, on the other hand, is the deepest and most closely resembles the state of being in a coma. The intermediate stages fall somewhere between. Each of these stages reflects a different state of consciousness. As a person moves from Stage One to Stage Four the individual moves to different levels of thought, awareness and consciousness. In essence, during sleep the individual moves further and further from daily consciousness and descends deeper and deeper into the recesses of his being. In the process the individual loses any sense of self. In a manner of speaking, along the way the individual forgets himself and achieves a state of self-transcendence. Moreover, it has been shown that this process of moving from one stage to the next and then back again occurs numerous in a single night.⁷² The picture of the process of sleep which is described by modern science is not so different than the spiritual changes which the Zohar describes as occurring during sleep. By relating the two we find that ascent toward a higher spiritual realm is somehow related to a shift away from ordinary daily consciousness toward a more internal state. In that state, according to this text of the Zohar, an individual experiences God more directly and intensely. It is not a coincidence that the soul is said to make its ascent at a time when ordinary conscious thought is not functioning. When an individual is sleeping and is no longer

⁷¹ Dr. Ann Faraday, Dream Power (USA: Berkeley Medallion Books, 1972) pp20-21

⁷² Faraday, Dream Power p21

bound by the limits of conscious thought, the soul is free to ascend toward the spiritual heights.⁷³

Ascent In The Hasidic Prayer Tradition

A similar sounding process of self-transcendence is made during the Hasidic process of prayer. A person begins within the physical body and with a rational consciousness of the world. "Level by level" the individual moves away from ordinary consciousness and thereby ascends toward the heights of spiritual awareness .

כתפילה צריך לשום כל כחו בהדיבורים, וילך כך מאות לאות עד שישכח מגופניות, ויחשוב שהאותיות מצטרפים ומתחברים זה עם זה, וזהו תענוג גדול, דמה אם בגשמיות הוא תענוג, מכל שכן ברוחניות, וזהו עולם היצירה, ואחר כך יבא לאותיות המחשבה ולא ישמע מה שהוא מדבר, וזהו כא לעולם הבריאה, ואחר כך הוא בא למדת אין שנתבטל אצלו כל כחותיו הנשמיים, וזהו עולם העילות מדת חכמה.⁷⁴

In prayer an individual must put all his strength into the spoken words. A person does this, going from letter to letter until he forgets his physical self. He considers that the letters join and connect themselves one to the next, and there is great joy in this. And if there is joy in the physical realm, how much more in the realm of the spiritual realm⁷⁵, and this is the Olam HaYitzirah- The World of Speech. After that he comes to the Otiyot

⁷³ Psychologists and neuropsychologist would suggest that during sleep the linguistic left brain ceases to overshadow and filter out the right brain. In a very real sense, deeper level of the individual's being are revealed as one moves into a deeper sleep in which the right brain is increasingly active and "assertive". Dr. R. Joseph states that studies "strongly suggest a specific complementary relationship between REM sleep and right-brain activity." (Dr. R. Joseph, Dr. R., The Right Brain and the Unconscious: Discovering the Stranger Within (Plenum Press, New York and London, 1992) p272)

⁷⁴ בחר שם טוב ח"ב די"ז ע"נ

⁷⁵ Here we see parallels to the Zoharitic statements regarding the upper and lower worlds reflecting and paralleling each other. See Zohar I 205b-206a and Zohar II 20a)

HaMachshavah- The Letters Of Thought, and he doesn't hear that which he is saying. Through this he comes to the Olam HaBriyah- The World Of The Cosmos. After this he comes to the dimension of AIN in which he abolishes his physical self. This is the Olam HaAtzilut- The World Of Emanation. This is the dimension of wisdom.⁷⁶

A number of parallels can be seen between this prayer teaching and the statement from the Zohar regarding sleep and the ascent of the soul. In both cases, the process of ascent is understood as a gradual process which takes place step by step and stage by stage. In this text, this step by step process of ascent is based upon the four mystical worlds. Through prayer a person moves from one world to the next. In both sleep and prayer the mind loses conscious of the physical self and the material world. Ascent is directly connected to moving from the lowest level of conscious awareness in which the individual is cognizant of one's self, toward a deeper state of consciousness and an altered state of awareness.

The parallels between the changes which occur during sleep and prayer provide a good indication of some of the ways in which mystical ascent and shifts in awareness are directly related. Rivka Schatz characterizes Hasidic prayer as "essentially spiritual; its means are meditation and intellectual concentration on the spiritual element which is embedded in the natural world."⁷⁷ Through prayer an individual moves away from ordinary consciousness and through the curtains separating one world from the other. A

⁷⁶ Wisdom, חכמה, represents the divine will and creation. In the Lurianic system it is associated with the sefirah of tiferet.

⁷⁷ Schatz, p209

person moves toward self-transcendence leading toward contact with divinity. At each level of ascent during prayer the individual, the perception of the self, the surrounding world and of divinity is different. While a person begins with both feet, and mind, firmly rooted in this world, the individual quickly moves toward other, deeper realms of experience.

KAVANNAH: THE MEANS FOR ASCENDING IN SPIRITUAL AWARENESS

Before attempting to describe the four stages which a person encounters during prayer we need to address the means employed by the Hasidim in order to travel this path. In our texts, this is referred to by the term kavvanah, the dimension of prayer often translated as "intention". The importance of kavvanah in prayer can be traced back throughout Jewish tradition. The word is used in rabbinic literature "to denote a state of mental concentration and devotion while in prayer and during the performance of mitzvot."⁷⁸ ⁷⁹ In the Lurianic Kabbalah kavvanah took on a new form. kavvanah came to refer to specific thoughts which a person might entertain about a specific ritual act or the recitation of a prayer. While the kabbalist would perform the act or recite the prayer, he would focus his thoughts on the spiritual realm.⁸⁰ While the individual would perform the acts or pray the prayers, he would concentrate on specific thoughts; the mystical kavannot,⁸¹ which accompanied that individual prayer. For example,

When reciting the word 'one' in the unification of the Shema, you should intend that there is nothing in the world but the Blessed Holy One, whose 'presence fills the whole earth'⁸². You should consider yourself to be absolute nothingness. Your essence is only

⁷⁸ The importance of kavannah in prayer is mentioned in numerous Talmudic sources, including Berachot 31a, 6b, and 28b which states that in prayer one must "know before whom you stand."

⁷⁹ Scholem, "Kavannah" p852

⁸⁰ Idel, Kabbalah p103

⁸¹ Specific thoughts and intentions which were considered during the performance of mitzvot, including prayer.

⁸² Isaiah 6:3

the soul within, part of God above. Thus only God is. This is the meaning of 'one'.⁸³ ⁸⁴

In describing this process Moshe Idel remarks that "mystical kavvanah can therefore be defined as a nomian technique, using as it does the common prayers as vehicles for accomplishing mystical and theurgic aims."⁸⁵ Through prayer, and the added layer of mystical thought during prayer, the mystic came to know and understand the structure of the spiritual realms.

Kavvanah In Hasidism

Although the Hasidim did not formally employ the kabbalistic kavannot⁸⁶, they too viewed kavvanah as the vehicle for ascending to the higher realms of divinity. Joseph Weiss observes:

In Hasidism, the kabbalistic type of kavannot yields to a far more emotional involvement and attachment (devekut) to God. The metamorphosis which took place in the meaning of kavannot at the advent of Hasidism, and more explicitly after the Great Maggid [Dov Baer of Mezhirech], consists in this - that an

⁸³ from Likkutei Yeqarim

⁸⁴ "In the Kabbalah kavannot (the plural of kavvanah) denotes the special thoughts one should have at the recitation of key words in prayer. Very often these thoughts are divorced from the contextual meaning of the words and are of a mystical, esoteric nature." (Scholem, "Kavvanah" Encyclopaedia Judaica Vol.10, p853)

⁸⁵ Idel, Kabbalah p103

⁸⁶ For the Hasidim the Kavannot became "problematic and were sometimes explicitly rejected." (Idel, Kabbalah p150)

originally intellectual effort of meditation and contemplation had become an intensely emotional and highly enthusiastic act.⁸⁷

According to the Lurianic kabbalah a curtain separated one world from the next. The divine light which emanated from a higher world would be refracted and dissipate as it shone down into a lower. Individuals, living in the physical world, are prevented from encountering the higher realms by the curtain which separate their existence from the more purely spiritual realm. While Hasidim did not seem to draw upon this dimension of the Lurianic kabbalah,⁸⁸ either, the Hasidic literature on prayer and worldly ascent clearly indicates an understanding of a separation between one world and the next. Rather than concern with the divine light which filters from above toward the lower worlds, however, the Hasidim were concerned with the movement of the individual from the lower worlds into the higher ones. As previously described, this movement from lower to higher should be understood not only as a mystical ascent, but as a move from temporal conscious to an expanded awareness in which the individual is no longer constrained by the limits of conscious thought.⁸⁹ The means for crossing over from one world into the next, and for turning from daily consciousness to higher levels of awareness, during prayer was focussed intent. Aryeh Kaplan notes that in order to

⁸⁷ Louis Jacobs, "Prayer" in Encyclopaedia Judaica. Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing, Israel, 1971. p984. (Citing Joseph Weiss from Journal of Jewish Studies, 9(1958), pp163-192)

⁸⁸ As Moshe Idel notes, the Hasidim left much of the esoteric Lurianic system behind in their reinterpretation of the Lurianic mystical system. (Idel, Kabbalah p103)

⁸⁹ As previously noted, one of the times when this ascent took place was during prayer.

encounter and focus on the spiritual nature of the world, the individual must "make a conscious effort to rid the mind of extraneous thoughts."⁹⁰

Kavvanah and Meditation

As noted, for the early Hasidim kavvanah meant meditative, consciousness altering, focus. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan notes:

The word kavvanah is most often used in relation to prayer or worship. In Judaism, as we shall see, the line between worship and meditation is often a very fine one. Many elements of the worship service are specifically designed to be used as meditations, to reach higher states of consciousness."⁹¹

While prayer had always had a meditative dimension, the Hasidim took the traditional prayers and made their meditative aspects central to the process of prayer.^{92 93}

Kavvanah, the directing of one's thoughts during prayer, became the vehicle which lifted

⁹⁰ Aryeh Kaplan, Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide (New York: Schocken Books, New York, 1985) p65

⁹¹ Kaplan, Jewish Meditation p50

⁹² It must be noted, however, that although the Hasidim stressed the meditative qualities and approach to prayer, they maintained the halachic requirements of prayer in a stringent manner.

⁹³ Meditation, or hitbonenut, has a long history within Judaism which begins in Kabbalistic writings from the middle of the 13th century. In those writings, the term refers "to protracted concentration of thought on supernal lights of the divine world and of the spiritual worlds in general."

the individual in prayer from one level of consciousness to the next.⁹⁴ An individual would concentrate his thoughts on the letters of prayer and, in so doing, would block out daily concerns and mundane thought. Through the kavvanah of focussed prayer, the individual would shift away from an outward, "this worldly" focus and reach inward. As a person became increasingly focused on the process of praying, the thought process is altered, as the individual becomes inwardly directed.^{95/96} Thus, in Hasidic prayer, the very act of applying kavvanah to prayer became an act of meditation.⁹¹ Thus, Joseph Weiss notes,

The mystic's contemplation here means a specialization in his mental activity, and its simplification by narrowing down the field of consciousness and thus intensifying the activity of thinking. In other words, it means thinking more and more about less and less.⁹²

In prayer the individual must;

⁹⁴ Kaplan goes so far as to suggest that the Amidah was instituted as a controlled method of meditation through institutionally accepted words. (Kaplan, Jewish Meditation pp44-45)

⁹⁵ The analogy found in the Zohar between sleep and mystic ascent is fitting.

⁹⁶ In much the same way that the thought process shifts during other forms of meditation.

⁹¹ "The Maggid introduced [a technique] by which man eradicates self-consciousness and achieves a state of absorption into God. The process begins with an understanding that the physical aspect of a human being is merely external. This can occur as one begins to pray. Meditation that precedes prayer is devoted to understanding the relationship between one's physical self and one's consciousness. For example, the power of one's physical existence is so strong that it diverts one's consciousness to physical; sensations and considerations." (David Ariel, The Mystic Quest p179)

⁹² Weiss, "Via Passiva in Early Hasidism" p 83

דע כי כל חיבה בזה קומה שלימה, וצריך להיות כל בחו בה, כי אם לאו, תהיה כמו מחוסר
אבר.⁹³

Know that each letter is a complete existence, and all of one's strength must be in it, for if not, it is as if he is missing a limb.

The word "strength" here refers to intellectual focus. Accordingly, all of an individual heart, mind and concentration must be included in the act of prayer. If a person desires to truly experience prayer and God's presence in prayer, focussed concentration-kavvanah- must be present. If kavvanah is not present, the individual does not experience any changes in awareness and the potential of the prayers to alter thought and spiritual experience is not reached.⁹⁴ Thus, the prayer is "born as if missing a limb" and the individual's capacity for drawing closer to divinity is not tapped. Without kavvanah the individual remains conscious only of this "this world" and finds it impossible to move to the next and higher world. Through this meditative focus in prayer, however, the individual achieves "the stripping away of the physical realm". That is, "one strips his soul away from his body and his soul will be dressed in the thoughts which he speaks and he sees world after world." Thus, the process of concentrating and focussing one's thought becomes the means employed to transcend the limits of intellectual thought and physical boundaries. It is there, in the breaking away from the physical that an individual encounters divinity. The stripping away of self-consciousness of this world makes ascent to the higher realm of spiritual awareness possible.

⁹³ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ך ע"ב

⁹⁴ In this case, ascent does not become possible.

An even more explicit statement that in Hasidic prayer directed thought became the vehicle which lifted the individual in prayer from one level of consciousness to the next is found in the statement:

הנשמה אמרה להרב, שמה שזכה שנתגלו אליו הדברים העליונים לא מפני שלמד הרבה בש"ס ובפוסקים הרבה, רק משום תפילה שהיה מתפלל תמיד בכוונה גדולה, ומשם זכה למעלה עליונה.⁹⁵

Rav's soul told him⁹⁶ that the matters of the upper worlds were not revealed to him because he had learned a great deal of Talmud or many verses of Torah, but because of prayer, for he always prayed with great kavvanah. Because of this, he was worthy to ascend to the upper world.

In this teaching we see a clear self-consciousness within the Hasidic tradition that the kavvanah with which prayers were recited was the very reason that ascent toward the upper spiritual realm was at all possible. To use the words of the teaching, kavvanah provides the "worth" of a person to enter the higher realms. Kavvanah is the vehicle through which the ascent to the higher realms becomes possible. Thus we find that successful prayer, in which one ultimately encounters divinity in its purest state, necessitates placing all of one's strength- that is kavvanah, into the act of praying.

⁹⁵ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ד ע"ב

⁹⁶ The Baal Shem Tov's inner-most self told him...

A Stage By Stage Process

The process of stripping away the physical and achieving mystical ascent and higher awareness is described as a process which takes place in stages. A person must, "go from spiritual level to spiritual level" in the process of ascent.

צריך לליך ממדרגה למדרגה בתפילה שלא יפסיד כל כחו בתחילת התפילה רק יתחיל במחון, ובאמצע התפילה ידבק בדבקות גדול, אז יהיה יכול לומר אפילו במרוצה התבות של התפילה, אף על פי שבתחלת התפילה אינו יכול להתפלל בדבקות מכל מקום יאמר התבות בכוונה גדולה ויחזק את עצמו מעט מעט עד שיעזור לו השם יתברך להתפלל בדבקות גדול.⁹⁷

One must go from spiritual level to spiritual level in restraint during prayer lest he lose all his strength at the beginning of his prayer. And in the midst of prayer he will cleave to the Eternal with great clinging. Thus he will be able to even in of the letters of the prayer even though at the beginning of prayer he was not able to pray in cleaving to the Eternal. In any event one should say the letters of prayer with great kavvanah and little by little strengthen himself until the Holy One helps him to pray in greater cleaving.

The order here might be inverted. If, "one says the letters of prayer with great kavvanah" and focus, then, the individual will move "from spiritual level to spiritual level". Similarly, we find a teaching in which kavvanah is clearly depicted as the tool which bridges the gap between one world and the next, allowing for ascent from this world of limited awareness to higher and higher worlds.

The importance of kavvanah in prayer cannot be understated. This is shown through hyperbole in the fact that the intensity with which one should put his strength

⁹⁷ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ד ע"א

into prayer is enough to cause the person to die. So draining is the total focus of true and complete prayer that it should, we are told, completely exhaust a person. This does not happen, however, because of God's mercy returning the individual's soul and strength to him.⁹⁸

זה חסד גדול מהשם יתברך שאדם חי אחר התפלה, שלפי דרך הטבע היה לו למות, מחמת שמפסיד כחו, כי נתן כחו בהתפלה, כל כך, מכח הכוונה הנדולה שהוא מכוון

It is from the great mercy of the Holy One that a person lives after prayer. According to the natural law he should die, since he has damaged his strength, for he put all of his strength into his prayer. This is so much the case that it is from the strength of his great kavvanah which he directs to the heavens.

Similarly,

יחשוב קודם התפלה שהוא מוכן למות באותה התפלה, מחמת גודל הכוונה, ויש מכוונים כל כך עד שפעמים בטבע היה יכול למות, בשנים או בשלשה תיבות שאומר לפניו יתברך שמו, וכשיחשוב כך, יאמר בלבו למה לי איזה פנייה ונאות, באותה תפלה, כיון שבדעתו אפילו למות אחר שנים או שלשה תיבות, ובאמת הוא חסד גדול מהשם יתברך, שנותן לו כח ומשלים התפלה והוא חי.⁹⁹

Prior to prayer one must consider that he is prepared to die in his prayer because of the great intensity of his kavvanah. For there will be so much kavvanah in each word that he will be able to die, in just two or three words that he says before the Holy One. And when he considers this he will say to himself, "Why do I have such supplication and pride in this very prayer?", for he knows well that he could even die after two or three words. In fact, it is through the great mercy of the Holy One that he has the strength to continue and subdues the prayer and lives.

⁹⁸ The implicit danger associated with kavvanah shares a common element with meditation. In Jewish Meditation Aryeh Kaplan warns that meditation too can be a dangerous activity. One may enter into the process and is then unable or does not want to leave.

⁹⁹ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ר ע"ב ודף זי"ן ע"א

A third and final statement of this type states,

בשם הבעל שם טוב ז"ל, שאמר שנס גדול הוא כשאדם חי אחר התפלה, שלא יצאה נשמתו
מגודל הדבקות.¹⁰⁰

The Besht said that it is a great miracle that a person lives after prayer since his soul has not departed from him due to the greatness of his cleaving to God.

The strength of putting one's energy into the prayers, and the resultant closeness to God, is so very strong that an individual should not be able to survive the encounter. If one begins from the premise that kavvanah is really meditative focus, however, we see an added dimension. If one truly prays properly and focusses upon the letters of prayer with full and complete concentration, there should be nothing left of his connection to the physical world. For a moment, the person as self-reflective individual no longer exists.

In other texts we are told that God does not only help a person to live after prayer, moreover, but God plays an intimate role in the very process of establishing and maintaining focus.

כל מקום יאמר התבות בכוונה גדולה ויחזק את עצמו מעט מעט עד שיעזור לו השם יתברך
להתפלל בדבקות גדולה.¹⁰¹

In any event one should say the letters of prayer with great kavvanah and little by little strengthen himself until the Holy One helps him to pray in greater cleaving.

¹⁰⁰ שפתי צדיקים פ" בשלח

¹⁰¹ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ד ע"א

When a person applies complete concentration to the act of prayer, we are taught, the process becomes automatic and builds upon itself. Rivka Schatz observes that through kavvanah:

the spiritual possibilities which are thus opened up presuppose...the breaking of the chains of the material world. As man himself spares no efforts in concentrating his mind and directing it solely to the one thought about God, God himself comes to his aid and releases him completely from these chains.¹⁰²

Thus;

מכוון בתפלתו בכל הכוונות הידועות לו, אינו מכוון רק אותן הידועות לו, אבל כשאומר התיבה בהתקשרות גדול, נכלל בכל התיבה כל הכוונות מעצמן ומאליהן, שכל אות הוא עולם שלם, וכשאמר התיבה בהתקשרות גדול, בוודאי מתעוררין אותן העולמות העליונים, ועושה פעולות גדולות בזה, לכן יראה אדם להתפלל בהתקשרות ובהתלהבות גדולה, ובוודאייעשה בזה פעולות גדולות בעולמות העליונים, כי כל אות מעורר למעלה.¹⁰³¹⁰⁴

The one who directs all of the kavvanah which he is capable of in prayer does not just direct only that which is known to him. When one says a word of prayer with a desire to cleave to the Eternal all of the individual's kavvanah, as well as, all of the kavvanah from above is included in each and every word. For each and every letter is a complete world¹⁰⁵ and when one says a word with great cleaving, it surely stirs up the upper worlds. And he does great work through this. Therefore one should see to it that he prays with great cleaving and supreme ecstasy. Certainly he has great influence in the upper worlds through this, since each letter stirs the heavens.

¹⁰² Schatz p213

¹⁰³ Since the upper and lower worlds mirror each other, all that takes place in the lower world affects the upper world as well. Thus, prayer in the lower world stirs the upper world.

¹⁰⁴ צוואת הריב"ש די"ד ע"ב: לקושים יקרים די"ז ע"ד

¹⁰⁵ Each word of prayer, when prayer with proper, meditative kavvanah, has within it the power to aid the individual at prayer in ascending to each and all of the four worlds of awareness.

Attachment to Letters

This act of applying meditative focus in prayer in order to strip away ordinary consciousness is sometimes referred to as "attachment to letters". "Attachment to letters" begins by focussing on the form of the letters and the divinity hidden within, thereby diverting one's attention away from conscious self-reflection. Rather than consider the prayers in an intellectual way, the individual at prayer would focus on the form of the letter. In effect, the letters of prayer became the locus for meditation. Rivkah Schatz describes the process in this way:

Meditation thus begins with what is ...called 'entering into the letters of the prayers'. [However] man may be unable to enter this state and incapable of contemplating the object of his meditation, because the external world blocks his path and does not allow him to concentrate his thoughts and progress from one spiritual degree to the next. He is thus exiled from the supernatural to the natural world. The spiritual vision of the object of meditation is described in hasidic sources as seeing through a transparent object: as the mystic concentrates upon the letters, their concrete shape dissolves and the divine attributes that are concealed in the letters become spiritually visible.¹⁰⁶

According to this approach, the act of mentally focussing on each letter of prayer not only allows an individual to enter deeper levels of consciousness but enables the individual to draw closer to God. The kavvanah with which each word, and even each letter, is spoken becomes the determining factor as to how the prayer effects the individual, divinity and the relationship between the two. Therefore, the act of prayer is no longer reliant upon the contextual meaning of the words of prayer.

¹⁰⁶ Schatz, p211

לבקש מן האותיות ממש, וכמו ששמעתי פירוש שמן אדוני אבי זקני זללה"ה, פירוש מן סוד
אלוה שבהם שיעזור להם לדבר האותיות בכוונת אמת לשמה, ועל ידי זה נמתקין כל הדינים
בשרשן.¹⁰⁷

Truly seek from the letters. I have heard the explanation of my master that the explanation is this- Seek from the hidden Divinity that is in the letters that it will help them speak the letters with true intention to this, and through this all of the laws will be repaired at their very root.

According to Louis Jacob this was one of the major differences between the approach taken to prayer by the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim.¹⁰⁸ While the Mitnagdim focussed on the meaning of the prayers, the Hasidim focussed more on the form of each word, and even each letter than on their meaning.¹⁰⁹ For the Mitnagdim what the prayers said was important. For the Hasidim, how the prayers were said was central.^{110 111} The words became the focus of meditation. Thus one finds a Hasidic prayer teaching that one must put all of his strength into the prayer in order to ascend from world to world.

בחפילה צריך לשום כל כחו בהדיבורים, וילך כך מאות לאות עד שישכח מגופניו.

In prayer one must put all his strength into the spoken words, and one does this, going from letter to letter until he forgets his physical self.

¹⁰⁷ דגל מחנה אפרים פ עקב

¹⁰⁸ The rabbinic opponents of the Hasidim

¹⁰⁹ Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer p31_

¹¹⁰ Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer p31

¹¹¹ This seems much akin to meditating on the letters, as the letters as the focus of the meditation. To concentrate on their meaning would only prevent the individual from moving from one "state of consciousness to the next."

Through complete kavvanah one places "all of one's strength into the prayers" and moves from the realm of the physical into the realm of the spiritual. This shift increases one's potential to encounter divinity in its fullest form.¹¹²

Divinity Within The Letters Of Prayer

The ability to encounter God by focussing on the letters of prayer was predicated on the mystical understanding that within each letter is a divine spark. Through contemplation, in the form of focus, the spark of divinity was released and could thus be encountered by the individual. Thus, the letters themselves have mystical qualities. As the words are spoken, they break down into their component letters, each containing a spark of the divine. Later, after rising to the spiritual realm, the letters reconnect to re-form words which the individual would never have imagined to speak.

יש בכל אות עולמות ונשמות ואלהות, ועולים ומתקשרים ומתייחדים זה עם זה, עם אלהות, ואחר כך מתייחדים ומתקשרים יחד האנתיות ונעשה תיבה, ואחר כך מתייחדים ייחודים אמיתיים באלהות¹¹³

In each letter there are worlds, souls and Divinity. They rise up, draw close to each other and bind themselves to one another, and to Divinity. Afterwards the letters become united and draw together and create words. Afterwards, they become one with the unity and truth of the Divine.

¹¹² As we will see later, this potential to encounter Divinity takes place as part of the "forgetting of the physical self".

¹¹³ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ח ע"ב

This is so because the letters themselves have divinity embedded within them.^{114 115}

Similarly we find:

ישם כל מחשבתו בכח התבות שהוא מדבר עד שיראה האורות של התבות האין מתנצצים זה בזה מוכם נולדים כמה אורות, וזהו¹¹⁶ אור זרוע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה, האוריות שבתרה הם חדרים של השם יתברך שהוא ממשיך בהם את אצילות אורו כמו שכתב בזוהר הקדוש¹¹⁷ קודשא בריך הוא ואורייתא כולא חד ולחוכן צריך אדם לתת כל הכוונה שהיא הנשמה, כי הכוונה הוא הנשמה, וזהו הדבוק קודשא בריך הוא ואורייתא וישראל כולא חד, זהו התפשטות הנשמיות, פירוש, שיפשיט נשמתו מגופו, ותהיה נשמתו מלוכשת באותן המחשבות שהוא מדבר, ויראה כמה עולמות העליונים.¹¹⁸

One must place all of his thoughts into the strength of the letters which he speaks until he sees the Divine light of the letters how they blossom one from the other and from

¹¹⁴ The same holds true for the study of Torah. "Torah study is a way of coming upon the presence of God, the Baal Shem taught. A man learning Torah should feel like a son who receives a letters from his father and is most anxious to know what he has to say to him. The letter is precious to him upon every rereading, as if his father stood there beside him. 'I' (anokhi), the first word of the Ten Commandments, consists of four letters in Hebrew and forms an acrostic for the words 'I give Myself in written form,' it is said in the Talmud. God has given Himself in the words, and man must learn how to encounter Him. He is concealed in the letters, and through their mystical contemplation one can discover His light. The purpose of immersing oneself in Torah is not only to understand its rational meaning but also to become united with the divine presence therein." (Abraham Joshua Heschel, A Passion For Truth, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1973, p63)

¹¹⁵ Similarly, "Each word is a PaRDeS, an orchard of four possibilities. Peshat: the simple meaning, literal, superficial, waking. Remez: the hinted meaning, allegorical, concealed, dreaming. Drash: the interpreted meaning, searching, learned, unconscious. Sod: the secret meaning, mystical, universal, transpersonal, infinite. Confusion. Mystery. Terror and light. The whole thing. All belongs to us." (The River of Light- Kushner- pgs15-16) Through attachment to letters we enter into the deeper, mystical meaning which is embedded within.

¹¹⁶ תהילים צ"ז

¹¹⁷ עי' יתרו דפ"ה ע"כ, אחרי דע"ג ע"א

¹¹⁸ כש"ט ח"ב ד"ב ע"ד, לקושי אמרים ד"ד ע"א

them a number of lights are born, and this is the meaning of the verse, "light has been sown for the righteous and to the upright a joyous heart".

The letters of the Torah are rooms of the Holy One God continues in them the Divine light as it is written in the holy Zohar, "The Holy One and all of the Torah are one." Thus a person must give all of the kavvanah, which is the soul, for kavvanah is the soul. And this is cleaving to divinity.

"The Holy One, Torah and the people of Israel are One." And this is the stripping away of the physical realm. One strips his soul away from his body and his soul will be dressed in the thoughts which he speaks and he will see world after world.

The way the words are said takes priority over the words themselves. That is not to say that the words themselves were unimportant. However, the words and how they were recited did become secondary to the kavvanah of prayer. In what was likely seen as heretical, each word has a complete existence on its own. Each word therefore contains within it all of the spiritual power necessary to encounter God. Furthermore, any of the words of prayer will suffice, as long as the individual praying is able to direct all of his concentration into them.¹¹⁹ Each and every word, or even letter, can stir the heavens and move the person into a different world. As long as they are said with the proper intention.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ It must be noted here that although this was certainly the case, these were Halachic Jews who followed the legally prescribed elements for prayer.

¹²⁰ One teaching which combines the divinity of the letters of Torah and prayer with the requirement of proper kavvanah states, "The Besht said that when a person is reading from the Torah and sees the holy light of the letters which are in the Torah, even though he does not understand each and every intonation properly, so long as he reads with love and in ecstasy, the Holy One is not stick with him regarding the mistakes in reading. This is likened to a baby whose father loves him with absolute love. When the child wants something from his father, even though the child stammers and does not speak the request perfectly, the father is extremely pleased with him. Similarly, when a person speaks words of Torah with love, the Holy One loves that person greatly and is not strict in checking if he is saying them properly." (לקוטים יקרים דף א')

Conclusion

Kavvanah functions as the mechanism for the elevation of "human thought from the words of prayer to the sefirotic realm".¹²¹ Kavvanah enables an individual to "strip away" awareness of his or her physical self and alter his or her consciousness as he ascends toward Divinity. The early Kabbalists offer no specific descriptions, however, of the stages of ascent nor descriptions of the inner changes in one's consciousness.¹²² From numerous prayer texts, however, we are able to glean a picture of some of the dimensions of ascent.

Before turning to these specific texts, however, a final teaching offers a summary description of the importance of kavvanah in this process of ascent.

המשל הוא בלי להשכל, וכן הדיבור הוא בלי להמחשבה, כשהוא מדבר בלי כוונה הוא שבירת הכלים, שאין חיות בכלים, כשהוא מפשיט עצמו מנשמיות, שהוא הנוף והכלי שלו, אז יכול לראות הפנימיות הכלי, דהיינו החיות והאורות של האותיות, כשהוא מפשיט עצמו מנשמיות, ומלביש עצמו בחוך דיבורים, אז הוא דבוק בבורא יתברך שמו, שהוא מלובש בחוך הדיבורים, ויראה שלא יפול ממחשבתו, ויחזיק עצמו להעלות למעלה.¹²³

The analogy can be made between thought and a vessel. Speech is the vessel of thought. When one speaks without kavvanah he is like a hole in a vessel. There is no life in the vessel. When one strips away from his physical self, which is the body and his vessel, then he is able to see inside of the vessel. That is, [he is able to see] the life and the divine light of the letters. When he strips himself of the physical realm, and dresses himself within the utterances, then he cleaves to his creator, the Holy One for he is

¹²¹ Idel p103

¹²² Idel p104

¹²³ כתר שם טוב ח"ב ד"ב ע"ב: לקוטי אמרים ד"ד ע"א

dressed within his utterances. He should fear lest it [the focus of kavvanah] fall from his thoughts. One must strengthen himself that he climb higher and higher.

OLAM HAASIYAH- THE LOWEST LEVEL OF AWARENESS:
APPREHENDING GOD WITH ONE'S INTELLECT

Being Aware Of This World's Distinctions

A number of the texts from Amud HaT'filah discuss the four worlds of mystical ascent. These worlds are equivalent to four distinct stages of comprehension which one encounters as one moves from temporal consciousness to mystical awareness. Through an examination of these worlds, and the stages they represent, we begin to better grasp the structure of ascent.

Hasidic prayer teachings often characterize the lowest realm of existence, the physical world, which is also referred to as The World of Action, as the domain of distinction and separation. The upper world is described as the dominion of wholeness and unity. In the lower realm God's presence is hidden and difficult to encounter. In the highest realm God's presence is overwhelming. In the lowest realm we must strive to seek out God's presence. In the highest realm we must lose ourselves in order to allow divinity to fill our being. For this reason, our awareness of divinity is a measure which indicates our location within the spiritual structure of creation.¹²⁴ This distinction between unity and separation and our awareness of them is reflected in the following teaching:

¹²⁴ Gershom Scholem notes that beginning in the 13th century we find a fundamental distinction made in the Kabbalah between the "world of unity" which corresponds to the upper, spiritual realm of the sefirot and the "world of separate intelligences" which is to the "lower world" which lies beneath the sefirot in the physical realm. (Scholem, Kabbalah p117) This world is the realm of disconnection. The upper world is not.

צריך האדם לחשוב את עצמו כאין, וישכח את עצמו מכל וכל, ויבקש הכל בכל תפלתו על השכינה, ואזי יכול לבוא למעלה מהזמן, דהיינו לעולם המחשבה, ששם הכל שוה, חיים ומות, ים ויבשה, וזהו מה שכתוב בזוהר אלי דייקאדא בעתיקא תליא, שהיו צריכין להפקיר את עצמן, ולשכח בצרתן, כדי שיבואו לעולם המחשבה, ושם הכל שוה, מה שאין כן כשהוא דבוק בנשמיות עולם הזה הוא דבוק בהתחלקות טוב ורע, דהיינו זי"ן ימי הבניין, ואיך יבא למעלה מזמניות, ששם אחדות גמור, וכן כשחושב את עצמו ליש, ומבקש צרכיו, אז אין הקדוש ברוך הוא יכול להתלבש בו, כי הוא יתברך שמו אין סוף, ואין בלי יכול לסבול, מה שאין כן כשחושב את עצמו לאין.¹²⁵

A person must consider himself as no-thing. Little by little he will forget himself. Through his prayer he will little by little draw upon the Divine presence.¹²⁶ In time he will be able to come to the higher realm- this is the Olam HaMachshvah- the World of Thought. There everything is equal- life and death, sea and dry land¹²⁷ and this is what is written in the Zohar- going up depends upon the past. For He must separate himself, and forget his physical self, in order to come to the World of Thought, and there everything is equal. It is not this way when one is cleaving to the physicality of this world and when one cleaves to differentiations of good and evil. This is the days of the building. And how will he come upward in time, for there is complete unity. When a person considers himself as some-thing and he seeks his needs, then the Holy One is not able to garb him- for God's name is AIN SOF- no end. There is not vessel which is able to Hold Him.¹²⁸ This is not the case when he considers himself as no-thing.¹²⁹

In this teaching we see a major distinction between ordinary daily consciousness and higher levels of consciousness¹³⁰. The lowest level, that of daily awareness, is characterized by contrast and by separation from divinity. At this level we have self-

¹²⁵ ליקוטי אמרים די"ח ריש ע"ג

¹²⁶ Shechinah

¹²⁷ This is not the case in Olam HaAsiyah

¹²⁸ There is no "something" which is able to hold "nothing" wince the two are utterly different. see analogy below

¹²⁹ For at such a time both the person and Divinity are "nothing". (See Matt "Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism")

¹³⁰ Actually we see three realms represented here.

consciousness. Nonetheless, a person must strive to "consider himself as nothing" and divest himself of self-comprehension. This is the paradoxical of start of spiritual ascent. As long as we are able to consider ourselves as "something", we have the power to distance ourselves from both ourselves and the world. Such consideration limits our ability to perceive of the divinity within creation. The higher realms, on the other hand, are characterized by unity and complete awareness of divinity. At this higher level of awareness we have lost self-consciousness and have become "nothing." In this nothingness we are stripped of our ego and are able to fully encounter divinity.

The everyday world is the world of mundane awareness. This is the arena of distinctions and separation in which we categorize, divide and classify all that we experience.¹³¹ At this level we are intellectually aware of the world which surrounds us. We are conscious of the distinctions of this world and the ways in which one event, person or object is different from every other. The opposition of this world, such as "good and evil", "life and death" and "sea and dry land", occupy our thoughts and guide our actions as we label, classify and quantify.

In The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind Julian Jaynes observes that consciousness of our surroundings and the distinctions of time, space and reality prevent us from encountering the full and total experience of the world and

¹³¹ "If we only talk and think, all [the] beautiful, intriguing and informative stimuli fade from conscious consideration, and we focus instead on single features of the environment or mistake words or labels for reality." (Joseph, The Right Brain p69)

of all existence. The limitations of consciousness affect our existence at every moment and limit our perception of this world. Jaynes remarks that even a piano player "suddenly conscious of his fingers during a furious set of arpeggios would have to stop playing."¹³² Since the music of a concert violinist is created by the unity of separate movements, once the musician becomes aware of one single, distinct movement, the unity of the music is lost. The music, which is dependent upon this unity, will then stop.¹³³ The reverse applies as well; until a musician can play a piece of music as a unified whole, rather than as a series of distinct motions, the musical potential of the piece cannot be achieved, and the musician is unable to move to a higher level of performance.¹³⁴

A Hasidic parallel is found in the form of a parable.

Once Rabbi Hayyim of Krosno, a disciple of the Baal Shem's was watching a rope dancer together with his disciples. He was so absorbed in the spectacle that they asked him what it was that riveted his gaze to this foolish performance. "This man," he said, "is risking his life, and I cannot say why. But I am sure of the fact that while he is walking the rope,

¹³² Julian Jaynes, The Origins of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976.) p26

¹³³ Logotherapist Victor Frankl observed this same phenomena in working with a concert violinist. Frankl "speaks of a violinist patient who made a great effort to perform as consciously as possible, from putting his violin in place on his shoulder to the most trifling technical details. This resulted in a complete artistic breakdown." (Kuret Kocourek, "Dereflection" Logotherapy In Action, Ed. Joseph Fabry, Reuven P. Bulka and William Sahakian, (United States: Jason Aaronson, Inc. 1979, USA.) p93

¹³⁴ The prerequisite for the piano player to achieve this higher level of musical experience is the ability of the pianist to master the technical, "this worldly" task of learning the distinct notes which are ultimately put together, the distinctions between them lost. Similarly in prayer, the task of learning the words and melodies of prayer, which might be defined as a "world of separate intelligences" task, is a prerequisite for entering the "world of unity" through prayer. This teaching assumes a mastery of the distinct actions of prayer.

he is not thinking of the fact that he is earning a hundred gulden by what he is doing, for if he did, he would fall.¹³⁵

Similarly, psychotherapist and neuropsychologist R. Joseph notes that as long as we have a self-consciousness of our world, as long as we are able to describe our experiences in words, we are only encountering a small portion of the experience. If we sit without thought and merely experience the world around us, Joseph observes, we become fully aware of the world. As soon as we begin to consciously consider our surroundings, however, we lose this total awareness.¹³⁶ ¹³⁷ We find that consciousness and awareness are not synonymous. Rather, the former can and does limit the latter. While our intellect creates consciousness, it also creates a curtain between ourselves and a complete awareness of the deeper reaches of existence. As long as we are aware of ourselves and we see ourselves as "something" we remain in the lower world of limited consciousness. While we are still able to "consider" the world, and aware that we have a distinct self, we stand apart from the rest of creation. Limited by our intellectual consideration of the physical world, the spiritual realm remains hidden-- just a bit beyond our grasp.

¹³⁵ As retold in Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters (Schoken Books, New York, 1947, Revised Edition 1991) p174

¹³⁶ Joseph pp117-118

¹³⁷ Joseph relates this distinction between linguistic consciousness and total awareness to the difference between a left-brain and a right-brain perception of the world. The left brain is linguistic, labelling and considering its surroundings. The left is the seat of what we commonly refer to as consciousness and it provides a conscious, albeit finite, view of the world. The right-brain is non-linguistic and is associated with the unconscious. When we do not consider or label our surroundings we are in left-brain mode and, while not conscious of the world, are aware of it.

There are at least two realms of existence and awareness; the first separates and isolates us, while the second opens and includes us. Moreover, one realm may exclude an awareness of the other. The first realm is the physical world and our awareness of it. As long as we are cognizant of this world and our position in it, we are prevented from a true awareness of the unity of divinity. While we are aware of the differentiations of this world, as long as we attempt to observe the higher realm of the holy from within the world of distinctions, we fail to fully encounter God.¹³⁸

The Limits of Conscious Perception

One of the goals of prayer is self-transcendence in order to close the gap between ourselves and divinity. Meaning comes, according to logotherapist Dr. Joseph Farby, through the process of self-transcendence. To truly encounter another person or God, one must "come with a commitment that transcends personal interest..."¹³⁹

Farby notes,

¹³⁸ This might be likened to two computer systems. As long as one is working on a Mackintosh computer one is unable to access data stored on an IBM Dos based system. However, one is able, through the employment of the right process, to use the Mackintosh system to access the IBM data. Similarly, this teaching suggests, division does not permit the direct access of pure unity except by indirect means.

¹³⁹ Joseph Farby, "Sharing Groups" in Logotherapy In Action. Ed. Joseph Farby, Reuven Bulka and William Sahakian, p166

In universal stress situations self-transcendence comes naturally- in cities under air attack or after an earthquake. The young find self-transcendence in the ecology movement; they are beginning to see that the entire earth is in a universal stress situation..."¹⁴⁰

As we have seen, the Zohar suggests that self-transcendence can take place naturally during sleep once the conscious mind is no longer fully in control of thought and physical functions. Could not this same process occur while one is awake and not in a state of stress? This is the goal of step by step ascension during prayer which leads toward self-transcendence. The great irony here, however, is that the only way to achieve this self-transcendence¹⁴¹ while one is awake is through consciously focussed thought. Through the act of highly focused contemplation on the letters of prayer one can slowly turn inward, strip away the consciousness of this level, and move toward the depths of the soul and inner self. "In these situations,"¹⁴² Dr. Sidney Rosen comments, "a person is aware of the vividness of inner mental and sensory experiences, and external stimuli, such as sounds and movements, assume lesser importance."¹⁴³ At such times, according to psychotherapist Milton Erickson, the individual is less involved with intellectual thoughts and issues and draws closer to "unconscious learnings".¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Farby p167

¹⁴¹ in which we cease to focus on ourselves and our needs...

¹⁴² By his use of the phrase "in these situations" Rosen is referring the trance-like state which one enters through prayer or meditation.

¹⁴³ Sidney Rosen, My Voice Will Go With You: The Teaching Tales of Milton H. Erickson (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1982) pp26-27

¹⁴⁴ Rosen p27

From the perspective of prayer, the jumping off points for this process of concentrated introspection, with the goal of mystical ascent, are verbal speech and highly controlled thought.¹⁴⁵ A statement attributed to Dov Baer of Mezhirech, The Maggid makes this point.

The first thing one has to know is that God fills all the worlds¹⁴⁶ and that no place is empty of Him and that He is in all worlds, etc. That this is so can be observed from experience.¹⁴⁷ For in all things there inheres the vital energy of the Creator, blessed be He. It is obvious that things have taste or smell or appearance or love, that is to say, there are things that are loved or are feared or are beautiful and so with regard to the other attributes. Now if one strips away the material aspect of things to concentrate solely on the spiritual aspect in itself- the taste or the smell and so forth- it becomes quite obvious that this is not something tangible or apprehended by the senses but by man's vital force, by his soul. It follows that it is a spiritual thing, the energy of the Creator which resides in this material thing just as the soul resides in the body.¹⁴⁸

This teaching begins on the lowest and most limited level of awareness. It begins with the need for the individual to "know" in a linguistic and thoughtful way, that God's presence fills the world. Only then does an individual begin to "strip away" the גשמיות- awareness of the physical and reveal the רוחניות- the encounter with the spiritual which is hidden within. At the beginning point, when a person must "know" that God is present,

¹⁴⁵ Schatz p221

¹⁴⁶ It should be noted that the Maggid uses the plural "worlds". The individual stands in only one world, while God's presence fills all worlds.

¹⁴⁷ The quote, which will be further explicated later on, goes on to discuss the ultimate goal of prayer as stripping away the material and making an ascent toward the spiritual.

¹⁴⁸ Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer p67

there is no direct contact with divinity. Rather, there is an intellectual knowledge that divinity is present in the world. While an individual "knows" and "observes" God's presence at this level, one is not directly engaged in the encounter.¹⁴⁹ At this point the individual's intellect controls the thought process and allows the individual to consider the events which surround him. Since the individual is observing the world with his intellect, however, that person remains separate from the spiritual encounter which is sought. While an individual "knows", "considers" and "labels", that person is not fully there.

This is the case for the social anthropologist or the reporter, as well. As an observer, she is present at the event, but is not fully engaged in the events around her. In The Search For God At Harvard, Ari Goldman describes his first days at Harvard Divinity School as a time when he observed all that was taking place about him, but did not become fully engaged in them:

In those opening days of school, I carried a small reporter's notebook wherever I went, ostensibly as a way to record the experience. It was one of those lean spiral books that fit neatly in one hand, just right for jotting down the sounds and sights of a train wreck. The notebook has also served another purpose; it has long been my shield against getting involved....My shield seemed to work fine for the reporter on the street, but it was wrong for the student of religion. I had to come to terms with the fact that the incessant scribbling was a way of hearing but not feeling. After several days at the school I put the notebook down and allowed myself to enter the worlds I had so feared.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ It is important to note here that while the Hebrew word "to know" (יָדָע) can be used to refer to intimate contact between two individuals (Adam Knew Eve) or between person and God this is not the case here. The word know is only used in this lowest level and clearly refer to a state of intellectual separation from the object under consideration; that is- God's presence.

¹⁵⁰ Ari Goldman, The Search For God At Harvard (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991) pp7-8

Goldman discovered that so long as an individual observes an experience intellectually that individual remains separated from it. Similarly, in an address to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner describes a Berit Milah which he once attended. The child's father was so preoccupied with photographing the event that he did not fully notice what was taking place. Many are "so preoccupied with watching, recording, and analyzing our lives," Kushner comments, "that we fail to live them."¹⁵¹ In each case, intellectual scrutiny created distance between observer and observed. It was only when Goldman stopped thinking about the experience and began to live it that he fully encountered the Harvard world. The father never put the camera down. He missed the experience entirely.

In a similar vein, if we are preoccupied with intellectually considering our prayers, we fail to really pray them. And if we are preoccupied with considering divinity, we fail to truly encounter God. The individual at prayer must begin in observation but then continue until he becomes fully involved in the prays. This is the main attribute of Olam Ha-Asiyah- the lowest level of awareness: this is the level of intellectually considering God's presence in the world and consciously seeking a connection to God through the words of prayer. In Olam HaAsiyah a person considers the spiritual potential which is

¹⁵¹ Lawrence Kushner, "Encountering the Divine Presence- The Gornicht of God: Six Observations About Nothing" (CCAR Yearbook) p31

hidden within the letters of prayer and within himself, but is unable to encounter either.¹⁵² He observes the words of prayer as if from a distance but unable to immerse himself in them. And so long as there is a gap between the individual and the prayer, there is also a gap between the individual and God. This separation is manifest in the individual's considering the prayer intellectually rather than fully experiencing it. The first stage of prayer is to observe the words of prayer. But such an encounter is necessarily limited in its scope. So long as the participant is self-conscious he can not be fully absorbed in it and thus is not able to be transformed by it.

The Maggid's teaching states, "One strips away the material aspect of things to concentrate solely on the spiritual aspect in itself - the taste or the smell and so forth". The Maggid describes a heightened level of awareness. At such a time, it "becomes obvious that this is not something tangible or apprehended by the senses but by man's vital force, by his soul." Having stripped away the physical and our consideration of it, reality no longer looks the same. Indeed it is not the same. An apple, for example, is no longer merely an apple but now appears as a vessel containing the divine presence.

A friend was once driving with her four year old daughter. Suddenly, the little girl began to point out the window and say, "Mommy, mommy I see God." When her mother looked to see where the girl was pointing, all she saw was a tree. Most of us look at a

¹⁵² Even this is already a shift in awareness for most people who, during their daily lives rarely have the opportunity to consider that there is anything beyond their daily needs and responsibilities.

tree and, if we even bother to take note of it, see a trunk, branches and leaves. The Maggid suggests that if we cease our constant intellectual consideration and we "strip away the material dimension" and transcend conscious thought, then we will find that everything is merely a vessel for the divine presence. At the lowest level of awareness, Olam HaAsiyah, this process of self-transcendence has not yet occurred. The "material aspect" of the self has not yet been stripped away. The individual remains an observer. The tree still looks like a tree. The prayers are still examined and considered. While this level is limited and limiting, it is the necessary beginning of prayer. The individual can, after all, only begin to pray from within this world of daily life. When an individual starts to pray he approaches the endeavor out of the "stuff" of daily life. With the hope of becoming more aware of God's presence, though, he begins by thinking about God and grasping the idea that God is present in the world and that communion with God is possible.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ But not in this world of awareness. This is only possible to be achieved through the transformation of the individual.

Prayer As A Conscious Act

A number of prayer teachings indicate that the first stage of prayer is a conscious act. The individual is directed to intellectually consider the words which will be said prior to speech.¹⁵⁴

יחשוב כשמתפלל שבאותיות מתלבש השם יתברך, פירוש, דאין אנו יודעין מה שאדם חושב אלא אם כן מדבר, נמצא הוי הדיבור מלבוש למחשבה, ויאמר בלבו, מלך גדול בזה אני עושה לו מלבוש, ראוי לי לעשות במחשבה, וידבר בכל כחו, כי בזה נעשה אחדות עמו יתברך שמו, כי כחו בהאות, ובהאות שורה הקדוש ברוך הוא, נמצא הוא אחדות עמו יתברך שמו.¹⁵⁵

One should **consider** that when one prays that the letters garb the Holy One.¹⁵⁶ It is explained in this way- we do not know what a person thinks unless he speaks it. In this way we say that speech garbs one's thoughts.

[An analogy is made to] one who said to himself, "A king as great as He, I will make him clothing. It is worthwhile for me to do it in thought, that he should speak with all his strength. For **through this [strength and focus] unity is made with the Holy One.** For he placed his strength into the letters [of the words of prayers]. And through the letters¹⁵⁷ he saw the Holy One, and he found unity with the Holy One¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁴ As we will see, this differs significantly from teachings dealing with the higher three worlds of awareness.

¹⁵⁵ צוואת הריב"ש די"נ ע"א

¹⁵⁶ Clearly there is a consideration here that God needs our prayers, or at least our prayers complete or complement the Holy One. This imagery of dressing God goes back to the Biblical understanding that the sacrifices would create a garland of glory for God.

¹⁵⁷ and meditation on them through "attachment to letters"

¹⁵⁸ because through meditation on the letters he was able to strip away his self-consciousness and ascend to the higher spiritual realms

The journey toward total awareness of God's unity begins in intellectual consideration. Through this conscious act of prayer the individual is able to place all of his strength¹⁵⁹ into the letters he recites and he approaches the realm where divinity and humanity can become one. This, however, occurs in a number of stages as an individual moves from total self-consciousness to total lack of consciousness. Similarly we find that-

בתפילה צריך לשום כל כחו בהדיבורים, וילך כך מאות לאות עד שישכח מנופנייות, ויחשוב שהאותיות מצטרפים ומתחברים זה עם זה, וזהו תענוג גדול, דמה אם בנשמייות הוא תענוג, מכל שכן ברוחנייות, וזהו עולם היצירה

In prayer one must put all his strength into the spoken words, and one does this, going from letter to letter until he forgets his physical self¹⁶⁰. He considers that the letters join and connect themselves one to the next. There is great joy in this. And if there is joy in the physical realm, how much more in the realm of the spiritual realm. This is the Olam HaYitzirah- The Created World¹⁶¹.

Here we already see the second world discussed. In the lowest world a person intellectually "considers" the prayers. He thinks about the prayer and about the process of prayer. This first step of prayer is only a stepping stone toward the expanded awareness of the higher worlds, however. As the individual concentrates on the letters of

¹⁵⁹ That is he meditates through the focus of kavannah

¹⁶⁰ Here we find that the process of "attachment to letters" is one of the early stages of the process of Hasidic prayer. By using the letters as the focus for a meditative process the individual strives to transcend the self thereby encountering God.

¹⁶¹ It should be noted that few of the Hasidic teachings deal specifically with one level or another. Rather, they describe two or more and the relationship between the two. Thus here we see the description of the movement from Olam HaAsiyah to Olam HaYitzirah.

prayer and moves from letter to letter, he eventually comes to the next level, Olam HaYitzirah. Similarly,

אין דיבור בלא מחשבה, כי מקודם הוא חושב מה שידבר, והנה כשחושב קודם התפלה מה שידבר ולפני מי ידבר, בוודאי תפול עליו יראה ובושה שיהיה ירא מן הדיבורים עצמם, כשנותן על לבו שהעולם הדיבור, היא השכינה כביכול, מדברת בו, והיא כלולה מכל המדות יראה ואהבה והתפארות וכן כולם כידוע, ואיך לא יהיה לו יראה ובושה כשידע שמעורר השכינה וכל המדות כביכול, וזהו¹⁶² עושי דברו, שעושים מדיבור מעשה.¹⁶³

There is no speech without thought, because first one considers that which will be said. In this case, when one considers prior to prayer that which he will say and before Whom he will say it, certainly awe and shame will fall upon him for he will be reverent on account of the utterances themselves. When he places it upon his heart, that the World of Speech, that is, the Shechinah, speaks through him¹⁶⁴. And it is included in all of the dimensions of awe and love, etc., as they are known. And how will he not be in awe and humbled when he knows that the Shechinah has been aroused and all of the dimensions. And this is the meaning of "Make his Word", That one should make from his word dead.

Thought, consideration and desire become the keys to unlocking the gateway to the upper worlds. Similarly, we find

הבעל שם טוב זי"ע פירש, צוהר תעשה לתבה, צוהר לשון אורה, ותיבה לשון דיבור, פירוש כשאישישראל רוצה לדבר דיבור צריך לראות שהמחשבה תאיר בהדיבור בתחלה, כי מחשבה אותיות חשב מה.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Psalm 103

¹⁶³ כתר שם טוב ח"ב ד"ה ע"ב

¹⁶⁴ This is one dimension of the intermediate worlds

¹⁶⁵ תולדות יצחק פ' נח

The Besht expounded, "Enlighten¹⁶⁶ the word¹⁶⁷" Zohar is the language of spiritual light. Tevah is the language of speech. It is explained in this way, when a Jew wants to speak a word he must see to it that his thoughts enlighten his speech from the very start. The letters of the word "Thought" ("Machshavah") indicate that one should think (Chashav) of what (mah) [he will say].

At this level, conscious thought precedes the act of prayer and of reaching toward Divinity. Finally,

פעמים אין אדם עובד רק בקטנות, היינו שאינו נכנס בעולמות עליונים כלל, רק שמחשב שמלא כל הארץ כבודו, והוא קרוב אצלו, והוא באותו שעה כמו קטן, שאין שכלו גדול רק מעט, ומכל מקום אף שהוא עובד בקטנות עובד בדבקות גדול.¹⁶⁸

At times, a person is only able to serve in a state of spiritual finitude and he is not able to enter into the upper worlds at all. At such times he should consider that God's presence fills all of the world and that God is near to him. At such times he is like a child. His intellect is not great. Rather, it is limited. In any event, even though he believes that he is praying in a state of spiritual finitude he is truly praying with cleaving to the eternal.

The Internal Component of Olam HaAsiyah

Ordinary daily awareness, in which we are conscious of our actions and the world which surrounds us, and intellectually self-conscious prayer are among the characteristics of Olam HaAsiyah. At this point in prayer the words are still conscious and controlled since the individual praying wants to become involved in the process of prayer. Not only

¹⁶⁶ "Zohar"

¹⁶⁷ "Tevah"

¹⁶⁸ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ז ע"ב

must the individual be aware of the process of prayer and his role in that process, but he must feel a sense of awe and humility at embarking on such a process.

מתחילה כשרוצה להחפיל יהיה ביראה, שהוא השער לכנוס לפניו יתברך¹⁶⁹ ויאמר בלבו למי אני רוצה לדבר את עצמי להבורא בדיבורו נל העולמות, והמהווה אותם ומקיים אותם, ויתבונן בגדולתו וברוממותו, ואחר כך יכול להיות בעולמות עליונים.¹⁷⁰

At first, when one desires to pray he should be in awe, for awe is the gate to enter before the Holy One. He should say to himself, "Who am I to want to cleave myself to the One who creates through speech all of the worlds." Afterwards he will be able to enter into the upper worlds.

Statements about the emotional condition of the individual are not found in connection to the highest world to which ascends, the world where that person becomes "nothing." This is because in order to be aware of one's emotions the individual must be self-reflective and self-consciousness. The process of moving toward higher realms, however, is connected to the removal of this self-reflection. As a result, the movement toward higher realms is associated with decreasing awareness of emotions.

¹⁶⁹ שבת דל"א ריש ע"ב

¹⁷⁰ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ז ע"ב

Conclusion

An individual begins the process of prayer by consciously approaching the words of the text. Slowly, the individual then strives to close the gap. Which separates an individual from the divinity hidden within the words.

ובמה אתה יכול לעשות כן בא אתה וכל ביתך אל התבה היינו בכל גופו כחותך תבא אל התבה.¹⁷¹

And how are you able to do this?¹⁷² "Come, you and your entire household into the word [of prayer]",¹⁷³ That is to say, with all your body and all your strength come into the word¹⁷⁴ [of prayer].

When a person begins to pray there is a gap between that individual and the prayer as well as between the individual and divinity. A person must overcome the gulf between the self and the words of prayer in order to overcome the gulf between the self and divinity. This is accomplished by placing "all of oneself", one's strength, into prayer and beginning to lose a sense of the physical world. Until this is accomplished, however, the gulf will remain. This is so because

¹⁷¹ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ח ע"ב

¹⁷² That is, to discover the unity buried within creation and to ascend toward higher recognition of the divine.

¹⁷³ The word used here is תבה which, as previously noted, has the dual meaning of "ark" and "word". This quote, Genesis 7:1, is the Divine command to Noah that his family should enter the ark as the flood waters begin to pour upon the earth.

¹⁷⁴ תבה

כשחושב את עצמו ליש, ומבקש צרכיו, אז אין הקדוש ברוך הוא יכול להתלבש בו...¹⁷⁵

So long as one continues to consider himself as something¹⁷⁶ and seeks his material needs, the Holy One is unable to wear him.

¹⁷⁵ ליקוטי אמרים די"ח ריש ע"נ

¹⁷⁶ has everyday consciousness...

INTERMEDIATE LEVELS OF AWARENESS

The intermediate levels of awareness, The World of Speech- Olam HaYetzirah¹⁷⁷ and The World of Thought- Olam HaBeriah¹⁷⁸, are much more difficult to define than The World of Action- Olam HaAsiyah. While the World of Action is familiar and common to us, the stages of higher awareness which the two intermediate worlds portray are less familiar and often difficult to distinguish from one another. While we often encounter these realms, they are easily overlooked. If they are recognized, they are not seen as altered states of awareness. For instance, a day dream is an altered state of awareness. For that moment, perception of the world changes. The mind has been freed to wander to another place and another time.¹⁷⁹ Yet daydreams are often dismissed as meaningless. In fact, they are the expression of a part of our being which seeks and needs to be expressed. Worse yet, if an individual is in the classroom a daydream is seen as a waste of valuable learning time. Everyone has, at some time, been shaken out of a daydream. For that moment we were seemingly unaware of our surroundings. We are aware of the world in a different way. Often we will say, "Sorry, I was just daydreaming," as if the daydream were less real or less significant than the everyday consciousness of events which we would have had otherwise. Yet we often reject such a time of altered consciousness as irrelevant. A similar state can be arrived at through the

¹⁷⁷ Also referred to by the name Olam HaDibur

¹⁷⁸ Also referred to by the name Olam HaMachshavah

¹⁷⁹ In psychological terms, the left brain has momentarily stopped dominating and the right brain has been allowed to pierce through.

process of guided meditation. Ericksonian Psychotherapist, Sidney Rosen, describes these moments as, "a natural state experienced by everyone. Our most familiar experience takes place when we daydream, but other trance states can occur when we meditate, pray or perform exercises...."¹⁸⁰ In the Hasidic formulation, these moments are perhaps more real than daily consciousness, representing a state of higher consciousness in which an individual no longer considers "this-worldly" matters. There, barriers are lowered and divinity is encountered. There, distinction is lost and unity dominates.

The intermediate worlds represent the process of the loss of the self-consciousness. While they are described and spoken of as two different worlds, they often seem to be part of the same process; loss of self on the path toward unity with divinity.^{181 182} In these modes, the individual at prayer is neither firmly rooted in this world, and in "this worldly" consciousness, nor has he left ordinary consciousness entirely and ascended to the heights of awareness. At this point the individual is somewhere in between mundane awareness and the mystical knowledge which comes with total loss of self.

¹⁸⁰ Rosen pp26-27

¹⁸¹ From the perspective of the mystical reality of each there is, however, significant difference. Rivka Schatz states, "Man speaks and thinks because the 'world of speech' and the 'world of thought' speak and think through him; he attains intellectual or mystical 'illuminations' because rays from the world of the divine intellect reach his mind and illuminate it..." (Schatz p220)

¹⁸² Rivka Schatz groups them together making one the sub-world of the other. She states, "...The Maggid [Dov Baer] speaks of a kind of 'enlargement of consciousness' of the 'world of thought' by which the latter includes the 'world of speech'...." (Schatz pp221-222) In fact, The World of Thought represents a deeper state of stripping away self-consciousness.

The Experience Of Divinity In The Intermediate Levels

If the lowest world is characterized by consciousness of distinction, the description of the intermediate worlds reflects the process of stripping off this conscious awareness. This is the mode whose reality is

מה שאין כן כשהוא דבוק בגשמיות עולם הזה הדבוק בהחלקות טוב ורע

That which is not so while an individual cleaves to the physical nature of this world, that is, cleaving to the distinctions of good and bad.

At this level, the individual is no longer connected with the separation and distinction which characterized the lowest world, Olam HaAsiyah. The prior intellectual consideration, in which the individual classified and contemplated, has ceased. Distinctions have melted away and have been replaced by a sense that all creation is one. This idea runs contrary to the theory that each person, creature, thing or experience is separate and isolated from every other one. The individual has moved past the physical realm toward an encounter with a reality which is different and more unified. 'The individual has יבא למעלה מזמניות ששם אחדות נמור - come to the higher realm for now there is complete unity. Because there is no longer separation, the individual is more connected to the rest of existence and is able to better encounter the divinity hidden within.¹⁸³ It is not clear, however, if it is the individual who no longer sees distinction,

¹⁸³ Think about those moments when you felt "at one" with the world. As soon as you began to consider this feeling it was lost. Yet it was ultimately real, perhaps more real than anything else that day..

or if this higher world is one where distinction and separation no longer exist.¹⁸⁴ In either case, this level of awareness is clearly associated with an increased sense that all of existence is interconnected- that wholeness and unity is possible.

ענין הייחוד הוא שלא להפריד השכל מן הדיבורים, שלא לערב רע בשוב, וזהו¹⁸⁵ ועץ הדעת טוב ורע, וזהו¹⁸⁶ שפחה כי תירש וכו' וכענין מים עליונים¹⁸⁷

The essence unification is that one must not separate one's intellect from his speech, that he will not be able to distinguish bad from good. This is the essence of, "that the tree of knowledge is good and bad" and this is the meaning of "a hand-maiden who supplants" and it is like the matter of the upper waters.

Similarly,

קודשא בריך הוא ואורייתא וישראל כולא חד, זהו התפשטות הנשמיות, פירוש, שיפשיט נשמתו מנופו, ותהיה נשמתו מלוכשת באותן המחשבות שהוא מדבר, ויראה כמה עולמות העליונים.¹⁸⁸

"The Holy One, Torah and the people of Israel are One." And this is the stripping away of the physical realm. One strips his soul away from his body and his soul will be dressed in the thoughts which he speaks and he will see world after world.

The individual is now able to experience the ever-present but often hidden divinity.

Divinity, Torah and the people of Israel are one. While in the world of distinction,

¹⁸⁴ Rabbi Lawrence Kushner refers to this realm as the point where paradox is acceptable. This author sees this realm as the point where paradox is non-existent because all distinctions have ceased entirely.

¹⁸⁵ פרשה בראשית

¹⁸⁶ Proverbs 30:23

¹⁸⁷ ליקוטים יקרים ד"ה ע"ד

¹⁸⁸ כש"ט ח"ב ד"ב ע"ד, לקוטי אמרים ד"ד ע"א

though, this unity was not apparent. Having removed this stumbling block to unity, however, the interconnectedness of the three, and of all creation, becomes clear. The individual has turned inward so that "his soul will be dressed in the thoughts which he speaks". As a result, the spiritual levels of creation become accessible to him.¹⁸⁹

Automatic Speech: When The Words Speak Through The Individual

Upon ascent to the intermediate worlds there is also a shift in how the words of prayer are articulated. When the individual begins to pray, he is charged with consciously considering the words of prayer and drawing himself into the letters of the words of prayer. ("Bring yourself and your family into the words [of prayer].") This is the meditative technique of "attachment to letters". In these intermediate stages of ascent this has been accomplished. Intellectual consideration of the prayers has ceased and the gap between the individual at prayer and the words of prayer has closed. Now, rather than

¹⁸⁹ A well known story attributed to the Baal Shem Tov makes the point that all of creation is merely an illusion which hides God's presence. "A king had built a glorious palace full of corridors and partitions, but he himself lived in the innermost room. When the palace was completed and his servants came to pay him homage, they found that they could not approach the king because of the devious maze. While they stood and wondered, the king's son came and showed them that those were not real partitions, but only magical illusions, and that the king, in truth, was easily accessible. Push forward bravely and you shall find no obstacle."

saying the words of prayer, the words seem to flow forth of their free accord.¹⁹⁰ This is the second world of ascent, The World of Speech.

כשמדבר יחשוב ברמז קול ודיבור, וידבר ביראה ובאהבה, ויחשוב שזה מדבר עולם הדיבור מפיו, אז מעלה הדיבורים.

When one is thinking let him consider in a whispered voice and utterance. And one should speak in awe and love, and consider that the World of Speech¹⁹¹ speaks through his mouth. Because of this his words [of prayer] ascend.

Similarly, although it does not specifically mention The World of Speech, we find:

פעמים יכול לומר התפלה במהירות מאוד מחמת שכוער בלבו אהבת השם יחברך מאוד, והתיבות יוצאים מפיו בעצמם.¹⁹²

There are times when a person can say prayers with great speed because a great love for the Holy One burns within his heart. And at such times the letters fly forth from his mouth of their own accord.

This same phenomena is described in other terms as well. In the words of the Maggid,

"The World of Speech [now] speaks through him" or as it is described in a different text,

"the Shechinah speaks through him".¹⁹³ Similarly we find,

¹⁹⁰ Rivka Schatz refers to this as "automatic speech".

¹⁹¹ Olam HaYetzirah

¹⁹² צוואת הריב"ש ד"ד ע"ב

¹⁹³ Joseph Weiss notes that "during ecstatic prayer..the divine is supposed to take hold of man and govern his speech...The speaker must have no power over his diction, which bursts forth from him uncontrolled and impulsive. (Joseph Weiss, "Via Passiva in Early Hasidism, Journal of Jewish Studies 11 (1960): pp137-156

יחשוב שעולם הדיבור מדבר בו וזולתו אי אפשר לדבר כמו שנאמר ¹⁹⁴ אדני שפתי תפתח, וגם כן מחשבתו אי אפשר להיות כי אם על ידי עולם המחשבה, והוא כשופר כי מה שתוקעין בתוכו אותו הקול הוא מוציא, ואם יפרוש ממנו התוקע אז לא יצא קול, כך בהעדר ח"ו בחו יתברך שמו ממנו אינו יכול לדבר ולחשוב. ¹⁹⁵

One should consider that the World of Speech¹⁹⁶ speaks through him. And he is unable to speak of his own accord, as it is written, "Adonai, open my lips...". Similarly, it is impossible [even] for him to think except by means of the World of Thought. He is like a shofar for that which is sounded within him, the same sound comes forth from him. and if the shofar blast has withdrawn from him then the sound will not come forth, his strength, The Holy one, from him, he is not able to speak or to think.

Similarly:

כשמדבר יחשוב ברמז קול ודיבור, וידבר ביראה ואהבה, ויחשוב שזה מדבר עולם הדיבור מפיו, אז מעלה הדיבורים. ¹⁹⁷

When one speaks [words of prayer] one should consider in whispered voice and utterance. One should speak in awe and in love. And one should consider that the World of Speech¹⁹⁸ speaks through his mouth. Thus do the words ascend.

A final teaching states:

אין דיבור בלא מחשבה, כי מקודם הוא חושב מה שידבר, והנה בשחושב קודם התפלה מה שידבר ולפני מי ידבר, בוודאי תפול עליו יראה ובושה שיהיה ירא מן הדיבורים עצמם, כשנותן על לבו שהעולם הדיבור, היא השכינה בביכול, מדברת בו, והיא כלולה מכל המדות יראה ואהבה והתפארות וכן כולם כידוע, ואיך לא יהיה לו יראה ובושה כשירע שמעורר השכינה וכל המדות בביכול, וזהו ¹⁹⁹ עושי דברו, שעושים מדיבור מעשה. ²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ Psalm 51

¹⁹⁵ כתר שם טוב ח"ב די"ט ע"ד

¹⁹⁶ Olam HaYetzrah

¹⁹⁷ כתר שם טוב ח"ב ע"ב: לקוטי אמרים ד"ד ע"ד

¹⁹⁸ Olam HaYetzrah

¹⁹⁹ Psalm 103

²⁰⁰ כתר שם טוב ח"ב ד"ה ע"ב

There is no speech without thought²⁰¹, because first one considers that which will be said. In this case, when one considers prior to prayer that which he will say and before Whom he will say it, certainly the awe and shyness will fall upon him for he will be fearful from the utterances themselves. It is when he places his heart²⁰² that the World of Speech, which as it were is the Shechinah, speaks through him.²⁰³

While the individual is no longer fully a part of this world and an awareness of this world, he is not yet completely freed from the constraints of this world.

Having ascended to the second mystical realm, the World of Speech, the individual encounters divinity more directly than in the lower worlds. Rather than speaking the words of prayer the individual, is now an empty vessel through which divinity speaks. An artist, asked how she creates her works of art, will often reply that it is not she who creates the art, but she who has become the vessel through which the creative process flows. According to Daniel Matt, a similar process may have taken place during the authorship of the Zohar by Moses de Leon. For de Leon, the activity of writing the Zohar, which he purported to be the words of Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai, may have been "automatic writing" in which the creative process flows forth from the individual without conscious thought. In this type of creative process the mystical author would, through meditation, be placed into a trance and create without self-reflection or thought.²⁰⁴ As

²⁰¹ This is the lowest level- intellectual consideration

²⁰² kavvanah and focus

²⁰³ Through kavvanah one comes to the next level and the prayers become automatic.

²⁰⁴ Daniel Matt, Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment (United States: Paulist Press, 1983)

Matt puts it, "All creativity links the conscious and the unconscious, the personal and the transpersonal. From the mystical perspective, creativity flowers when the human mind draws on its divine source."²⁰⁵ This can only happen, however, when the unconscious mind is able to exert itself.²⁰⁶

Literature on the dream state describes this phenomena as the "alpha-state." This is the point during sleep, or on the road toward sleep, when the conscious mind ceases to filter the subconscious mind. The subconscious then expresses itself through images or language which seems almost automatic, since it is not the result of conscious, considered thought. In a state of complete relaxation and semi-sleep we suddenly say something which seems totally unrelated and absurd. Having been triggered by something in the conversation, this comment comes from an association deep within our subconscious mind. Normally the conscious mind would have filtered this thought and it would have remained buried in the subconscious. In the state of semi-sleep and total relaxation, however, the conscious mind did not filter the thought and it was articulated as part of the conversation. This same process may occur in prayer. Thus, in the simple

²⁰⁵ Matt, Zohar p29

²⁰⁶ This teaching reflects another significant change, as well. At this level emotions such as love and awe become much more apparent. Having turned toward oneself and narrowed one's focus of thought, the individual now encounters emotions which may have been present all along but were not recognized due to outside distractions. This is not the case once the individual ascends to the highest level and has stripped away all sense of selfhood and self-reflection. At that point there are no emotions since the individual has become "nothing".

comment that "the words flow through him" we see reflected a major shift in consciousness and awareness.

Not only does automatic prayer occur at this stage, but the ability to pray in this way is deemed a positive quality of the highest order. Thus, we find that the Baal Shem Tov is described as the paradigm of the individual whose prays flow through him.

המדבר בלא מחשבה הוא כמו מוציא ז"ל רחמנא ליצלן, כי המחשבה אצל האדם הוא שיעור קומה שלימה והראיה לזה כי כשאדם מחשב בדבר אחר בעת הזווג מוליד בן תמורה (נדרים ד"כ ע"ב), וגם כשאין מחשב כלום מעין הזווג אינו יכול לזווג, והמחשבה הוא החכמה, והדיבור הוא ההולדה, כי גם במחשבה יש אותיות, כי מחשבה באותיות, וכשאדם אינו מחשב כמה שהוא מדבר אזי הוא כמו מוציא ז"ל, שהדיבור הוא חיות שלו.²⁰⁷

"The one who speaks without thinking" is like our teacher, may mercy be upon him, for thought among people is a complete "measure of existence". For when a person considers one matter at the time of marriage it gives birth to a pure son. And when he has no thought and thought is wisdom, and speech is its offspring, for also in thought there are letters, for thought is in letters. When one does not think about that which he is speaking- he is like our teacher the Besht, for speech is his life.

Here the Baal Shem Tov is described as praying in this automatic mode. The words pray through him. Moreover, this teaching suggests that this entrance into the automatic mode occurs when the thought process has been bypassed; an individual "speaks without thinking". The tone of this teaching, and the fact that the Besht himself is used as the example, indicates that this mode of prayer is held in high esteem. Perhaps this is so because automatic prayer is the next stage on the path toward heightened awareness and mystical ascent.

²⁰⁷ ליקוטים יקרים ד"ד ע"ב

When Prayers Are No Longer Heard...

Thus far, only the process of how the prayers are said has been discussed. The individual's relation to the prayers once they have actually been uttered has not been mentioned. This too is significant. At some point after the time when the prayers become automatic and are "spoken through the individual", the individual ascends yet further and ceases to hear the prayers at all. The words are still spoken but any relation to them after they have been said ceases. Upon arriving at World of Thought the individual has so "stripped away the physical" that he no longer hears the words which his body is producing. At this level he

יבא לאותיות המחשה²⁰⁸.....לא ישמע מה שהוא מדבר

arrives at the letters of thought.....he no longer hears what he is saying....

The point at which the prayers become automatic is now coupled with a concentration so complete that the individual's sense of hearing has been bypassed. Now an additional layer of his נשמיות - his physical nature is stripped away. The words may be spoken by his lips, but he is neither conscious of creating the sounds, nor of hearing the sounds that are produced. Not only does he no longer think about the words he speaks, but he no

²⁰⁸ The World of Thought is Olam HaBeriah

longer hears them.²⁰⁹ He is not yet cleaving to God since he is still connected to the physical world.

The Internal Component Of This World

In the brief descriptions of these intermediate levels we see clear indication that just as someone at this level no longer perceives of the world in the same way, so too does a person no longer perceive of himself in the same way. The individual who had previously been attached to the wants, needs and desires of the physical world, no longer feels such a connection. Having ascended past the World of Action, the individual must

לשכח בצרכן כדי שיבואו לעולם המחשבה

forget his [physical] needs in order to come to the World of Thought²¹⁰

This level represents a clear turning inward. Not only has outward perception ceased, but the process of observing oneself and assessing one's needs has ceased as well. Interestingly, it is not that these needs, for such things as food, drink, and physical pleasure, have ceased, they indeed continue. Rather, at this level, the individual "forgets

²⁰⁹ Weiss notes that this automatic process was also connected with the preaching of the early Hasidic masters. A disciple of the Maggid's, R. Ze'ev Wolf, wrote, "Once i heard the Maggid of blessed memory state explicitly, 'I will teach you the best way to pronounce Torah, which is as follows- not to be aware of oneself but as an ear hearkening to the way in which the 'World of Speech' speaks within one. It is not himself who speaks. as soon as he hears his own words, let him stop!" (Joseph Weiss, "Via Passiva in Early Hasidism", p79)

²¹⁰ Olam Beriah

his needs". The needs remain but the individual is so inwardly directed that they are no longer part of his perception and awareness. Joseph Weiss describes this state in this way:

According to the theory of the Great Maggid which originated in some of the sayings of the Baalshem Tov, and further back in the Cabbalah, no one should pray for his own particular, personal needs. The abolition of the worshipper's personality begins thus in the very act of contemplative prayer from which all reference to personal needs is eliminated...²¹¹

Thus, the second stage in the process of ascent during prayer is the non-perception of needs. A return to the analogy of the piano player might be helpful in describing this level of awareness. This is the point at which the musician has so fully focussed on the notes she is playing that she has lost herself in them. She is so filled with the music that there is no room within her psyche or her soul for consideration of anything else, least of all something as mundane as a physical need such as hunger or thirst. A more graphic analogy can be made to the race-car driver. In an interview one driver was asked what he does when he needs to urinate while driving at 175 miles per hour. His telling response was that "when you are driving at speeds in excess of 150 miles an hour, if you want to live you need to be so fully focussed on what you are doing that the need or even the thought of taking a leak never occurs to you." However, when the race is over, total concentration is lost and the individual returns to ordinary consciousness. At this level, the recognition of this physical need returns and "you often end up running like blazes

²¹¹ Weiss p50

for the restroom." When the race ends and self-reflection returns, recognition of physical needs returns, as well.

In each of these three cases, the musician, the race-car driver and the individual at prayer, the focus which is achieved during the activity is so complete that the individual involved in the activity has "forgotten himself" and "stripped away" his physical needs. The person has ascended to a level where the senses now function in a different, more focussed way.

According to these prayer texts a shift of this nature is necessary for the individual who seeks an encounter with divinity. As long as we are filled with an awareness of our own needs there is limited room for an awareness of God to fill us. At this level, however, the individual has sufficiently stripped away the self to have forgotten physical needs. Now other, more spiritual, aspects of existence can come to fill the void which has been created.



The Physiology Of The Intermediate Levels

The description of this level, from the automatic production of sound, to the individual no longer hearing the sounds he produces, to the heightened sense of emotion which is associated with this level of prayer awareness, provides some indication of what might be taking place on a physiological level. The descriptions offered by these prayer

teachings suggest that a major shift has taken place from left brain to right brain awareness. The left brain is associated with language, reading, writing, thought, logical and analytical reasoning, and awareness and concern with details.²¹² Many of these qualities or activities are associated with the description of the individual while in the World of Action.²¹³ The start of the process of prayer, in which an individual thinks and considers the words of prayer, is a left brain activity. This is the case since, language is the tool of "daily" consciousness²¹⁴ and is supported by the functions of the left brain. The right brain, on the other hand, is associated with emotion, automatic process, perception of nuances, insight and intuitive reasoning.²¹⁵ Interestingly enough, the right brain is also associated with praying and religious encounter.²¹⁶ It

cannot read, spell, or write and cannot understand many aspects of human speech except for a few simple words, particularly those that are emotional. However, it can still express itself vocally through singing, swearing, crying, praying...²¹⁷

Many of these qualities and activities are associated with the intermediate levels of awareness. Thus, in ascending from the World of Action to the intermediate levels of awareness, there may be an internal switch in the part of the brain the individual uses at that time. On a physiological level, then, the individual who has ascended from the World

²¹² Joseph p45

²¹³ As many educators have observed, our present educational process tends to nurture all of the qualities associated with left-brain thought.

²¹⁴ Joseph p29

²¹⁵ Joseph p45

²¹⁶ Joseph p30

²¹⁷ Joseph p30

of Action to the intermediate levels of the World of Speech and the World of Thought, has undergone a transition from left brain to right brain awareness. The left brain has been "shut off" and no longer filters the awareness and perception of the right brain.²¹⁸

At the level of reaching the World of Speech and the World of Thought the right brain has become central to the act prayer and the encounter with divinity. Even on a physiological level, limits which bar the encounter with divinity have been removed.

Conclusion

The intermediate levels of awareness represent two parts of the second stage of ascent. The individual has stripped away consciousness and through meditative prayer, has moved into a trance-like state.²¹⁹ At this level the individual encounters Divinity in an increased way. Thus we find:

...כשהוא מפשיט עצמו מנשמיות, ומלביש עצמו בתוך דיבורים, אז הוא דבוק בבורא יתברך שמו, שהוא מלובש בתוך הדיבורים, ויראה שלא יפול ממחשבתו, ויחזיק עצמו להעלות למעלה.²²⁰

When one strips himself of his physicality, and dresses himself in the words, then He is cleaving to his creator, Blessed is He, For he is dressed within the words, and he should be fearful lest he fall from his thoughts, and he should strengthen himself that he may ascend upwards.

²¹⁸ Once again the connection to sleep and dreams is apparent.

²¹⁹ Rosen p26

²²⁰ כש"ט ח"ב ד"ב ע"ב, לקוטי אמרים ד"ד ע"א

The individual is described as having stripped away the layers of his physical being. He no longer has consciousness of his physical needs, he no longer is away of the production of the words of prayer and he no longer hears the words as they are produced. More than that, he has emptied himself of self-reflection and has, through this meditative process, entered the words of prayer. Now, the individual is "dressed in them"²²¹ and he no longer has a separate self. In this state, he is prepared to encounter creation and divinity in a their fullness.

²²¹ the words...

WHEN NOTHING ALLOWS IS THE EXPERIENCE OF EVERYTHING

The process of mystical ascent ends in Olam HaAtzilut - The World of Emanation, in a moment which can only be described as "nothingness". The process of loss of self; begun in intellectual focus, and continued through the intermediate stages of semi-consciousness, is now complete.²²² The individual has been emptied of all self-hood. No residue of the material world remains.²²³

בתפלה צריך להיות כמו מופשט ממשמיות ואיננו מרגיש מציאותו בעולם הזה²²⁴

In prayer one must be like one who has stripped away the realm of the physical and is not able to feel the reality of this world.

All of the barriers associated with self-reflective, intellectual consideration have been lowered. This is the realm where there is no longer any differentiation between the individual and the rest of creation. All of the borders which created distinction have vanished.

This momentary might best be understood in the following terms.

²²² The main teacher of the importance of "nothingness" was the Maggid. Daniel Matt states, "Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezritch, encourages his followers to change any (I) into ayin, to dissolve the separate ego in nothingness. (Matt, "Ayin" p46)

²²³ One psychologist who is interested in the psychological dimension of the mystical tradition writes, "The Maggid insightfully observed that our ego- the habit-oriented, social self-tends to prevent such episodes from happening more often. We are afraid to 'let go,' afraid to surrender our calculating mind to the nonrational and spontaneous. Only when our minds are totally emptied of all daily, mundane effluvia can we reasonably expect to enter into a radically different state of consciousness, he preached." (The Way of Splendor p122)

²²⁴ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ן ע"א

There is an ungraspable instant in the midst of all transformation when that which is about to be transformed is no longer that which it had been until that moment, but has not yet emerged as its transformed self; that moment belongs to the ayin [nothingness] within God.²²⁵

The individual as he was no longer exists, yet the reformed individual has not yet emerged. In this instant the individual is "nothing". Because all barriers have now been lowered, it becomes possible to encounter a realm which is purely spiritual. Divinity in its purest state can now be experienced.

...ואחר כך הוא בא למדת אין שנתכתל אצלו כל כחותיו הנשמיים, וזהו עולם העילות מדת חכמה.²²⁶

...After this²²⁷ he comes to the dimension of nothingness in which he abolishes his physical self. This is the Olam HaAtzilut- The World Of Emanation. This is the dimension of wisdom.^{228 229}

²²⁵ Arthur Green and Barry Holtz, p14

²²⁶ כתר שם טוב ח"ב די"ז ע"נ

²²⁷ after passing through the first three worlds...

²²⁸ Wisdom, חכמה, represents the divine will and creation. In the Lurianic system it is associated with the sefirah of tiferet.

²²⁹ Louis Jacobs explains this stating, "The world of emanation is identified with the Sefirah Hokhmah ('Wisdom'). In Hasidic thought this Sefirah is called ayin, 'Nothingness', because of this stage of the divine process nothing can be said; it is utterly beyond all human comprehension. When a man attains to the stage of self-annihilation he can thus be said to have reached the world of the divine Nothingness, because of this stage of the divine process nothing can be said; it is utterly beyond all human comprehension. When a man attains to the stage of self-annihilation he can thus be said to have reached the world of the divine Nothingness. Emptied of self-hood his soul has now become attached to the true reality, the divine Nothingness." (Jacobs, Hasidic Prayer p78)

What Does An Individual "Know"?

At the level of Olam HaAtzilut we no longer know anything. The thought and conscious differentiation of the lower worlds, which had previously separated the individual from encountering Divinity have fully ceased. One text states,

צריך האדם לחשוב את עצמו כאין וישכח את עצמו מכל וכל²³⁰

One must consider himself as nothing, and forget himself in every way.

More than describe the realm of nothingness, this statement describes the path which the individual has taken to reach this point. In order to encounter divinity in all its fullness the individual must become nothing. The only way to achieve this, however, is to strip away all remnants of physical self-reflection. This is done when the individual "thinks of himself as nothing" and, "little by little", "forgets himself". Through meditative focus the individual eventually comes to the point where he has forgotten himself entirely, having passed through the three lower worlds, he is nothing. He is now able to encounter divinity. Now, encounter is possible. Daniel Matt comments that at such a point

the kabbalist no longer differentiates one thing from another. Conceptual thought, with all its distinctions and connections, dissolves ...here the mystic cannot grasp for knowledge; rather, he imbibes from the source to which he is joined. In the words of Isaac the Blind, "The inner, subtle essences can be contemplated only by sucking...not by knowing." When we no longer seek to "know" but merely draw from the higher realm and allow ourselves to experience we have left the realm of separation and mundane consciousness. We are no longer conscious of the

²³⁰ ליקושי אמרים די"ח ריש ע"ג

separations of this world; it is there that we can encounter divinity.²³¹ We have finally arrived at the world of "nothingness"²³².

The ultimate paradox is achieved here. At one and the same time the individual knows nothing and is aware of everything. One text goes so far as to state that through the process of entering into the letters of prayer (and Torah) the individual is able to see "from one end of the world to the other."

שמעתי בשם הבעל שם טוב זללה"ה שפירש, צוהר תעשה לחבה, לעשות צוהר מן החבה של תורה ותפלה, לראות ולהסתכל עמה מראש העולם ועד סופו.²³³

The Besht said, expounding on "Make windows in the ark", create the Zohar from the words of Torah and prayer, that one can look and see with it from the top of the world to its end.

Similarly we find,

קודשא בריך הוא ואורייתא וישראל כולא חד, זהו התפשטות הנשמיות, פירוש, שיפשיט נשמתו מנופו, ותהיה נשמתו מלוכשת באותן המחשבות שהוא מדבר, ויראה כמה עולמות העליונים.²³⁴

"The Holy One, Torah and the people of Israel are One." And this is the stripping away of the physical realm. One strips his soul away from his body and his soul will be dressed in the thoughts which he speaks and he will see a number of upper worlds.

²³¹ One story which is attributed to the Baal Shem Tov describes the various aspects of this world as little more than an illusion of separateness which hides the unity of God's divinity. Only the spiritually minded which is open to a variety of levels of conscious awareness is able to see through the illusion of separation and find God.

²³² Matt, "Ayin" p45

²³³ אור המאיר פ' בשלח

²³⁴ כש"ט ח"ב ד"ב ע"ד, לקוטי אמרים ד"ד ע"א

The Experience of Divinity Amidst Nothing

Olam HaAtzilut is the opposite extreme of the lowest level of awareness, Olam HaAsiyah. The essence of both is captured in the statement;

בשחושב את עצמו ליש, ומבקש צרכיו, אז אין הקדוש ברוך הוא יכול להתלבש בו²³⁵

When one considers himself as "something", and he seeks his needs, then the Holy One is not able to be garbed in him.

While the Holy One is unable to be dressed in an individual when the individual has the capacity for self-reflection and thus considers himself as "something", upon reaching the realm of Olam HaAtzilut is the point at which the individual has fully transcended himself, thus enabling the individual to fully encounter Divinity - to be "garbed in him". The individual has gone from a full capacity for self-reflection, to intermediate stages where self-reflection is reduced until finally, completely stripped of self-hood, the individual is merely a shell. The individual has

בא למדת אין שנטבטל אצלו כל כחותיו הנשמיות (זה) מדת חכמה.

Come to the mode of Nothingness- for he has abolished all of his physical strength. This is the realm of wisdom.

²³⁵ ליקוטי אמרים די"ח ריש ע"ג

At this extreme the individual has lost all sense of self and ego and has become a vessel which can be filled with the divine "nothingness". Conscious awareness of self has been entirely removed and unconscious awareness of creation has taken its place. In this process of stripping away self-conscious reflection, the individual has also removed the barriers which stood between himself and a complete encounter with divinity.

Turning Off Outside Stimuli

A number of prayer teachings suggest that one way to aid in this process of becoming nothing, or perhaps a response to achieving this stated and slipping back into the "somethingness" of self-consciousness, is to turn off outside stimuli to the greatest degree possible. One of the ways in which this is achieved is by closing one's eyes in order to focus ever more inward.

בשארדם במדרגה קטנה, אז טוב יותר להתפלל מתוך הסידור, שמכח שרואה האותיות, מתפלל יותר בכוונה, אבל כשהוא דבוק בעולם העליון, אז יותר טוב לסגור עיניו, כדי שלא יבטל אותו הראייה מלהיות דבוק בעולם העליון.²³⁶

When a person is on a level of spiritual smallness, it is better to pray from the prayer book, for through the strength of seeing the letters he will pray with greater kavvanah. However, when he is in a state of great cleaving to the Eternal and with the upper, spiritual world it is better for him to close the prayer book so that vision will not prevent him from being in a state of complete cleaving with the upper world.

²³⁶ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ד ע"ב

Similarly we find,

החכם עיניו בראשו להבין ולהשכיל אם הזמן נורם שיוכל לכוון בסוד הפנימי ולהתענג כנ"ל מוטב, ואם רואה שהוא בסוד הקטנות ואינו יכול לכוון, שמתנבין עליו מחשבות זרות, אזי יתפלל כתינוק בן יומו מתוך הכתב, כאשר העיד מורי על עצמו שהיה בארץ אחרת זמן מה בכחינה זו, שנסתלק ממנו הנ"ל והיה מדבק עצמו אל האותיות וכו', ואמר כאשר מתפלל מתוך הכתב ומדבק עצמו אל האותיות אזי מעלה בחינת עשייה, כי תכת כתב הוא ר"ת בחר של מלכות שהוא ת על ידי בינה, וכך צוה לאיש פרטי שיעשה כך עד שחזר למדרגתו העליונה וכו' ²³⁷

"The ones who are wise in their eyes"²³⁸ - It is to the wise man to understand and to know whether the time has arrived that he can direct the inner secrets and he rejoices. And if he sees that he is in a state of spiritual smallness²³⁹ he is not able to direct his prayers in this way, for strange thoughts²⁴⁰ have overpowered him. At such times he should pray from a text like a day old child.

When my teacher testified for himself, he said that he was in a different land at the time of the test, and he renounced his plans and he is able to cleave himself to the letters. And he said that when he prays from a written text and he cleaves himself to the letters, then he went up in the sense of deeds. For the letters of the hebrew word Writings {Catuv} stand for "The crown of the kingship that is reached through wisdom"

Both of these texts clearly indicate that while on a lower spiritual level it is preferable to pray from a text. The words of prayer are the vehicle through which the meditative process of stripping away self-consciousness can take place. Therefore it is necessary to see the letters and to focus thought upon them at the beginning of the ascent. Once this ascent has taken place however, and an individual has reached this highest level, the

²³⁷ כחנת פסים בלק דמ"ג ע"נ

²³⁸ Ecclesiastes 2:14

²³⁹ Katnut

²⁴⁰ A great number of Hasidic prayer teachings deal with the problem of extraneous thoughts which enter into an individual's mind during prayer and detract from achieving complete concentration on the inner, spiritual dimension.

words become a detriment to the achievement of "nothingness". At such a time it is therefore better to pray with a closed book. According to the first teaching, this is because "it is better for him to close the prayer book so that vision will not prevent him from being in a state of complete cleaving with the upper world". The stimulus of vision is part of the physical realm. It has the potential to remind the person of the attributes and activities of the physical realm, including categorizing, intellectual thought and , thereby returning the person to a lower level. By such distraction, a person is kept from the focus necessary in order to delve deeper and deeper into the letters of prayer and "strip away the physical self". Since ascent to "nothingness" is contingent upon this stripping away of self-reflection, anything which stands in the way, such as vision, must ultimately be removed. Thus, at a certain point in the process of ascent it is preferable to close one's eyes and concentrate ever more fully.²⁴¹ The importance of complete "inwardness" is captured in the following teaching:

פעמים יש לעבוד להשם יתברך בנשמה לבד, דהיינו במחשבה, והנף יהיה עומד במקומו, כדי שלא יחלה כשישתמש בו הרבה, ולפעמים יכול אדם לומר התפלה באהבה ויראה והתלהבות גדול בלי שום תנועה, ויהיה נראה לאדם אחר שהוא אומר אותן דברים בלי שום דבקות, וזהו יכול האדם לעשות כשהוא דבוק מאוד להשם יתברך אז יכול לעבוד אותו בנשמה לבד באהבה רבה וגדולה, וזה העבודה הוא יותר טובה והולכות במהירות יותר וכדכיקות יותר

²⁴¹ The shutting of eyes in prayer is likely rooted in earlier Kabbalistic techniques for attaining a state of complete concentration- hitbodedut. According to Moshe Idel, "This technique is well known to us from Sufism and in connection with achieving kavannah (direction and concentration) in prayer..." (Moshe Idel, "Hitbodedut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah" in Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible Through the Middle Ages, Ed. Arthur Green, Crossroads, NY 1986.)

להשם יתברך, מהתפלה שנראה בחוץ על האברים ואין להקליפה אחיזה בזו התפלה שכולו
הוא בפנימיות.²⁴²

There are times when a person should serve the Holy One with his soul²⁴³ alone, that is with thought. And the body should stand still in its place, that it will not become ill because it is used too much [in God's service]. And there are times when a person says prayers in love, and in awe and in great ecstasy without any movement. At such times it will appear to another person that the first person is praying without any cleaving to God. But this is possible for a person to do only when that person is in such a state of great cleaving to the Holy One that this individual is able to serve the Holy One with Soul alone, and in great and immense love. Such worship is greater, and goes forth more quickly and in greater cleaving to the Holy One than prayers which one see upon the limbs of an individual. And the shells²⁴⁴ to not grasp on to this type of prayer for it is entirely internal.

These teachings are particularly significant in understanding early Hasidic prayer in light of the importance which movement plays in traditional Jewish prayer. Throughout the Jewish worship service there are specific movements which are associated with particular prayers. While not law, these movements have the power of minhag, tradition which is often as powerful as law. Here however, the importance of the internal meditative aspect of prayer supersedes these movements.

Verbal prayer gives way to abstract contemplation, to a liberation of the worshipper's mind from all content other than his attachment to God. First all of one's energies are concentrated on the word as spoken with fullness; now the word itself is released, and nothing remains with the worshipper but the fullness of heart

²⁴² צוואת הריב"ש די"ג ע"א, כחר שם טוב דכ"ב ע"ב

²⁴³ "Neshamah"- A passage from the Zohar divides the human being into three layers, "Nefesh", "ruach" and "neshemah". Of the three, Neshemah is the deepest, most internal and most spiritual.

²⁴⁴ This is a reference to the mystical tradition that klipot, shells, hide the divinity which is hidden throughout the world. Through internal prayer, however, these "detractors of holiness" are unable to get a grip.

that, paradoxically, also marks him as an empty vessel, ready to receive the light from above. Even the self-conscious feeling of this fullness must be transcended, for a person who still knows how intensely he is praying has not yet overcome his awareness of self."²⁴⁵

The Fleetingness Of This Level

Entry into this level of nothingness is the goal of prayer, yet it is only a temporary achievement. One of the characteristics of this level of awareness is that it is fleeting. Once "nothingness" is achieved, it is soon lost and the process of ascent to Olam HaAtzilut begins again. Numerous texts discuss "falling from one level to a lower one" and a subsequent attempt to ascend once again. One text which clearly indicates the difficulty of remaining at this highest level states,

וכן כשנפל ממדרגתו באותה התפלה, יאמר התכה בכונה קטנה כפי שיכול, ואחר כך יחזק עצמו לחזור למדרגתו אפילו כמה פעמים במדרגה אחת, ומתחלה ידבק בנוף של התכה ואחר כך יתן בתכה הנשמה, וצריך לעורר עצמו בתחלה בנוף שלו בכל כחו, כדי שתאיר בו כח הנשמה בדאיתא בזהר²⁴⁶ אע"פ דלאדליק יבטשבו וינהר, ואחר כך יכול לעבוד במחשבה לבד בלי תנועת הנוף.²⁴⁷

Similarly, when one falls from his spiritual level in the midst of the same prayer, he should say the word with as much Kavannah as he is able. Afterwards he will strengthen himself so that he will be able to return to the level, and perhaps he will return to the same level a number of times. At first he will cleave to the form of the letters and then he will place his soul into the letter itself. And he must arouse himself first in the body of it with all his strength so that the strength of his soul will appear in him, as it is

²⁴⁵ Arthur Green and Barry Holtz, Your Word Is Fire p13

²⁴⁶ פ' שלח דקס"ח ע"א

²⁴⁷ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ז ע"א

written in the Zohar, wood that is lit, kicks and breaks forth. Afterwards he will be able to serve the Eternal One in his thoughts alone without the motion of his body.

A person can attain this highest spiritual level but cannot remain there. Through this step-by-step process of prayer the individual achieves the level of self-transcendence. But it is impossible for the individual to remain there. The individual emptied of selfhood quickly returns to the realm of daily consciousness and a recognition of physical needs. This is accompanied by a return to a sense of distance from divinity. For a moment, though, the individual has experienced complete unity with all of existence. The spiritual dimension which hidden in all of creation has become open to his encounter. "World, mind, and self dissolve momentarily in ayin and then reemerge. Ayin is not the goal in itself; it is the moment of transformation from being through nonbeing to new being."²⁴⁸

Conclusion

The highest level is the point at which the process of ascent momentarily reaches its pinnacle in "nothingness". For a moment all of the barriers between the individual and God are removed. In that instant there is utter cleaving to divinity.

Thus, prayer

...reaches its culminating point in the ecstasy when the personal consciousness becomes totally annihilated. The worshipper's desire to annul his personality and

²⁴⁸ Matt, "Ayin" p46

to disregard his private needs, is typical of all contemplative mystics. The contemplative, mystical school of Hasidism demands the elimination of the worshipper's personality in a twofold way- the extinction of personal consciousness in ecstasy, and the elimination of all reference to personal needs.²⁴⁹

Quickly, however, this state of the total stripping away of all conscious references is lost. Awareness of self and personal needs returns and, with their return, the gap between the individual and God returns. The process of prayer is, therefore, a constant movement between consciousness and meditative "trance", and between the World of Action and the World of Emanation.

²⁵⁰ בתפלה צריך להיות כמו מופשט ממשמיות ואיננו מרגיש מציאותו בעולם הזה,

In prayer one must be like one who has stripped away the realm of the physical and is not able to feel the physical dimension of this world.

²⁴⁹ Weiss p50

²⁵⁰ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ן ע"א

CONCLUSION

The Hasidic tradition is known for its fervor and ecstasy in prayer. Often, the ecstasy that these Jews experienced in prayer overshadowed the the examination of the more complicated dimensions of their worship. Yet, for the early Hasidim prayer was a complex dual process of mystic ascent and focussed internalization, rather than merely being the activity of ecstatic worship. An examination of a selection of the prayer teachings from the early generations of the Hasidic masters reveals its various aspects.

The first dimension of prayer is the activity of mystical ascent. Through the process of prayer an individual would move from one worldly dimension to another. These levels of ascent mirrored earlier Jewish traditions on spiritual ascent. With each step the individual entered a higher realm in which God's presence could be more directly encountered. Within Hasidism, however, the event of connecting with God became central, rather than the comprehension of the structure of the ascent. Hasidic mysticism, therefore, might be characterized as significantly more experiential than earlier mystical traditions within Judaism. The second dimension of prayer is the activity of meditative inwardness. Hasidic prayer was much more akin to the modern traditons of meditation than is often discussed. Through focus on the letters of prayer, the individual would slowly shut out outside stimuli and depart from the distractions which accompany daily consciousness.

It is clear from many of the various texts cited here that these two dimensions are intricately related. The process of mystic ascent was not completed through intellectual consideration, but rather, it was accomplished in conjunction with, and perhaps through, the inwardness which accompanies meditation. The individual begins prayer in the World of Action. This world is associated with the human dimension of conscious awareness of one's surroundings and a limited experience of God. The process of ascent takes the individual through the intermediate worlds of the World of Speech and the World of Thought. This intermediate stage is associated with the process of moving away from consciousness toward an inner-focussed, trance-like state. Reference to personal needs departs, followed by a stripping of the functions of the senses. Prayer becomes an automatic process until finally, conscious thought ceases entirely. The pinnacle of the process of prayer comes when the individual finally reaches the fourth and highest world, The World of Emanation. This level is associated with a moment when the processes begun in the World of Speech and deepened in the World of Thought, become complete. For an instant the individual no longer has an independent self. Ego has been totally overcome and the individual as a separate, conscious entity no longer exists. In that instant, the individual and God are connected.

This entire process of ascent is described in the previously cited teaching which states,

בתפילה צריך לשום כל כחו בהדיבורים, וילך כך מאות לאות עד שישכח מנופנייות, ויחשוב שהאותיות מצטרפים ומתחברים זה עם זה, וזהו תענוג גדול, דמה אם בגשמייות הוא תענוג, מכל שכן ברוחניות, וזהו עולם היצירה, ואחר כך יבא לאותיות המחשבה ולא ישמע מה שהוא מדבר, וזהו בא לעולם הבריאה, ואחר כך הוא בא למדת אין שנתכתל אצלו כל כחותיו הגשמיים, וזהו עולם העילות מדת חכמה.²⁵¹

In prayer one must put all his strength into the spoken words. One does this, going from letter to letter until he forgets his physical self. He considers that the letters join and connect themselves one to the next, and there is great joy in this. And if there is joy in the physical realm, how much more in the realm of the spiritual realm²⁵², and this is the Olam HaYitzirah- The Created World. After that he comes to the Otiyot HaMachshavah- The Letters Of Thought, and he doesn't hear that which he is saying. Through this he comes to the Olam HaBriyah- The World Of The Cosmos. After this he comes to the dimension of AIN in which he abolishes his physical self. This is the Olam HaAtzilut- The World Of Emanation. This is the dimension of wisdom.²⁵³

²⁵¹ כתר שם טוב ח"ב די"ז ע"ג

²⁵² Here we see parallels to the Zoharitic statements regarding the upper and lower worlds reflecting and paralleling each other. See Zohar I 205b-206a and Zohar II 20a)

²⁵³ Wisdom, חכמה, represents the divine will and creation. In the Lurianic system it is associated with the sefirah of tiferet.

APPENDIX NUMBER 1: GADLUT AND KATNUT

The lower and higher levels of awareness sound strikingly familiar to two other states of being, which are referred to in numerous Hasidic prayer texts in Amud Ha-T'fillah. The terms "Katnut" and Gadlut"; literally "smallness" and "greatness" are used when describing the relationship to, and awareness of, the physical world and the spiritual world. The term katnut refers to a state of spiritual limitedness in which awareness of the self and one's surroundings restrict the individual's ability to experience divinity. This stands in opposition to "Gadlut", which is a state of spiritual greatness, in which awareness of the self has been replaced by a revealing of internal layers within the self and an awareness of divinity.²⁵⁴ While these terms are applied by the Hasidim to refer to states of the individual during the mystical ascension toward divinity, the move from katnut to gadlut represents a shift in awareness from an outward, everyday perception to an increased focus on the internal potencies and potentials of the individual. It is in this turning that an individual finds God.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ In his book, The Mystic Quest, David Ariel comments that in early hasidism "The Maggid introduced a profound awareness of the role of consciousness in religion. He distinguished between self-consciousness, called smallness (katnut), and mystical consciousness, called greatness (gadlut). Self-consciousness is an obstacle to true consciousness since it is illusory. Since only God exists, all else is illusion. Mystical consciousness is the goal of Hasidism, and prayer is the technique for its acquisition." (David Ariel, The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism. (New York: Schocken Books, 1988) p180

²⁵⁵ From a mystical perspective this is so because the layers of the self mirror the layers of the spiritual realms. By encountering on, the individual encounters the other.

פעמים מתפלל בקנות ואחר כך ברנע אחד מאיר אור נשמתו ועולה לעולם העליון כמו אדם העולה בסולם כמו שכתוב²⁵⁶ שלח אורך ואמתך המה ינחוני דהיינו אור העליון.²⁵⁷

Sometimes, one is praying in a state of spiritual finitude and afterwards, in a single moment the light of his soul is kindled, and he ascends to the upper world like a person who ascends a ladder, as it is written "Oh send out thy light and truth"²⁵⁸ that is, the upper light.

פעמים אין אדם עובד רק בקטנות, היינו שאינו נכנס בעולמות עליונים כלל, רק שמחשב שמלא כל הארץ כבודו, והוא קרוב אצלו, והוא כאותו שעה כמו קטן, שאין שכלו גדול רק מעט, ומכל מקום אף שהוא עובד בקטנות עובד בדבקות גדול.²⁵⁹

At times, a person is only able to serve in a state of spiritual finitude and he is not able to enter into the upper worlds at all. At such times he should consider that God's presence fills all of the world and that God is near to him. At such time he is like a child, and his intellect is not great but rather, is limited. In any event, even though he believes that he is praying in a state of spiritual finitude he is truly praying with cleaving to the eternal.

אפילו כשנופל ממדננתו יחיה דבוק בבורא במחשבה קטנה [כי] לפעמים יש גם בן קטנות למעלה, בזעיר אנפין, ומבחי אותו הקטנות יבא לגדלות, כמו בנחלים, אם יהיה ניצוץ אחד שנשאר יכול לנפח בהם הרבה, עד שיהיה מדורה גדולה, לאפוקי אם לא יהיה אף ניצוץ קטן לא יכול לנפח אש, כך אם לא יהיה דבוק במחשבה קטנה תמיד בו יתברך, יכבה נשמתו לגמרי ח"ו.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Psalms 43

²⁵⁷ לקוטים יקרים ד"נ ע"ד

²⁵⁸ Psalms 43:3

²⁵⁹ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ד

²⁶⁰ ליקוטים יקרים דט"ו ע"ב: כתר שם טוב דכ"א ע"א

Even when one has fallen from his level of spiritual awareness let him cleave to the Creator with small thoughts. At times there is even spiritual finitude (KATNUT) in the Heavens [the spiritual heights], on a very small scale. From the strength of this, his spiritual finitude will become spiritual boundlessness. This is like a burning coal. If even a slight glow remains it is possible to create sparks from it and produce a great fire. However, if there is not even the smallest spark it is impossible to ignite any fire at all. Therefore, if one does not have the slightest cleaving to the Holy One in his thoughts at all times, he has extinguished his soul.

In one teaching, however, we find that katnut and gadlut are not always mutually exclusive.

כשיהיה בקטנות יהיה גם כן בדבקות גדול עם השכינה, ואחר כך ברנע אחד תיכף כשיחשוב בעולם עליון מיד הוא בעולמות עליונים, שכמו שאדם מחשב שם הוא, ואם לא היה בעולם עליון לא היה מחשב כלל.²⁶¹

When one is in a state of spiritual finitude, he can also be in a state of great spiritual unboundedness with the Divine Presence. Afterwards, in one moment, he immediately will think of the upper world and immediately he will be in the upper worlds. That as a person considers this he is there and if not he was in the upper world he has not been thinking at all.

The terms Gadlut and Katnut refer to different modes of spiritual being. Both are part of an individual's spiritual life. In a state of gadlut, however, many of the barriers between the individual and divinity have been broken down.

²⁶¹ צוואת הריב"ש ד"ח ע"א

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