

# **The Concept of God as Nothing in Hasidic Mysticism**

**Karen Deitsch**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for ordination  
Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, New York**

[2004]

THE KLAU LIBRARY  
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE  
JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
BROOKDALE CENTER  
400 WEST FOURTH STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10012

### **...With Thanks**

Firstly, I would like to express my deep gratitude to and admiration for my thesis advisor, Rabbi Larry Kushner. To have had the mentorship of this magnificent teacher has been a source of great pride for me; his writing and instruction have been an inspiration to me as long as I can remember, and I am so incredibly thankful to have had the opportunity to work with him. His support occurred both academically and in terms of my own spiritual journey – leading me to revelations about God that I would have never been able to reach otherwise; one sentence from him has wisdom of infinite proportion. He is an exceptional mind and a wonderful rabbi.

Another great source of guidance and inspiration for me in this project came from Dr. Elliot Wolfson. He set aside an enormous amount of time and patience for me, and I would have never been able to work through this material without him. Through our long discussions I found the teacher of mysticism that I have long searched for and I will never be able to thank him enough for his devotion, knowledge, friendship, and direction.

Rabbi Larry Hoffman has been a light in my life since the moment I met him. There are no words to express my appreciation of this man. He is simply a blessing for which I don't believe I have merited and I thank him – for everything – with all of my soul.

Dr. Wendy Zierler is another teacher for whom I am incredibly grateful. She is profoundly wise and deeply inspiring and her support has been so incredibly valuable to me. I thank her for her insight, her dedication, and for simply being the wonderful woman that she is.

Dr. Sharon Koren set me on this mystical journey long ago, and while I did not have the pleasure of working with her more closely as the proposal became a thesis, it is because of her that I created what I did. She is a source of vast intelligence and a powerful educator, and I thank her for setting me on my path.

My mother, Dr. Shira Deitsch walked through this intense journey with me every step of the way, as she has done since the moment she brought me in to this world. Without her, I would not be. She has been my light and my safety throughout this process; my study partner, my sounding board, my therapist, my teacher, and my best friend. She has bolstered and supported my love of spirituality unconditionally and enthusiastically throughout my entire life, and her wisdom is unprecedented. I will never be able to thank her enough.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II. Bittul Yesh: The abnegation of ego and the casting off of the world of particulars that it affirms to be real.</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>III. Dveikut: Cleaving to God</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>IV. Conclusion</b>	<b>84</b>

## I. Introduction

A teacher once said that he found it ironic that we call ourselves human beings, for more and more so, we exist as human *doings*; simply *being* has very little to do with our lives. We spend our days going about the business of doing: doing errands, doing bills, doing exercise, and (especially if you are from Los Angeles) doing lunch; making money, making meaning, making sense of our lives with little if any time reserved for the act of simple and pure existence. The importance and purpose of our lives is driven by desire to do more so as to acquire more so that we can do more with what we have acquired, and, as such, we collectively deny the value of *being* as a way to spend our time. That there is value in the process of getting present and simply existing is an essential and undeniable truth. But the mistake in calling ourselves human beings is not in its misrepresentation of our true selves, but rather in the fact that it denies our fundamental nature – that of desiring to be and to have more than we've already got. Our acts of doing reflect the fact that *wanting* is the driving force of our lives. From the moment of birth we are wanting: first air and then food, then to communicate and to walk and to play and to learn and to acquire more than what we already have; that is the true nature of who we humans are. And as such, we adopt the act of doing as the means by which to effectively get what we are wanting, such that our time is spent in some aspect of preoccupation with that force of our essential nature.

The problem with existing as 'doings', however, is that it keeps us locked in the cycle of existential dissatisfaction: we are always wanting something more. And in our misguided social belief system, we are taught to assume that it is only through perpetual doing that

we will ever reach a place that we can finally be. More and more often, I find myself asking people the same simple question: "what is it that you want?" And while the specifics of the responses vary (though less than you would imagine), the final statement is always this: "I want to be happy." Meaning, "I want to reach a state of *being* – in which I am sated and satisfied and whole." We live our lives doing because we live our lives wanting – but we chronically ignore the reason behind our actions, which is to reach a state of *shalom*: of complete and peaceful presence of being. It is not so much that we are misrepresenting ourselves through the term 'human beings', but rather, that we are denying that description as the source of who we are. We have forgotten that the only true way to fulfill our perpetual wantings is in embracing and harnessing the force of being behind them.

Additionally, we err in the way we interpret our wanting; we become trapped in the cycle of dissatisfaction not only because we become preoccupied with goal – oriented action, but also because the goals we define for ourselves as the recognition of our desires are limited and unfulfilling ends. Our state of being is interrupted not only by our doings, but more significantly, by the fact that those actions are driven by our perceiving ourselves as ego – based, material creatures for which the world occurs as an isolated and personal experience. Our desires are perpetually unmet because they are based on our definitions of self as separate and corporeal entities in search of materials that will make ourselves more complete. It is only in the realm of spirit that we will finally and totally reach a state of being; to 'be happy' requires us to reunite ourselves with one another and with the Force that exists as a result of participating in that experience of Unity. It is from that

act of reunification that we can experience perpetual satiation; by reuniting with God we allow ourselves a true and total sense of being by which all of our wantings in the material world are granted effortlessly as a by – product of our authentic nature. If we stay only in the corporeal realm, we are destined to live in a state of constant lack of fulfillment; we must nurture the Divinity that exists within us and beyond us in order to find true bliss.

That ability to achieve wholeness, satiation, and material fulfillment is allowed by returning to the realm of God, and the most effective methods for doing so are outlined in the teachings of the Hasidim. Through their spiritual practices, they dictate the way by which we can coexist with the Divine such that it makes Itself manifest within us and around us in each and every aspect of our lives. Hasidism, and most specifically, the teachings of the Maggid of Mezeritch, outlines the ways in which to manifest our deepest desire: that of *being* -- through our reality and beyond it. It allows us to tap in to the realm of universal consciousness by which we can transcend the struggles and contrasts of our mundane lives for the complete state that contains them; it directs us back to the source of All There Is such that we can participate in It and create from it what we are wanting for ourselves and our world. Through these teachings we are reminded that all of our reality is the result of the transformation of the Nothingness into all of the 'something's' that we behold. We are allowed to reacquaint ourselves with the basis of natural law: that everything comes out of Nothing, and as such, our processes of creation and fulfillment depend on the ability to resource the Unmanifest for that which we seek to make manifest.

In the teachings that follow, the keys to true and total fulfillment exist – both in terms of creating what it is that we desire in the material realm, and more significantly, in the ability to return ourselves to the celestial realm that contains us and gives us life. The following paragraphs will outline the processes by which the Hasidim understood the true nature of existence and learned to navigate themselves within that understanding so as to reach fulfillment and enlightenment. By examining these teachings, it is my intention to present the guidelines by which we modern seekers can activate our own journey towards bliss and wholeness. The ultimate intention is, and has always been, to return to our experience of self as a reflection of the Creator. In Genesis we learn that God created humanity in Its image – *Betzelem Elohim*. It is our nature and our function to exist as microcosmic reflections of our Source – mirroring the Unity, the infinite potential, and the power of seemingly miraculous creation that occurs in the realm of the Divine. The fulfillment of our every mundane desire is a by – product of harnessing the power of the Deity; by engaging in the practices of Hasidic mysticism we are given the keys for ultimate well – being in the material world and far beyond it. We learn to lose our selves for the sake of reclaiming ourSelf: a recovery of utter wholeness. And so...through the presentation of historical, theoretical, and practical ideas, the journey towards enlightenment and the return to Spirit begins...

### ***Olam Hayichud and Olam Hapredah***

"If the material world were constantly attached to the Creator without any forgetting, the creatures' existence would be nullified, [since] they would be attached to the root, to *ayin*. Thus they would do nothing, considering themselves to be *ayin*. So there had to be a breaking [of the vessels], which brought about forgetting the root. Everyone could then lift his hand and act. Afterwards, through Torah and prayer, they attach themselves to the root, to *ayin* ...and thereby raise the sparks of the material world...bringing pleasure to God. Such pleasure is greater than constant pleasure, as when a father who has not seen his son for a long time is reunited with him: the father is more overjoyed than if the son had been with him always. The son too, having not seen his father for a long time, has a greater desire and yearns all the more to be together with his father."

In the beginning...before the beginning of the beginning, there was God. And God was everything. And it was, well, great! But in the experience of being everything, there was nothing that was something apart from everything, and therefore no way to objectively experience being everything, and this was not so great. And so God set out to separate Itself from Itself so that it could experience Itself, and it is from this place that the journey into transcendence begins...and ends.

This act of separation of God from Itself manifested, according to the Hasidim, two opposing worlds: *Olam Hayichud* and *Olam Hapredah*. The former is the realm in which there is Nothing; the infinite and endless occurrence of God known as the *Ein Sof*. Here



there is nothing beyond the Unity which is the Divine, and an unadulterated participation in that union on the part of all Its endless components. In this world there is no possible perception, no access to objective knowing of self, because everything is one thing that is indistinguishable from anything else. And while this "root" of Nothing is the ultimate whole, in which utter completion occurs, it exists before anything else: before knowing, before understanding, before experiencing; it is the source from which all of that grows, but precedes those developments in its envelopment of them all. As such, to occur within the *ayin* is to exist before understanding that existence, where we would "do nothing" because Nothing was all there was.

The opposing world – that of separation – was thus manifested by its Source as a means for objectively understanding everything in terms of its particular components, allowing for action on the part of those components as a means for returning to their container. In the *Olam Hapredah* exists the experience of the mundane; the everyday world from which we apprehend the contrast of the Infinite and the Nothingness of God as *yesb*; this realm is comprised of the "things" that have Nothing as their root.

In the process of God contracting Itself so as to manifest in the world of *yesb* came the opportunity for It to know Itself; we are the manifestations of that endeavor. We, and our world of particulars, are the results of the Divine contraction, or *tsimtsum*.<sup>4</sup> We are the gift of objective perception that God gave to Itself, and all of the darkness we think we see; all of the matter that we believe to exist in its distinct and independent form, is nothing more than an indication of the spark of light lying dormant and quietly within it

– waiting to be retrieved and brought back up to the container that holds it all. There is no true shadow; there is no real material, only illusory expressions of a world of substance – or *yes*h -- that are in effect the gift we (as part of God) gave ourselves so as to have the experience of knowing our Source. There is in fact no greater gift – no deeper joy – than having the experience of God, and this bliss is induced by our process of first separating from that experience and intentionally reuniting with It. The glory of forgetting comes in our actively re – membering, returning ourselves intentionally to the *ayin*, the Nothingness, from within the world of *yes*h. This return is the apprehension of unity, of love, of wholeness...of light, and it can only be known to us through our transaction in restoring the sparks of light within that which is material, fractured and unable fully shine. We know God by confronting the mirage of what It is not and actively lifting the veil to rediscover the unified truth. That is why we chose to be here: to re – member ourselves, to re – collect ourselves, and to re – create ourselves in the image of the Divine, and we do so by retrieving the sparks of light from the shattered matter of our world.

We are the reflections of a vessel that is eternally giving of its light and infinitely receiving it, and in the moments when we permit this flow to occur within us and through us, we are reunited with the One that contains us, and blissfully aware of this reunion. The Maggid of Mezeritch remarked that “as much as the calf wants to nurse that’s how much the cow wants him to nurse from her; so too, just as much as the people want to love God, that’s how much God wants the people to love Him -- and that is why He contracted himself [by *tsimtsum*].<sup>iii</sup> Our lives are simply a gift of apprehending who we

are: a series of lessons that work to remind us of our true Divine membership with a nature that is ever giving, ever receiving, and charged with the mission of restoring the broken pieces of the containment of the Light. Understanding and navigating through the *Olam Hapredah* as a means of actively returning to *Olam Hayichud* is thus fundamental to the practice of Jewish mysticism and specifically, to the spirituality of the Maggid.<sup>iv</sup>. Its application allows for an interpretation of the world and our purpose in it that can bring only bliss, empowerment, and enlightenment; it is behind all of the analyses that follow.

### *Transcendence*

The process of moving from within the realm of *yesh* back into the world of *ayin* is in essence an act of elevating the elements of matter back to their source, with the particular manifestation of the self as a separate and ego – based individual the basis of that world of matter. This elevation, or *aliyah*, of which the Maggid speaks constantly, can be termed a process of transcendence. Merriam – Webster defines transcendence as “surpassing; exceeding usual limits; extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience ...being beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge, beyond comprehension [and] the universe of material existence.” Evelyn Underhill further clarifies this process of elevation from beyond the material world as composed of three distinct processes: “1) The primary break with the sense – world 2) The ‘new’ birth and development of spiritual consciousness on high levels, [and] 3) That ever closer and deeper dependence on and appropriation of the fullness of the Divine Life; a conscious participation, and active union with the infinite and eternal.”<sup>v</sup>

The following writing will use the word "transcendence" as a means for describing the act of elevating oneself above the realm of material existence that is definitive of the *Olam Hapredah*. This term seeks to signify the total annihilation of the realm of matter as a means for lifting above it to the world in which all exists as a total and unified whole. In so doing, the senses are abnegated and an awareness of God is reached as a reunion within which one can consciously participate and apprehend. Transcendence is the surmounting of matter from identifying the illusory limitations of that material and redefining it by means of that which exists above it and contains it all.

### *Dveikut*

...The important thing regarding devekut is that God, blessed be He, thereby receives pleasure from us, [even] as we have said, that by pushing away the evil we cling to the good; that is, we fulfill what is said, "I have always placed God before me" [Ps. 16:8...] we find that if we merit this clinging (dveikut), we will think of ourselves that we are nothing without God, may he be blessed, who sustains us, and who is the one that exists, and without Him there is no other..."<sup>i</sup>

In transcending the 'evil' shadows of an illusory reality, we are able to fulfill our purpose in a reunification with the source of Light by engagement in *dveikut*. This word, which has its source in early Kabbalah<sup>vii</sup> defines the act of communion with God, or a "cleaving" to God. The use of the word "cleave" is interesting in that it connotes a separation in the process of ultimate unification; in order to attach oneself to the Divine, a sever must occur simultaneously with the physical realm of limited material and

separation. The achievement of *dveikut* was the foundation of Hasidic spiritual practice and manifested as the driving force behind all actions and intentions; the ability to reunite with the Divine and have a direct and total experience of It sponsored both the mundane and spiritual life of the practitioner. Divergent from mainstream Judaism in which a distinction between the Godhead and His creations was maintained, Hasidism broadened the Kabbalistic intention of Divine reunification, which was described by earlier mystics such as Isaac of Akko as “pouring a jug of water into a flowing spring, so that all becomes one”<sup>viii</sup>. In its earliest manifestations, the act of *dveikut* was the final act of ascension from out of the elements of the material world into the chambers of God; a process reserved for an exclusive group of initiates. Hasidism expanded the demographics and applications of attaching to God such that it became reinterpreted as a “commandment<sup>ix</sup> binding on everyone”<sup>x</sup> Transcendence and unification with the Source of all emanations was the focus of Hasidic spirituality, with all practices directed towards *dveikut* – both in the realm of mundane existence and in the process of prayer. No longer was this task of spiritual ascension an esoteric and occlusive one relegated to the highest of spiritual disciplines; rather, with Hasidism, *dveikut* became a more “user – friendly” element of the life of all practitioners in all of their undertakings. The act of elevating oneself back to the source required recognizing the presence of God within all things as the only truth of that matter. By a positive state of awareness fostered by the intention in cleaving to God, the possibility of awakening the Unity within the particular became the foundation of Hasidic spirituality.

Making use of early kabalistic divisions of the soul<sup>xi</sup> Hasidism reaffirmed the distinction - between the animal soul and the Divine soul<sup>xii</sup>. The process of *dveikut* was for them one in which the primitive and individual aspect of the self be elevated through its corporeality while the godly element of the soul was simultaneously awakened and reunited with its Origin. Rabbi Luzzatto explained, "If one sanctifies himself...even his physical actions come to partake of Holiness."<sup>xiii</sup> In the act of communing with God, all aspects of being were directed towards that end, and rendered meaningless outside of that exclusive intention.

The notions of separation and meaning within the mundane was something to be totally nullified – as a means for experiencing that which preceded them; in attaching to the One, every thing becomes one thing that is beyond conception. As such, the processes of abnegation of anything that contradicts the apprehension of Unity are essential to Hasidic spirituality and will be discussed presently; explications of the specific methods of reaching communion with God will be presented in the second section.

## **II. Bittul Yesh: The abnegation of ego and the casting off of the world of particulars that it affirms to be real.**

"This is the foundation of the entire Torah: that yesh [the apparent somethingness of the world] be annihilated into ayin<sup>יין</sup>"

That the basis of the Torah is *ayin*, or 'nothingness', seems profoundly ironic. Here we have a scroll of parchment that seems to pay ultimate homage to the value of tangible objects. Costing upwards of forty thousand dollars to create filled with painstakingly crafted letters, garbed in intricately embroidered fabrics and adorned with jewels; the Torah seems most certainly a precious commodity. And then there are its contents, which also seem to focus in detail on the specifics of human life in all of its manifestations; journeys, romances, families, finances, conflict, sadness and joy, blessings and curses, laws, customs...The torah is quintessential material. In all aspects, it seems to be a reflection of the physical world, so that it is puzzling to read a statement suggesting that its foundation exists in the obliteration of all physical matter. And yet, it is possible to conceive that behind all of the adornment – underneath all of the specificity's and legalities and particularities -- radiates a soft but overwhelming light that illuminates a sense of quiet wholeness to anyone who gazes upon it. It is feasible that all of the tangibility of the Torah is nothing but a yielding veil over its essence: a powerful refraction of the Nothingness of God made manifest through the particulars of language. The foundation of our reality – of which the Torah is a prototype -- is in the renunciation of matter for meaninglessness and of something for Nothing. That is the basis of our faith and the secret lying speechlessly between the letters of the words of the stories on the

parchment in the scroll under the cover that we kiss. The process of converting something back into the Nothing from which it came is known in Hasidism as *Bittul Yesh*; it is for those mystics the path towards communion with God, and as such, demands a bit of attention.

### *Negative theology as a philosophic backdrop*

"The depth of the primordial being...is called Boundless. It is also called Ayin because of its concealment from all creatures above and below...if one asks, 'What is it?' the answer is *Ayin*, that is, no one can understand anything about it...it is negated of every conception."<sup>v</sup>

In the everyday world, it is only by experiencing what something is not that we can fully recognize what it is<sup>vi</sup>. This fact holds true in just about every situation: one never notices the way a finger feels until they get a paper cut; it is in the experience of a pain that is not normally occurring at the top of the finger that they are made conscious of what it feels like when there is no pain. It is in a friend's unusual bad mood that her normally chipper disposition is noted. It is in the going out of a lightbulb that we realize the illumination it usually provides. If the light was always on, there would be no experience of it; we would be forced to take it for granted if it were always in existence. It is only through the absence of light that light can be understood; an objective understanding and experience of something requires having its opposite exist alongside it. The only way to know light is to experience 'not light' – darkness. The only way to experience silence is through



sound. The only way to understand bliss is through suffering. The only way to encounter Unity is by separation. The only way to apprehend God is through the objective illusion of what God is not, and if God is everything, then one method for truly grasping this Everything is by negating it all. A "positive sense of nothingness" <sup>xvii</sup> is the end result of describing God through negation; it is the means by which we can experience that which is always there.

Huston Smith explains that "the Infinite cannot be defined positively because definitions compare; either they liken what they define to something or they distinguish it from something. If they distinguish, we are back with negation: the object defined is not what it is contrasted with. And if they liken? But the Infinite is all – inclusive, so there is nothing other than it to which it can be likened." Negation is the means by which we are able to break free from any and all limitations, which is the essence of experiencing God; it is the process by which the rational mind is broken down through its being forced to contemplate something that exists beyond the terms of contemplation<sup>xviii</sup> so that a return to the Source of everything can occur as a total and direct encounter. As such, we Jews use a name for God that is forbidden to us to pronounce. The tetragrammaton has been for two thousand years a symbol of that which we apprehend to the point that we cannot vocalize it, so that our physical negation of the name allows it to occur beyond the limits of pronunciation; it is the primary emblem of negative theology that exists in Judaism. The notion of God as something that can only be characterized in the mundane realm by negation is a universal religious truth.<sup>xix</sup> Moses Maimonides was one of many religious thinkers who articulated the process of negation as a means for literal characterization of the Divine. Under the influence of medieval Muslim philosophers, he created a method

of negative attribution as a means for understanding the reality of God,<sup>xi</sup> explaining that “a description of God ... by means of negations is the correct description, a description that is not affected by indulgence in facile language and does not imply any deficiency with respect to God...You come nearer to the apprehension of Him, may he exalted, with every increase in the negations regarding him”<sup>xii</sup>

The Rambam's negative theology was taken up by the mystics of the medieval era; Azriel of Gerona, Shem Tov Ibn Gaon, Moses de Leon, and Solomon ibn Gabirol all adopt and mold this negative theology such as to develop a relationship with God through the understanding of Its Nothingness; the concept of *Ayin* (the Hebrew term for nothingness)<sup>xiii</sup> occurs for these mystics as the means for objectively understanding the Divine. Through the contemplative expansion that occurs by negative attribution, an experience of that which was previously taken for granted can occur. There is a mental and spiritual freedom that transpires through understanding that there is no thing that God can be; all limitations are lifted from the thinker and the God that he is thinking of when the parameters of definition are negated.

Due to its effectiveness as a means of spiritual development, this mode of negation in approaching the Divine continued to be a practice up through the Hasidic movement. Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer categorizes the Hasidic practice of annihilation as a form of “quietism”, explaining that “In the history of religion, quietism is known as the path towards God via the abandonment of self, the primary goal of which is the destruction of the natural forces in order to facilitate the action of the divine within man.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Negation

manifests in quietism as the apprehension of Nothingness as the only truth in existence, with the effacing of the self as the means by which to unite and exist within the Divine. It is through the process of elimination, of negating all perceived illusions of existence, that the passive presence of God can occur for us. That the Divine presence is a passive encounter demands the total abandonment of preoccupations with the particular's of life; the dualities of existence must be negated such that the unity that lies quietly behind them can make itself manifest. "God does not desire any particular thing from man – neither good nor evil, neither the performance of certain actions or the refraining from others."<sup>xxiv</sup> A transcendence of the dualistic nature of reality is at the source of Hasidic quietism, in which the process of negation is used in order that all oppositions are rendered meaningless in the face of that which unites them.

Engagement in negative theology is a popular religious practice because it is an effective one in the objective of returning to the Source of being. It fosters a sense of pure consciousness and an experience of untainted existence in which an encountering with totality occurs. In that it is a state of awareness that precedes everything that emanates from it, it occurs in and only in the realm of absolute being. There is no thought no material, no sense of a separate self in the realm of *Ayin*, but rather a complete and total interconnection from which all the power of the universe can be made manifest. As such, it is the essential starting point for the attainment of enlightenment as well as the place from which all earthly desire can be made manifest. By negation, we stretch the boundaries of our contemplation to the point that they are broken through, such that we may return to our spiritual core and thus to the potential for all possibility in the corporeal

world. All spiritual practice demands the apprehension of the void<sup>xxx</sup> as the source of focus by means of releasing oneself from the world of particulars that emanate from it.

To exist within this realm of Nothing is to render the world and its particulars as meaningless; negation has at its basis the realization that nothing means anything apart from the definition we give it – which we can just as readily take away. In a universe that is in effect Nothing, there is no thing that can have a denotation in and of itself; what we define does not exist beyond our interpretation of it, and does not possess any inherent meaning outside of that interpretation. By the process of negation, we are allowed to encounter the illusions of our translations – realizing that all of our renderings of ‘reality’ are nothing beyond our limited thought processes obscured by past experiences and emotions projected onto whatever it is we are encountering at the present moment. There is, in fact, no meaning in any thing, any thought, any emotion. All we see before us is the mirage of past experiences projected forward so that we repeat the fallacy of believing what was true for us before to be true now. We allow ourselves to eclipse a Divine encounter (one in which we accept the boundlessness of Nothing) by our limited versions of existence, in which we are trapped by the ‘something’ we allow Nothing to mean.

A teacher tells a story about preparing for a major conference, for which she was hired by one of Rabbi Larry Hoffman. As she initiated the presentation, she noticed Rabbi Hoffman towards the back of the room with a sort of perplexed look on his face. His eyes were squinted, his forehead crinkled, his arms folded across his chest. Glancing at him, she began to get concerned; he was clearly displaying the posture of someone in a

state of discontent. She began to muster up thoughts of defense: "how can he be sitting there criticizing me? I prepared for this presentation for a month! He is passing judgement on my work and he hasn't even been here for fifteen minutes. Maybe I ought to just quit. Yes, clearly if I am not up to his standards, we are better off going our separate ways in the future. I have plenty of other places where my talents are appreciated...." As it turned out, the reason Rabbi Hoffman was looking the way he was had to do with his having lost his glasses. He was not able to see to the front of the room -- hence the squinting and crinkling, and he was frustrated by that state of affairs, thus the crossed arms. My teacher took what was occurring and gave it a meaning that somehow resonated with her past experiences and thought sequences; defining her present reality with a series of interpretations that were totally real to her -- until she realized that they were in error.

Argyris and Senge of Harvard University title this application of arbitrary meaning onto the circumstances surrounding us as "the Ladder of Inference". Our lives are only the meaning we give them, which is a projection of our past experiences onto the present circumstances; behind that meaning Nothing is there. And the more powerfully we accept this truth, the more liberated we are on both the mundane and spiritual plane. The former becomes more obviously true in our power to define our lives with interpretations that bring us happiness, and the latter allows us elevation from the world of interpretation altogether; a re - union with our Source as a coexistence in the realm of *Ayin*. Were my teacher for example, to have had more awareness around the fact that her interpretations were nothing more than selective applications of meaning onto something which in itself

was devoid of the meaning she gave it, she would have been free to apply something more supportive of her own sense of self -worth to the situation; something that gave a more pleasurable meaning to the situation. In the realm of her attachment to the opinion of those around her of her work (which is a product of the ego – a topic that we will visit in more detail later in this writing), she would have recognized that it was nothing more than her interpretation of their responses that would define for her their opinion, and could therefore elect a kinder meaning with which to objectify her own performances. At best, the act of reinterpretation would have liberated her from believing in the limitations of her perceptions; by rendering the situation as meaningless, she would have been able to reapply meaning that was more bolstering. However, reapplication of meaning still provokes the experience of the mundane realm, for there is no meaning in the domain of Spirit beyond its own definition. A focus from beyond the *Olam Hapredah* into the world of ultimate unity – in which all borders are dissolved – is the true intention; it is in elevation from the attachments to personal meaning that we are reunited with the Infinite. *Ayin* has no definition, no limitation, no boundary, no temporality; this is the Truth. This is our only freedom, from which unfathomable possibilities can occur – for, within Nothing is the possibility of Everything. Our access to all that is miraculous comes though our rendering of the physical world and ourselves within it as nothing. From that act we commune with God in *dveikut*.

To this end, R. Hayyim Haykl of Amdur stated, “for those who gaze at the Creator, blessed be He, bringing everything to nothingness...when they bring everything to nothingness, to the primordial matter, then everything is transformed – and this is called

“war”, and this is the world of transformation and opposition, and thereby one is victorious in all wars.”<sup>xxvi</sup> The intention in our acts of “bringing everything to nothingness” is transformation by means of communion with God, but this endeavor initiates a war to be sure: a battle between and in triumph over opposition. To embark on the journey of transcendence above the world of contrast requires that we become warriors in the domain of meaning; we must eliminate any sense of believing in the existence of “some thing”. However, this is by no means an existentialist endeavor; the conclusion is not that there is ultimate meaninglessness – on the contrary. In rendering the mundane world devoid of inherent meaning we are raised up into the realm of Nothingness from which derives Divine meaning: a pure expression of God as light and love that fills the world it emanates. God as Nothing fills the world with meaning that is independent of the definitions that we apply to it; our war with opposition triumphs in the abnegation of personal meaning for an acceptance of the Divine definitions of the world.

Releasing personal definition for the sake of embodying the will of the Creator is at the heart of experiencing Nothingness. And in order to fully understand the nature of *ayin* and the methods by which to attach to It, we must first examine the world from which we must elevate ourselves. In understanding the nature of the physical atmosphere and the contention by which it is composed, we are more fully equipped to participate in the act of negation that will lead us back to God.

### *Understanding Opposition in the Process of Bittul Yesh*

A friend recently spoke of the first great love of her life – one that remained so for a total of three agonizing and adolescently dramatic years. During that time she wept many the tortured tear of a young woman in ‘love’ – addicted to the roller coaster of highs and lows of a relationship that only rarely gave her the security and adoration she was constantly asking for. She spent her time with that young man ecstatic over the moments of full attention and communion that he chose to give her and in agony over the rest of the time – during which he was unavailable, non – committal, and profoundly argumentative. In the end, there came a moment when she had an instant of transformative revelation: she was sick of the roller coaster and she was done arguing. She realized in a second that she had been perpetuating a game of contrasting emotions by which she could intensely experience a moment of rapture through and only through its opposite feeling of total abnegation and rejection, and that she was no longer prepared to play that exhausting game; better to live in a state of simple and consistent bliss than in a world of such traumatic ups and downs. It was in that same moment that she reflected back on our relationship – for it was suddenly over for her – and began to examine what it had taught her beyond the important fact that she no longer needed extremes to be her definition of romance. That she was done arguing was a big conclusion; she would never again allow herself to participate in extended discourses that based themselves on two parties battling for the need to be right. But then again, it was through all of the arguments, and through all of the other emotional extremes, that she had come to this new and more balanced state of being. It was by way of experiencing opposition that she



was able to find the middle ground between the two poles and as such, the sense of existential bliss in inhabiting that space of center.

We have all allowed ourselves to participate in proverbial emotional and intellectual roller coasters for the same reason that we go on those rides at the amusement park: the intense experience of contrast is the stuff that human existence is excited by. And not only are oppositions the source of our human entertainment, they are also the means by which we learn to define ourselves, our beliefs, and our desires. It is solely by coming up against a negation that we come to fully recognize and understand its opposite; so long as we use that contrast to return to the middle ground we are given the gift of a recovery of Bliss.

Movies are not made and books are not written on the ease of attaining and maintaining a peaceful and blissful love; the subtlety of such graceful relationships has little draw for the human audience. It is rather the drama: the highs and lows and conflicts that must be overcome that define romance for us; the stories end when the oppositions are overcome and "happily ever after" concludes that triumph with an indication that a state of balanced completion has finally occurred. The desire to attain union with someone that we perceive as unattainable is such a compelling one because we define the value of that attainment by our experience of its painful absence. We are creatures of duality; that is the essence of the material world: a composite of invaluable oppositions that seek to maintain a state of balance through their proper coexistence. Our suffering occurs physically, emotionally, and spiritually when we deny the laws of our corporeal nature,

which dictate that all material maintains itself through and only through the state of homeostasis, or – in Hebrew, existing *beinoni*<sup>xvii</sup>. It is by recognizing the duality and maintaining a balance between its opposing components that we can effectively live within it and transcend it.

“...This is the meaning of, ‘and God separated between the light and the darkness’ [v.5]. And why is this so? Because ‘and God called’ – that is, that man called suffering by the name *Elohim*, which is judgement. Therefore, [he called] ‘the light, day’ and ‘to the darkness’ – therefore it is darkness because of ‘night’. But in truth, ‘and there was evening’ -- for he who does not believe, the suffering is for him as morning. And it is all ‘one day’ [ibid.], for everything that He did was done for good – and contemplate this.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Through understanding the way in which our [illusory] existence presents itself, we are then free to raise it and see what is beyond it. As was previously discussed, the purpose of negative theology is to transcend the realm of perceived reality as a fractionated and incomplete occurrence, and move into the Divine experience of wholeness that sponsors it. This Unity is achieved through acknowledging that something...any thing... is not in fact that thing; negation is the introduction of opposition. In order to nullify something's existence, its diametrical pole must be presented against it. That is the nature of reality, for what we understand to be real manifests as an opposition of some sort.

“In the world of *asiyah* [of physical doing] there is division, while in the upper world there is unity.”<sup>xix</sup>

Opposition is the source of creation; in the genesis of our world, God created a series of confronting phenomena: light and dark, land and water, day and night, man and woman, work and rest. This process of separation was brought to its ultimate manifestation in the Garden of Eden – at which time humanity took upon itself the knowledge of the archetypal distinction of good and evil. In the eating of the apple our ancestors initiated the autonomy inherent in the ability to distinguish the polarities of the mundane universe. Our reality was defined for us by God's declaring the endless dualities within it and by our choosing to exist within the realm of those oppositions. Our human experience is one in which we behold separation, with our success in the mundane sphere largely determined by how powerfully we can engage in the process of distinction. Carl Jung explains this process of distinction as that of successful individuation. He submits that "each human being has originally a feeling of wholeness, a powerful and complete sense of Self"<sup>xxx</sup>; with the *Self* to whom he is referring equivalent with the experience of Unity that one achieves in cleaving to God. He goes on to explicate that as "the individual ego emerges during the transition from infancy through childhood" a separation must occur with this sense of wholeness, such that autonomy by which the individual can successfully "relate himself to his adult environment" can be achieved. Autonomy is the ability to comprehend mundane polarity. There is no way to successfully navigate through the realities of terrestrial human existence without a competency to appropriately identify the oppositions within it, and in order for that necessary separation of the individual to occur, some "severe injury to the original sense of wholeness" is inevitable.

Since the moment Adam and Eve became autonomous by means of the ability to distinguish material duality, human experience has been defined by that ability. Indeed, our corporeal undertakings are all colored by how well we triumph over the world of distinctions; it is in overcoming our own limitations (which, ironically, occurs through the recognition of the limitations in everything that surrounds us) that we more powerfully exist in the world. But inherent in that experience is the concept of limitation, or opposition. No matter how far ahead we can move in the realm of challenging the dictated limits of our reality, we find ourselves troubled by another set of limitations; that is the source of all our mundane struggles. And in those struggles, we turn to seeking that which is beyond limitation; our *spiritual* experience occurs in opposition to our human one.

Our spiritual experience is one in which we behold Unity; God is at the source of the oppositions that come from It – It is the Limitlessness that contains all of us limitations. It is from this type of understanding that Dov Baer, The Maggid of Mezeritch states, “Think of yourself as Ayin and forget yourself totally. Then you can transcend time, rising to the world of thought, where all is equal: life and death, ocean and dry land. Such is not the case if you are attached to the material nature of this world. If you think of yourself as something, then God cannot clothe himself in you, for God is infinite. No vessel can contain God, unless you think of yourself as Ayin.”<sup>xxx</sup> While the true objective is the transcendence of all aspects of corporeality, The Maggid acknowledges the oppositions that humans must first learn to distinguish in his explication of how to move beyond them.

The psychology of Hasidic mysticism therefore has at its source the act of contemplating opposition such that it can be transcended. The term used for this trascension, or elevation, back into the celestial realm of Nothingness is *leha'a lot*; this is one of the key terms and concepts in the writings of the Maggid of Mezeritch. Elevation is in effect the process of the "union of compliments"<sup>xxxii</sup> by which the point that contains the variant poles of reality can be retrieved by the individuated self. Negation and ultimate *ayin*hilation occur through resolving the oppositions of mundane life; returning oneself to the center "point where compliments unite and opposites are resolved"<sup>xxxiii</sup> Hasidism instructs the use of corporeality as the means by which to successfully categorize and distinguish; only from that process can we return to the Ayin from which we came. We engage in the elements of day and night, man and woman, land and sea, work and rest because they emanate from the Creator that exists beyond them, and, so long as we maintain that Source in our doings, we are able to return to It through our very acts of negative distinction.

### *The Abnegation of Ego*

Another friend of mine was telling me about a very difficult time he had at a recent dinner party. He had gone to the gathering with a woman he had been dating, who had recently expressed uncertainty about her feelings towards him and their romantic future. Already feeling insufficient to merit her love and commitment, and wanting something more from her than she seemed interested in providing, he entered the party with

insecurity. And as the evening progressed, his date spent most of her time speaking to another man, while my friend struggled to overcome his experiences of isolation, abandonment, and betrayal. He felt increasingly small, intensely lonely, totally disconnected, and deeply incomplete; these are the characteristics of existing solely in the physical world – these are the antitheses of communion with God. All of the manifestations of my friend's upset came from an ego that had been wounded and quickly swollen such that it made the world of 'somethings' appear real and terrifying; fear is always present in an unbalanced expression of ego. The ego is the basic opposition in the material world; it occurs in contrast with our selves as part of the Divine – part of Nothing. And while, as Jung demonstrated, it is a necessary mechanism for both corporeal and spiritual existence, it is only of benefit when properly directed towards *ayin*.

When the ego is allowed to 'run the show' independent of its spiritual opposition, it induces a world based on limitation and apprehension. In investigating anything that has at its source the emotion of fear, a sense of separation, negativity, and lack will be identified. In that these attributes are connected to the sense of the individual ego, they are simultaneously the markers of all which is opposite to the experience of the Divine. The emotion of fear comes up in circumstances that seem threatening to one's sense of individual security and perpetuate the experience of separation by fostering belief systems indicating that very separation. We fear rejection, criticism, abandonment, loss...we feel anxiety at and only at the thought of something that is limited and can occur as a lack for us. It is solely in the participation of the illusion of a finite and restricted existence that this emotion exists; there is no place for it in the realm of the

Infinite. As such, it occurs for us (often) as the most powerful tool we have for transcendence. For, when we recognize fear and the egotistical preoccupations it feeds upon, we are given the most powerful opportunity to apprehend its opposite.

The ego is the fundamental outcome of God's contraction; the pinnacle of Everything's ability to objectively return to Itself. It was formed with the bite of the apple in Eden, and demonstrated in the moment when Adam and Eve felt compelled to cover their nudity. With that act they exhibited the first demonstrations of self – consciousness (which is a key indication of the ego at work) and the need to place some sort of material protective covering on their suddenly vulnerable physical bodies. In that process we recognize the archetypal demonstrations of the ego: a sense of separate self that feels in some way unsafe and seeks out the acquisition of material substance to try and compensate for that experience of fear. However, with the advent of the ego also came the possibilities of autonomy and free will. Separation implies autonomy, and that independence gave us the means by which to exist *Betzelem Elohim* -- actively re-creating in the image of God so that an apprehension of that Source could be a knowledge – based experience.

Hearkening back to the explanation of *Tsimtsum*, it is clear that in order to know something requires a level of distance from it – otherwise it would simply be, and there would be no objective ascertainment of its occurrence. In order to experience God, God had to contract Itself to the point of creating an objective stance from which to view Itself. The individual ego is the point of view from which we can experientially know What Is by our identifying what it is not. R. Shneur Zalman explains, "The cause and reason for *tsimtsum*<sup>xxxiv</sup> and concealment with which the Holy One, blessed be He,

obscured and hid the life – force of the world, making it appear as an independent existing entity, [is as follows:] It is known to all that the purpose of the creation of the world is the revelation of God's sovereignty, for, 'there is no king without a nation [Pirquei de – Rabbi Eliezer, Ch. 3], The word *am* is related etymologically to the word *amunot* ['dimmed' or 'extinguished'], for they are separate entities, distinct and distant from the level of the king...but only 'in a numerous nation is the glory of the king' [Prov. 14: 28]<sup>xxxv</sup>

So long as the individual self is applied towards an objective understanding and return to the Source, it is an occurrence of great power. This return is the ultimate manifestation of *Bittul hayesh*, with the annihilation of the separate self fundamental to the Hasidic endeavor of reuniting with the One. Individual nullification, along with the void of all of the illusory aspects of separation that is perceived from an ego – based observance is the objective. It was an intention behind all practice of human existence for the Hasidim, by which one could learn to "think of oneself as a limb of God, not as separate"<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Union with the Divine was an active and all – engaging process that demanded constant and total negation of the self and all of the particulars occurring for that individual as a means for elevation to the Source. In short, the process of annihilation of the separate self – the ego (or the *ani* in Hebrew) allows for a return to the experience of the *ayin*<sup>xxxvii</sup>. This cancellation permits for rediscovering our authentic nature as totally connected, all pervasive, and filled with endless possibility in which we occur beyond duality, resistance, and intellect. It is an experience of self that is no longer corporeal or



objective, but rather based on the apprehension of Spirit within and beyond our individuality.

איתא בגמרא גדולים מעשה צדיקים יותר ממעשה שנים הארץ כ"י. פירוש כי מעשה שנים הארץ  
היה יש מאין. צדיקים עושים מיש אין. כי מכל הדברים שעושים, אפילו גשמיות כמו אכילה,  
מעלין מצוין הקדושות מזה המאכל למעלה, יכן מכל דבר, במצא שעושים מיש אין.  
(עמוד 24)

The Maggid states that "the righteous make from something (*yesh*) nothing (*ayin*)"<sup>xxxviii</sup>; in other words, those who are committed to a spiritual life work to transform the material dualities of corporeal existence into the state of all – encompassing nothingness. This transformation occurs through the renunciation of the ego and the realities it perceives: those of an object - based environment in which the points of reference always occur outside of the self. As was previously mentioned, perceptions based on external material are based on fear – for they require the approval from and control over and power achieved by conquering things perceived to be separate from oneself. Any experience that is fueled by a sense of separation is an ego (and therefore fear) – based occurrence, and it occurs as tremulous because it denies a sense of abundance and interconnection; in the province of material is the belief of limits and scarcity. The process of moving outside of the perception of *ani* allows for freedom from all illusory limitations – moving us out of an existence dependent on externality and material control in which strength is contingent upon and limited to that outside source of definition. Engaging in *bittul hayesh* brings us back to a true sense of self; ironically, it is in canceling out the meaning of all substance that an understanding of permanence, interconnectedness, and internal reference can occur.

To engage in an act of *Bittul Hayesh* is to negate what is, and as was previously discussed, everything that we declare to be real and distinct in the world around us is an illusion of separation defined by our pretenses as individuals. With each moment that we allow our separateness – our ego – to solely define our reality, we give more power to the fantasies of duality, trapping ourselves within the limitations of the substances we have given meaning to. We live out a life of opposition based on a fundamental simulation: that 'I' exists as an isolated and distinct entity from everything else, and from that stance the world becomes essentially defined for us as a place to suspect and protect our selves from. In the world of the ego there is opposition; in the world of ego there is death, and this threat of death causes the emotion of fright in the individual.

Abnegation of the self must begin by recognizing the Divine spark within the matter that lives in constant opposition with itself. In this case, that light lies in the fact that the human ego is also the key for our being able to effectively function within the world of duality. The more powerfully we can ascertain our own parameters and the fluidity within those boundaries that seek to expand themselves beyond us, the better we are equipped to approach the elements of the material world. A healthy ego allows for skill in navigating through the polarities of mundane reality, it is the way in which we achieve an identity and a motivation for independent progress (a chicken will eternally eat, sleep, mate, and produce eggs – while humans will constantly invent new ways for collecting and packaging those eggs... and tastier recipes for omelets...). But a healthy ego is one that is balanced with the understanding that it is not in charge of the Self, rather, simply an element of it that helps it upon its journey of enlightenment. Sadly, an unbalanced ego moves quickly out of the gift of autonomy and into the hunger for tyranny. When

something is based on notions of 'me' and 'mine' and fixated on the illusions of *yesh* as things that really exist with independent meanings and definitive values that inspire their acquisition, it can take hold of the body it inhabits as the driving force.

More and more so, that imbalance is perpetuated in a society that affirms the prominence of material and the importance of the separate self without equal weight given to the nature of the spirit and the unified whole. Without the intention of God in our perceptions and actions, we are exiled to the world of singularity – from which comes confinement and fear; that emotion indicates a distrust of the Eternal. All of the material symbols to which we give value are representations of our ego at work. Prestige, connections, money, clothing, all of these illusions of Nothing are made into something of value by our separate selves in an attempt to replace the sustenance and love of the Divine. They are nothing short of idols – representations of separation that will ultimately fail in bringing about the sense of completion and fulfillment that drives the need to possess them. They will fail and they will leave an ever-greater experience of lack and isolation as they do. And the greater the power of the ego, the more fear it will instill, until the mechanics of self – consciousness swell into a depressing narcissism that overtakes all inclinations towards unity. An unbalanced ego throws us into exile from our authentic Self (it is ironic that self – consciousness is really the antithesis of being conscious of the Self) – trapped in the *galut* of idolatrous separation.

And yet, the Maggid explains that “every liberation from *galut* gets us out of exile”<sup>xxxix</sup>. Our moments of ego – based despair have within them the most powerful sparks for release from that state of illusion; in the moment that we redefine our fear as something that holds God within it we are liberated from its mundane confinement. Fear allows us

the choice to move into love and without the experience of it that choice and that return would be impossible. When we come to the place of humility from our encounter with consternation we disarm the ego; when our trepidation becomes sufficiently extreme and our understanding that no material can offer sufficient protection, we are humbled...we are released from expulsion and returned to the Source. *Yirah* is the word for fear not only as a material result of preoccupation with the limitations of *yesh*, but also the definition of reverence when associated with the Divine. Reb Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl teaches that "the fear of the Lord is His treasure' (Isaiah 33:6). There are different types of fear to be sure, but the true treasure is awe before God's greatness – fearing Him because He is master and ruler, the Source of all worlds. It is this attitude that will lead you to serve God with all your strength and devotion. You will do so not out of fear of death, punishment, or hell; these will all be meaningless in the face of your true awe before the Creator." <sup>xi</sup>

The concept of fear is defined in Hasidic thought on two levels, with the former existing as a manifestation of the ego and therefore occurring against its opposite: love. The Maggid distinguishes between *ahavah* (love) and *yirah* (fear), explaining "when you are afraid of something you cannot love it but the *ayin* combines love and fear as one for the [the *ayin*] combines the power of action in its potential"<sup>xii</sup>. We have already examined how the return to the realm of nothingness allows for a transcendence of the experience of opposition; the aforementioned statement supports another example of contrasts that become a unified experience in the apprehension of the Infinite. But the use of love and fear are more than an additional illustration of the world of contradiction and the ability to move beyond it; they are in fact the fundamentals of that world and, as such, need to be

examined in greater detail. Fear and love are the essential contrasts that color our human experience. The former is the indication of the ego at work, while the latter is the definition of the Divine as an objective experience to which we can return.

When the emotion of fear is harnessed such as to foster a sense of humility as a part of something greater than the individual self, it becomes a key method for cleaving to God. *Yirah* in its spiritual context is totally distinct from the experience of fear as an ego-based sensation; rather than fostering a sense of isolation, danger, and withdrawal, this emotion induces a state of reverence and awe when directed to the Source. It evokes a state of *katnut* – of smallness – before the Infinite that contains us all, and in this way abnegates the preoccupation with the individual self. Therefore, in terms of engaging in the realm of opposition in order to transcend it, the polarity of love as obeisance, humility, and reverence is the way in which to find the sparks of light within that darkest of emotions. We must find the ‘who’ that is aware of the experience of fear and induce meekness in that ego before its Creator. In the cultivation of that humble stance -- or *shiflut*<sup>חשיפות</sup> -- before the greatness of the One we are able to lift above the boundaries of our smallness; ironically, it is by harnessing humility that we are granted ultimate greatness.

The essence of the worship of God and of all the mitzvot is to attain the state of humility, namely...to understand that all one's physical and mental powers and one's essential being are dependent on the divine elements within. One is simply a channel for the divine attributes. One attains such humility through the awe of God's vastness, through realizing that ‘there is no place empty of him’ [Tiqqunei Zohar 57]. Then one comes to the state of ayin, which is the state of humility...One has no independent self and is contained, as it were, in the Creator, blessed be He...<sup>הוא</sup>

Once this retrieval of humility within Greatness is achieved, the true objective – which is to elevate ourselves into the realm where both (and neither) exist – can be undertaken. The Maggid teaches that “both love and fear are needed in combination in order to reach God” <sup>xiv</sup> By effectively harnessing the contrast that is provided for us by our feelings of trepidation we are able to encounter its antithesis: the emotion of love – which is the experience of God. But this love is not to be confused with that of coveting or possessing that occurs on the material plane. Divine love is that which the Maggid refers to in explaining that it is beyond the contrast of the two human emotions and rather in the realm of Unity which encompasses and transcends them both. Love in the domain of *devikut* is an absolute emotion in which the awareness of anything other than it does not exist – a complete and eternal feeling in which limitation, polarity and distinction no longer endure.

שהגדול בתורה, תל"ז באו לידי מיתה. כ"א אמר אבא אמלך, והנה מדת סליחת מקבלת  
ממדינת תורתנים, והאדם שמענין אותו למלך הוא כמו שאר בני אדם, רק רצון העבדים היה למען  
אחיו למלך. ולהיותה למדינה תחתונה מאד, כזו שצריכה לקבל צבאים על כן רגלי יורדות מית.  
ומזה תוכחת מגילה למי שמתבטא באיזה מדת על שאר אנשים לאמר שהוא חכם יותר מהם, אז  
יראה שזוהי באמת עצמות המחשבה אבא אמלך, שהוא מקבל תענוג ממדינת תחתונים ממנו, והוא  
מהשכירה ל"ר.  
(עמ"ד 118)

Love is the result of releasing the ego and the denial of Unity that it perpetuates such that we are once again participants in the secure and ever – flowing source from which we come. In returning to this source of love, a sense of greatness will inevitably occur, but this is achieved only through first becoming humble; “humility comes before greatness [as] the depth of the darkness brings forth the light.” <sup>xv</sup> It is not that we should abnegate

the natural desire for greatness, but rather that we foster this aspiration as spiritual rather than egotistical creatures. With the ego annihilated, notions of competition, hierarchy, and ownership that are associated with 'greatness' in the physical world are absent; this eminence one cultivated by total unity and inclusivity, and is motivated by spirit rather than matter. The Maggid teaches, "*gadlut* [the desire for greatness] to reach a higher spiritual state is legitimate, but not a reason to feel you are superior [to others]. It is an [acceptable] necessity in our doings, and only when it is disconnected from the larger [spiritual] value system is it unacceptable."<sup>xvi</sup>

We abnegate our identities – from which we put forth an experience of ourselves that is limited to a certain set of behaviors, characteristics, and beliefs -- for the revival of our authentic Selves, which occur as microcosms of the Greater Oneness from which we come. In our forfeiting the independent *ani* for the wholistic *ayin*, we succeed in embodying all parts of ourselves and the endless possibilities of who we can become in the likeness of our maker. All pretenses are washed clean, all of the shame and deceit and insatiable desire that manifested with the advent of the ego in Eden disappear, with nothing but a complete and all encompassing Love to take their place. In the release of the individuated self, the illusory knowledge from the primal tree is replaced by the wisdom that preceded it. In Job 28:12, we read "Where [me – ayin] is wisdom to be found?" In that *ayin* connotes both 'where' and 'nothing' in biblical Hebrew, Jewish mysticism transformed the question "into a mystical formula, 'Divine wisdom comes into being out of nothingness.' Asher ben David writes, the inner power is called ayin because neither thought nor reflection grasps it. Concerning this, Job said, 'Wisdom comes into being out of *ayin*.'"<sup>xvii</sup> The knowing that promotes a need for acquisition and

individual security is displayed as illusory, overcome by a wisdom of uncertainty, a detachment and personal fluidity through cleaving to God. To exist in this ultimate state of love and wisdom is a subtle and unwavering experience, but we humans still occur in the process of *tsimtsum*. We are subject to restriction within our acts of abnegation; vulnerable to the realm of oppositions as the means for transcending them. Therefore, examining the nature of the human will and the processes of resistance in terms of Hasidic spirituality is important.

### *The Nature of Resistance<sup>chiv</sup>*

"Once Rabbi Dov Baer was walking on the street accompanied by his disciples and saw a little girl hiding in an alcove, weeping. 'Why are you crying, little girl?' asked the rabbi. 'I was playing hide-and-seek with my friends,' replied the girl, 'but they didn't come looking for me!' Rabbi Dov Baer sighed and said to his students, 'In the answer and the tears of that little girl I heard the weeping of the shekina, 'And I will surely hide My face.' (Deut. 31:18) I, God, have hidden Myself too, as it were, but no one comes to look for Me!' <sup>111</sup>

In playing the game of hide and seek, the whole joy in finding someone is in their having hidden really well; they resist exposure to the best of their ability, and the more well – hidden they are, the more time and energy it takes to find them, the greater the triumph of having done so. We are entertained by overcoming circumstances of restriction when we intentionally set them up as a game; it's just that we have forgotten that we set up our lives -- just as much as we developed the games we play within them -- as a process of creating and then triumphing over restrictions. Even more significantly, we have forgotten that behind the whole process of our individual play with resistance hides God, waiting for us to summon ourselves to participate in the ultimate game, in which we find the hidden meaning that is already there.



The analysis of the process of restriction brings us back to our initial discussion of the act of *Tsimtsum* – which is essentially defined as God’s act of contracting Itself – restricting Its perpetual flow of light so as to objectively apprehend Itself. Revelation requires that something be revealed – which demands that it first be hidden from view; *tsimtsum* is the quintessential game of ‘hide and seek’. And in that God’s contraction resulted in Its disbursement to many seemingly individual pieces, it is in the restriction we meet by confronting the particulars around us that we are given the opportunity to reunite with the Source. It is in our interaction with the material world – both its people and its property (and our own primitive ego that defines these things as independent from us) – that we encounter restriction, and it is through our mastery over these perceived experiences that we cleave to God. It is our purpose here to re – member our connection to the Divine, and to do so we must discover and lift up the sparks of the Divinity in everything we come in contact with. In our games, we are most thrilled by overcoming circumstances of great opposition; in our lives, we interpret such situations antithetically. And yet, the same rule holds true: the greatest opportunities to cleave to God come through the most challenging experiences of conflict, for wherever there is resistance, there is the potential for the revelation of a spark of Light.

Our confrontation with resistance occurs in the *Olam Hapredah*; we resist opposition in terms of the world of particulars and are liberated from this resistance by lifting up the sparks we find there into the *Olam Hayichud*; the world of Unity. Interestingly, the word *olam* shares its root with *ne’elam*, which means ‘hidden’. God hides within the everyday

world everywhere and all the time, waiting patiently for us to recognize the illusion of our so-called "realities" and wake up to the Light shining behind them. God hides because we hide: from our true purpose and our complete perfection. As long as we remain wrapped up in the fragments of self-judgement and lack of faith, God will remain hidden in the shadows we have cast for It.

The Maggid of Mezrich writes, "In the name of R. Baer, may he live long, [concerning] the matter of the changes in the creator: he and his changes are one, for the master receives his kingship from the opposites [act of] changing, for kingship is used [in reference to] the servants, to the fact that they would do the opposite of their own will in order to do the will of the King." <sup>1</sup> Taking into consideration the previous discussion on the nature of opposition as a means for effectively navigating through concrete reality, this paragraph affirms not only the relevance of engaging in acts of opposition – but, more significantly, the fact that such an engagement allows for the experience of Unity behind them. This leads to a discussion of the nature of will; according to the Maggid, it is by identifying one's separate will and reconciling it with the opposition that is stimulating it that *dveikut* is achieved. It is through the proper use of our will (namely, in acting in opposition to it) that we are allowed to experience God consciously and voluntarily; there is no other way to do so – for when there is no opposition there is no objective experience. As such, all experiences of resistance and opposition become spiritual gifts; they are the sole opportunities that we have to understand and experience the Divine. We must constantly and actively participate in the raising of our personal will to act in accordance with God's will; any and all opportunities to move beyond the realm

of separation should be greeted with the joy of one who is gifted with the encounter of God.

Contrast is essential to the process of *dveikut* in that it is the only means to consciously return to wholeness. But that return demands that one does not become buried in the contradiction or in the driving force of his or her individual will. Rather, the will and the experience of resistance that stimulates it is to be recognized as the means by which to return the realm beyond it. We humans become preoccupied with the elements of kingship and servitude in our mundane lives. We immerse ourselves in the reality of opposition, where 'mine' and 'theirs' and the social hierarchy that dictates such perceptions are allowed to overcome us. Hasidism invites us to recognize our experiences of resistance as the means by which to transcend them rather than engage in their limited offerings of pleasure. In engaging in the "opposite acts of changing" and allowing our will to return to the will of the One that encompasses us, we are allowed to transcend the suffering of reality by our recognizing the contrasts that perpetuate it.

These contrasts that cause our circumstances of resistance are termed by the Hasidim as our evil inclinations (*the Yetzer Harah*). They exist in and only in the realm of the physical as shadows of the light; they are delusions of our primitive element. The Maggid explains: "Man was born with an animalistic soul and moves into the world of spirit by overcoming the *yetzer harah*."<sup>4</sup> This act of mastery comes from mirroring the cosmic *tsimtsum*; by inducing a personal state of restriction we are able to objectively examine the negativity that is in some way conflicting us and find the spark of light within it such that we can return it to the *ayin*. To elevate above the evil inclination

requires our being able to examine it and render it as meaningless, which is accomplished through the act of restricting its impact upon us. All negative experiences are only such that we may know what God is, and therefore what we are in God's image, by the experience of what God is not. By engaging in the act of resistance – specifically to the acceptance that the elements of particularity are unreal – we align our will with its Source and rise above the darkness. We recognize that we set up the process of resistance in our lives for the same reason that we do so in our games: as a means for actively triumphing over it.

"Consider this in the light of Deuteronomy 31:18, where God says, "I will surely hide my face." The Hebrew here employs a common biblical construction for emphasis by using two forms of the same verb, "hestayer asteer." In English, this double verb is customarily rendered as "surely hide." But this repetition might also imply that there are two kinds of hiding going on. The first is that God is hiding and therefore life seems hard or painful or even worse. The second kind of hiding is that the hiddenness itself is concealed from us. The hiding is itself hidden. We don't even know, in other words, that God is hiding. And that is the source of our terror and dismay! This is because we are more frightened by the fact that we don't realize that God is hiding".<sup>18</sup>

We set up our games as games of resistance over which to master, and we are called to remember that we, as the highest expression of ourselves, did the same thing with our daily lives. All of our complaints are in essence frustration over the conflicts that we feel have been imposed on us; if only we recognized them as identical to our games we would in an instant be able to play. But these frustrations are only secondary to the more existential agony that we will all confront at some point in our lives. The irritations around petty circumstances of resistance can be tolerated and overcome in our developing mastery over them – recognizing that the Divine is playing with us by contraction in these occurrences. Through this revelation, resistance is given meaning by our understanding that the Divine is hidden within the material. However, "when the

hiddenness is itself concealed", solace is not so easily achieved; meaning is not so easily reapplied and the confrontation with the apparent Nothingness can become an existential crisis.

Recognizing that resistance is nothing but Divine Hide and seek is one thing; maintaining utter belief in that which is hidden behind the hiding in those moments that seem like Nothing is another. The objective is two – fold: firstly, to understand that we are at the source of our own confrontations with resistance and able in a second to recognize these situations as the moments of most acute opportunity to proactively cleave to the spark of light hidden within the presentation of conflict. Secondly, and more significantly, we must cultivate a trust -- a *bitahon* in the presence of God as hidden behind Its own hiddenness; in those moments of fear that there is Nothing, that our lives are void, we are called to foster a conjectural faith that there is a meaning hidden within the alcoves of Nothing that will maintain our wholeness and our infinite fulfillment if we believe in it.

What is hidden behind that which is hidden is boundless light, waiting only to be found again. The meaninglessness that shrouds It engenders terror, it is totally unsafe, completely unreliable, and it lurks behind all of the illusions of reality that we try to build our safety upon. But God did not create a meaningless world, a world in which dislocation -- which is at the source of terror -- seems to exist. Rather, this *Olam Hapredah* is the refraction of infinite interconnectedness with the purpose of voluntarily restoring that unity so that it can be experienced. Hidden behind the hidden is the fact that God is always present, within us and around us, waiting for us to remember

ourselves within It. God's will is the providence upon which we must put our faith, knowing that It is always protecting us even when we don't know that It is hiding.

### ***The Nature of Time in Relation to Dveikut***

"If anything is still important to you apart from the Holy One, blessed be He, you are not [yet] cleaving to God, for the connection is not whole"<sup>iii</sup>

In the process of abnegating the ego, all of the realities that it perceives are rendered meaningless, as is the experience of temporality within which they manifest; there is no time in the realm of Nothing. If there is anything that "remains important", that is, that still has meaning, it is an indication that there remains an attachment to the secular world in which the past dictates the belief systems and experiences of the current reality. In the realm of the Divine, there is only being...only the moment, which is "beyond time". All that we know to be true in the physical world is a reoccurrence of a definition we established for ourselves in the past, and the future is no more than these past experiences projected onto the nothingness we have yet to encounter.

"Speech and action are within time, but thought is not within time; even though thought is also within time, in all events the supernal world as against the lower world is not within time. For example, when a person has understanding he is able to understand a thing in one moment but when he needs to recite it, he must recite it for an hour or more"<sup>iv</sup>

As will be discussed in greater detail in the second section, speech and action are secular and time – bound occurrences associated with the individuated self; the results of living in the material world. When thought is attached to those forms of matter, it is also a temporal occurrence, limited by the conditions of a past, present, and future; confined to

the repetition of acquired distinctions known from the past. In the process of abnegating the ego, these restrictions on thought are also nullified and knowledge becomes wisdom. God becomes all there is – a complete and Universal awareness that takes the place of individual cognition.

It is impossible to simultaneously cleave to God and participate in the physical world; that in itself renders a contrast, of which there is none in the act of ascension. The elevation is a liberation from the constraints of time and all of the definitions of reality it has dictated to be true. Interestingly, it is by thought that we are constantly able to connect with the Divine, for thought in and of itself is a timeless occurrence. Whatever one holds in the mind is the truth in that moment. Thought about something makes that thing exist – it is the fundamental definition of what is real. And this reality occurs without time, such that thinking about something is an instantaneous transpiration. Thinking always happens now (even if you are thinking about what you thought about before!), and as such, in the act of directing those thoughts onto something, that becomes what exists. For the most part, our thoughts are non- – directed: fractured in nature by the fact that they are concentrated on divided materials. And thus, a reality of opposition is perpetuated from moment to moment by a focus upon it, rather than concentrating on the realm in which one moment is the only moment there is. In contemplating that absence of temporality, that is what is. Think of being present and in that instant – if your concentration is undivided, that is what you will be and that is all there will be and that is the Nothingness that is God.

To understand this, and to abnegate anything that is not an indication of the spark of God contracted in what God is not means that each moment is as it is and only is; there is none

other. To cleave to the Divine requires nothing short of transcending the illusion of time and thus being present with each second to the indications of the presence of Nothingness. Recognizing that presence perpetuates itself so long as that is the focus to the full abnegation of any other thing. The act of being present engenders *dveikut* in that it is the only time that is eternal and real. It is not colored by remembered applications of contrasting meaning which is the past, nor by projected interpretations onto what will come next, rather – it is a state of awareness, of consciousness, of being that negates and ascends the realm of temporality and opposition.

"The reason why redemption comes at a time of forgetfulness is that when a person is conscious, he thinks of [various] actions by which he may be saved from his trouble, and he has not complete trust in God, may he be blessed. Therefore, he does not receive assistance from God, for God says, "as you wish to save yourself by means of your actions, I do not wish to save you, and I will see how you are able to help yourself"<sup>14</sup>

So long as we are preoccupied with the troubles in our reality, we are existing in the realm of a past that causes an inevitable, predictable and limited future. It is in the annihilation of the belief system that gives meaning to the troubles we believe we are experiencing and a turning to the Providence and clearing of the Divine that we are released from the circumstances that allow the troubles to exist as such. In thinking about the troubles, those troubles are perpetuated; in returning consciousness to the present, those thoughts are rendered meaningless – for they do not exist in the moment without the past defining them as what they are.



Choosing this moment to be as it is allows for recognizing the Divine spark within the experience; from this identification we permit the lessons to come forth through the experiences we are presently having, and in so doing, we are released from their perpetuation in the future. In abandoning the temporal realm for existence in the eternal realm we arrive at each encounter fully present, and by that release from the past we are free to choose a new experience in the future from out of our acceptance of the lessons offered in the present one. But more valuable than our ability to be at the source of the choices we make for our future is the abandonment of our own will for faith in the will of God. In our "forgetfulness" we give up our own definitions of reality that are harbored in our past understanding of the world such that we are resigned to the will and the destiny of God – as a return to boundless and infinite unity.

### III. Dveikut: Cleaving to God

As has been explained, the ultimate intention in *Bittul Hayesh* for the Hasidim was achieving a state of *dveikut*: a process by which a "close and most intimate, personal communion with God"<sup>16</sup> was intended. And while this attachment to God is always an unpredictable and undeserved state of grace that cannot be actively contrived, all of the spiritual practiced in which the Hasidim engaged sought to foster an environment in which such an experience would be more likely. As such, this desire for a cleaving to the Divine was the driving force behind all mundane action, such that each individual endeavor was elevated to the Source preceding it by the recognition of the spark within it and the abnegation of everything but that gleam. The annihilation of self and the particulars of its environment were performed solely in order to restore the individual to the Unity that inspired its distinction. This abnegation was effected within the mundane realm in addition to existing as the source of prayer; all aspects of existence in Hasidim sought to fulfill the single desire to cleave to God.

Communion was not a process relegated to the spiritual life as distinct from the physical life, rather, both the animal and divine aspects of the human soul were enveloped in *dveikut*. As such, the entirety of one's navigation through life became fostered by a single transcendental intention. The body, the mind, the language, the music, the senses, the emotions, and the forms of prayer all reflected the desire to reunite with Nothingness; all maintained the process of abnegation in doing so. The following section will elaborate on the concepts of negation, opposition, and annihilation in terms of their application in the intention of *dveikut*. Specifically, it will seek to examine how the body and emotions

were dealt with in terms of communing with the Divine, and the methods of prayer that were developed in order to foster that reunion.

***Annihilation: reaching the realm of Nothingness***

In Biblical Hebrew, the word *ayin* means both 'where' (in terms of determining the location of something) as well as 'nothing'. As such, in interpreting the statement from Job 28:12 that states "Where (meayin) is wisdom to be found", Daniel Matt explains that "the kabbalists of the thirteenth century transform this question into a mystical formula: 'Divine wisdom comes into being out of nothingness'." What the commentators were saying is that in order to truly access our deepest and most complete wisdom, we must be willing and able to return to the realm of pure and total Nothingness. It is by reconnecting with our essentially absolute and unhindered state of being that we are able to reenter the world of particulars with Divine wisdom. The condition of *ayin* is one of totality – a pure and unadulterated consciousness in which Nothing exists and therefore Everything is possible. The realm of *Ayin* is the precursor to all that is made manifest in the corporeal world. It is the potential energy that occurs before any particular thing and therefore contains all of those things within it in their latent possibility of existence.

To cleave to the Nothingness is to engage in the experience of our true nature: we are most fundamentally participants in a total and unified whole from which all is possible and everything is created. To be where there is Nothing is to return to the state of existence that precedes action, speech, thought, and distinction all together such that we

(again) become totality and infinity; this is our authentic state of being. And it is from such a return that we are allowed essential liberation from any and all of the limitations that plague us in the material realm. We are granted freedom from all of the emotional, psychological, and physical constraints that surround us when we perceive ourselves through the senses when we cleave to the *Ayin*, and allowed to return to our corporeality with a renewed and empowered ability to create what we want within it. The Maggid states that "you take the spark [of God which is considered] *yesh* [the material world], you bring it up to its source which is *ayin*, you make it into zero [and in so doing] you release it from its physical imprisonment".<sup>lvii</sup> In other words, it is in the identification of the nothingness within our illusory perceptions of matter that we are liberated from those perceptions and our attachments to them. Our transformation into the Divine occurs by our ability to develop a powerful relationship with our material; our transcendence above matter begins on one level by developing a powerful relationship with it as it is. This requires presence of being, as was discussed in the section about temporality. It also reflects the process of *tsimtsum* in that we must be looking at the matter in order to cleave to the Divine spark within it that will lift us above it. This is a challenging but powerful paradigm: something is rendered as nothing by acknowledging it to be what it is first. By resisting something to be what it is, it is given life – but by really looking at it, it disappears into *ayin*.

Nothingness presupposes meaninglessness such that all of the meanings we make of our reality are no more than what we affirm them to be. Our abnegation of self engenders the nullification of our own imposed value – a worth that we have based on our identity,

which is built by the particulars we choose to associate with our selves. The process of *dveikut* requires that we accept our identities as meaningless; we must rid ourselves of the act of interpretation that give definition to what we see. In so doing, we understand that what is is Nothing, and nothing ironically means everything.

### ***Attaching to God From Within the Physical World***

... "Have faith that in performing a mitzvah with your body ... you arouse pleasure in the Upper Worlds, causing the Holy Blessed One and the Shekhinah, joy and satisfaction. This should be your intention when performing any mitzvah...Remember: you can only bring pleasure to the Upper Worlds by first arousing passion below, that is, by experiencing your own physical pleasure."<sup>xviii</sup>

Down here on earth, we humans like salty fries with sweet ketchup, warm cookies with cold milk, and sobering coffee after intoxicating wine. We are inclined to balance polarities in all aspects of our mundane lives, and it is indeed a spiritual experience to consume a perfectly salted thick cut fried potato in just the right amount of Heinz. The process of elevation makes use of the polarities of the mundane world as the means for rising above them; this is a physiological and psychological endeavor rooted in spiritual intention. Distinct from more ascetic forms of mysticism that are found in Christian quietism and Eastern spiritual disciplines, Judaism (and specifically, Hasidic mysticism) did not find value in the denial of the physical self as a means for achieving spiritual transcendence<sup>lix</sup>. Rather it maintained an inherent value in the mundane elements of existence, teaching that the act of appropriately navigating *through* the world of material

contrasts was the process by which to access their Source. Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer explains that "one of the most widespread teachings of Hasidism from the very outset of the movement is that calling for man's worship of God by means of corporeal acts (*avodah be – gashmiyut*)"<sup>11</sup>.

הצדיק בעוה"ז ממשיך והיאצות שמעורש נשמתו בכל דבר שבעולם ומעלה אותו הנצוצות לבורא  
 ה' המזעבה הוא כלי להשכל, וכן הדיבור הוא כלי למזעבה.  
 (שם 45)

By spiritualizing the concrete world of opposition the Hasid was allowed to return to the original wholeness from which he came; through embracing the material reality he was allowed to go beyond it. Among the many Hasidic teachers that encouraged this method of dealing with the body, the Baal Shem Tov forcefully encouraged the wholehearted relish of physical activities as a means for transcending them. This notion of elevating oneself by enjoying and lifting up from within the physical was similarly affirmed by the Maggid: "when pleasure is inspired in a person from bodily activities such as eating or drinking, they can be elevated to the source"<sup>12</sup>; any and all functions of the physical world become celestial activities when the intention is a return to Unity.

הרצון לקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים בשלימות יפנה מחשבתו מהרהורים, ואפילו כשהוא אוכל ושותה ישים מחשבתו, כו'  
 שיהיה חזק לעבודתו ית'. צריך להגביר חשבו הרצוני על תאות הגשמי, ומה ית'  
 לו יותר כח מרדעיות המאכל. וזהו מה יפיה ימה נעמח אהבה בתענוגים, שיהיה לך אהבה בתענוגים.  
 (שם 66)

"[Man] has to clear his thoughts from distractions all thoughts that are not connected to the intention of *dveikut* – even when he eats and drinks the intention must be to cleave to God"<sup>13</sup>

This 're – union' with God is based on the ability to distinguish and navigate through reality – which is in effect a cognitive process of distinguishing what something is not,

such that the limitations of what it is make it a manageable commodity. Identifying the boundaries of a thing is the way in which one can determine where it ceases to exist...where it is not. And as soon as something becomes a finite article, it is a manageable one – for it is limited in its existence. It can be contained in the mind of the beholder and as such is smaller than him or her; this was the process of *avodah be-gashmiyut*: the act of using one's separate self as the way to identify its distinction from Limitlessness. The relationship with Nothingness for the Hasidim was tempered with an acknowledgement of the material reality from which that nothingness could be apprehended; it is by manipulation of the material reality that the Hasidic practitioner was able to transcend it. And inherent in this perception of reality was the idea that within all matter lies the potential energy of the Deity; trapped in the realm of the physical is the occurrence of the celestial – which is obtained through examining and participating in that material.

"Man is unable to ignore the 'cry' of the sparks imprisoned within matter; therefore, his ignoring of the realm of the concrete which is on the periphery of his life is considered an insult to the longings of the concrete to be redeemed"<sup>222</sup>

The process of *avodah be' gashmiyut*, or service in corporeality, is in effect one of identifying the elements of the Divine from an active existence within the concrete material world -- harnessing the natural and physiological impulses of opposition and transforming them into spiritual ones of unity. In order to properly engage in such service, the elements of the physical realm must be approached with the intention of balancing their contrasting occurrences. Rather than acting in the world by dealing solely

with its particulars, there is an intention of constantly recognizing and elevating the distinctions of reality as whole and united phenomena. As such, the physical self was manipulated and maintained through understanding its total interconnectedness – reflecting that state in *Olam Hayichud*. Furthermore, it engendered a process of maintaining balance in “a universe [that] can be understood as limitless pairs of opposites the source of which is unified and unchanging”<sup>lxiv</sup> To participate in Divine service through the body is to elevate its polarities to the level of Union by a “balanced interplay of [extremes] and their transformation into one another at any time”; recognizing the constant change that dictates the extremes of nature and reaching a stillness of being from accepting the process of change.

This physical maintenance of a middle place (*beinoni* in Hebrew) is driven by the intention that all polarities return to a center, from where they can be elevated; the center point in all things is resonant with the vibrations of God. In perceiving ourselves do be microcosmic reflections of the Infinite source that contains us we must exist as a unified whole within the limits of our separate existences. For, prior to our “fall” out grace (or, the ability to perceive the world as and only as unified), we were made in the Image of God – *Betzelem Elohim*. As such we occur within the realm of limitations as reflections of unity – with a center place in ourselves and all of our doings that reverberates with our essence in totality.

The only way that we can engage in an act of resonance with the Infinite is by locating that same occurrence of totality within ourselves. In order to do this, we must maintain a



state of equilibrium; one in which the body, mind, and spirit are maintained in total harmony and attended to as components of the All that we reflect and seek to cleave to. Achievement of relative health and balance in the realm of the natural world elevates us to the frequencies of the celestial world; the Divine sparks are lifted from matter in our attending to it in the right way: namely, by balancing, centering, and sanctifying the material oppositions we encounter with every moment of our lives. Furthermore, participating in corporeal action collectively can also be understood to elevate the physical to the spiritual. It is in participation with matter and with one another in the material plane that we are lifted up; all moments of bliss in this world come from achieving some sort of balance and collectivity within its environs.

"If a person is removed from corporeality, he is then divided within himself. Within himself he is attached to the Creator with great longing, while externally, within the world, he performs all physical actions, such as eating and sexual union. Within himself he is like an angel separated from corporeality, while externally he seems like an animal to those who see him."<sup>lxv</sup>

The accomplishment of transcendence occurs by engagement in, recognition of, a recollection from *within* the confines of the realm of polarity. Health and spiritual well-being come as the result of reconciling seemingly disparate internal aspects such that a state of equilibrium and center can be achieved. "To deny or repress our physical side is at best a mere subterfuge [that de-emphasizes] the importance of honest acknowledgement of our impulses we wish to change"<sup>lxvi</sup>; hence, the importance of participating in *avodah b'gashmiyut*. The Baal Shem Tov instructs that we conduct ourselves in a normal way and be in communion with [our] comrades." If we can learn to do so, we "will learn to find [the divine] in all our enjoyments, even in eating."<sup>lxvii</sup>

### ***Hilla'avut: Divine Love***

"The general rule is that a person must try with all his light to be joyful, for by nature a person is drawn toward melancholy and sadness because of the events that befall him, and all people are full of suffering. It is therefore essential that one force himself with all his strength to be joyful always and to use every means to make himself rejoice, even if he has to resort to sully things. It is true that it is also very good for a man to have a broken heart, yet this should only be in a certain hour. He should set aside an hour each day to break open his heart and pour out a speech to God...But for the rest of the day he should only be in a state of joy. For it is easier to be led into melancholy from the state of brokenheartedness than it is to stumble, God forbid, through joy so that one is led to frivolity" <sup>lviii</sup>

One of the easiest chord sequences to play on the guitar is was what is commonly known as "the blues". Fingers somehow easily find their way to the right strings for making the sort of sad, despondent melody that colors the songs of melancholy, just as the voice readily sings out a rhyme of the same expression; "the blues" all pretty much sound the same way and say the same thing. "Since my baby left me, I don't know what to do. I've never felt so all alone, my heart is torn in two...I feel so lonely, I feel so sad, I need some ice cream, life is bad." The blues are easy to play because they repeat the same thing in endless variations: that we suffer, and that the cause of our suffering is a feeling of separation from some other thing.

Our experience as individuals on earth is troubled solely by our confrontation with the limits of the world around us and our attribution of meaning onto those limitations. We

suffer when we feel that we are forced into some sort of containment – be it financial, emotional, or physical; wherever there exists a barrier to our complete freedom we experience pain. Our struggles are a result from allowing ourselves to get wrapped in the meanings we give to the particular manifestations of Nothingness. And when the pain becomes great enough – when we find that there is no solace in seeking out more in the world of material, we turn towards the spiritual: to the Boundlessness that can contain us and comfort us as nothing else can. But it is not only pain that leads us to the apprehension of God.

It is more significantly in our moments of greatest joy that we exist in the realm of Limitlessness – of Unity. When we are connected to one another in love, when we hear the sounds of music produced by individual players working as a collective unit, when we watch our favorite basketball team get it together and triumph – we feel joy. The act of uniting causes in us a sense of bliss, hope, security, and possibility – for in that unity we transcend the world of particulars, let go of the oppositions, and coexist with the God that contains us all. We experience faith, which “applies to neither the visible, comprehensible being, nor to the nothingness, invisible and incomprehensible, but rather to the nexus of nothingness and being”.<sup>lxix</sup> As well, and more essentially, we are released from the agony of containment when we accept that there is no real container. The interpretation we place on the elements of the world around us is arbitrary, and in truly accepting that everything is Nothing, and therefore inherently meaningless beyond the meaning we make, we are elevated to the blissful heavens. In the departure from the

illusions of confinement, in the understanding that there is something beyond what we allow to be real, we are granted grace and faith and bounty.

Faith is based on believing in something greater than us, something that is beyond our ability to understand (and therefore control). The Hasidim recognized that the only way out of suffering is to learn how to coexist in the realm of matter (and therefore opposition) and of God (otherwise known as Unity) by elevating the former up to the latter. Peace, wholeness, limitlessness, and meaninglessness exist in transcension of opposites; that is what the mystic is always after.<sup>lxx</sup> Our function as humans is to re-member; literally: to return to the divine gathering at our source. And this is achieved through recognizing the world of opposites in which we live and successfully negating them such as to move beyond them to the Unity that contains them both. That is the intention in all the aforementioned religious disciplines; that is what guided the Hasidim in their practices of quietism and *dveikut*<sup>lxxi</sup>, and *avodah be gashmiyut*. At the source of transcending polarities is the establishment of balance between them, and that is achieved through a physical and spiritual practice of equalization. It is in recognizing that "...there is in every human being a mixture of good and bad" <sup>lxxii</sup> that those poles can be manipulated; the illusion of the separate self is acknowledged as the point from which it can return to Ayin once it is recognized as inherently devoid of meaning.

To maintain balance in terms of the emotion means to find and maintain the middle path: the state of centered bliss that comes from existing at one's center. A balanced emotional state, as a position of corporeal equilibrium, connects us immediately to our Self as resonant with the greater Image in which we are created. Finding the space in the midst of pain and ecstasy is a sure means by which to cleave to God; it is the feeling of simple

and untainted peace that allows us to elevate ourselves effortlessly into the world of *ayin*. In Hasidism, this process of attaining emotional steadiness was a mundane act in which the primitive responses were acknowledged only with the intention of overcoming them. This was not a psychology of delving into the pain, but rather an allowance for it only as a means of navigation away from it. "Hasidism [left] no room for the importance of existential pain"<sup>lxiii</sup>; for suffering is inherently the acceptance of limitation, which is an instant departure from God. Much as the guidelines for engaging in *avodah b'gashmiyut* encouraged the savoring of physical activities as a means for transcending them, so too they required that the emotions be pleasurable as well. This notion of cleaving to God from a positive emotional state predated Hasidism. In the Gemarah<sup>lxiv</sup> it is written, "the Shechinah rests [upon man] neither in indolence nor in gloom nor in frivolity nor in levity...but only in rejoicing connected with the religious act"; God will not make Itself manifest in the presence of negative emotion or flippancy, but rather in the state of spiritual joy between them. Similarly, the Rambam (1135 – 1204) wrote that "Prophets do not prophecy whenever they desire. Instead, they must concentrate their attention [upon spiritual concepts] and seclude themselves, waiting in a happy, joyous mood..."<sup>lxv</sup>

By the time Jewish mysticism established itself, the notion of a positive emotional status as a means for achieving *dveikut* was well articulated within Judaism. Edward Hoffman writes that "perhaps the central Kabbalistic premise concerning our health is that it is a positive state of well – being, not merely the absence of gross disease. Well – being is an active condition, encompassing such mental qualities as clear thought, a sense of purpose in life, and an openness to higher experience."

כשתפלל במקום שיש דברים בטלים, אם הם דיבורים של שמחה או יכול להעלותם, ומכאן  
שמעלה אותם יש שכרה גדולה למעלה, ותולד בו התלוצכות גדולה. ואם הדברים של עצבות קשה  
להעלותם, ישם כל מחשבתו בכה הציבות שהוא מדבר עד שיראה האורח של הדיבות ואז  
מתרצץ' זה בזה, ומתוכך נולדים כמה אורות.  
(עמ' 47)

Hasidism capitalized and fine – tuned this Kabbalistic precept by dictating that it is through a sense of balanced emotion that one can effectively attain spiritual communion. Feelings of sadness prohibit the worship of God in that they do not resonate with that presence and they perpetuate the illusion of being stuck in the limited realms of polarity. Negative emotion is “the hidden enemy of the real mystic”<sup>lxxvi</sup> in that it prevents access to the state of center that is Divine. As such, Hasidism dictates that there is an obligation to maintain a state of joy on our part and to offer up prayer from this state alone. The Maggid explains that “words of sadness are difficult to elevate in prayer”<sup>lxxvii</sup> and that “worries ... distract man from essentials and prevent him from serving God.” Emotions that are not resonant with the spiritual realm are to be examined, acknowledged, and swiftly repolarized with the intention of canceling out their extremes for the central experiences of Unity that occur between them. As with the encountering of all mundane experience, one’s feelings are to be manipulated by active negation -- recognizing what we are feeling as distinct from what is the experience of God, so that we can activate the sparks within that contradiction and initiate a conscious return to our true and joyful nature. We must capitalize on the experience of *oneg*, or pleasure, as the vehicle for elevation back to the creator.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

To be clear, there is a distinction in the achievement of *dveikut* from an emotional stance of bliss and stillness, and the positive feelings of ecstasy or rapture; the Hasidim are

prescribing the former. The latter state of positive emotion is an extreme one – one that we are obsessed with attaining and maintaining at the cost of our true well – being. We have misconstrued euphoria for bliss such that we are constantly seeking to sustain those moments of climax at the cost of our own true state of existence. We live in a society that prizes peak experiences, intense pleasure, and manic happiness while equally shunning depression, despair, and melancholy. We find shame and ugliness in the latter, but inevitably commit ourselves to experiences of that nature by remaining obsessed with sustaining the former; we must release our addictions to the highs in order to be liberated from the lows; it is in the silent middle that authentic joy can be fostered and retained. And while this middle path is always the intention for the spiritual practitioner, it is not by means of denial that it is achieved for the Hasidic mystic any more than asceticism is the means by which transcendence is reached by the body. We are not to ignore our suffering, but rather to confront it such that we might cleave to the spark of light within it and transform it back to Nothingness.

Rather than repressing our sadness, we are to seek out the divinity occurring dormant within it, and as the Maggid instructs “bring it up to its source in *ayin* ...back to zero [so that you] release it from its material chains of captivity.” He further explains that, “sometimes the man comes to places that are depressed and disgusting, and they appear this way because he needs to go down in order to elevate the sparks from within such places into the upper worlds.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> Our confrontation with suffering and darkness is the means by which we can actively return those illusory and limited phenomena to the Light. It is our gift and our ultimate purpose as humans, according to the Maggid, to elevate the experiences of darkness back up to the light; our shadows are the vehicle for

return to God and should therefore be embraced with courage and acceptance as a Divine gift. The state of bliss is not achieved through Prozac or denial, but rather by actively lifting ourselves out of the confines of our perceived states of pain; the descent makes the ascent possible.

The key in transcending emotions of pain in Hasidic mysticism lies in the *kavanah* – the intention – behind confronting those emotions. So long as we intend to cleave to God, we are granted an escape from suffering. And this act of *dveikut* inspires us not only to recognize the elements of light within our perceptions of darkness, but to do so through rendering those perceptions as Nothing. Upsets are in all forms acceptances of the illusion of limitation that disrupt our peace of mind, and they are real only so long as we allow ourselves to believe in the meaning we have attributed to them. By maintaining the *kavanah* of cleaving to Nothingness, we are forced to look upon the world of meaning as a series of arbitrary definitions that we allow to impact our centered state of being. In our act of elevation, we are forced to accept that our sadness is Nothing, instigated by Nothing, resulting in Nothing; emotion is energy put in motion by the interpretations we choose to make about our experiences in the mundane world. Once we exit that realm of illusion we are freed from the meanings to which we have given power; in the apprehension of total negation, our upsets are no longer upsetting because something cannot exist in the world of Nothing.

From cleaving to God we are returned to the element that precedes all thought, all experience, all emotion; we occur for ourselves as infinite and peaceful possibilities with the freedom and power to attribute whatever interpretations we choose onto the imaginary physical world we have risen from. We are granted instant liberation from the



boundaries of emotion such that we no longer allow them to dictate our existence. This is the definition of *hitlaavut* – we are caused to become love by our cleaving to the Source. Love is the emotion that occurs as complete, all – expansive, safe, ever – flowing, peaceful, and pure. We reach it through becoming it in the negation of anything less than it; we think of our sorrow as nothing and in that instant we are elevated.

Our emotions are not only the means by which we can access and maintain the presence of the Divine in our lives; they are also the most available indicators of whether or not that experience of *hitlaavut* is accessible through the actions we are taking. The concept of a 'gut feeling' is given much less importance than it deserves in our systems of action. What we instinctively feel about something is the quickest and most untainted indicator of whether or not we are resonating with our highest (and therefore God's highest) intentions. While the nuances of feeling are specific to the situations in which they occur, at the base of each response will exist either an emotion that is positive and resonant or uncomfortable; discomfort is an indication of something against the Divine energy. Negative emotion coexists with experiences of separation, isolation, lack, and thus withdrawal from the Unity. It indicates that the choice is not in harmony with the Source of all being, and as such, will perpetuate more of that negativity if it is allowed to persist in the actions we take.

Our feelings are thus first and foremost the way by which we can recognize if we are existing with the intentions of *dveikut* or of trying to satiate the insatiable ego that veils our access to God. The *shema* and *ve'ahavta* instruct us in the process of elevating ourselves to the realm of the Divine. We are told to listen; to pay attention -- to examine the feelings in the heart, and the soul and the mind and let them be resonant with the love

that emanates from cleaving to the Infinite. Vibrations and emotions that in any way contradict total Unity indicate to us that we must examine those phenomena closely to find their meaninglessness and the spark of the Eternal lying dormant captive in their confines. We maintain the intention of cleaving to God such that our mundane experiences dictate that constant reunion. If it doesn't feel like love, it is a sign that we must bring our intention of love into that experience and elevate it to where it feels right again. So long as we keep our *kavanah* we are free, and life presents itself *benoni* – in the middle or center space that is recognized as the place from which “each moment is filled with splendor.”<sup>lxxx</sup> By resonating in the loving frequency of the Divine we have the capacity to attract that energy into all of our secular endeavors, transforming them into spiritual acts; it is by our seeking out the vibrations of love that we are transported out of suffering.

Much research has been done in the field of psychology on the ways in which to change one's state of emotion. While most prominently, we hear about the use of medications as a means for helping the millions who suffer from a lack of well – being to return to a state of 'center', other methods for feeling good have been documented as successful. One of these is based on the premise of “faking it 'till you make it””; it has been observed that by forcing oneself to smile when feeling sadness or by participating in other actions that occur as contrary to the negative state of affect that one is feeling, a return to happiness occurs. Sometimes, inducing a shift in physiology or environment is sufficient to alter one's mood; by harnessing the intention to lift out of a space of suffering, that energy is pulled into the realm of emotions until it shifts them into a better frequency.<sup>lxxxi</sup> The Hasidim followed this method of shifting emotions; Nachman of Breslav stated that

at times one's "enthusiasm may be forced at first, but it will eventually become real...always be joyful, no matter what you are. If you have no enthusiasm, put on a front. Act enthusiastic and the feeling will become genuine"<sup>lxxxii</sup>, Schneur Zalman of Liady "often remarked that activity is the only way to deal with depression"<sup>lxxxiii</sup> and the Maggid similarly explains that, "in order to create excitement during prayer there is a need to have several attempts or preparations to concentrate before the prayer itself induces [that emotion]". The means by which to cleave to God is in the attainment of a positive emotive station, and one can induce this feeling by right intention and by invalidating negativity with actions that induce its opposite.

### *Thought, Speech, and Action*

Even though in [in the supernal world] God is love and *tsimtsum* all in one minute, in the word of matter [literally, 'doing' -- *olam haasiyah*], vessels are required. Because according to the [nature of the] worlds, the upper world is simple unity. But in the lower world there appears to be [some] division [or separation] ...[an example]: the thought is in one heart only, [but when that] thought wants to reveal itself [into the secular world], it needs voice and speech -- several different utensils -- and then moves from speech to action. [With this transition], the divisions [of the secular world] are even more [acutely] demonstrated. [However], the enlightened man does not create separation in the lower world because he sees that the entire size and aliveness of the lower world comes from the upper one, [and] that without God's upper world the lower world would be absolutely nothing.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

As was explained in the previous section, the world of God, which is the world of thought all, occurs in and only in "one minute". The abnegation of the self and the disparate thoughts that preoccupy that ego creates a clearing for the unity of thought and presence of being in the experience of cleaving to God. That realm occurs in opposition to the material realm, in which the "vessels" of particularity occur. Voice, speech, and action

are exponentially more substantial reflections of the world of separation; they are the tools by which we interact with the physical world – the means by which we participate in *avodah b' gashmiyut*. Communication 'up there' is instantaneous understanding – that is the nature of thought – such that it is telepathic: unhindered by the elements of time and material that obstruct it on earth. Down here, we require the divided and temporally – bound vessels of speech and action in order to affirm the divisions we encounter. The Maggid is conveying that our thoughts are increasingly divided by our applying secular language to them, and then acting upon what we have affirmed them to mean. In negating their particularity, however, and rechanneling action and speech back to an undivided thought, all of these mundane distinctions become *ayin* once again; communion with God is achieved.

"Thought is letters; that is, whatever [a person] may think in any matter, is all in letters, so it is clear, that there cannot be but one thought. That is to say, a person is unable to think two thoughts simultaneously, or two thoughts in one...thought is the world of pleasure"<sup>xxxv</sup>

Our thoughts manifest themselves in language. The letters of this language have their source in the realm of the Divine as the prototypes of creation in the world of the particulars. If they are applied solely to that mundane world, they will exhibit the divisions inherent in it; if, however, they are maintained by their infinite source, they take on a pristine and Divine nature by which they remain attached to the world of unity. And with that attachment, they perpetuate thoughts of the same nature, thoughts that resonate with the Creator. As such, "there can only be one thought", the thought of the Infinite. Any other thought is inherently divided and therefore relegated to the realm of the physical – which separates the thinker from God.

All we have is what we think, with the language that these thoughts perpetuate creating what we understand to be real, and it is in our power to think from within the "world of pleasure" by maintaining the single cerebral focus of unity within our minds. And this opportunity presents itself within every divided thought that occurs to us: for it is not possible to maintain that concentration on division if the thought is transferred to its opposite; "a person is unable to think two thoughts simultaneously". As such, a concept of boundlessness will organically abnegate any musings on limitation; contemplation of pleasure will eliminate displeasure instantaneously. And through this refined method of cognition, the mundane world is transformed as well. Action will reflect the speech that embodies the letters of the thoughts of God such that they will also resonate with that infinite pleasure; mundane existence can be transformed by the thoughts through which we act in it.

### *Kavanot and Mitzvot: the Intentions of Hasidic Spiritual Practice*

ונאמר בו למרב הדבר אל השכל ואיך כל דיבור מוכרח להיות בן שם הדיבור, כי הלא ידוע כי את  
 יו"ד היא חכמה והיא מחשבה, והנה על המחשבה מוטרה הוא שיש עליה שכל עליה יותר גבוה  
 שהמחשבה מקבלת ממנו כחבר בדרושים הקדושים. ולקדב אל השכל יותר נאמר כי הנה ידוע  
 שהמחשבה טבעה היא עיונית, למשל האדם מחשב מחשבות תמיד ומחשבתו מתפזרת בכל מקום,  
 ובכל דבר שדאדם יראה איתו הוא מחשב בו, ואף שאינו רואה אותה כעת היא מחשב בו מאוחר  
 שכבר ראה, אי מחשב באיזה דבר יד, מה שיהי, כלל של דבר שאין מחשבת האדם פני' רק  
 מתנועעת ומתפזרת ממחשבה למחשבה בתמידות כי כך טבעה. והנה אם צריך האדם לחשב  
 בדבר אחד הנכרח לו, והנה צריך האדם ההוא לצמצם מחשבתו בצמצום גדול שלא יחשוב שום  
 מחשבה אחרת זולת ההכרחי לו. כי אם לא כן יבולבל מחשבתו ולא יגמור מחשב' ההכרחי לו.  
 למשל האדם המעין הוא מחשב בהלכה הוא מחשב זמן רב, ואח"כ כאשר בא לו השכל והבנה,  
 ולמה הוא כך, מפני שמחשבה עדיין לא צמצם מחשבתו היטב, ואח"כ כאשר בא אליו השכל העליון  
 ואפשר לו שיהא הקץ של יו"ד העליון שהוא המצמצם את הדיבור שהיא המחשבה שלא תפנה אנה  
 ואנה, ואז תיכף כאשר בא השכל הוא מיד נתגלה לו קצת בדרך כללות הדרך אשר ילך בה,  
 ואשר יבין מתוכה פרטיות הדברים אשר נתקשה בהם, תעדיין אינו יכול לסדר דבר דבור על  
 איפניו. והנה ידוע כי בבוא אל באדם התגללות ההוא יש לאדם תענוג גדול ושמחה גדולה מאוד,  
 וזה מורה שבה בעולם עליה גבוה מאוד ולמה התענוג והשמחה, לאחר כך מחשב האדם בפרטיות לסדר  
 הדברים ולשבו כל אור"א על מקומו.  
 (עמוד 302)

"Man has to have *sechel elyon* [a higher consciousness], which is transcendent of thought, such that the thoughts [he has] receive instruction from [that higher consciousness]. Man constantly thinks, and his thoughts spread everywhere. A thought is applied to everything a person sees, and even when he doesn't see [something] he applies his thoughts about what he has seen, or thinks about what will happen. Thus, the problem is that the person's thoughts are divided from one thought to another; this is their nature. And so, when the person needs to think about one important thing, he needs to intensely concentrate [*letsamtsem*] his thoughts until he thinks no thought other than what is the most important. In the moment he is able to contract his thoughts such that they don't move back and forth, higher consciousness immediately arrives and shows the path along which he should travel. The moment this revelation comes to the person, there is a deep pleasure and enormous happiness [which results from his having] arrived to a superior realm: the realm of spiritual pleasure. [And once this happens] the man can arrange all his thoughts and create order in them and put everything in its place. <sup>דברים</sup>

Descartes' famous statement, "I think, therefore I am" succinctly acknowledges the fact that the individuated self is a thinking being; thought is the basis of our knowing our own existences. In the process of having a thought, a distinction is made – as such, our mental faculties provide us with the world of opposition in which we participate. Our reflections on reality are the product of our ego, and they affirm the existence of something through the process of objectively identifying it. Thoughts are the formations of our existence, "divided from one another" because they reflect a world of division and separation; a reality that is temporal and limited and perpetuated as such by the disorder of their occurrences. Oppositions and limitations occur for us as real through the course of thinking about something solely in its material context, speaking about this thought, and then interacting with what was articulated to be what it is. In short, our processes of creation consist of thinking, speaking, and acting (known in Hebrew as the stages of *mahshavah, dibbur, and asiyah*). When relegated to the confines of the physical world, they tend to repeat for us what we have already known, affirmed and accepted to be true before, and thus lead to a sense of incarceration and upset. But thought that is

concentrated to a miniscule focal point such that its occurrence in the mundane realm is all but abnegated leads to an entirely new realm of cognition: the Universal Consciousness. In denial of the particulars of an external reality, thinking is converted into knowing, speaking is transformed into channeling, action is replaced by being; this *dveikut* is freedom and endless possibility, which is most readily achieved through prayer.

Rivka Shatz Uffenheimer explains that "the origins of prayer lie in the conflict with the external world, known as 'evil thoughts.' Prayer requires a great effort of concentration if man is to overcome the tendency for his consciousness to be permeated by the plentitude of exterior reality."<sup>lxxxvii</sup> This concentration, the contraction of thought, is the intention of Hasidic prayer. In the renunciation of thought, the perceptions of reality are rendered meaningless and the soul is returned joyfully and powerfully to its Source. Each instant that we exist in the material world has within it the potential to occur as a transcendent one if the right intention is maintained. However, as much as the Hasidim acknowledged the presence of the Divine in all mundane activity, it was in the act of prayer that they identified the most deliberate means by which to cleave to God. In the process of channeling our thoughts and words to the Source, we become love – we exist as consciousness. Thought is abnegated because there is no thinker to comprehend it; reflection back on it is the only possibility.

But this method of prayer is distinct from the petitionary and materially based supplications of mainstream Judaism. The sole intention in Hasidism is *dveikut*; a union through which all secular wants are at once annihilated and at the same time made totally accessible by a return to the origin of creation. The Maggid explains that "the way to unite with God is through *hitlaavut* in prayer"<sup>lxxxviii</sup>. This process is one in which the

emotion of love is induced such that the Divine can be accessed – with that feeling sustained through the resulting union. This form of prayer differs both in intention and practice from those of traditional Judaism in that it is focused on a personal and total communion with the Divine. To repeat, the *kavanah* of Hasidic prayer was in the process of transforming the preoccupations of the mental and physical being through an act of focus that silenced those distractions. It is the practice of consciously redirecting one's thoughts (which are illusions of a material reality) onto a space of nothingness by means of concentration on a single image, word, or sound. Through this type of prayer, the mental and physical being is disarmed of its hold on the individual such that a state of relaxation and the ability to overcome all obstructions that divert the attention within the mundane realm can occur, such that attachment to the limitations of material world is renounced.

While conventional Judaism placed a focus on group prayer as an occurrence within and reflective of the corporeal world as “the focal point of religious activism”<sup>1000x</sup>, its mystical side adopted a quietistic approach. The deliberate and centrally verbal act of supplication became reorganized in Jewish Mysticism such that the focus was on self – abnegation, resignation and a withdrawal from out of the urges of the material world into the application of the numinous self. Building on early practices of Kabbalah, Hasidism sought to capture and heighten the self by means of abjuring the attachments to the physical universe, such that a blissful merger with God could be attained. This distinction between the primitive and spiritual state of being by a renunciation of the former was the means for release from the world of conflict into a state of blessed *dveikut*. Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzatto stated that “The Highest Wisdom decreed that a



man should consist of two opposites ...in a constant state of battle"<sup>xx</sup> That struggle and the upset it causes is overcome by elevation above the combat area – a process brought about through the practices of Hasidic prayer.

The intention for the Hasidim in achieving *dveikut* required a method of entreaty that brought in the apprehension of Nothingness. As such, petitionary prayers (or *bakashot*) were of no great use to them. Rabbi Joseph Solveitchik stated that "*bakasha* is this-worldly and democratic; Jews are sensitized by Halacha to become constantly aware of their need for God's assistance". In other words, the petitionary - type prayer is in effect a method by which to strengthen people's dependence on a force outside themselves as a means for achieving sustenance in their mundane reality. Daniel Landes further defines Halacha as prayer that is "petitionary in its very essence", [affirming]" human beings in all our neediness and the capacity of God to hear our petitions and to act upon them."(5). When the intention exists in the perpetuation of material success and submission before an external Godhead, the use of petition is appropriate; these are the driving forces of traditional Judaism. However, when one is seeking to ascend beyond the mundane world in a communion with God, prayer in the form of request is an antithetical process. Not only does it solidify the importance of the ego and all of its illusory distractions of a world of conflict and separation, but it solicits attention towards exactly what God is not – perpetuating a focus that contradicts the very Source to which we are supposed to be directing our prayers!

"And so he ought to do by way of petition, when he requests and prays for some lack, let it not be except in concern of the arousal of prayer and ascent and *dveikut*. But after he is aroused, he should cling to the source, that his desire to attain the lack be nullified, he too desires naught save that which is necessary [i.e. the basic things needed for existence]. Then, when he approaches his root, the hidden light influences him from within, and the lack is automatically filled." <sup>xxi</sup>

Petitionary prayer promotes a concentration on opposition (of what we have and what we want, of who we are versus our enemies, of the self and God...) and lack – a concept that only exists within the realms of the material world. Alternatively, prayers of a meditative and contemplative nature allow for ascension through a negation of all contrasting elements of 'reality' such that the truth of a unified and infinite Nothingness is experienced. Ironically, it is through this second method of communing with the Divine that we are more likely to overcome our suffering and fulfill our material desires; this topic will be explored in more detail later. Hasidic prayer is in short the annihilation of all thoughts by which we are able to apprehend Nothing. It is the spiritual discipline of negative theology, in which all that presents itself in the experience of the practitioner is annulled such that the silence behind it comes through.

As was previously stated, there are several ways in which to quiet the mind, and thus redirect the thoughts, through prayer. The first is to repeat a word, phrase<sup>xii</sup>, or series of phrases, the second is through a concentration on a specific sound, tone or melody, and the last is to focus on an image of some sort. All of these methods maintain the intention of drawing one's attention into an immediate attendance so that all of the thoughts and the behaviors and material obsessions perpetuated by those thoughts are actively dismissed. In so doing, these preoccupations are rendered meaningless; we harness the element of the witness within ourselves: that aspect to us that can observe and annihilate all of phenomena that come to distract us from a point of focus and presence. Prayers of this nature strengthen the element of a neutral observant (which is our Divine self; the spark within us that can cleave to God) that can recognize our thoughts as not us, our

possessions as not us, our emotions as not us, our physical form as not us. It is an observation of thought; thinking according to the Hasidic explanation, is the vehicle of creation. By sitting in attendance of the ego's internal dialogue, statements such as "I am frightened" are shifted to "I am having an experience of fear – but it is not who I am". From such observations and the concentration on a focal point away from them, they are displayed in their limited and illusory occurrences. From recognizing the boundary of an aspect of the material plane, it becomes smaller than the self that is recognizing it. From applying the notion that these things mean nothing, they become powerless circumstances over which we have the capacity to abnegate and transcend.

In Hasidism, the act of prayer was one in which divided human thought gathered its illusory particulars and negated them such as to return the cognition behind them back to its source. But, as is seen in the previous example, thought manifests itself for we humans as language, and as such, the element of speech must be harnessed in the process of reaching *dveikut* along with thought. The process of Hasidic prayer consisted of two stages: namely, speech and thought, and as was mentioned earlier, the former affirms the latter as a reality. If I see a flat plank of wood attached to four upright bars and call it a "table", that is what it is, and I will likely place dishes and food on it. If, however, I see this same object and say that it is a bed, I would proceed to lie on it. In my speaking of the object I declare its meaning for me and that definition becomes true in my saying so; the words transform my thoughts into being and I will interact with that thing according to what I say it means. The letters that compose the words of language are the source of existence made manifest, and were thus the starting point of contemplation during prayer;

in redirecting speech to God, the mundane reality is made void and the Divine is made manifest.

"Just like the whole of creation is the result of God's speech, so too the children of Israel can elevate through their speech the first spark of that occasion"<sup>xciii</sup>

Prayer with the intention of *dveikut* is an invocation of Nothing; of meaninglessness. It is a practice through which a return to that which precedes all thought, speech, and action can be achieved; a return to the Ein Sof that is nothing but the experience of boundlessness. In this realm of the Infinite, there are no words; language emanates from It, but does not yet exist within the primal Nothingness. As such, the use of speech in the process of cleaving to God is only applicable so long as it is directed towards that Source, and in the actual communion there is a primordial silence. The Maggid instructs that speech be used as a mechanism from the lower world by which to ascend to the Universal Consciousness (*leha'alot olam hadibur beolam hamachshava*) and cleave to it.<sup>xciv</sup>

Language came forth from God as the mode of Its creating the lower world and is the sole means by which we have reality; all of which we know to be exists in and only in the fact that we affirm it by our words to be true. Truth lives only in language; nothing exists until it is affirmed to be through the declaration of it as such. Speech as the instrument of disparate being began with God's saying "let there be light" – to which the occurrence of light became manifest – and repeats itself with every word we, in Its image, utter; there is no thing that is inherently that thing without our verbalizing it to be such. Our access to the mundane world relies solely on the use of language; our speech is the means by which we affirm and then distinguish between the materials of reality – it is the means by which we impose boundaries on the particulars within the Plurality. And without the use of

language, there is no access to defining or knowing something to be what it is; it is no thing without the ability to say that it is some thing. As such, in the process of redirecting speech back to the realm of the Divine, we redefine our perceptions of reality; with words that are rooted in their Source, the language that we utter becomes a dialect of Unity and love from which a reality of sustenance and wholeness are affirmed. In the use of language with the intention of *dveikut*, the words – and the very letters that compose them -- have the capacity to provoke that state of union.

Speech is the life force within you, and this vitality comes from God. Thus, when you speak "good speech," your words ascend on high and stir the Supernal Speech. This, in turn, causes further vitality to flow downward to you. If, however, you say something negative, the life force will depart from you and ascend, leaving you severely weakened.<sup>xv</sup>

Speech in the form of prayer incapacitates the ego and dematerializes the reality it dictates; the Maggid writes that with the utterance of *adonai sefatai tiftach*, "the Shechina enters us and the *ani* disappears."<sup>xvi</sup> In other words, by devoting the lips of our physical selves to the Nothingness, It opens them and speaks Its essence through them such that the individuated ego is annihilated in the process. In this abnegation, language as a means of distinguishing the contrasts of the terrestrial realm is rendered meaningless, as are its distinctions. Rather, "the man's speech when he is in the *ayin* is not conscious talk; it is not rational or common [i.e. mundane]"<sup>xvii</sup>. *Dveikut* causes language to become channeled by that which encompasses us out of our mouths, and gives us the possibility for reapplying meaning onto our reality by first rendering it as meaningless. In our returning our words to their Source, we negate the definitions that they put forth

for us; we reunite with the essence of creation and as such are given the liberty to recreate from out of our act of annihilation.

“...I have seen great zaddikim who were joining themselves to the higher worlds and were stripped of their bodily garments – and the shechinah rested upon them and spoke out of their throats. Their mouths spoke prophecies and told of the future. Afterwards those zaddikim themselves did not know what they had said because they had been joined to the higher worlds and the Shechinah had been speaking out of their throats.”<sup>xcviii</sup>

The point between human speech and Divine language is accessed by repetition of a word or series of words with the intention of cleaving to God; this use of language existed in the Hasidic endeavor for *dveikut* in the “ascent of the human soul to the divine realm through intense repetitive prayer”<sup>xcix</sup>. The act of repetition of a given phrase, word, or sound is a powerful method of contemplative prayer. In the process of concentrating on this reiteration, the preoccupation with external matter is arrested; all distracting thoughts reflective of the physical world are annihilated by means of taking the focus off of them. In bringing all attention to a repetitive saying, which in itself is meaningless outside of its use as a point of convergence, the illusory concepts of the mundane world are rendered powerless in that they are abnegated from the mind. The power of the word as the vehicle of creation is transferred from the process of differentiation and materialization to collation and elevation. By shifting one’s thoughts away from terrestrial particulars, those occurrences are rendered meaningless; they are demonstrated to be nothing in the ability to eliminate them from the mind. In their stead, speech becomes a refinement of the Divine presence; language is uttered from out of our mouths that comes from the

unified source that we have attached ourselves to, we become channels of the Shechinah and our egos are washed away by that stream.

Speech as contemplative prayer means that the intention of the language is directed towards being Nothing, such that vocalization in the act of prayer is a process of negating the world of particulars. But *dveikut* is also achieved by a meditation on language that precedes speech: that of visualization of the letters. Here, the objective is to direct oneself to a single point of concentration such that all superfluous thoughts, emotions, and sensations are annihilated. Rising above the physical realm means transcending the *yetzarim* – or inclinations – that tempt and distract the individuated self from Divine union. Bringing full attention to the Hebrew letters is a powerful method for achieving *dveikut*. The Maggid teaches that “we can overcome the *yetzarim* [the physical urges] by looking and concentrating on the letters; this brings to forgetting the body.”<sup>57</sup> Attaching to the Universal Consciousness or the “World of Thought” can be invoked by meditating on the letters – the building blocks of what is – that emanate from that world.

Contemplating the “letters of thought” to the extent that all other sensory and cognitive stimuli are nullified by that contemplation is a powerful means for returning to Unity. Unlike the act of repetitive language, which rechannels a product of mundane existence (namely, words as the means by which we identify the particulars around us) back to its Source, visual contemplation brings about abnegation from a focus on “the pre –existence of intellect”, or *Kadmut hasechel*.<sup>58</sup> The letters are the templates for substance, the elements of creation; the mode of expansion that comes forth from the *tsimtsum* in which

God contracted itself. They are used in the process of *dveikut* visually, auditorily, and contemplatively. Hasidic prayer applies the use of letters in passing through the first stage of *dibbur*, in which they are maintained as a point of visual focus until their silhouettes become blurred and their definitive occurrences are obscured to the eye. As the letters themselves lose their separate presentation for the observer, so too does the sense of distinction that they affirmed to be true disappear, at which point "the verbal recitation of prayer becomes automatic. Man continues to recite the prayers until an awesome stillness descends upon him, and his thought ceases to function in particulars; he establishes a connection with the divine 'World of Thought', which functions simultaneously on transcendent and immanent perceptible levels."<sup>ci</sup> This stillness abnegates all physical and emotional preoccupations, and that nullification occurs through focusing not on the prayer, but the letters that compose them. In this way, the prayer exists as the "medium"<sup>cii</sup> for accessing God.

The words of sadness are difficult to elevate [in prayer], [but if] we really contemplate the actual letters ... God comes out of the letters through the prayer itself."<sup>ci</sup>

The act of visualizing the letters as a part of prayer has its roots in early Kabbalah. In the *Sefer Yetzirah* (dated between the third and sixth centuries CE), the Hebrew aleph – bet along with the ten primary numbers are identified as the circuits of Divine energy that inspire the entire universe. Each letter relates to a different primordial element of the creative force, and by bringing the attention to one of them such that all other thoughts are nullified, it becomes a vehicle of return to the source from which it originates. Meditating on the letters and on combinations of them (which worked to bring forth



particular streams of Divine energy) continued as a practice in later Kabbalah. Abraham Abulafia developed an entire system of contemplation based on the apprehension of the letters, and mystics such as Isaac Luria and Chaim Vital in Safed also used concentration on the letters in practices such as *yeichudim*, during which the letters were reformulated such as to create new words, upon which the practitioner would meditate until all else was annihilated. Visualization as a means for cleaving to God also made use of characters other than letters – such as the sefirotic tree of life. Regardless of the focus of meditation, so long as it effectively renounced the mundane world of particulars, it fulfilled the intention of ascending to the realm of the Divine.

“You will whirl the letters front and back and create many melodies. One should begin comfortably, and then, hurrying, train himself so that he becomes very accomplished in the art, familiar with all the changes and combinations.”<sup>107</sup>

Incorporating both speech and visualization, the use of music as a practice for cleaving to God is an ancient one that the Hasidim made central to their worship. Sound and music have always been utilized as a means for achieving spiritual transcendence; they capitalize on the essence of our nature as communicative beings. As has been mentioned, as far back as the first verses of the bible, God is described as having *spoken* the world into creation; it is through the word in its articulation that creation did, and continues to occur. And at the essence of this word are the vibrations it produces; sound is always transformational. Other cultural disciplines affirm this idea; the Gospels state that “in the beginning there was the word”, and in Greek the word *logos* means both word and sound. The two are inextricably linked as the fundamentals of our conscious existence;

the word distinguishes us as human and allows for the ability to create and exist in reality. Sound is harnessed in our speech as the channel for creation, and it is through making and listening to sound that we are elevated to a conscious and participatory experience. But, sound is not only the means by which we create our reality, it is also a way by which we can transcend it. Sound produced us, and we, in turn, produce sound. Remembering this can inspire us to apply this essential tool to our spiritual evolution in many manifestations.

People have long recognized the power of music as a pedagogical vehicle as well as a stimulus for spiritual and physical inspiration. The Talmud records that the oral law used to be taught by singing the words, thereby making it easier for the students to memorize the texts. The Bible records that when King Saul was in a foul mood, and no one could get through to him, his advisors hired a music therapist, the shepherd David son of Jesse, who played such entrancing harp music that the king snapped out of his depression.

Modern therapists are quite familiar with the multifaceted power of music. Studies have demonstrated that music with a pulse of 60 beats per minute can shift consciousness from beta to alpha range, and certain forms of drumming can induce the theta range. As well, it has been observed that autistic children can communicate with melodies but not with speech, and that people who stutter when speaking never stumble when singing those very same words. Other recent studies exhibited that expectant mothers who used music as a relaxation cue required less medication during labor and delivery and went through an average two hours less labor than the control group; a group of 153 premature infants that had Brahms' "Lullaby" piped in underneath their incubators six times a day gained

weight faster and were discharged an average of one week sooner than the control group, and college students who listened to Mozart saw a significant jump in their IQ scores<sup>cvi</sup>.

If he shall praise with [his] voice he is more likely to bring pleasure to the soul and lead it to the Holy Spirit, as it is said, "with nevel and tof and halil and kinor before them, and they shall prophecy" [Sam. 10:5], and so also in the matter of Elisha [IIKings 3:15] "but now bring me a minstrel". You likewise find that in the Eternal House [the temple] they played and performed upon musical instruments. You know their saying, "the most important music was by means of instruments." Although some said, "the most important music was vocal" it was all through the enunciation of sound alone, rising and falling. The main intention was to arouse the soul to make use of all its glorious power, which is the power of intellectual attainment.<sup>cvi</sup>

It has already been discussed that for the Hasidim, the intention in all of their mundane and spiritual action was to attain a state of *dveikut*; the previous text documents some of the history that contributed to the practices of this later strain of Jewish mysticism. In the process of cleaving to God, the annihilation of all preoccupations with the material world was required, and the induction of an emotional frequency that resonated with the Source was also necessary. In that "vibrating sounds form patterns and create energy fields of resonance and movement in the surrounding space"<sup>cvi</sup>, the use of sound as a means for attaining the state for elevation and union to the *ayin* was a powerful one. The intention in *dveikut* is to raise the elements of the world of opposition to that of Unity – such that the animal soul of our individual selves is elevated to the divine soul with which we coexist; music was one method by which the Hasidim sought to accomplish this. Ellen Koskoff explains that this process of cleaving to God was achieved in Hasidism by four stages of musical action<sup>cix</sup>. The first sought to rouse the *kavanah*, or intention in the practitioner during which a particular *niggun* (a wordless melody) was initiated. The second step worked to "mesmerize the animal soul" by introspection and physical gestures that corresponded with the melody. Thirdly, a "separation of souls" occurred

through effort on behalf of the practitioner, with "extraordinary musical gestures [such as] wild bodily movements, screaming, and drinking" accompanying that work. And finally, a "union with *dveikut*" was achieved, with a complete absorption into that realm of Nothingness demonstrated by "swooning and unconsciousness".<sup>cx</sup>

In that the act of *dveikut* requires a state of emotional bliss, the value of choosing an appropriate melody for meditation is defined by its ability to arouse such feelings in the singer. The Hasidim have thus been known to use anything (even the melody of a Pepsi commercial!) as a tune, so long as it is effective in inducing a state of delightful communion with the Divine. By focusing oneself on a melody and engaging the body through singing and movement, all preoccupations of the world of contrasts are nullified; a focus is achieved and the spirit is allowed a space for elevation. Don Campbell says that "listening absorbs an average of 55 % of our daily communication time, speaking 23%, and reading 13%."<sup>cx</sup> Any means by which we choose to rechannel these acts of mundane activity to God allows them to become meditative processes; that sound is most prevalent in our physical engagements indicates its usefulness as a tool for spiritual elevation. To that end, meditation by means of music seems a most efficient way of attaining *dveikut*.

#### IV. Conclusion

##### *Making Something from Nothing*

Isaac of Akko dreams that he sees 'a curse against the rebels who believe in only Ein Sof...and neither pray nor bless, for they say, 'What need does He have for our prayers? What benefit can he derive from our blessings?'<sup>cxiii</sup>

Daniel Matt points out that some kabbalists found the act of engagement in a totally negative theology to be an issue in relating to God<sup>cxiii</sup>. While the experience of confronting God's nothingness --of releasing all conceptions and boundaries of limitation from the self and the surrounding universe -- can be profoundly liberating, it is can also occur as a frightening and dysfunctional phenomenon. The experience of transcendence is a temporary one at best; the encounter with Ayin is not one that allows a person to function in his or her (illusory) reality. In the annihilation of all conceptions of God, all meaning, purpose, relevance and necessity in being human disappears; if there is nothing then nothing matters.

The liberation that comes from this experience brings with it the anxiety of meaninglessness; looking at the world without any point of reference and having to function in it can cause insanity. *Ayin* is an experience to have briefly and completely in the midst of maintaining a relationship with the material world. It can be a magnificent source of empowerment and bliss only so long as it serves to manifest its opposite; on the

other side of total nothingness is everything. The most applicable purpose for the experience of negation and its subsequent annihilation is to open up the possibilities of everything. In understanding this universe as meaningless and illusory we are given the freedom to make it mean what will best suit us to have it mean. The true power in Nothingness comes through the ability to understand it so that its Divine opposite can be harnessed; the world of endless possibility allows for existing at the source of our human experience. Even more significantly, a faith must be induced and constantly nurtured in that which is hidden behind what is hidden. While our initial practice in cleaving to God requires total annihilation and a subsequent acceptance of total Nothingness, we must learn to believe that there is a Divine meaning within the Nothing. Within the timeless, the boundless, the undifferentiated, the unperceived, the preconceived, the infinite whole...within God, there is the ever-flowing presence of Itself seeking to know Itself intimately and experientially through Its particular composition. We, as those composites, are summoned to rediscover our Selves by accepting and attaching to Nothing. This is what hides: that we are all One and that each part of that unity is therefore a reflection of It: perfect and complete and nothing that can be limited to a definition or distinction from any other thing – which is also not a thing.

The way in which the Jewish mystics refined the Nothingness of God and Its hidden and existentially threatening nature so that it could be a negotiable spirituality by which to function was by the sefirot. While far beyond the scope of this writing, it is important to at least mention this system of navigating through the *Olam Hapredah*. These ten progressively dense manifestations of the *ayin* are essentially collective archetypal belief

systems that allow the illusion of the world to exist at its most balanced and universal manifestations. The sefirot occur as the transition between the ultimate nothingness of the *Ein Sof* from which they are derived and the everyday world in which we, as particulars, inhabit. They encompass the manifestation of Nothing as everything in its most complete form, representing the perfect tension between opposites; the negations that allow for balance between them. "The kaabalists insisted on an array of positive, vibrant attributes: the ten sefirot. The sefirot are stages of divine being and aspects of the divine personality. Prior to the emanation of the sefirot, God is unmanifest, referred to simply as *Ein Sof*, Infinite (literally, there is no end). The sefirot reveal what can be conveyed of the divine nature (they allow for the purest experience of something that exists as the flip of nothing such that we – as beings – can relate to a world of being)" <sup>cdv</sup> That is, the sefirot seek to support the experience of being alongside the apprehension of nothingness at their source.

The sefirot can be understood to occur as the medium between *Ayin* and *yesh*; if *Ayin* is the Infinite and Universal Nothingness, the Sefirot are the transition to the Finite and Particular Somethingness that allow the universe to occur for us as a reality. It is through their embodiment of "the divine soul...[[their] name for the nameless" that we are allowed the experience of separation from which to objectively experience the Unity. The combination of the ten emanations of God are a rendering of the Divine psyche as manifest; they occur as everything upon which we base our reality and have at their source the Infinity which they negate and are negated by. They are the manifestation of reality via thought and word in the purest and most complete form. As such, they are

incredibly valuable points of focus in returning from the apprehension of nothingness back into the realm of the mundane, and can be used as sources of prayer for navigating within the world.

### *Yesh Me - Ayin*

In some ways, a summation of the teachings within Hasidic spirituality is best presented by a blank page, on which there is Nothing so that Nothing is all there is. But taking for granted that we live in the world of action produced by speech contrived by language made up of letters whose source is thought, a translation of those thoughts into the world of particulars is more appropriate. In fact, it is the essential dichotomy with which we are left at the end of the study of God as Nothing; while that truth may best be told through the presentation of a blank piece of paper, we would not be satisfied by that – for we live *within* this mundane world. We exist within it, and it is through it that we work to remember ourselves as Nothing. We are not practitioners of nihilism; we have not sought *dveikut* as a means for ignoring or escaping this world. On the contrary, we are *human beings* – seeking to find within our world and each other the possibility of God that exists through our presence of being who we really are.

We are human beings, and in the physical realm, we are also human doings: driven by an inherent desire for expansion and greatness beyond our present positions. This is the reality from which we receive the teachings of Hasidism; illusory as it may be, it is the circumstance from within which we must function, and our journey back to God demands



that we accept and recognize the point from which that return begins. We are human beings first and foremost: called to embrace the state of presence within ourselves and the world around us so that we may apprehend it for what it truly is. And in that apprehension we will recognize our nature as doers, as meaning – makers, as resisters. We will learn to see the illusions of the past that we have projected onto the otherwise untainted present and the boundless future. We will be able to understand that the oppositions that reflect the distinctions from the thoughts that initiated them are no more than the arbitrary applications of our egos, and that our egos in themselves perpetuate an illusion of separation. All of this comes from simply being; that is where we must begin.

In being we are granted the possibility to notice that within every so-called thing is the spark of Nothing, which is the Everything that is God. We are called to abandon our attachment to the world of particulars by first existing within it: realizing that we, as components of God, created it and chose to live within it so that we could actively and fully know what exists beyond it. At once, this mundane world reveals the sacred that is hidden within it and we begin to play and love and illuminate and reconnect with one another as reflections of our Creator.

*Betzelem Elohim* we remember each thing as Nothing and we attach ourselves to It in the pleasure of allowing It to be our only thought. With that thought, with that wisdom of nothing we are released in an instant from our separate selves and we realize the true and only fulfillment of the desires for expansion that have been nagging us from within the world of separation; we are happy, we are complete. We are our Creator, and from that

release of the time – bound and limited world we are free to create again from within It. The irony is that in *dveikut* there is nothing: no desire, no lack, and that only from this place do we have the capacity to manifest any ‘‘thing’ we want. By detaching from the definitions of particulars as our identity and our illusions of security we are free to create them anew. And as such, we can return to the *Olam Hapredah* with our desire intact, and operate within the world of opposition that we created for ourselves with the pleasure of remembering that we chose it. Every experience becomes a holy one and every mundane desire is easily accessed – so long as we create that thing we are wanting out of the Nothing – or “*yesh me-ayin*”.

Daniel Matt explains that the concept *yesh me-ayin* became a description of the process of creation some time during the end of the eleventh century. <sup>65</sup> It is in the recognition of the *ayin* – of the fact that there is nothing out there beyond what we put out there -- that we return to the source and to the realm of genesis. Genesis is in fact a description of the manifestation of something out of nothing, and we – in the image of our maker – also have the full capacity to generate our reality. Any new experience is possible for us out of our returning to the source, to the Nothingness, to the *ayin* from which all new experience is generated. It is simply by our transcending to that realm of wisdom that we are free to re – create ourselves.

*Ayin* is our source and our essential opposite when we exist in the physical realm, therefore, our opposing it will define us as meaning makers. That is what we humans do: we make meaning; that is really all we do – for there is nothing except what we say is

something. But we forget this constantly, and what Hasidim can offer us is a reminder: that we are at the source of the reality that we define for ourselves and that this reality will only bring fulfillment so long as it is constantly reassociated with the emptiness from which it was brought forth. We make meaning out of everything we see. With each instant that we define what we experience, we have attributed a sense of significance to that thing, which induces an opposition to it such that we are exiled to the experience of endless contrast. We are stuck in the world of polarity and the limitations of our past by the vocabulary that it offered us, and the only way to become liberated is to detach from this language and return to what exists behind our words, behind our actions upon these words, which is the being that is God.

With this return we are freed from all constraints to simply and totally be. All of the illusions of lack, of need, of dissatisfaction are in an instant abnegated and replaced by an everlasting sense of sustenance: as endless and available as the oxygen we breathe. But we can only inhale so much, and then we must exhale and inhale again – and this is the essence of *tsimtsum*. We can take from the Endlessness whatever we need, but it will be restricted by our own finite capacity to contain it such that we must release totally whatever we took in, in order to take it in again. Our suffering in life comes from the fact that we remain attached to the meanings we have previously made; we do not exhale completely out of fear that we will not be sustained by new oxygen once we do.

Somewhere in each of our pasts we bought in to the illusions of the ego at the expense of faith in God, such that we believe the limited meanings of a separate reality to be real and therefore finite in capacity. Our attachments to that system of knowledge keep us trapped

not only in the cycle of polarity, but also unable to access our true and ultimate desires – which will at their essence be fueled by a want to be blissful and complete. And completion – a sense of *shalom* – comes in and only in returning our selves to God.

Our searches for material security are illusory; our belief that something physical and finite can fulfill us a mistake. We must replace the knowledge we took on from the tree of polarity – of good and evil – by the wisdom available from the first tree: the Tree of Life. This is the wisdom of uncertainty and the apprehension that there is Nothing, because nothing means everything. In taking on that wisdom we get on the circuit of the Divine, and we harbor the potential for creating endless possibilities out of the infinite potential in which we commune. In acknowledging the source of power we take that power on; in releasing the notion that anything exists we open ourselves back up to the realm of endless possibility in which only what we give meaning to has that meaning. Our physical world is no more than God withdrawing Itself from itself in order to know Itself objectively through matter; remembering this allows us to realize that we have the glory of being Who We Are by everything we experience in our lives. We have with each instant the possibility of recreating ourselves as a means of knowing God, which is knowing totality, love and awe.

When the choices we make are limited to the world of dualities, we are in effect trapped by the boundaries of causes and effects that have already existed for us in our past experiences. It is through and only through reentering the realm of *ayin* that we are freed from these limitations and able to make pure and proactive choices for ourselves.

Apprehending Nothingness allows us to become instantly free of the limitations we perceive ourselves beholden to – such that we are allowed to manifest our new and chaste intentions without the clouds of past failures and anticipated negative consequences. We become immediately free of the conditioned responses that have collected in our corporeal intelligence; the triggers of discomfort are reformed by our reinterpreting their meaning from the perspective of meaninglessness.

In short: God is Nothing, which means God is also everything. We exist in and only in that paradigm as the contraction of It into a finite container that objectively apprehends it. All of our lives are lived in order to re-member our membership and have the opportunity to know that reunion experientially. All of our existence will be blissful so long as it is fueled by the intention to remember. Contrast is the way in which we can remember. We navigate through the world of contrast by contracting our Divine thoughts into material thoughts into words into speech into action. That is how we give nothing the meaning of something, and reversing that process will bring us back to Nothing. In returning to Nothing we are able to make something again, and the more fully we are able to detach from the something we made before we returned to Nothing, the more liberated we will be to recreate something new. We do this by intentionally placing our physicality on our desire without the constraints of previous and arbitrary meaning; we direct our thoughts, words, speech, and action on the possibility we desire to make manifest, and manifest it will. Division, separation, and isolation exist only because they reflect our thoughts (and words and speech and action) about them – which perpetuate their existence. These phenomena are not real, and it is up to us to negate them with our lives.

When we do, we become One, and we can have anything we want in the mundane world so long as it reflects and has its source in the recognition of that Unity. The instructions are simple ones: Firstly, constantly engage in negative theology: annihilate the ego and all of the divided meaning it perpetuates. Then, allow the sense of being to overcome all other contrasting thoughts such that only a musing with the One that is present in the only time there is exists in the mind. This will engender an attachment with the Nothingness that waits at the conclusion of every act of negation and presence of being. Finally, create *yesh me ayin*: recreate from the connection of the self with the Self anything that you desire by directing a full, unhindered intention and the placement of thought, word, speech, and action onto that desire.

Use the gift of the separate self with the awe of knowing that it and all of what it experiences is Holy; our lives are God's way of experiencing Itself, which is accomplished by our intentionally returning to It. Cleaving to God attaches us to the will of God – will precedes all thought, action and emotion. It galvanizes the primal impulse that initiates change; when our will matches God's, whatever we intend is allowed to occur.

"...By man's great faith and trust he is connected to and cleaves with all his thought and vitality to the good of the Creator, blessed be he, for which a person hopes and anticipates, and by this means [his wish] is quickly performed, without interruption and without obstacle. And this is not the case if, heaven forbid, there is not faith and great trust, and he introduces within his thought doubts as to whether or not it will be – this in itself is a delaying or obstructing [factor], heaven forbid" <sup>cxvi</sup>

Doubt indicates attachment to the past projected onto an anticipated outcome of the future, and so long as there remains such an association, true *dveikut* is not occurring, and therefore, the power of creation is inhibited. Total faith means a willingness to step into the unknown, by which all previous meaning is rendered impotent and all that is left is the possibility of God's will projected back onto the world of particulars. If a desire is not fulfilled it is because the past meaning projected in it was not totally annihilated and that it is thus on some level in protest to the will of the Divine. Total faith in God; a complete abnegation of the ego's will for the will of the True Self is at the heart of our gaining infinite fulfillment. We become blissful in our knowing that everything we encounter is nothing but God showing Itself as a bounty upon which we should attach ourselves, and in our being bliss we perpetuate bliss so that it is all we feel. Taking this affect and translating it back through the finite thought processes and out between the letters of the words we utter makes our reality *our* reality. It begins with a powerful relationship to perceiving what is to be what it is: not our past interpretations reintroduced to it but rather a spark of God contained within a vessel that negates Its infinity. From that place we ascend. From that ascension we are liberated, from that liberation we become the *ayin* that we all are.

## Bibliography

- Campbell, Don. *The Mozart Effect*: New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997.
- Colbin, Anne Marie. *Food and Healing*: New York: Ballantine Books, 1986.
- Donen, Hayim Halevy. *To Pray as A Jew*. New York: Basic Books, 1980.
- Hoffman, Edward. *The Way of Splendor: Jewish Mysticism and Modern Psychology*. Boulder: Shambhala Press, 1981.
- Hundert, Gershon, ed. *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to Present*. New York: New York University Press, 1991.
- Idel, Moshe. *The Mystical experience in Abraham Abulafia*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- Jung, Carl G. *Man and His Symbols*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1964.
- Koskoff, Ellen. *Music in Lubavitcher Life*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.
- Kaplan, Aryeh. *Meditation and Kabbalah*. Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1982.
- Kaplan, Aryeh. *Jewish Meditation*. New York: Schocken Books, 1985.
- Kushner, Lawrence. *The Book of Letters: A Mystical Hebrew Alef – Bait*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1993.
- Kushner, Lawrence. *God Was In This Place and I, I Did Not Know*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1994.
- Kushner, Lawrence. *The River of Light: Spirituality, Judaism, Consciousness*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 1993.
- Lamm, Norman. *The Religious Thought of Hasidism: Text and Commentary*. New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999.
- Luzzatto, Moses Chaim  
--- tr. Shraga Silverstein, *The Path of the Just*. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1978.
- Luzzatto, Moses Chaim. *The Way of God*  
--- tr. Aryeh Kaplan. Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1978.



Matt, Daniel C. *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995.

Matt, Daniel C. *Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism*  
---ed. Fein, Lawrence. *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*. New York: New York University Press, 1995

Mezritch, Rabbi Dov Baer. *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*,  
--- ed. Schatz -Uffenheimer, Rivka. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990.

Mitchell, Stephen, *The Tao Te Ching*. New York, New York: Harper Perrenial, 1988.

Pitchford, Paul. *Healing With Whole Food: Oriental Traditions and Modern Nutrition*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1993.

Rose, Or with Ebn D. Leader, *God in All Moments: Mystical and Practical Spiritual Wisdom from Hasidic Masters*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.

Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

Temple - Thurston, Leslie. *The Marriage of Spirit: Enlightened Living in Today's World*. Santa Fe: Core - Light Publications, 2000.

Uffenheimer, Rivka Schatz. *Hassidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought*. Jerusalem: The Magness Press, The Hebrew University, 1993.  
--- tr. Chipman, Jonathan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: the Nature and development of Spiritual Consciousness*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999.

---

<sup>i</sup> Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 124 -27; see Shatz, *Hasidut*, 61; see Matt, *Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism*, 144.

<sup>ii</sup> . Isaac Luria (1534 - 1572) developed this term as an essential idea in early Kabbalah in order to explain the manner in which the Divine contracted Itself into an infinite number of seemingly separate vessels to occur as independent manifestations of All That Is.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p. 112

<sup>iv</sup> The concept of *tsimtsun* repeats itself throughout the Maggid's teachings, and may be considered the fundamental idea behind his theology.

<sup>v</sup> Underhill, *Mysticism*, 34

<sup>vi</sup> *Liqutei Yeqrim* (Lemberg, 1865) 12b; 18b - c

<sup>vii</sup> The Hechalot literature from the first century documents Merkavah Mysticism, in which the spiritual objective became an ascent into the Divine realm during which a union with God could be achieved.

<sup>viii</sup> Matt, *Ayin*, 137.

<sup>ix</sup> The commandment comes from Deuteronomy 11: 22 - "To love your God, to walk in all His ways and to cleave unto Him"

<sup>x</sup> Scholem, in Hundret, 276ff.

<sup>xi</sup> Early Kabbalists divided the soul into five categories: namely, "*nefesh* (animative soul) *ruach* (spirit), *neshamah* (soul), *hayyah* (angelic soul), and *yechidah* (unitive soul)

<sup>xii</sup> The Talmud teaches that man is half animal half angel, with "the body [as] the seat of the soul, man's animal nature as the receptacle for his angelic nature"; see Kaplan, *Meditation*, 134

<sup>xiii</sup> Luzzatto, tr. Silverstein, *The Path of the Just*, 329

<sup>xiv</sup> *Boneh Yerushalayim*, 54

<sup>xv</sup> Gikatilla, *Shaarei Orah*, tr. Weinstein, 160.

<sup>xvi</sup> Several months ago, I boarded an airplane after a short and exhausting trip to Europe. With my quickly draining energy, I organized all of my belongings in the overhead bins, fastened my seatbelt, and settled in to the comfort of having nothing to do and no one to listen to for the next seven hours. I truly thought that I had reached the ultimate state of quiet time when the flight attendants came traveling down the aisles distributing small black pouches to each of the passengers. Upon receiving mine, I opened it to find a set of Bose Headphones inside, along with an explanation that these earpieces were designed to eliminate all superfluous environmental noise. Skeptically plugging them in, I wondered what noise these things would eliminate in what seemed to me to be perfect quiet in the cabin; I was in for a big surprise. As it turns out, there was an enormous difference between what I thought was silence and what I experienced to be silence after putting on the phones. All of the hummings and buzzings and mumblings and clickings that had gone unnoticed by my unrefined ear were suddenly absent, and I was in a state of profound and ecstatic relief at the true soundlessness I was experiencing. Not until I put the headphones on did I realize the noise that had been polluting my environment before then; it was not until there was an absence of the cacophony existing subtly all around me that I was aware of its having existed. Most of the time, it is

<sup>xvii</sup> Matt, *Ayin*, 127

<sup>xviii</sup> This can be applied to the intention behind meditation - a practice that will be described in more detail later.

<sup>xix</sup> It is what the Hindu's refer to as *nir-guna* (without qualities), Buddhism calls *nirvana* (non - drawing) and Taoism defines as "the Tao [that] cannot be spoken."<sup>xx</sup>

<sup>xx</sup> Daniel Matt explains that due to the influence of Moslem philosophers such as Alfarabi and Avicenna, Maimonides adopted the practice of negative theology, "extending and radicalizing it" as a means for apprehending God.

<sup>xxi</sup> Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 1: 58 - 59

<sup>xxii</sup> *Ayin* as a state of Nothingness corresponds to the *Ein Sof*, which is a Kabbalistic reference to the source from which all reality emanates and precedes these emanations by its containing and occurring before and beyond all of them.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Uffenheimer, *Hassidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 65

<sup>xxiv</sup> Uffenheimer, *Hassidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 66

<sup>xxx</sup> It is the *Tohu Vavohu* that precedes creation of all form in Genesis, the "empty and formless heaven" referenced by the Taoist master Kuan – tzu, and the Rig Veda's Hymn of Creation which states that "in the beginning there was neither existence nor non – existence, all this world was unmanifest energy...the One breathed, without breath, by Its own power Nothing else was there..."

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Kitvei Qodesh*, p. 8c; see Uffenheimer, *Hassidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman , 69

<sup>xxvii</sup> Rivka Shatz Uffenheimer explains r. Shneur Zalman's classification of the Jewish people into three categories: "the *Zaddikim* (those who are wholly righteous), *beinonim* (intermediate ones) and *reshaim* (wicked) [with] the true subject of religious life [being] the *beinoni*. Those of us living in the world of opposition and intended homeostasis fall under this intermediate category, with our balanced existence dependent on achieving the state of counterbalanced equilibrium alluded by this Hebrew word.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Jacob Joseph of Ostrog, *Sefer Rav Yeivi, Bereshit*, p. 2b; see Uffenheimer, *Hassidism as Mysticism*: tr. Chipman, 83

<sup>xxix</sup> Baer , *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer , 101

<sup>xxx</sup> Jung *Man and His Symbols* ,120

<sup>xxxi</sup> Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, 71

<sup>xxxii</sup> Smith, *Forgotten Truth*, 26

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>xxxiv</sup> This is the Ari's word explaining the contraction and manifestation of separate vessels to be filled with light by the Godhead, and the shattering of those vessels due to their inability to contain that light – resulting in the energy of evil and confusion with that shattered separation.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Tanya*, pp. 81b – 82a (*Sha'ar ha – Yohud*, Ch. 7); LT, pp. 909 – 911; see Uffenheimer, *Hassidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman ,270

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Dubnow, *Toldot Hachasidut*, Chapter Two, see Rose with Leader, *God In All Moments*.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Chasidic teachings articulate the transformation that occurs in moving from the individual and separate state (namely the state of identification as *ani*) into transcendent and unified experience of *ayin* – with these two words being composed of the same letters and symbolize the existential transformation of the individual through that which occurs in simply switching the letters around.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Baer , *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer , 24

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Ibid.* , 18

<sup>xl</sup> R, Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl, *Hanhagot Yeshtarot*; see Rose with Leader, *God In All Moments*;

<sup>xli</sup> Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer commenting on the teachings of Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezritch, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer , 19

<sup>xlii</sup> Or Rose writes that "shiflut, or 'humility' or lowliness' is one of the most important ethical spiritual virtues in Hasidism. It is viewed not as a value of self – loathing, but as the proper response to a true understanding of God's greatness and the fragility of our lives." See Rose with Leader, *God In All Moments*, 70

<sup>xliii</sup> Issachar Ber of Zlotshov *Mevasser Zedek* , 9a - b

<sup>xli</sup> Baer , *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer , 118

<sup>xli</sup> *Ibid.*, 119

<sup>xlii</sup> Matt *Ayin*, 128

<sup>xliiii</sup> I was recently taking care of a friend's (very cute) bulldog, who was delivered to me with all of his daily essentials: food, a little bed, a leash, and a very stinky, ratty old toy that is his most adored object. Every evening as I sat (like the good student of mysticism that I am) to do my meditation, Pilgrim (the bulldog) would approach me with the malodorous toy dangling from his mouth and place one of its ends in my hands. The game was a simple one: I pulled one side, he pulled the other, everyone growled a little bit, and eventually I would wrench it free from his fabulous face and throw it for him to retrieve and bring back to me for another round. Pilgrim was content to play this game for hours, but my patience was far more limited, such that usually, at about round four, I began to wind things down by not taking my end of the slobbery toy; when

there was no one for Pilgrim to pull against, he did not want to play anymore and would go back to his little doggy bed for a doggy rest. When there was nothing to resist against his pull, there was no game.

<sup>xxx</sup> Ituray Torah VI, 198-9: the Maggid is commenting on Pesukei d'Zimra "When You hid your face, I was terrified."

<sup>i</sup> Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 68

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Siddur Baal Shem Tov, 71

<sup>iv</sup> Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 79

<sup>v</sup> Ibid., 211

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid., 86

<sup>vii</sup> Scholem, "Devekut, Or Communion With God", in Hundret, Gershom d., ed., *Essential Papers on Hasidism*, 265.

<sup>viii</sup> Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 24

<sup>ix</sup> Baer, *Hayyim V' Hesed* #13 - 14

<sup>x</sup> R. Nachman stated in terms of types of spiritual practice: "you should not seek unnecessarily harsh disciplines, for these can lead to depression" Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor*, 76

<sup>xi</sup> Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 52

<sup>xii</sup> Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezritch, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990) p.43

<sup>xiii</sup> Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 66

<sup>xiv</sup> Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 56

<sup>xv</sup> Pitchford, *Healing With Whole Foods*, 9

<sup>xvi</sup> Meshullam Feinbush Heller of Zbarazch, *Derech Emet*, 19a; see Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 109

<sup>xvii</sup> Hoffman *The Way of Splendor*, 68

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>xix</sup> Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *Likkutei Moharan* Tinyana, no. 24

<sup>xx</sup> Taken from "Being and Nothingness" - Azriel of Gerona, *Derekh ha - Emunah ve Derech ha - Kefirah*, ed. Scholem, "Seridim Hadashim mi Kitvei R. Azriel mi - Gerona", see Assaf and Scholem, eds., *Sefer Zikaron le Asher Gulak ve li Shemuael Klein*

<sup>xxi</sup> This holds true not just in terms of Jewish Mysticism. For most all religious traditions in our world, bliss is brought about through the process of recognizing and unifying the opposites of our reality. Be it in the practice of tantra (which is defined as a balancing of opposites and represented by the union of Shiva and Shakti as the masculine and feminine archetypes), or Christianity (in which the gospel according to Thomas states that "Jesus said to them: when you make the two one, and when you make the inner outer and the outer as the inner and the above as below, and when you make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female not be female... then you shall enter [the Kingdom]"<sup>xxii</sup>), this principle of union holds true. In Sufism "mental purification means that impressions such as good and bad, right and wrong, gain and loss, and pleasure and pain, these opposites must be cleared out by the opposite of these things. Then one can see the enemy in the friend and the friend in the enemy. When one can recognize poison in the nectar and nectar in the poison, that is the time when death and life become one too. Opposites no more remain opposites before one."<sup>xxiii</sup> For Buddhism "when some people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly. When people see some things as good, other things become bad. Being and non-being create each other. Difficult and easy support each other, high and low depend on each other. Before and after follow each other. Therefore the Master acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything. Things arise and she lets them come; things disappear and she lets them go. She has but she doesn't possess, acts but doesn't expect. When her work is done, she forgets it. That is why it lasts forever."<sup>xxiv</sup>

<sup>xxv</sup> Defined as "cleaving to God" - process which occurs by annihilating the self so as to become one with Nothingness.

THE KLAU LIBRARY  
HARVARD DIVINITY COLLEGE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
UNIONDALE CENTER  
100 N. FIFTH STREET  
UNIONDALE, NY 10012

- lxiii R. Zadok ha-Kohen, *Peri Zaddik*, pt I, Kedushat Shabbat 7, pp. 22 a – b; see Lamm, 469
- lxiiii Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 80
- lxiv Pesachim 117a
- lxv Rambam, *Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* 7:4
- lxvi Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 47
- lxvii Ibid.
- lxviii This is another leighttheme in the teachings of the Maggid: Lehaalot *hattanug laboreh* – to access and then elevate the pleasure of the physical world to the celestial world.
- lxix Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 62
- lxx Hoffman *The Way of*, 93
- lxxi Research in the field of Neuro Linguistic Programming speak to this phenomenon. Additionally, the research of Abraham Maslow on “self-actualization” demonstrated that creative people who induced their own inspiration tended to experience more in the way of peak experiences than the rest of the population.
- lxxii *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*, pp. 148 & 179
- lxxiii Hoffman *The Way of Splendor*, 69
- lxxiv Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 101
- lxxv R. Yitzhak of Berdichev, *Or ha Emet*, 77a; see Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 211-212
- lxxvi Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 302
- lxxvii Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 60
- lxxviii Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 67
- lxxix Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 144
- xc Moses Chaim Luzzato, *The Way of God*, tr. Aryeh Kaplan (Jerusalem, Feldheim, 1978) p. 45
- xi R. Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, *Peri ha – Arez*, 95; see Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 158
- xci Known in Far Eastern meditation practices as a ‘mantra’
- xcii Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 99
- xciv The Maggid uses this formula of elevating the world of Speech up to the World of thought repeatedly in his writings as a means for achieving union in the upper sphere.
- xcv Tzava'at HaRivash #103 – taken from *God In All Moments* p. 117
- xcvi Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 110
- xcvii Ibid.
- xcviii Kalonymous Kalman Ma'or va – Shemesh (New York: n.p., 1958), p. 51a; see Matt, Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism, p. 141
- cx Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life*, 32
- c Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 84
- ci Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman, 206
- cii Ibid. p. 60 - 61
- ciii Baer, *Maggid Devarav le' Yaakov*, ed. Uffenheimer, 47
- civ Ibid.
- cv Abulafia, *The Path of Names*, 9
- cvi See Campbell, *The Mozart Effect*
- cvi Joseph ibn Caspi (14c) belonged to the school of Abraham Abulafia; see *Sefer Yesod Olam*, 32
- cvi Campbell, *The Mozart Effect*, 34
- cix These steps correspond to the four different realms of being in the sefirot; a subject that will be returned to later.
- cx Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life*, 200
- cxii Campbell, *The Mozart Effect*, 44
- cxiii Issac of Akko, *Ozar Hayyim*, cited by Amos Goldrich in his edition of Isaac's Me'irat Einayim, 411 - 414; see Matt, “Mystic and the Mizwot,” 374; cf. Tiqunei Zoahr 70, p. 131b; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 90.
- cxiii Matt *Ayin*, 129
- cxiv Ibid.
- cxv Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 2: 25; Joseph Albo, *Sefer ha – Iqqarim* 1:2. The phrase ‘yesh me – ayin’ appears for the first time at the end of the eleventh century in the anonymous Hebrew paraphrase of

---

Saadia Gaon's *Kitab al – Amanat wa'l – l' tiqadat*; see Daniel C. Matt *Ayin: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism*

<sup>צאנ</sup> Uffenheimer, *Hasidism as Mysticism* tr. Chipman , 87

THE KLAU LIBRARY  
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE  
JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
BROOKDALE CENTER  
ONE WEST FOURTH STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10012