Rabbinic Thought Through the Lens of Emotional Intelligence
Geoffrey A. Mitelman

Digest

The psalmist charges us to "get a heart of wisdom," and one of the most revolutionary ideas of the last twenty years is that it is not just our rational and cognitive side – our "head" – that can learn. Rather, our ability to control our impulses, our capacity to find blessings in life, and our facility in strengthening social relationships – our "heart" – can develop, as well. Applying these insights in a contemporary Jewish context, this thesis has two goals: first, to understand the classical Rabbis' intuitive psychology and their implicit understanding of emotional intelligence and second, to see how people today can utilize emotional intelligence (seen through a Jewish lens) in their own lives.

Chapter 1 ("Exploring Emotional Intelligence") outlines the ideas of emotional intelligence, and addresses some methodological considerations. **Chapter 2 ("Rabbinic Psychology")** explores the Rabbis' understanding of human nature, and sees how rabbis today have connected rabbinic ideas and modern psychology. **Chapter 3 ("Controlling our Impulses")** examines how the Rabbis suggest we subdue our *yetzer hara* and manage our anger. **Chapter 4 ("*Kavvanah* and Flow")** uses the rabbinic idea of full engagement in prayer to see how we can find more engagement in life as a whole. **Chapter 5 ("Social Intelligence and *Mitzvot bein Adam l'Chaveiro*")** looks at what the Rabbis teach about how we can create stronger interpersonal relations. **Conclusions ("Bringing Emotional Intelligence into the Synagogue")** applies the ideas from the previous chapters in the realms of counseling, prayer and education.

Ultimately, exploring rabbinic thought through the lens of emotional intelligence is about working towards *tikkun olam*, improving our relationships inwards, toward ourselves; outwards, toward others; and upwards, toward God.

RABBINIC THOUGHT THROUGH THE LENS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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חנך לנער על פי דרכו
גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה

Teach children the path to tread,
and when they are old, they will not depart from it.
Proverbs 22:6

For my niece and nephew,
Lexa Sophia Harpel and Zander Stephen Harpel

לילך ששונה בת אברם ותושיה ברורה
Lilach Sasonah bat Avram v'T'shiah B'rurah

זאב דוד בן אברם ותושיה ברורה
Ze'ev David ben Avram v'T'shiah B'rurah

May you find joy in living out the Jewish values
of knowing yourself,
of building relationships,
and of finding and creating blessings in life.

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Rabbi Mitelman, and the time I spend with Randee and Joe Seiger (along with Jonah, Bara and Alicia) and Shel Mitelman (along with Risa, Robert, Cami, Kasey, Todd and Josh) is always pure enjoyment. And of course, my grandparents, Sol and Ida Mitelman ז"ל and Maurie ז"ל and Frieda Cossman have helped shape who I am, and formed the basis for who I will be as a rabbi – often in ways I am sure they would not have expected!

To my parents, Bonnie and Alan Mitelman – you have no idea how much you have given me throughout my life. With your trips to Cincinnati, Sandusky and Jerusalem just to support me along each stage of this journey, your willingness to entertain and develop the ideas in this thesis, and your ever-constant sense of patience and good humor, you have meant so much to me. I love you both.

Finally, and most importantly, to my brother, Stephen Lelewer ז"ל – you truly are the person who has led me to this moment. You will always inspire me.

A Note on Language

The translations of rabbinic passages come from a combination of the Soncino Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, *Sefer Ha-Aggadah: The Book of Legends*, the Schottenstein Edition of the Babylonian Talmud and my own personal interpretations.

One guiding belief for how I have tried to adapt these translations is that I believe God is beyond male and female. Whenever I have had an opportunity to translate a biblical or rabbinic passage, I have, as much as possible, attempted to avoid gendered God-language. However, when quoting earlier scholars who use biblical or rabbinic texts, I have kept the integrity of their writing.

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There are two complementary strategies for improving the human condition. One is to relieve what is negative in life; the other is to strengthen what is positive.

Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman[1]

INTRODUCTION

At our most extraordinary moments in life, our times of greatest celebration or triumph, we often strive for ways to intensify our joy. At our most distressing moments, our times of greatest struggle or heartache, we often strive for ways to lessen our anguish. Even in our most ordinary moments, we are often simply searching for connection and purpose as we go about our daily lives. Traditionally, when Jews have tried to find personal meaning and personal growth, they have turned to classical sources – the Bible, the prayerbook and rabbinic literature. Today, many people turn also to the ideas of modern psychology. And yet these two paths – each of which can have great independent merit – frequently remain unconnected for modern Jews.

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[1] From the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, http://www.sas.upenn.edu/CGS/downloads/MAPP_brochure_2007.pdf

I believe it is possible to bridge this gap, and I believe that the combination of these two sources of knowledge can provide people with ways to relieve what is negative in life and strengthen what is positive. In order to join these two domains, this thesis will explore rabbinic thought through the lens of one psychological theory, the theory of emotional intelligence.

The psalmist charges us to "get a heart of wisdom."[2] Along those lines, emotional intelligence claims that it is not just our rational and cognitive side – our "head" – that can learn. Rather, our ability to control our impulses, our capacity to engage fully with life, and our facility in strengthening social relationships – our "heart" – can develop, as well. Thus in a contemporary Jewish setting, emotional intelligence can help us improve our relationships inwards, toward ourselves; outwards, toward others; and upwards, toward God.

The goal of this thesis is twofold: first, it is to understand the classical Rabbis' intuitive psychology and their implicit understanding of emotional intelligence. And second, it is to see how people today can utilize emotional intelligence (seen through a Jewish lens) in their own lives. Life is filled with a myriad of situations, and both Judaism and psychology aim to provide people with ways to respond to them. Quite simply, this thesis is about connecting these two disparate realms in order for us to create better responses to the highs, the lows, and the in-betweens of life.

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[2] Psalms 90:13.

אמר להם: צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם.
רבי אליעזר אומר: עין טובה. רבי יהושע אומר: חבר טוב.
רבי יוסי אומר: שכן טוב. רבי שמעון אומר: הרואה את הנולד.
רבי אלעזר אומר: לב טוב. אמר להם: רואה אני את דברי
אלעזר בן ערך מדבריכם שבכלל דבריו דבריכם.

**He [Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai] asked his disciples:
"Go out and see: What is the right way for a person to cling to?"
Rabbi Eliezer said, "A good eye." Rabbi Joshua said, "A good friend."
Rabbi Jose said, "A good neighbor." Rabbi Simeon said, "The ability to consider
the consequences of one's actions." Rabbi Eleazar [b. Arakh] said, "A good heart."
Rabbi Yohanan said to them: "I prefer the words of Rabbi Eleazar b. Arakh
over all the others, because his words ["a good heart"] include all of yours.**

m Avot 2:9

CHAPTER 1:
EXPLORING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

In 1995, Harvard professor Daniel Goleman wrote a revolutionary book entitled *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, arguing that "intelligence" is about more than just obtaining factual content-based knowledge – intelligence can also be about how we understand ourselves and how we interact with others.[3] That is, not just our rational minds but our *emotions* can become more intelligent, as well. As we begin this investigation to connect classical rabbinic thought with these ideas of emotional intelligence, we start by asking two questions. First, what exactly is "emotional intelligence"? And second, what are some potential methodological issues to consider as we connect traditional Jewish texts with modern psychological theories?

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[3] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 37-42.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

"Emotional intelligence" is not one concept. It originated in the findings of Professor Howard Gardner at Harvard University. For many years, "intelligence" was seen to consist primarily of mathematical and linguistic skills – indeed, the SAT still measures only these two aspects. Gardner, however, recognized that "intelligence" can come in many forms, and he outlined seven of them. Not only are there mathematical and linguistic intelligences, but there are also visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, and – most important for our case – intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences, as well.[4]

In 1990, psychologist Peter Salovey developed these intra- and interpersonal intelligences into five main domains of "emotional intelligence":

> **Knowing one's emotions.** Self-awareness is the basis for all aspects of emotional intelligence. Knowing what emotion we are feeling is the first step towards finding ways to either change or amplify it.
>
> **Managing emotions.** After identifying what we are feeling, we can begin to control negative emotions, and take concrete steps to lessen feelings like sadness, anger or fear.
>
> **Motivating oneself.** Increasing positive emotions is just as important as controlling negative ones, and so finding intrinsic motivation to achieve goals is a critical skill for personal growth.
>
> **Recognizing emotions in others.** If the first three pieces of emotional intelligence are intrapersonal, this concept forms the basis

[4] Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, Basic Books, 1993), vii, 1. See also Stephen Wise, "Rabbinic Literature and Multiple Intelligences" (Rabbinic Thesis, HUC-JIR New York, 2005).

> for interpersonal relations. If we recognize what other people are feeling, we can bring out greater positive (or lesser negative) emotions in others.
>
> **Handling relationships.** Once we recognize others' emotions, we can build on this awareness to create strong and lasting connections with other people.[5]

These ideas are not new by any stretch of the imagination – they have always been crucial to both intra- and interpersonal understanding. The theory of emotional intelligence, however, brings two new elements. First, it is based on solid, scientific studies, rather than qualitative anecdotes. And second, it assumes that all of these skills are learnable – and therefore teachable.

Indeed, it is this aspect of learnability that makes these concepts relevant to us today. We have all met people of staggering intellect who nonetheless cause others to feel awkward or ill-at-ease, and so have had minimal success in life. On the other side, we have also seen people who, despite not having the highest IQ, have had strong internal motivation or excellent people skills, and so have succeeded greatly. It is important to realize that neither pure rationality nor pure emotionality is the key to success in life – both are critical to our maturity as human beings. We truly have two parts of our brain that can learn and develop: the rational *and* the emotional. Goleman even claims that

> …[i]n a sense, we have two brains, two minds – and two different kinds of intelligence: rational and emotional. How we do in life is determined by both – it is not just IQ, but *emotional* intelligence that matters…The old paradigm held an ideal of reason freed of the pull of emotion. The new paradigm urges us to harmonize head and heart.[6]

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[5] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 43-44.
[6] Ibid, 28-29, italics in original.

Education as a whole is based on the assumption that people can learn new skills and new concepts and then apply them in different situations. From memorizing multiplication tables in elementary school to writing essays in high school to exploring the different meanings of one Aramaic word in graduate school, as a society we believe that people can and should always be obtaining new knowledge.

Without question, I agree with this assumption. Yet I also feel that Goleman argues quite convincingly that an integral aspect has been missing in how we educate ourselves and our society. While many scholars and teachers have tried to develop ways to improve our cognitive intelligence, there has been scant attention paid to developing our emotional intelligence. In the last twenty years, psychologists such as Gardner and Goleman have claimed that the skills outlined above are just as learnable as topics like subtraction, Shakespeare or the political history of the Middle East. We simply have to teach them.

But even if we understand the "what" of emotional intelligence, before we seek to implement the "how," we need to ask "why." Why is emotional intelligence important? Why should we even bother trying to educate our emotions? Goleman provides his rationale as follows:

> ...[Today there] looms a pressing moral imperative. These are times when the fabric of society seems to unravel at ever-greater speed, when selfishness, violence, and a meanness of spirit seem to be rotting the goodness of our communal lives. Here the argument for the importance of emotional intelligence hinges on the link between sentiment, character, and moral instincts. *There is growing evidence that fundamental ethical stances in life stem from underlying emotional capacities.* For one, impulse is the medium of emotion; the seed of all impulse is a feeling bursting to express itself in action. Those who are at the mercy of impulse – who lack self-control – suffer a moral deficiency: The ability to control impulse is the base of will and character. By the same token, the root of altruism lies in empathy, the ability to read emotions in others; lacking a sense of another's need or despair, there is no caring. And if there are any two moral

> stances that our times call for, they are precisely these, self-restraint and compassion.[7]

By discovering methods to alleviate some of our negative emotions and finding concrete ways to develop more joy, hope and optimism in life, in many ways, emotional intelligence is about *tikkun olam*, seeking to bring about a more ethical and caring world. As such, we shall seek how Jewish tradition in general, and classical rabbinic texts in particular, can connect with the theories and goals of emotional intelligence.

Methodological Issues

As we ponder how rabbinic thought can be examined through the lens of emotional intelligence, there are at least two methodological considerations that we need to address: (1) What are the challenges when we place modern concepts – such as psychology – onto rabbinic texts? (2) Where is it *not* appropriate to connect emotional intelligence and rabbinic thought? While the first topic is addressed in the next chapter, "Rabbinic Psychology," we shall address the second one here.

I will be honest – I am not a trained psychologist. I simply do not have the appropriate academic training to determine the validity of the experiments Goleman and other psychologists have used to define what emotional intelligence is or how it can be applied. However, the experiments and stories that will be described in this thesis reflect the best knowledge of some of the most thoughtful professors at this time. Without a doubt, future experiments and future scholarship will refine these theories, but given what we know today, there are still several aspects that relate to rabbinic literature. I would not argue that everything about emotional intelligence was understood by the classical Rabbis; rather,

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[7] Ibid, xii, italics mine.

I claim that there are *some* points of connection between the two, based on the best knowledge of each that we have at this time.

But before looking at these shared ideas which will form the bulk of our study, we should look at what aspects of emotional intelligence were foreign to the Rabbis' worldview. The biggest difference arises when we talk about intention versus action. In general, the classical Rabbis cared much more about what actually happens in the world than what might have motivated the action. One of the classic texts on this idea is found in the Jerusalem Talmud, where God is quoted as saying, "Better that they forsake Me, but follow My laws, since by following My laws, they will return to Me."[8] There are two implications to this statement. First, for the Rabbis, it is "what we do" more than "why we do it" that matters to God. And second, while we usually think of our motivations as coming from the inside out, often, they come from the outside in. Indeed, Rabbi Judah says in the name of Rav, "A person should always occupy himself with the Torah and the *mitzvot*, the commandments, even if he is doing them for some external reason [lit., 'not for their own sake'], because simply by doing them, he will in the end come to do them for their own sake."[9] While it is certainly true that our intentions greatly influence what we do, for the classical Rabbis, it is often our actions that come first, and end up providing the impetus.

In contrast, emotional intelligence is primarily about our internal motivations, and about how those internalized feelings come out in the world. While ultimately, the purpose of emotional intelligence is to improve ourselves and our society, it is about moving from the inside out.

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[8] *y Hagigah* 1:7.
[9] *b Nazir* 23b.

> All emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us. The very root of the word *emotion* is *motere*, the Latin verb "to move," plus the prefix "e-" to connote "move away," suggesting that a tendency to act is implicit in every emotion.[10]

Here, Goleman's position is the reverse of the classical Rabbis' stance (though Goleman's point of view is the more common one today). While there is clearly an interplay between our motivations and their results, we must remember that in the rabbinic statements we will be examining, emotion is often a secondary issue. For the Rabbis, while our intentions are important, ultimately, our deeds are what matter most.

Another contrast between classical rabbinic thought and the theory of emotional intelligence comes in the role of fear and anxiety. In classical rabbinic thought, *yirat Adonai* and *yirat cheit* – the "fear of God" and the "fear of sin" – are essential virtues. "Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa said: He whose fear of sin (יראת חטא, *yirat cheit*) precedes his learning, his learning will endure. But he whose learning precedes his fear of sin, his learning will not endure. As it is said, '*The fear of Adonai* (יראת יהוה, *yirat Adonai*) *is the beginning of wisdom.* (Ps. 111:10)'"[11] Notice that first of all, for Rabbi Hanina, a sense of fear and awe, not the learning itself, is what allows for wisdom and knowledge to last. And second, it is truly the יראה (*yirah*), that sense of awe and fear, and *not* where it is directed, that is most important – "fear of sin" and "fear of God" are essentially interchangeable here.

Along those lines, Rabbi Judah explains how we can keep our fear of transgression: "Consider three things and you will not fall into sin. Know what is above you: a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all your deeds recorded in a book."[12] For Rabbi Judah, the way to *yirat cheit*, fear of sin, is to recognize that God is always watching us and recording our deeds.

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[10] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 6, italics in original.
[11] *m Avot* 3:9.
[12] *m Avot* 2:1.

So even though the word *yirah* – "fear" – connotes more of an impression of "awe" than a sense of "fright," it is inherently related to a feeling of anxiety. Scholar Jonathan Wyn Schofer explains that for the classical Rabbis, this constant sense of apprehension comes from the threat of divine reward and punishment that is always looming over our heads:

> God's observation and recording of all intentions and deeds,
> leading to judgment that is certain and momentous,
> mean that a rabbi must be vigilant at all times. He must
> attend to multiple levels of action and internal states,
> always maintaining awareness of God's presence
> and of the tremendous significance that God's presence
> brings to every moment of life. Moreover, he is always to be
> anxious, never certain that he has credit before his deity.[13]

Thus rabbinic thought was obviously not just about love; fear, awe and even anxiety were critical elements, as well.

Yet in emotional intelligence, fear and anxiety are negative traits, and Goleman even goes so far to call them "toxic emotions":

> Anxiety – the distress evoked by life's pressures – is perhaps
> the emotion with the greatest weight of scientific evidence
> connecting it to the onset of sickness and course of recovery.
> When anxiety helps us prepare to deal with some danger
> (a presumed utility in evolution), then it has served us well.
> But in modern life anxiety is more often out of proportion
> and out of place – distress comes in the face of situations
> that we must live with or that are conjured by the mind,
> not real dangers we need to confront.[14]

For the classical Rabbis, God's displeasure was a very real concern, and all of our actions were thought to be recorded by God. In the post-modern world, even God is sometimes perceived as a figment of our imaginations – "conjured by the mind," if you will (as but one example, in 2006, scientist Richard Dawkins wrote a New York Times best-seller entitled *The God Delusion*). So while fear and anxiety were essential complements to love

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[13] Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 148.
[14] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 172.

in the rabbinic world, they have significantly less value in contemporary culture. While human emotions have not changed significantly in 2000 years (we all feel joy, sadness, anger, fear, hope, and so on), our societal values obviously have shifted. What the Rabbis saw as important and what we post-moderns emphasize are not always identical.

Indeed, because of this difference, we cannot ever fully reconcile classical rabbinic thought with theories of emotional intelligence. But again, that is not the goal here. Rather, it is to explore what aspects of emotional intelligence *were* intuitively understood by the classical Rabbis, and which texts can help us grow in both head and heart. Both emotional intelligence and classical rabbinic thought are enormous topics, with multiple conflicting viewpoints. Yet despite these difficulties, we can find many places where they connect, and each can help illuminate the other.

Conclusion

Jewish traditions have been read, re-read, interpreted and re-interpreted throughout the millennia. Reform Judaism in particular stresses interpreting traditional Jewish texts in conjunction with current findings in history, science, sociology, economics, politics and psychology – it is a foundational assumption that ancient texts can speak to us today, but that they need to be seen through the lenses of modern realities. In this vein, I make two assertions: first, that classical rabbinic psychology reflects an intuitive sense of emotional intelligence, and so is still relevant to us today, and second, that an understanding of classical rabbinic thought can help us develop some aspects of emotional intelligence in our own lives. Thus having now explored the necessary definitions and addressed some of the methodological considerations, we spend this next chapter looking at the broader topic of rabbinic psychology. A sense of what the Rabbis saw as "human nature" will necessarily

form the basis for the rest of our study, so we now investigate the foundation for our further exploration of rabbinic thought and the theory of emotional intelligence.

הוא היה אומר: חביב אדם שנברא בצלם.
חבה יתרה נודעת לו שנברא בצלם.

He [Rabbi Akiba] used to say:
Beloved is humanity, for humans were created in the image of God.
But it was an act of even greater love that they were told
[lit. "it was made known to them"] that they were created in the image of God.

***m Avot* 3:14**

CHAPTER 2:
RABBINIC PSYCHOLOGY

It is always problematic to place modern concepts onto classical rabbinic literature. In part, this is because different values exist between modern society and rabbinic culture, such as the importance of "fear" that we explored previously. In addition, classical rabbinic literature is by its very nature multi-vocal, providing multiple viewpoints on one issue, and often not even coming to any kind of real conclusion. Finally, depending on how early one dates the period, the time of classical Rabbis (and "proto-Rabbis") lasted anywhere from 600 to 700 years, and so when we look at a page of Talmud or Midrash, we are often looking at "discussions" among Rabbis who could have lived centuries apart in entirely different parts of the world. As a result, trying to read modern ideas such as "history," "theology" or "psychology" onto classical rabbinic literature is rather tricky, and we have to act almost as cultural anthropologists, teasing out the Rabbis' worldview.

For example, the Rabbis had no concept of "history" as we understand it today – in the Talmud, Alexander the Great talked with the High Priest in Jerusalem[15] and the Emperor Nero converted to Judaism,[16] and yet neither of these events appear in the historical record. Similarly, "rabbinic theology" is also a problematic term. Solomon Schechter entitled his classic book *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (later republished as *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*), since he understood that it was impossible to encapsulate this field of study – all one could do was examine elements of it:

> My object in choosing the title "Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology" is to indicate that from the following chapters there must not be expected either finality or completeness. Nor will there be made any attempt in the following pages at that precise and systematic treatment which we are rightly accustomed to claim in other fields of scientific inquiry.[17]

As Schechter implies, "rabbinic history" and "rabbinic theology" cannot be subjected to precise analysis, since these were not concepts that the classical Rabbis dealt with. Instead, we have to study the texts that the classical Rabbis have passed down to us, and interpret them through the lens of the modern concepts we wish to consider. The question then becomes how that lens reflects, and at times distorts, the rabbinic corpus. And indeed, these same issues arise when we talk about "rabbinic psychology."

As we shall be exploring particular aspects of the intersection between rabbinic Judaism and modern psychology, it is worth examining what has been done in the past when attempts have been made to connect these two subjects. This brief study can be divided into two parts: first, we can look descriptively – we can investigate classical rabbinic literature to address the question, "On their own terms, what did the Rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash say about human nature?" Or, we can look

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[15] *b Yoma* 69a.
[16] *b Gittin* 56a.
[17] Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (Woodstock, VT, Jewish Lights, 1999), 1.

prescriptively – we can see how current rabbis have examined rabbinic literature to ask, "How can we *use* classical rabbinic thought to better understand ourselves?"

As this thesis as a whole is about connecting classical rabbinic thought with the theory of emotional intelligence using both descriptive and prescriptive lenses, this chapter will do the same as we look at the broader question of "rabbinic psychology."

Describing Rabbinic Psychology

When we look at psychological aspects of the Rabbis' worldview, we are trying to understand what the Rabbis saw as people's motivation to act in this world. We are trying to answer the questions, "How did the Rabbis understand people's relationships with themselves and others? How did they understand human nature?" Though there are many normative halakhic (i.e., legal) statements about how we are supposed to act (a large part of rabbinic literature is civil law), it is truly through *aggadah*, through stories, that we can get a sense of rabbinic psychology. Stories, by their very nature, have an emotional element to them that laws do not. Thus while the Rabbis did not know the writings of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung or Daniel Goleman, we can look at *aggadot* to get a sense of how the Rabbis understood human nature.

The fundamental assumption about rabbinic psychology is that the Rabbis saw human beings – and everything about them – as having been created by God, and even more than that, as being the pinnacle of creation. This statement has two main implications – first, it implies that humans have a responsibility towards themselves and towards others, since they are reflections of the Divine Image. Second, it means that despite divisions into body and soul (a prevalent notion in Greek thought that came to influence rabbinic ideology), human beings are essentially unified, since they were formed in the likeness

of the one God. Indeed, the quote from *m Avot* that began this chapter truly encapsulates the Rabbis' view about human nature. While people can do terrible things to each other, at our core, we are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, but even more than that, we are *told* that we are created in that image. For the Rabbis, quite simply, we are special, and we are to be aware of that specialness.

The Rabbis proceed from that supposition to emphasize that every person is unique and valuable in their own way. Ephraim Urbach, in his book *The Sages*, explores a well-known text from *m Sanhedrin* 4:5:

> In the way man was created and in the form that the Creator gave him, two principles find expression – that of human unity and that of the individual worth of each man. "Hence man was created as a single individual... and for the sake of peace among men, that one should not say to his fellow: 'My father was greater than yours'... and to declare the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, for a man stamps many coins with one seal, and they are all identical, but the King of the king of kings [sic] stamped every man with the seal of the first man, and none is identical with his fellow. Therefore it is the duty of every one to say: 'For my sake the world was created.'"[18] This Mishna states, on the one hand, that no man is identical with his fellow, but is a separate personality, possessing his own worth and bearing responsibility for the existence of the world, but at the same time all men are stamped with the one seal, and no one can say to his fellow that he is unique.[19]

While the *mishnah* from *Sanhedrin* has been read and applied in a multitude of ways, Urbach's main point is that it can act as a balance for people. On the one hand, it shows that human beings have potentially infinite worth – every single human being has not only the right, but the *duty* to say, "For my sake, the world was created." But it also shows that no one person has inherently *more* worth than another. Since all people are created with the "stamp" of the creator, it is incumbent upon us to find ways of valuing both ourselves and others.

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[18] *m Sanhedrin* 4:5.

[19] Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1985), 217.

Indeed, this connects with another rabbinic text about people's relationships with each other, which appears in two forms. The shorter version comes in *Sifra Kedoshim*: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Lev. 19:18). Rabbi Akiba says: 'This is the greatest principle of the Torah.' Ben Azzai says: [the verse] *This is the book of the generations of Adam* (Gen. 5:1) is a greater principle."[20] To understand this passage, we must also know the second half of the verse from Genesis 5:1, namely, *for in the likeness of God did [God] make Adam*. When people today point to a biblical verse to direct their actions, they often go back to the verse from Leviticus as a form of the "golden rule." But the Rabbis argue that while the verse *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* is a good guide, it has the problem of being relative. If we do *not* love ourselves, then we will never learn to love our neighbor – and if we use Akiba's model, how we treat others will be almost completely dependent upon how we treat ourselves. In contrast, Ben Azzai's statement is an objective standard. We are descendants of Adam, who was created in the image of God, and so we have responsibilities towards others *regardless* of how we view ourselves. For the Ben Azzai, *that* is the most critical piece to remember when we think about humanity.

The longer version of this debate expands on this concept:

> Ben Azzai said: "[The verse] *This is the book of the descendants of Adam* (Gen. 5:1) is a great principle of the Torah."
> Rabbi Akiba said: "*And you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Lev. 19:18) is an even greater principle." Hence, [from Rabbi Akiba's statement you can deduce that] you must not say: "Since I have been put to shame, let my neighbor be put to shame." Rabbi Tanchuma said: "If you do, know Whom you [also] put to shame, [for] *in the likeness of God did [God] make humanity* (Gen. 5:1)."[21]

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[20] *Sifra Kedoshim* 4:12.
[21] *Bereishit Rabbah* 24:7.

Here, the underlying implications of Ben Azzai's statements are spelled out. If we have been mistreated, we should not want to retaliate, because all people have the divine spark within them. Note here that in many ways, psychology and theology counteract each other in this passage. When we are wronged, our natural psychological tendency is often to want to fight back, to do unto others as they have done to us. Yet Ben Azzai's statement – which is primarily theological – tries to nullify that inclination. From his perspective, we must remember that wronging another person is like wronging God. When our baser urges try to overcome us, remembering that God has created us can help us prevail in that struggle.

This balance between the "humanity" and the "divinity" within us leads to the second implication of humans being created in the image of God, namely, that people are essentially unified. In Platonic and subsequent Hellenistic thought – the prevailing intellectual climate of the time of the classical Rabbis – human beings consisted of two parts, the body and the soul. The body was seen to be "earthly" at best and evil at worst, with the soul being "heavenly" and good. Christian thought was a direct descendant of this thinking, yet rabbinic Judaism rebelled against this idea. For the classical Rabbis, despite apparent distinctions, the body and the soul are always and inherently connected.

The most striking passage arguing for this idea appears as a fabricated discussion between Antoninus and Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, the redactor of the Mishnah. Antoninus represented a Roman emperor (possibly Caracalla[22]) and acts as an archetype of Hellenistic thinking. Rabbi Judah, on the other hand, was such an important figure that he is often simply called "Rabbi." In *b Sanhedrin* 91a-b, the two men debate the role of body and soul:

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[22] Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine: A Political History from the Bar Kochba War to the Arab Conquest* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 248-249.

> Antoninus said to Rabbi: "The body and the soul can both free themselves from judgment. The body can plead: 'The soul has sinned, [with the proof being] that from the day it left me, I lay like a dumb stone in the grave [powerless to do anything].' Yet the soul can say: 'The body has sinned, [with the proof being] that from the day I departed from it, I fly about in the air like a bird [and commit no sin].'"
>
> He [Rabbi] replied, "I will tell you a parable. To what may this be compared? To a human king who owned a beautiful orchard which contained splendid figs. Now, he appointed two watchmen [to guard it], one lame and the other blind. [One day] the lame man said to the blind man, 'I see beautiful figs in the orchard. Come and place me upon your shoulders, and we may take and eat them.' So the blind man put the lame man on his shoulders, and then took and ate the figs.
>
> Some time after, the owner of the orchard came and asked them, 'Where are those beautiful figs?' The lame man replied, 'Do I have feet to walk with?' The blind man replied, 'Do I have eyes to see with?' [So] what did the king do? He placed the lame man upon the blind man and judged them together. So will the Holy One, blessed be God, bring the soul, place it [back] in the body, and judge them together, as it is written, *God shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people* (Ps. 50:4): *God shall call to the heavens from above* – this refers to the soul; *and to the earth, that he may judge his people* – [this refers] to the body."[23]

This passage is reflective of one of the implicit tensions in rabbinic thought – the balance between Greek thinking and biblical ideology. Urbach notes that in the Bible, there was no conception of a division between "body" and "soul" within a human being. "Every organ of the body serves as a substitute for the entire body…*Nefesh, guf* and *ruach* [soul, body and spirit] form an indivisible entity, and it may be said that man is a psycho-physical organism."[24] And indeed this tension between unity and division is the main point of the passage above.

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[23] *b Sanhedrin* 91a-b.

[24] Urbach, *The Sages*, 215.

Note first that Antoninus, as the exemplar of Hellenistic philosophy, assumes that the body and the soul are separate entities. When a person dies, each divisible part can claim innocence, since the body and the soul "disconnect" from each other when a person dies, and each one goes to its natural realm – the body to the earth and the soul to heaven. In contrast, Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, while not denying that the body and the soul are independent, argues that they are innately joined. From his perspective, neither can survive without the other. Thus while the rabbinic view of the body and soul is not as monistic as the biblical view, it still does not reach the pure dualism of Greek thought. While the soul still is the motivating entity, a human being is reflective of the one God, and so is an inherently unified being.

When thinking about rabbinic psychology, therefore, we need to realize that the Rabbis saw human beings in their entirety. Rabbinic psychology was not just about the psyche, but about the person as a whole – body, mind and spirit. Since this classical rabbinic view on human nature continues to inform current rabbis in their encounters, we turn now to see how these ideas have been implemented in modern settings. We take a few moments to study those who have tried, in their own work, to connect findings in modern psychology with traditional Jewish ideas, investigating the ways ancient texts have been utilized today.

Rabbinic Texts in Psychological Settings

When modern rabbis bring classical Jewish texts into psychological and pastoral settings, a tension often arises between the rabbi's explicit job as a teacher of text and their implicit job as a pastoral caregiver. These potentially conflicting roles lead to the question of with which framework a rabbi begins. When a congregant comes searching for some

psychological guidance, does the rabbi start with traditional Jewish ideas to provide assistance? Or does the rabbi start with their own understanding of psychology to see how Jewish texts can be read through that lens? Since emotional intelligence is about helping people better understand themselves and others, it is worth looking at how rabbis today have used psychology in general to those same ends.

We start with Rabbi Robert L. Katz, who was Professor of Human Relations at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati, and the author of *Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition.* He describes the internal conflict inherent in rabbinic counseling:

> Rabbis often feel they have to choose between taking the role of *mocheach,* moral judge, or the role of *menahem*, giver of care, consoler. Some rabbis avoid both, preferring the role of *talmid chacham*, or disciple of the wise, objective teacher and guide – an honored role in the history of the rabbinate. They may be more concerned with principle and less with the personal consequences of the choices their congregants make.
>
> At such junctures some rabbis will make pronouncements as though wearing the mantle of the *dayyan*, the judge. They may cite the sources, confident that Judaism has a ready answer for the issue at hand, and feel they are authentic only when expanding the meaning of the text.
>
> Other rabbis will respond empathetically as persons of genuine sensitivity…The rabbi can be a resource in the healing of the soul (*refuat hanefesh*) as well as in the fulfillment of self (*tikkun hanefesh*).[25]

Katz feels that there is a direct link between the traditional roles of the rabbi and the various "hats" that a contemporary rabbi might wear – teacher, counselor, judge, and so on. At times, a rabbi today must deal with everything from the changing family to medical issues to existential crises. While the issues of the day may change, for Katz, there is a sense of continuity from antiquity to today in terms of a rabbi's job. While he

[25] Rabbi Robert Katz, *Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 21.

emphasizes the psychological and pastoral roles, for him, a rabbi is always based in Jewish tradition.

In order to highlight that lineage, Katz draws on a whole range of Jewish texts, from biblical to rabbinic to Hasidic. In his section on "Counseling in Classic Literature," he interprets *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim* 2:35 pastorally, as a way to warn against the dangers of a rabbi over-identifying with a congregant:

> "[Our rabbis taught]: *Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him* [Jer. 22:10]. [That is], *Weep not for the dead* [that is] in excess, *neither bemoan him* – beyond measure. How is that [applied]? – Three days for weeping and seven for lamenting and thirty [to refrain] from cutting the hair and [donning] pressed clothes; hereafter, the Holy One, blessed be He, says, 'Ye are not more compassionate towards him [the departed] than I.'"[26]
>
> We might extend this principle of control to include a whole variety of situations in human relations where conscious discipline is required to avoid overidentification. The rabbis did not anticipate the discoveries of contemporary psychotherapy by examining emotional reactions clinically or systematically. Intuitively, however, they did appreciate a very human tendency to give way to self-defeating overreactions.[27]

The midrashic passage speaks of the importance of not being "more compassionate" than God. The implication from Katz's perspective is that if we weep or bemoan a loved one too much, then we could not get on with our own lives. Indeed, Katz expands the meaning of this passage to advise rabbinic counselors not to become "over-involved" with congregants. Quite simply, rabbis should not care more about their congregants than the congregants themselves do. Thus Katz takes this midrashic passage about mourning,

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[26] *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim* 2:35

[27] Katz, *Pastoral Care*, 63.

and uses it to generalize about *all* situations where rabbis have the potential to become too emotionally invested.

But it is the last part of Katz's statement which is the heart of the issue. Katz understands that it is impossible to apply modern psychotherapeutic concepts to rabbinic literature and have them fit perfectly. The classical Rabbis did not write case studies nor discuss clinical diagnoses, but they did understand human nature. Indeed, at its core, human nature has not fundamentally changed since the time of the Rabbis' writings. Every person – from antiquity to today – has felt hope, joy, fear, anger, sadness, the whole range of human emotions. So even though classical rabbinic literature is not intended to be a basis for psychotherapy, Katz notes that the Rabbis' insights have relevance even to today, and that they have intuitively perceived the human struggle with much psychological insight.

Katz also brings up another challenge facing contemporary rabbinic counselors. Almost by definition, rabbis are seen as moral authorities, which means that rabbis must teach, espouse and live out particular values. Thus a complication arises when a congregant has made an immoral choice and comes to a rabbi looking for guidance. The "psychotherapist" part of the rabbi looks to comfort and guide, while the "moral authority" part of the rabbi may want to chastise and correct. Katz introduces these issues in his chapter, "Show Me Thy Ways":

> Their first exposure to psychological theory has a way of immobilizing rabbis and ministers. Some are shocked when they feel a tension between principles and persons. Others, on looking into Freud's writings, suspect an inherent threat to moral principles and lose no time in making clear that their loyalty is to religion and not to the relativism and neutrality of the psychotherapist...

> We see one possible resolution to the question of direction in counseling in these words of R[abbi] Jose b. R[abbi] Hanina: "Love unaccompanied by reproof is not love."[28] But there are problems here too. What attitudes and what behaviors are we reproving? If our goal is to judge and we are reasonably sure of the principles we have in mind, how do we offer reproof most effectively to the people we would counsel? Was Rabbi Hanina [sic][29] a moral absolutist who believed that all a teacher must do is apply authoritative principles to specific situations? Or was he suggesting that loving others may lead us to avoid even the suggestion of moral judgment?[30]

According to Katz, psychotherapy has the potential be ethically neutral.[31] In contrast, the rabbinate emphasizes morality and values. So how do we reconcile these aspects? Katz uses a quote from Rabbi Jose b. Rabbi Hanina to help resolve this problem: "Love unaccompanied by reproof is not love." If the psychotherapist should be aiming to help people love themselves as they are, then the rabbi should be aiming to reprove gently, and so from Katz's point of view, these two aspects are not contradictory – they are complementary. Yet there is still the question of how to apply this statement in a rabbi's day-to-day world. Talmudic maxims are, by definition, general, while issues facing congregants are, by definition, specific. Thus the challenge facing a rabbinic counselor is how to translate the broad ideas of traditional Judaism into particular situations.

Indeed, in that light, Katz sees classical rabbinic thought primarily as a series of guidelines and frameworks for interactions, not as specific instructions. Like Hillel's claim that "Love your neighbor as yourself" is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary that we must study,[32] from Katz's perspective, it is most important that a rabbi remain

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[28] Bereishit Rabbah 54:3.
[29] I am assuming here that Katz means Rabbi Jose b. Rabbi Hanina.
[30] Katz, *Pastoral Care*, 79-80.
[31] See also the essay "Psychotherapy and Judaism Today: The Interface" in Jack H. Bloom, *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar* (Binghamton, NY, The Haworth Press, 2002), 89-105.
[32] *b Shabbat* 31a.

rooted in Judaism, with psychology and psychotherapy as "commentary" on how to address specific situations. Yet today, more and more rabbis have an improved awareness of the role of psychology in the rabbinate, meaning that the practical usefulness of Katz's book has declined somewhat. When Katz himself was in rabbinical school, the rabbinate valued large congregations with powerful and often austere rabbis. As he was writing and teaching, the rabbinate was undergoing a major shift, emphasizing more intimacy and empathy in rabbinic-congregational relations. Now, in the twenty years since Katz's book, a greater number of rabbis have had experience in pastoral education and/or social work training. As such, while his book provides a good theoretical basis for pastoral counseling, it does not have a deep level of practicality for rabbis in the early 21st century.

To fill this need, the newer book *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources* (hereinafter *Jewish Pastoral Care*) has gone through two editions in less than five years, striving to be continually relevant and current for today's rabbis. Unlike *Pastoral Care in the Jewish Tradition*, which was written entirely by Katz, *Jewish Pastoral Care* is a collection of essays edited by Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman, and is designed to provide rabbis with both a theoretical *and* a practical guide to rabbinic counseling.

Friedman herself authored the essay "PaRDeS: A Model for Presence in *Livni Ruchani*," and bases her title on a phrase from the founder of Clinical Pastoral Education, Anton Boisen: "The pastoral interaction is an encounter with 'the human document.'"[33] Working from this hypothesis, a method that we might use to study Torah could be adapted to better understand people's stories. While the Hebrew word *pardes*

[33] Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman, editor, *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005), 42.

literally means "orchard;" in this context, "PaRDeS" is an acronym for four levels of depth for studying Torah: *p'shat* (the "simple" or literal meaning of the text), *remez* ("hint," implying an allegorical interpretation), *derash* ("exposition," which involves hermeneutics and homiletics) and *sod* (an esoteric, mystical and often wordless interpretation). This technique was outlined by Rabbi Moses de Leon in the Zohar, and has become a popular and useful method for rabbis to understand the different levels of meaning that a biblical text could provide.

Friedman uses this structure when talking about how rabbinic counselors can understand a person's individual narrative. Yet when using the PaRDeS method to interpret someone's story, we have to change the content slightly. In this case, the *p'shat* transforms into the simple level of what is actually happening to someone, the *remez* hints at their emotional response, the *derash* turns into how they will create an exposition to construct meaning around what has happened to them, and finally, the *sod* is the intimate and often wordless connection a rabbi can have with a congregant.[34] Notice that this use of the PaRDeS method to understand someone's life story is not a specifically psychotherapeutic technique. Unlike Katz, who uses specific texts to illuminate the sometimes conflicting interaction between religion and psychology, here Friedman uses an explicitly Jewish homiletical *process* in a therapeutic setting. This is not about texts *per se*, but rather, how we read them.

However, Friedman does use one rabbinic text in her essay – the classic story about the four Rabbis who entered the *pardes*, the "orchard of paradise":

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[34] Ibid, 44-50.

> Our sages understood the dangers of the encounter with the Ultimate. We recall the account of the four who entered the *pardes*. They didn't fare so well, on the whole:
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> "Ben Azzai cast a look and died. [Of him Scripture says: *Precious in the sight of the Eternal is the death of God's saints.*[35]] Ben Zoma looked and became demented. [Of him Scripture says: *Have you found honey? Eat as much as sufficient for you, lest you be filled with it, and vomit it.*[36]] Aher [Elisha ben Abuyah] mutilated the shoots. R[abbi] Akiba departed unhurt." (*b Hagigah* 14b)[37]

Friedman sees this as warning against the potential dangers of using this PaRDeS method in pastoral encounters. As she implies, while four Rabbis entered the *pardes* in the hopes of finding ultimate meaning, only one exited unharmed, and for us as well, once we enter the *pardes* in our interactions with others, it may be difficult for us leave. Thus one of the issues she raises mirrors one of Katz's concerns – rabbis may over-identify with congregants in crisis (almost literally "enter their *pardes*"), and their suffering and pain could overwhelm the rabbi. In any pastoral encounter, there is always the ever-present concern that the rabbi may become over-involved, and so Friedman here uses a specific (and quite relevant) text to provide warnings against potential pitfalls in a pastoral encounter. Yet notice that her essay as a whole highlights a specific *methodology* rather than an application of the texts themselves – she starts from her unique psychological perspective, and brings in rabbinic texts to support her particular interpretations.

In contrast, Rabbi Sheldon Marder's essay, "God is in the Text: Using Sacred Text and Teaching in Jewish Pastoral Care," provides a somewhat different outlook on the role Jewish texts can play in a healing encounter. Marder works from the role

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[35] Psalms 116:15.
[36] Proverbs 25:16.
[37] Friedman, *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 50.

of the text itself in an interaction, trying to see how it would manifest itself in a pastoral setting. For him, text is the basis of relationship:

> In pastoral care, we work with people in all kinds of distress – grief, rage, hopelessness; they are in transition or crisis. As we help them confront the anxieties of an uncertain future, *we need to be grounded in a strong foundation of ideas about God, persons and the meaning of our relationship with God.*[38]

Like Katz before him, Marder argues that the main reason a rabbi has a right to speak with a congregant is because the rabbi is "grounded in a strong foundation," which, to him, is primarily textual.

However, he would not claim that a rabbi should just walk into a patient's room and start teaching Talmud. Rather, he explains the role of text in a pastoral setting as follows:

> …Dvora Weisberg describes her own religious life: "When I study," she says, "I feel that I am an acute participant in a process that began with the Jewish people, an ongoing search for God's will and our place in the universe."[39] As I read it, she posits an "ideal model" of the Jewish religious life: a person who is (1) an active participant in a process; (2) connected to the Jewish people; (3) searching for God; and (4) searching for purpose. We thus have a clear, four-point answer to the question "Why use text in Jewish pastoral care?" Our task is to help people replicate the life of study that Weisberg describes.[40]

Thus "studying texts" beomes more than simply opening a page of Talmud – it is connecting people to each other and to God.

One potential issue with Marder's approach, though, is that he does not outline where study is *not* appropriate. He almost sees text study as a panacea – for example, in quoting *Midrash Tanhuma Yitro* 8, which speaks about the Torah curing bodily ills,

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[38] Marder in Friedman, *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 186, italics in original.
[39] Dvora Weisberg, "The Study of Torah as a Religious Act," cited in Marder; Friedman, *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 206.
[40] Marder in Friedman, *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 186.

he does not provide a more allegorical interpretation, taking it almost literally. He does concede that "[o]ut of context, this midrash might seem very odd, [since] most of us probably find it hard to imagine a literal belief in the Torah's ability to cure illness,"[41] but unfortunately, he does not tell us where Torah might be less helpful in pastoral encounters. There are moments when congregants or patients simply need a listening ear, and text study will not be the most appropriate response. He claims that there are "healable moments" that mirror teachable moments,[42] but it would have been helpful to have seen what circumstances are – or are not – most conducive to them.

To gain more information about potential "healable moments" in Jewish pastoral settings, throughout the fall of 2006, I corresponded with several rabbis who had experience in using psychology in their work. Many were Clinical Pastoral Educators, while others were clinical psychologists or had a background in social work. I asked the following questions:

> 1. Are there particular rabbinic texts or ideas that you find that you often return to in your work? How have you used them? What is it about those texts or ideas that you find most helpful?
> 2. What ideas from rabbinic thought do you see as most helpful for people to become more "emotionally intelligent"? What is it about those ideas in particular that makes them helpful?
> 3. What role does psychology play in today's rabbinate? What role *should* it play?

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[41] Ibid, 193.
[42] Ibid, 192.

Their responses provide a valuable complement to the published literature on using psychology and psychotherapy in Jewish settings, so let us examine what they have to teach.

The most important piece to these rabbis was self-awareness. Rabbi Mychal Springer notes that

> [...t]oday's rabbis need to have ways of conceptualizing people's behavior and their ways of functioning in the world so that we can engage them productively – we need to have the same kind of knowledge about ourselves. Rabbis function as helpers in many different ways and there are many dynamics that get triggered in the helping relationship which are challenging. If we bring self-awareness – awareness of our counter-transference – then we are much more likely to be helpful effectively all around.[43]

Springer believes that across the different roles that a rabbi plays – counselor, service-leader, teacher, moral authority – the constant factor is the rabbi him- or herself. Self-awareness therefore forms the basis for an effective rabbinate, since it can help prevent counter-transference, the ever-present issue of a rabbi putting their own needs onto their congregants. In addition, though she does not say it explicitly, Springer also explains that the biggest questions a rabbi faces each day are, "Who am I, and how and where do I bring myself to my interactions with others?" Being with another person inherently creates a dynamic, and so while the rabbi cannot control another person, it is crucial that the rabbi has a sense of him- or herself. Indeed, self-understanding is often the greatest task in strengthening the relationship between two people.

Rabbi Nathan Goldberg, an Orthodox rabbi and a supervisor in Clinical Pastoral Education, phrases it in a slightly different way. When writing about his experiences teaching CPE students, he describes how he knew they were maturing:

> The harbinger of growth in...students was their ability to live and affirm the limits of their own understanding and

[43] Personal correspondence with Rabbi Mychal Springer.

> re-mythologize as they discovered new ways of relating to the other and themselves. In my own rabbinic theology, as they de-and re-mythologized, they became more aware of their internal conversation with Self...[44]

In other words, from Goldberg's perspective, the most important aspect in a student's growth was first, his or her ability to understand who they were, and second, how they could create a sacred story around it (to "re-mythologize" it). The most important piece to him, though, was the "awareness of their internal conversations with the 'Self'." From his point of view, not only do we need to be introspective, we have to be aware of that introspection. For Goldberg, knowing who we are, and knowing *why* we are who we are, become the foundations for our development as human beings.

Another common thread amongst the rabbis I interviewed is that biblical and rabbinic texts can help people understand their own emotions.[45] Rabbi Terry Bookman says:

> I often employ...texts as mirrors, allowing people to reflect on their own growth and journeys. The brilliance of the Torah (and Biblical) stories is the fact that they reveal imperfect people living in an imperfect world, making imperfect choices. This gives others the permission to do the same, while grounding themselves in ancient texts.[46]

When people are in crisis, they often wonder, "Why did this happen? Am I being punished? Did I do something wrong? Did I make poor choices?" The rabbi's role is to be with people during these moments, but it can be comforting to know that characters in biblical and rabbinic literature also faced similar challenges. Bookman sees traditional texts not necessarily as "sacred writ," but rather as a source for people to identify with others facing difficult choices in their lives.

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[44] "Transcribed Theory Papers" Rabbi Nathan Goldberg, underlining in original; the capitalization of the word "Self" reflects his understanding of the different sides of a human being, via Carl Jung.

[45] Interestingly, the two rabbis who provided examples used biblical, not rabbinic, texts. However, the way they use biblical texts can easily be adapted to rabbinic literature.

[46] Personal correspondence with Rabbi Terry Bookman.

Rabbi Goldberg sees the Bible similarly, saying that he "[u]se[s] the psalms to access different emotions and 'make them kosher.'"[47] He explains:

> For instance, a patient angry at G-d [sic] often thinks that s/he may be sinful in that anger. The Psalms, with their fertile orchard of emotions, can help make what initially feels like an unkosher emotion (e.g., anger at G-d) into a potentially redemptive experience. As one Baptist Minister put it – you have to go through Psalm 22 to get to Psalm 23. (i.e., you have to ask "My G-d... why have you abandoned me?" before you can "fear no evil in the valley of the shadow [of death]..."[48]

This is quite a powerful image he brings. He recognizes, as Bookman does, that people feel a range of emotions when they are troubled. Goldberg argues that drawing on Psalms can provide people with a sense that their feelings are reasonable, acceptable and normal – that is to say, "kosher." Rather than "getting over" difficult times, Goldberg implies that we have to "get through" them, and understanding a person's psychological state is what allows a rabbi to find the appropriate text for that moment.

In the end, all these rabbis who sought to connect their role as "teacher of text" and their job as "counselor and pastor" felt a conflict. On the one hand, they understood that rabbis are rooted in Jewish tradition, which emphasizes textual interpretation and morality. On the other hand, when rabbis are in a clinical setting, their role is to help make other people's emotions "kosher," with the hope that they may help their congregants and patients get through to the other side. This tension may never be resolved, but as we examine rabbinic thought through the lens of emotional intelligence, we must remember that it will always be present, causing a rabbi to walk a fine line between two ways of understanding – and then repairing – ourselves and our world.

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[47] Personal correspondence with Rabbi Nathan Goldberg.
[48] Ibid.

Conclusion

While the classical Rabbis were not psychotherapists, they did have an intuitive understanding of human psychology. For today's rabbinate, however, using classical rabbinic texts in modern psychological settings can be quite challenging. Classical rabbinic psychology is tied in with theology, which is not what modern psychology emphasizes, and the role of "moral authority" could potentially complicate a pastoral relationship. Additionally, the explicit role of "rabbi as teacher of text" and the implicit role of "rabbi as counselor" can often be in conflict: With which framework do we begin? Which position dominates the rabbi-congregant relationship?

Since rabbinic literature is so multi-vocal, this thesis will base itself on the implicit role of the rabbi, with the rabbi as a counselor and intuitive psychologist, to find the connections between rabbinic thought and the theory of emotional intelligence. As Friedman did in her essay, we will begin from a particular methodology to see how rabbinic ideas can be applied and interpreted through it. Yet even though there will never be a clear and perfect fit between rabbinic thought and emotional intelligence, there is one common assumption that should remain at the forefront of our minds. Both rabbinic literature and the theory of emotional intelligence claim that understanding ourselves leads to improving ourselves, and that understanding others leads to improving our world. While the Rabbis saw people as valuable and unified, what is perhaps most interesting is that they did not see humans as inherently good or inherently bad. As imperfect human beings, we have great capacity both for good and for evil, and so, within both classical rabbinic thought and the theory of emotional intelligence, it is the choices we make that truly define who we are. We now start our examination of how we can make those choices good ones.

בן זומא אומר: איזהו גבור? הכובש את יצרו.

Ben Zoma said: Who is mighty? The person who subdues their own impulses.

***m Avot* 4:1**

CHAPTER 3:
CONTROLLING IMPULSES –
SUBDUING THE *YETZER HARA* AND MANAGING ANGER

We start our examination of rabbinic thought through the lens of emotional intelligence with its bases – self-awareness and emotional management. Developing emotional intelligence begins by asking, "What is driving us to act in certain ways?" Our first task is always to understand what we are feeling, and once we have done that, we can start to decide how we act on those emotions. As noted in Chapter 1, emotions are truly our impulses to act, and so we begin by looking inwards, exploring arguably the most common psychological concept in rabbinic thought, the *yetzer hara.*

The *yetzer hara* has been defined as "the impulse to do evil," "the anti-social impulse," "the sexual urge," "the equivalent of the Freudian 'id'" and even "the desire to be selfish." Yet the common theme among these definitions is that the *yeter hara*

is something to be directed, controlled and sublimated. Even though the word *ra* does connote a sense of "wickedness," the *yetzer hara* is not necessarily evil as it is, but rather, when it remains uncontrolled and is allowed to run rampant, it can cause us to do harmful things. Rav Assi gives perhaps one of the most accurate descriptions of the power of the unrestrained *yetzer hara*:

> At first, the *yetzer hara* is as thin as a spider's gossamer,
> but in the end, it is as thick as a cart rope, as it is said,
> *Woe unto them that begin to draw iniquity with gossamer strands,*
> *and in the end sin (as it were) with a cart rope* (Isa. 5:18).[49]

As Rav Assi tells us, the *yetzer hara* can exert great power over us if we cannot subdue it. It begins to draw us in with thin strands, but in the end, it develops into a rope that drags us in undesired ways. The unspoken implication of this statement is that we need to find ways to resist the *yetzer hara* early in its pull, since it is easier to escape from a web when it is made of gossamer strands than when it is made of cart ropes!

Controlling our impulses is also a critical aspect of emotional intelligence; however, that definition of "impulse" is somewhat different from the *yetzer hara*. As Daniel Goleman notes, "There is perhaps no psychological skill more fundamental than resisting impulse. It is the root of all emotional self-control, since all emotions, by their very nature, lead to one or another impulse to act."[50] Thus his definition of an "impulse" is *any* emotion that causes us to act in any way, and yet in the end, the emotions which require resisting are the ones that are the most powerful. Therefore in this chapter, we will address two distinct yet related rabbinic ideas on controlling strong emotions, namely subduing the *yetzer hara* and managing our anger.

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[49] *b Sukkah* 52a.
[50] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 81.

Subduing the *Yetzer Hara*

In *b Kiddushin* 81a, a story is told about Rav Amram the Pious:

> Certain [redeemed] captive women came to Nehardea. They were taken to the house of Rav Amram the Pious, and the ladder was removed from under them. As one passed by, a light fell on the sky lights; [at which point] Rav Amram seized the ladder, which ten men could not have raised, and by himself, he set it up and then proceeded to go up (סליק ואזיל, *salik v'azil*). When he had gone halfway up the ladder, he spread his feet apart, and cried out, "Fire in the house of Rav Amram! (נורא בי עמרם!, *nura bei Amram!*)" The Rabbis came and said to him, "We have put you to shame!" He said to them: "Better that you shame Amram in this world than that you be ashamed of him in the next." He then ordered it [the *yetzer hara*] to leave him, and it issued from him in the shape of a fiery column (עמודא דנורא, *amuda d'nura*). He said to it: "See, you are fire (נורא, *nura*) and I am flesh, but I am stronger than you."[51]

This story reflects the Talmudic dictum, "The greater the man, the greater the *yetzer hara*."[52] In this *aggadah*, certain redeemed women were brought to the house of Rav Amram the Pious. His appellation implies that he was a particularly righteous man, as he is described as "*the* Pious," possibly going so far as to imply that he was the most righteous person of his (or even any) generation. While Rashi tells us that the reason the women were brought to Rav Amram's house was because he himself had redeemed them, I would argue another possibility – given the fact that he was so virtuous, his house was naturally thought to be the "safest" place for the women to remain.

However, even Rav Amram was unable to resist the allure of one of the women when the light hit her in just the right way. He was so smitten that he lifted up the ladder separating the lower and upper levels (per Rashi), a ladder that was so heavy that ten men

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[51] *b Kiddushin* 81a

[52] *b Sukkah* 52a.

could not have lifted it. And yet the phrasing in Aramaic, סליק ואזיל, *salik v'azil,* "he proceeded to go up," might also be seen as encompassing two meanings. On one level, it has the literal sense of "he ascended the ladder," but the phrase might also imply he was getting an erection, with his *yetzer hara* taking control of him. At that moment, he stopped in the middle of the ladder because he needed "to regain his composure and steel himself against the Evil Inclination."[53] It was at that moment that he realized that he could not control his *yetzer hara* by himself, and so created a way to bring in other people to stop him from succumbing to his impulses.

As he stood halfway up the ladder, he proclaimed, "Fire in the house of Rav Amram!" – "נורא בי עמרם!," "*Nura bei Amram!*" Now, on some level, this was certainly not true. His house was still standing, and there was no *actual* fire in his house. However, his sexual desire was burning, and the word נורא, *nura,* is clearly a conscious word choice, as will be shown below. Rav Amram knew that by exclaiming that his house was aflame, his colleagues would come running to assist him, and so even though he himself could not restrain his *yetzer hara*, through a certain level of inventiveness, he was able to overcome it. He ends by telling the *yetzer hara*: "See, you are fire (נורא, *nura*) and I am flesh, but I am stronger than you." In other words, though he is only flesh and blood, he can subdue the "fire" (נורא, *nura*) in his loins. The ultimate implication is that no matter how strong the *yetzer hara* may be, we have the power to control our impulses – though we may have to be creative and to find some support in order to do it.

An important element in this passage is that Rav Amram was self-aware enough to recognize that he could not control his *yetzer hara* by himself. He sensed that his impulses

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[53] Footnote 35 in *b Kiddushin* 81a in *Talmud Bavli: The Schottenstein Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1993).

were taking over, and so used his community to help him alleviate his urges. In the end, he did not give in to sexual desires, because he himself was able to create a way for *others* to stop him from giving in. While he did say to the *yetzer hara*, "I am flesh, and you are fire, but I am stronger than you," he also knew that he could not overcome his urges alone – he needed outside assistance. Perhaps that is a reason why Rav Amram was called "the Pious." It was not because he did not have a *yetzer hara*, but rather, because he devised ways to control and subdue it, even when it was most difficult for him.

A particularly interesting parallel to this idea comes from a modern study that Goleman describes as "the marshmallow test." In this experiment, a group of four-year-olds were told that if they could wait while the experimenter ran a fifteen-minute errand, they would receive two marshmallows when he returned. If they could not wait, they would receive only one marshmallow, but would get it immediately. It was a "microcosm of the eternal battle between impulse and restraint, id and ego, desire and self-control, gratification and delay."[54] The question before these four-year-olds was the exact same question that continually challenged the Rabbis and Rav Amram in particular – how can we conquer our urges?

These four-year-olds likely had the same difficulty in controlling their desire for immediate gratification as Rav Amram did. And like Rav Amram, the most self-aware used outside help to control their impulses. "To sustain themselves in their struggle, [some of the children] covered their eyes so they wouldn't have to stare at temptation, or rested their heads in their arms, talked to themselves, sang, played games with their hands

[54] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 81.

and feet, even tried to go to sleep."[55] Like Rav Amram, these children "steeled themselves," and when temptation became too much for them to handle by themselves, they invented ways to help restrain their impulses.

What was most surprising about this study, though, was what happened to the children later in life:

> ...[T]welve to fourteen years later...these children were tracked down as adolescents. The emotional and social difference between the grab-the-marshmallow preschoolers and their gratification-delaying peers was dramatic. Those who had resisted temptation at four were now, as adolescents, more socially competent...They were less likely to go to pieces, freeze, or regress under stress, or become rattled and disorganized when pressured; they embraced challenges and pursued them instead of giving up even in the face of difficulties; they were self-reliant and confident, trustworthy and dependable; and they took initiative and plunged into projects. And, more than a decade later, they were still able to delay gratification in pursuit of their goals.[56]

This broader definition of "controlling impulses" illustrates that being able to delay gratification is a microcosm of general emotional intelligence. As both Rav Amram and the four-year-olds experienced, it is always a struggle to resist our desires for immediate pleasure. But if we are able to find ways to control these desires, we are also that much more likely to be more psychologically stable.

Indeed, controlling our impulses is never an easy task, as the Rabbis well knew. Our goal, therefore, is not to ignore these drives, but rather, to find ways to help us subdue them. Our impulses can have great power, and so it becomes our challenge and our responsibility to discover ways to master them. This leads us to another great

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[55] Ibid, 81.
[56] Ibid, 81-82.

intrapersonal struggle, namely how we handle our anger, and so it is to this topic that we now turn.

Managing Anger

The Rabbis recognized that anger was a reality in everyday life. *Pirkei Avot* teaches:

> There are four types of character when it comes
> to temperament. Quick to become angry, and quick
> to become pacified – his gain is cancelled by his loss.
> Hard to become angry, and hard to become pacified –
> his loss is cancelled by his gain. Hard to become angry,
> and easy to become pacified – this is a *hasid* [a pious person].
> Easy to become angry, and hard to become pacified –
> this is an evil person.[57]

As with the *yetzer hara*, the Rabbis do not ignore the fact that anger is a reality, and instead, underscore how we respond to it. Their assumption is that we all get angry at some point in our lives; the question becomes how little of a provocation it takes to set us off, and how much it takes to bring us back. When we do become angry, we might notice that we are more energized physiologically,[58] which means that at times, that emotion can even seem to feel good. Yet despite its fleeting seductiveness, in the end, anger leads primarily to damaging results, of which the Rabbis had quite a clear understanding.

One of the most insightful passages on this topic comes in *b Pesachim* 66b:

> Resh Lakish said: "[Concerning] every person who becomes
> angry – if he is a wise man, his wisdom departs from him;
> if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him."
>
> "If he is a wise man, his wisdom departs from him":
> [we learn this] from Moses. It is written, *And Moses was angry*
> (ויקצף, vayiktzof) *with the officers of the host...* (Num. 31:14)
> and [later in that chapter] it is written, *And Eleazar the Priest*
> *said unto the men of war that went to the battle: This is the statute*

[57] *m Avot* 5:11.
[58] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 59.

> *of the law which Adonai has commanded Moses…* (Num. 31:21). Therefore, it follows that this law had become hidden (אעלם, *i'alem*) from Moses.
>
> "If he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him": [we learn this] from Elisha. It is written, *Were it not [for the fact] that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward you, nor see you*, (2 Kings 3:14), and it is written [in the next verse], *'And now take for me a musician.' And when the musician played, the hand of Adonai [i.e., the spirit of prophecy] came upon him* (2 Kings 3:15).
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> Rabbi Mani b. Pattish said: "Whoever becomes angry, even if greatness has been decreed for him by Heaven, it is cast down." How do we know it? From [the story of] Eliav, for it is said, *And Eliav became incensed* (ויחר אף, vayichar af) *against David…*(1 Sam. 17:28) And when Samuel went to anoint him [i.e., one of Jesse's sons to be appointed as king], [with respect to] all of [Jesse's other sons] it is [simply] written, *Adonai has not chosen this one*, (1 Sam. 16:8ff), [but] with respect to Eliav, it is written, *But Adonai said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him.'* (1 Sam. 16:7). Thus it follows that Adonai had favored him until then [but rejected him at that moment].[59]

This passage requires some unpacking, yet its main emphasis seems to be that the more incensed one gets, the graver those consequences will be. This passage provides three very different examples of what happens when a person becomes angry, leading to three very different results.

Resh Lakish begins by claiming, "If [a man] is wise, his wisdom departs from him," drawing on an event in Moses' leadership that appears in Numbers 31. After a battle with the Midianites, Moses was "very angry" (ויקצף, *vayiktzof*) with the appointed leaders for having kept the Midianite women alive.[60] Seven verses later, the text says: "And *Eleazar the Priest* said unto the men of war who went to the battle: 'This is the statute of the law which

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[59] *b Pesachim* 66b.
[60] Numbers 31:14-15.

Adonai has commanded Moses…"[61] The Rabbis raise the point that it is Eleazar, and *not Moses* who addresses the populace. Indeed, this verse is the only time in the Torah where Eleazar speaks, and so from the perspective of Resh Lakish, this clearly means that Moses was unable to proclaim that law at that particular time. His conclusion is that Moses' anger caused this *mitzvah* to be "hidden" (איעלם, *I'alem*) from him, blocking his ability to access his memory.

Current psychological studies suggest that Resh Lakish was uncannily accurate in his assessment – anger can in fact cause parts of our memory to become "hidden":

> When emotions overwhelm concentration, what is being swamped is the mental capacity cognitive scientists call "working memory," the ability to hold in mind all information relevant to the task at hand…The prefrontal cortex executes working memory – and…is [also] where feelings and emotions meet. When the limbic circuitry that converges on the prefrontal cortex is in the thrall of emotional distress, one cost is in the effectiveness of working memory: we can't think straight…[62]

In other words, when we are consumed by any emotion – and anger in particular can be quite consuming – our cognitive ability is seriously hindered. The same part of the brain – the prefrontal cortex – is the seat of both the emotions and working memory, and so the word Resh Laskish uses – איעלם, *I'alem,* "hidden" – is a particularly apt choice. From the rabbinic perspective, it was obvious that Moses *knew* the *mitzvah*, but it was his "hijacked emotions"[63] that kept him from accessing it.

Now, it was certainly not good that a *mitzvah* was "hidden" from Moses, but there were no long-term repercussions – even within that chapter in Numbers, he is back to

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[61] Numbers 31:21, italics mine.
[62] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 79.
[63] See in particular, "Anatomy of an Emotional Hijacking," Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 13-29.

receiving commands from God.[64] In many ways, this description of Moses "forgetting" a law simply reflects the reality of most of our lives – we have all experienced strong emotions "hijacking" our ability to think straight. However, in this passage, there is no true prescription for how we can manage anger. It simply tells us, "This is what happens when one becomes angry," with no description of how Moses was able to bring himself back and calm himself down. In contrast, the next section of our talmudic passage (the story of Elisha) illustrates how people can take steps to assuage their anger – if they are self-aware.

The passage under consideration starts with an event in 2 Kings, when Jehoram, the king of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, are waging war against a common enemy. They come to Elisha asking for guidance, and Elisha exclaims to King Jehoram: "Were it not [for the fact] that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward you, nor see you."[65] Though the verse does not say explicitly, "Elisha became infuriated," its tone is unmistakable. He is clearly saying that he cannot even bring himself to cast his eyes upon Jehoram, since Jehoram was such a wicked king.[66] Resh Lakish thus naturally takes this verse to mean that Elisha became enraged.

Yet Elisha immediately proclaims: "'And now take for me a musician.' And when the musician played, the hand of Adonai [i.e., the spirit of prophecy] came upon him."[67] While within the biblical text, the musician was most likely there to stir up Elisha into a state of ecstasy to receive his prophecy, the Rabbis take this phrase to mean that once the musician began playing, Elisha started to calm down, and *that* was what allowed him to receive the spirit of prophecy. Rashi even explains that the music was designed to help Elisha "remove (i.e. 'get over') his anger" (להעביר כעסו, *l'ha'avir ka'aso*).

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[64] Numbers 31:25.
[65] 2 Kings 3:14.
[66] ibid 3:1-2.
[67] ibid 3:15.

Once the musician began to play, Elisha's anger indeed did "pass away," and his prophecy could return to him.

What is most interesting to observe here, though, is that Elisha, like Rav Amram, exhibited one of the hallmarks of emotional intelligence, namely, self-awareness. As he knew he was getting angry, *he himself* asked to have a musician brought in. Anger is known as a "hot" emotion since it arouses us physiologically, and so when we do "heat up," it is important for us to find ways to cool down. Dolf Zillman, who has studied the anatomy of anger, found that

> [o]ne such fairly effective strategy [for cooling down] is going off to be alone…[Other effective strategies include] relaxation methods such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation, perhaps because they change the body's physiology from the high arousal of anger to a low-arousal state, and perhaps too because they distract from whatever triggered the anger.[68]

One could easily add "listening to music" to these methods of soothing ourselves. The description of Elisha "taking a musician" shows that the Rabbis understood that we often do need to "cool down," and distract ourselves from our triggers. Venting is simply not an effective way to pacify ourselves: "…ventilating anger is one of the worst ways to cool down: outbursts of rage typically pump up the emotional brain's arousal, leaving people feeling more angry, not less."[69] Instead, finding distractions and ways to lower our arousal are significantly more helpful. This passage on Elisha shows that the Rabbis instinctively sensed effective ways to control our anger – rather than dwelling on the causes, it is better to find calming influences.

The last example in the talmudic passage shows the other end of anger management, namely, a complete lack of self-awareness and self-control. In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel goes

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[68] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 63.
[69] Ibid, 64-65.

to the house of Jesse to determine which of his sons should be appointed as king. Eliav is the first of Jesse's sons to come before Samuel, and when Samuel sees his beauty and strength, he exclaims, "Surely Adonai's anointed is before him,"[70] that is, surely Eliav is God's choice for king. Yet God responds, "Do not look at his appearance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him (מאסתיהו, *m'isteihu*), for Adonai does not see as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but Adonai looks on the heart."[71] The word מאסתיהו, *m'isteihu*, "I have rejected him," is the crux of this passage – Rashi explains that in regard to all of Jesse's other sons, God simply says, "I did not choose this one," but in regard to Eliav, there had been the possibility for him to become king until the particular moment that God "rejects" him. The question is – what was that moment? The Rabbis' answer comes from another aspect of this verse, namely the extent that God speaks about Eliav.

While it is said about all of Jesse's other sons, "I did not choose this one," God speaks about Eliav's character most specifically – God looks at "the heart," and clearly sees some defect in Eliav's personality that causes God to see him as unworthy of becoming king. But this verse does not say *what* Eliav's character was like, and so Rabbi Mani bar Patish answers that the only possibility is Eliav's angry disposition. 1 Samuel 17 talks about Eliav "becoming incensed" (ויחר אף, *vayichar af*),[72] and this is the only reference to Eliav's character. Given the fact that Eliav is rejected as king *even before* he is described as getting enraged, Rashi explains that, clearly, Eliav was an inherently short-tempered individual, and it was this trait that caused the kingship to be removed from him. Indeed, the phrase ויחר אף, *vayichar af*, implies an even more deep-seated anger

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[70] 1 Samuel 16:6.
[71] Ibid 16:7.
[72] Ibid 17:28.

than Moses' ויקצף, *vayiktzof*. While Moses simply "forgot" a *mitzvah*, Eliav's angry temperament caused God to reject him as king.

Indeed, there is a difference between a "mood" – as Moses was in – and a "temperament." Dr. Paul Ekman draws out this distinction:

> The easiest way [to distinguish between the two] is time. Moods last for hours, usually not more than a day. But temperament is often seen over a long period, though not necessarily throughout life…If [someone] has a hostile temperament, if anger is something that occurs easily and often in his life, it is going to be much harder to get over [a slight] than if [he] basically has a social, friendly temperament.[73]

Moses' anger was a "mood," while Eliav's was a "temperament." And we can see that while the consequence of Moses' anger was not positive – he did, after all, forget a commandment from God – it was not as severe as for Eliav, who lost the kingship. Anger is not good, the Rabbis tell us, but there are different levels of that emotion, and different levels of its consequence.

As we consider ways that the Rabbis implicitly suggest for managing anger, the most important piece to take away is the role of self-understanding in controlling our impulses. In emotional intelligence, knowing one's emotions is the first step towards managing them. Of the three biblical characters in the talmudic passage above, Elisha is truly our model, because he recognized both what he was feeling and potential ways to assuage it. Like Rav Amram, he was creative and inventive, but most of all, he knew himself. We often require similar strategies to subdue our *yetzer hara* and to manage our anger, since they are both rooted in how we cope with the negative traits within us all.

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[73] Daniel Goleman (narrator), *Destructive Emotions: How Can We Overcome Them?* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 150.

Conclusion

The rabbinic understanding of negative emotions matches quite closely with current psychological ideas on how to control them. The Rabbis realized that our powerful and potentially damaging impulses are very much a reality for us, so the issue becomes how we address them, manage them and subdue them. Within the rabbinic mindset, there are both accurate descriptions and valuable prescriptions for addressing the pull of our strongest emotions, and the Rabbis were able to see that disregarding our impulses is not as effective as finding ways to handle them. Whether it is through using our community, setting up obstacles, or finding ways to cool down, we can see how effectively the Rabbis were able to address our urges. In the next chapter, we turn from one type of emotions to another. We have seen what the Rabbis teach about controlling our negative emotions; now we will look at what they say about amplifying our positive ones – particularly through the use of prayer.

הקורא את שמע צריך שיכוין את לבו...

One who recites the *Shema* must direct their heart...

***b Berakhot* 16b**

CHAPTER 4:
KAVVANAH AND FLOW

One of the most prevalent tensions in rabbinic literature is between *keva,* the "fixed" and required nature of activities, and *kavvanah,* the "concentration and intention" that each person brings to their actions. On the one hand, *mitzvot*, commandments, could simply be seen as duties that we must fulfill – actions ranging from "observing Shabbat" to "praying three times a day" to "honoring father and mother." *Halakhah*, rabbinic law, is most concerned with defining what truly constitutes "performing a *mitzvah.*" For example, what does it mean to "remember Shabbat and keep it holy"[74]? If we just light the Shabbat candles, is that enough? Can we do whatever we want on Shabbat, or are there activities we should avoid? Should we eat meat, or is fish all right as a main course?

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[74] Exodus 20:8.

The halakhic side of rabbinic literature tries to answer questions like these, and is intimately related to the idea of *keva*, how we live out the "fixed" and legal nature of rabbinic ideology.

But there is another side, as well. The Rabbis also tell us "*mitzvot* require *kavvanah*"[75] – that is, there is a certain level of intentionality that needs to be part of our performance of a *mitzvah*. But the Rabbis faced a problem – it is impossible to legislate people's internal states. Instead, the Rabbis try to illuminate how we can achieve this sense of *kavvanah*, this sense of intentionality and deep concentration when we perform a *mitzvah*. And of all the religious actions described in rabbinic thought, prayer is the *mitzvah* that requires the most *kavvanah*. While the Rabbis saw prayer primarily as a halakhic obligation (in the rabbinic mind, we are to pray three times each day because it is one of many religious obligations to fulfill), they also tried to cultivate a particular internal emotional state during times of prayer.

Interestingly, many of the elements of *kavvanah* closely mirror a psychological state known as "flow," a feeling that comes when we are totally engaged in an activity and are completely absorbed in what we are doing. While there are certainly differences between these two concepts, the ultimate goal is quite similar, namely, to be completely immersed in a particular pursuit. Thus in the end, the eventual emotional state for both *kavvanah* and flow is almost identical, and so it is this commonality that we now explore.

Defining *Kavvanah*

Let us begin by examining several rabbinic passages that will lead us to an understanding of *kavvanah*. The first talmudic discussion of this idea appears in a section in *b Berakhot* 13a-b. The Mishnah under consideration starts: "If a man happened to be reading

[75] *b Berakhot* 13a.

[the paragraphs in Deuteronomy that make up the prayer of the *Shema*] in the Torah, and the time came for him to recite the *Shema* [which is a separate obligation], if he had *kavvanah*, he has [indeed] fulfilled his obligation (אם כוון לבו - יצא, *im kaven libo – yatza*)." The deliberation is this: the *Shema* consists of three paragraphs from the Torah, and yet these paragraphs have also become part of the daily liturgy, to be recited as part of our prayers in the morning and in the evening. The discussion thus revolves around what happens when someone is simply *reading* those particular verses in the Torah when the time comes to recite them in prayer. Is the reading itself enough, or is something more required in order to have fulfilled the obligation of "reciting the *Shema* in prayer"?

The answer is, "Yes, something more *is* required in order to have 'fulfilled one's obligation to recite the *Shema*.'" That "something" is *kavvanah*, which here denotes intention – if the person was specifically meaning to recite the *Shema* in particular, and was not simply reading the verses that happened to be in front of him, then he has fulfilled his duty. Much of the talmudic discussion on this Mishnah centers on one particular phrase found in the first of three paragraphs of the *Shema*: "Place these words which I command you today upon your heart,"[76] a phrase which the Rabbis maintain is the foundation for appropriate *kavvanah*:

> "'Place these words which I command you this day upon your heart.' Am I to say that the whole [first] paragraph requires *kavvanah*? [No.] That is why the text says 'these' words: up to this point *kavvanah* is necessary, but from this point [onwards], *kavvanah* is not necessary." These are the words of Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiba said to him: "It says '[Place these words] which I command you this day upon your heart.' From this you learn that the entire [first] paragraph requires it to be said with *kavvanah*." Rabbah b. Hanah said in the name of Rabbi Johanan: "The *halakhah* is as laid down by Rabbi Akiba."[77]

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[76] Deuteronomy 6:6.
[77] *b Berakhot* 13a-b.

The most salient topic in this discussion on *kavvanah* is that it is intimately connected to "matters of the heart." We are to "place these words upon our heart," and so the debate revolves around how broadly to define the phrase "these words." In the same sense that "Torah" could theoretically be narrowly defined to mean a particular *halakhah*, "these words" could potentially mean only the words that the person was reading at that moment. Instead, Rabbi Akiba tells us that the whole first paragraph of the *Shema* requires *kavvanah*. We must have the appropriate *kavvanah* for the first paragraph of the *Shema* because the phrase "these words" truly means that entire passage.

This discussion leads us to part of the traditional definition of *kavvanah*, namely, "intention." But there is also something deeper – there is an implication in this passage that *kavvanah* involves both *knowing* and *caring* about what we are doing. In some ways, *kavvanah* reflects both a "state of mind" and a "state of heart." To achieve a true sense of *kavvanah*, the Rabbis imply that we must join our intellect with our emotion.

This idea can also be gleaned from *m Berakhot* 5:1:

> One should not stand up to say the *t'filah* [the *Amidah*] except in a reverent frame of mind (כובד ראש, *kovod rosh*). The pious men of old used to wait (שוהין, *shohin*) an hour before praying in order that they might concentrate their hearts (כדי שיכוונו לבם, *k'dei sh'yikavnu libam*) towards their Father in Heaven. Even if a king greets him [in the midst of prayer], he should not answer him. Even if a snake is wound round his heel, he should not break off.[78]

This short *mishnah* illustrates several different aspects of the appropriate mentality when it comes to prayer – "a reverent frame of mind," preparation, and intense concentration. Let us explore each of these aspects in turn.

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[78] *m Berakhot* 5:1.

First, the Rabbis speak of entering prayer in a "reverent frame of mind" – כובד ראש (*koved rosh*). This is an idiom meaning "seriousness" or "sobriety," with its opposite being קלות ראש (*kalut rosh*) – literally "lightness of head," but more accurately meaning "flippant" or "lacking respect." But note that here we are talking about ראש, *rosh*, head, and *not* לב, *lev*, heart – there is a distinction between the two, meaning that we ourselves have to join them when we pray. The second piece to notice is how much preparation the Rabbis advise before we enter into prayer. They tell us that before praying, the pious ones of old would spend an hour "שוהין," *shohin*. Interestingly, this word appears only in this *mishnah* and its *gemara*. It has been variously translated as "wait," "tarry" and even "meditate." Regardless of its definition, it means that the "pious ones of old" did not simply jump into prayer – they took time to prepare themselves in order to concentrate their hearts (כדי שיכוונו לבם, *k'dei sh'yikavnu libam*) towards God. Note that this is a different idea than that of a "reverent frame of mind," since the word here is לב, *lev*, heart – again, there is both a "state of mind" and "state of heart" in this passage, and *kavvanah* in this case reflects a "state of heart." We might even say that the ideas of reverence, awe and weightiness (כבוד, *kavod*) come from the head, while direction and intention (כוונה, *kavvanah*) come from the heart. *Kavvanah* seems to be primarily an emotional experience, maybe even leading us to the definition "concentration towards something one cares about."

Finally, this *mishnah* explains how deep into concentration a person should be when it comes time for *t'filah*, prayer: "Even if a king greets him [in the midst of prayer], he should not answer him. Even if a snake is wound round his heel, he should not break off." In other words, one is to be so deeply immersed in prayer that one does not even notice other people – even the most important person one could possibly meet.

Not only that, potentially life-threatening danger(!) should not even enter into one's mind. Now, this certainly could be hyperbole, as the *gemara* does state that "Rav Shesheth said: This applies only in the case of a serpent, but if it is a scorpion, he breaks off."[79] However, the main point of this *mishnah* is still abundantly clear – the level of concentration in prayer is truly to be to the exclusion of all other concerns.

In that same vein, the Rabbis also tell us that we should not approach prayer when we are likely to be distracted, in order that we can concentrate more effectively.

> Rav Hiyya b. Ashi citing Rav ruled: A person whose mind is not at ease must not pray, since it is said: "He who is in distress shall give no decisions"[80] Rabbi Hanina did not pray on a day when he was agitated. It is written, he said: "He who is in distress shall give no decisions"...
> On returning from a journey, Samuel's father refrained from prayer for three days. Samuel did not pray in a house that contained alcoholic drink. Rav Papa did not pray in a house that contained fish-hash.[81]

All of the situations above are circumstances where one's mind would not be likely to be on prayer. If one is agitated, distressed, overwhelmed by smell or drink, or exhausted from travel, then it would be much harder to concentrate. But notice that these Rabbis do not say, "Ignore these disturbances," but rather, "These circumstances are inherently distracting, so do not even pretend that you can ignore them. Instead, wait until the circumstances are more conducive, and *then* pray." The main thrust of this passage is that the Rabbis recognized that concentration was not always easy to come by, and that outside conditions can affect how well we can achieve our sense of *kavvanah*.

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[79] *b Berakhot* 33a

[80] This is actually not a biblical verse. Rabbenu Tam attempts to trace it to Job 36:19. *The Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin* (London, The Soncino Press, 1938), 452.

[81] b *Eruvin* 65a.

Taken together, all of these passages on *kavvanah* illustrate how to achieve the kind of emotional state the Rabbis feel we should have when we pray. First, we must set aside an appropriate amount of time – *kavvanah* does not happen by accident, it comes only if we take the time to prepare. Second, that preparation partially involves our head, leading us to get into the right state of mind. We cannot have dozens of things we are thinking about – we must be able to devote ourselves fully to the task at hand. Third, that preparation also involves our emotions, leading us to get into the right "state of heart." We have to care about what we are doing – "going through the motions" is not truly acceptable. While prayer is a halakhic requirement, we also have the obligation to bring preparation, concentration and intention to our prayers. While the Rabbis could not legislate how we were to feel, they could outline ways to create the right circumstances leading to the appropriate emotional state. It is particularly striking, however, that their guidelines – this combination of preparation, concentration and intention – can also lead us to the psychological state of being in "flow," a concept which we now examine.

Kavvanah as Flow

A major question in business psychology today is what motivates people to work harder. For many years, the thinking was that the best way to bring people to their optimal performance was to utilize a combination of "carrots" (such as paychecks) and "sticks" (such as the fear of being fired). Yet over the last thirty years, research has shown that self-motivation is much stronger than external motivation. People want to enjoy their work in some way, and if they can reach a sense of almost pure delight in their tasks, this pinnacle becomes a state known as "flow." As Daniel Goleman says in his book *Working With Emotional Intelligence*:

> Flow is the ultimate motivator. Activities we love
> draw us in because we get into flow as we pursue them...
> When we work in flow, the motivation is built in –
> work is a delight in itself...The key to that exhilaration
> is not the task itself...but the special state of mind
> [we] create as [we] work, a state called "flow."
> Flow moves [us] to do [our] best work, no matter
> what work [we] do.[82]

Clearly, flow is both a state of mind and a state of heart, much like *kavvanah* is: to get into flow, we have to both know what we are doing, and deeply care about it. And just as *keva*, the fixed requirements we must fulfill, is both balanced and strengthened by *kavvanah*, so too are external motivations balanced and strengthened by the internal motivation of flow.

While flow is often about a state of pure enjoyment, we do have to distinguish between "enjoyment" and "pleasure." It may seem on the surface that neither of these ideas is related to *kavvanah* and prayer. Indeed, *b Berakhot* 31a states:

> Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai:
> It is forbidden for a man to fill his mouth with laughter
> in this world, because it says, *Then will our mouth be filled*
> *with laughter and our tongue with singing.* (Ps. 126:2) When will
> that be? At the time when *they shall say among the nations,*
> *Adonai has done great things with these.* (Ps. 126:3) It was related
> of Resh Lakish that he never again filled his mouth
> with laughter in this world after he heard this saying from
> Rabbi Yohanan his teacher.[83]

This passage would seem to imply that happiness is a *negative* aspect in the rabbinic mindset. After all, "Resh Lakish...never again filled his mouth with laughter"! It certainly may appear that joy is not intended to be part of a prayer experience. However, the Rabbis are truly reacting to a sense of frivolity and jest – remember that people were to bring "seriousness,"

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[82] Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (New York, Bantam Books, 1998), 106, 105.
[83] *b Berakhot* 31a.

not "light-headedness," to prayer. Thus while "pleasure" may not be something the Rabbis aim for, there is still a possibility of "enjoyment."

And as a point of fact, later on in the same talmudic passage, "our Rabbis taught: One should not stand up to say the *t'filah* while immersed in sorrow, or idleness, or laughter, or chatter, or frivolity, or idle talk, but only while still *rejoicing in the mitzvah* (שמחה של מצוה, *simchah shel mitzvah*)."[84] Joy – שמחה, *simchah* – is indeed an integral aspect to prayer. While it is clear that "pleasure" is not necessarily a high rabbinic value, there is a great possibility that *kavvanah* can lead us to "joy." The fact is that many of the aims of *kavvanah* truly can lead us to greater "enjoyment" through bringing us into a state of flow.

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience is the defining book on this concept. Written by University of Chicago psychology professor Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, it explains why pleasure is often fleeting, and not as valuable as enjoyment:

> Pleasure is an important component of the quality of life, but by itself it does not bring happiness. Sleep, rest, food, and sex provide restorative *homeostatic* experiences that return consciousness to order after the needs of body intrude and cause psychic entropy to occur. But they do not produce psychological growth. They do not add complexity to the self. Pleasure helps to maintain order, but by itself cannot create new order in consciousness...
>
> [In contrast,] enjoyable events occur when a person has not only met some prior expectation or satisfied a need or a desire but also gone beyond what he or she has been programmed to do and achieved something unexpected, perhaps something even unimagined before.
>
> Enjoyment is characterized by this forward movement: by a sense of novelty, of accomplishment.[85]

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[84] Ibid, italics mine.

[85] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1990), 46, italics in original.

"Pleasure" works to restore us to balance, while "enjoyment" – flow – pushes us ahead, leading us to psychological growth. It comes when our skills are high, and when we face challenges that match and stretch those skills,[86] creating a sense of novelty and leading us to surpass where we have been up to that moment. Thinking of this as prayer, we can even see it as living out the rabbinic maxim, "When you pray, do not make your prayer a routine"[87] – that is, each moment of prayer becoming a new experience for us.

When researching the activities and circumstances that lead people into flow, Csikszentmihalyi noticed that similar language and ideas seemed to run through them. He outlines eight aspects to "enjoyment," and interestingly, several of these are elements of *kavvanah*-filled prayer:

> First, the [flow] experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing. Second, we must be able to concentrate on what we are doing. Third and fourth, the concentration is usually possible because the task undertaken has clear goals and provides immediate feedback. Fifth, one acts with a deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life. Sixth, enjoyable experiences allow people to exercise a sense of control over their own actions. Seventh, concern for the self disappears, yet paradoxically, the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over. Finally, the sense of the duration of time is altered; hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours.[88]

Now, while it is obvious that the rabbinic definition of *kavvanah* in prayer is not identical to a flow experience, it is undeniable that this description closely mirrors what "prayer with *kavvanah*" should feel like.

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[86] ibid, 74-75.
[87] m *Avot* 2:13.
[88] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 49.

In particular, notice the similarities in regard to concentration. As Csikszentmihalyi says, "...[I]t is impossible to enjoy [anything]...unless attention is fully concentrated on the activity."[89] Concentration – one of the hallmarks of *kavvanah* – is also a key characteristic of flow, and Csikszentmihalyi notes that "one of the most universal and distinctive features of optimal experience takes place: people become so involved in what they are doing that... they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing."[90] This degree of engagement even appears in a rabbinic text – a story is told about Rabbi Akiba praying in private: "One could leave him in one corner of the room, and later they would find him in another corner, because of his bowing and prostrations."[91] In other words, Rabbi Akiba was so involved in his prayer that he did not even notice that he was moving across the room!

Indeed, concentration is such a characteristic of both flow and *kavvanah* that examples of one even sound like the other. When the Mishnah speaks of being so involved in prayer that a person would not even notice a snake being wrapped around one's leg, we may think of this as an exaggeration. However, consider this true story:

> A surgeon...recalled a challenging operation during which he was in flow; when he completed the surgery, he noticed some rubble on the floor of the operating room and asked what had happened. He was amazed to hear that while he was so intent on the surgery, part of the ceiling had caved in – he hadn't noticed at all.[92]

It seems clear that an intense level of concentration and attention unifies the ideas of *kavvanah* in prayer and the psychology of optimal experience. And indeed,

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[89] Ibid, 46.
[90] ibid, 53.
[91] *t Berakhot* 3:5.
[92] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More then IQ* (New York, Bantam Books, 1995), 91.

even Csikszentmihalyi himself brings up the fact that ritual and prayer can help increase the likelihood of bringing people into flow.

Almost by definition, prayer with *kavvanah* requires concentration, causes us to lose track of time, involves a certain amount of novelty, causes us to ignore our immediate surroundings, and allows us to grow psychologically. These are some of the precise aspects of a flow experience, and Csikszentmihalyi notices that this is probably not a coincidence.

> Because of the way [rituals are] constructed, they help participants...achieve an ordered state of mind that is highly enjoyable...[F]low and religion have been intimately connected from earliest times. Many of the optimal experiences of mankind have taken place in the context of religious rituals. Not only art but drama, music, and dance had their origins in what we now would call "religious" settings; that is, activities aimed at connecting people with supernatural powers and entities.[93]

In the concluding section of this thesis, I will outline some suggestions for how we can use Jewish prayer and ritual to bring people towards flow, but for now, we simply note that prayer and ritual seem to be almost intentionally created to place people in that state. While *kavvanah* is a particularly Jewish way of entering into prayer, it is also representative of a larger phenomenon of ways to elevate one's sense of engagement in this world. While it is not a guarantee, the fact is that when we concentrate and bring ourselves fully into prayer – when we pray with *kavvanah* – we have great potential to enter into flow.

[93] Csikszentmihalyi, 72, 76.

Conclusion

While the Rabbis would not have stressed "enjoyment" as an important aspect to prayer, concentration, preparation and intention are essential characteristics of both the rabbinic idea of *kavvanah* and the modern-day psychological notion of being in flow. While they are not precisely the same, the end result is often similar – both *kavvanah* and flow can lead us to a sense of such deep involvement in an activity that everything else seems to fall away. These concepts of *kavvanah* and flow – two very similar ideas applied to two very different realms – have the possibility to bring us not just greater psychological growth, but also a deeper sense of engagement with the world that is both around and above us. And so now, moving from that world above us to the world around us, we spend this last chapter investigating the Rabbis' ideas on how we should behave when we are immersed in our relationships with other people.

רבי אלעזר בתר דמסיים צלותיה אמר הכי:
יהי רצון מלפניך ה', אלהינו שתשכן בפורינו אהבה
ואחוה ושלום וריעות...ותקננו בחבר טוב בעולמך...

Upon completing the *Amidah*, Rabbi Eleazer used to say:
"May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to cause all of us to dwell in love
and companionship and peace and friendship…
and fix us with a good companion in Your world…"

***b Berakhot* 16b**

CHAPTER 5:
SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AND *MITZVOT BEIN ADAM L'CHAVEIRO*

When exploring the concepts of obligations and commandments in rabbinic literature, a common distinction is made between *mitzvot bein adam l'Makom* – commandments about a person's relationship with God – and *mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro*, commandments about how human beings should interact with each other. The previous chapter explored prayer, the paradigm of the relationship between humans and God. We now turn to the Rabbis' values related to our relationships with other people.

We can look at *mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro* in two ways. First, we can examine the *halakhot*, and investigate the large rabbinic corpus on civil law – laws of business, laws of property, and so on. Or, we can explore aggadic passages which, while not explicitly telling us how we should act, provide guidelines and ideals for our relationships.

As with previous chapters, we will continue to emphasize *aggadah*, examining stories that demonstrate the Rabbis' views on "healthy relationships." In fact, the phrase "healthy relationships" can mean two different things. First, it could mean "relationships that are healthy, where there is mutual respect and honor," or it could mean "relationships that help us *become* more physically and socially healthy." And in fact, a "healthy relationship" involves both aspects. Our interactions with others affect us in myriad ways, and findings in psychology and neuroscience show just how connected we all are. In 2006, Daniel Goleman wrote a book entitled *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships.* His hypothesis in the book is that we are "wired to connect,"[94] and that who we are as individuals is inseparable from who we are as part of a community. This chapter will explore three aspects of the idea of social intelligence and *mitzvot bein adam l'chaveiro* – the problem of feeling isolated, the challenges and benefits of marriage, and the value in creating joy and peace. Humans are fundamentally social animals, and so the ultimate question when we deal with others is how we ensure that these social relationships remain positive ones.

Isolation and Illness

Considering how much time many of us spend with our friends and our family, feeling isolated can be quite a painful experience. Many elderly people find that as they get older, their social networks shrink, and this loneliness affects their health quite dramatically.[95] Since our relationships deeply affect and shape us, a sense of isolation can almost feel like

[94] Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), 4.
[95] Ibid, 238-239.

death. And indeed, a well-known story about Honi the Circle-Drawer shows how essential it is for us to have some sort of social network, and how anguishing it can be to feel alone:

> Rabbi Johanan said: For his whole life, this righteous man [Honi] was troubled about the meaning of the verse, *A Song of Ascents: When Adonai brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like those that dream.* (Ps.126:1-2). Is it possible for a man to dream continuously for seventy years? One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree; he asked him, "How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years." He then asked him further: "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?" The man replied: "I found [ready-grown] carob trees in the world; [and just] as my ancestors planted these for me, so too do I plant these for my children."
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> Honi sat down to have a meal, and sleep overcame him. As he slept, a rocky formation enclosed upon him which hid him from sight and he continued to sleep for seventy years. When he awoke, he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and he asked him, "Are you the man who planted this tree?" The man replied: "I am his grandson." He then exclaimed: "It is clear that I slept for seventy years!" He then caught sight of his donkey which had given birth to several generations of mules; and he returned home. There he asked, "Is the son of Honi the Circle-Drawer still alive?" The people answered him, "His son is no more, but his grandson is still living." He then said to them: "I am Honi the Circle-Drawer," but no one would believe him.
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> He then went to the *beit hamidrash* [house of study] and there he overheard the scholars say, "The law is as clear to us as in the days of Honi the Circle-Drawer, for whenever he came to the *beit hamidrash* he would settle for the scholars any difficulty that they had." At that, Honi called out, "I am he," but the scholars would not believe him, and did not give him the honor due to him. This hurt him greatly and he prayed [for death] and he died. Rava said: Hence the saying, "Either companionship or death" (או חברותא או מיתותא, *o chevruta o metuta*).[96]

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[96] *b Ta'anit* 23a.

There are two pieces to this *aggadah*. First, many modern readers have taken the first part to emphasize the importance of legacies – "Just as my ancestors planted for me, so too, do I plant for my children." Indeed, rabbinic literature emphasizes the value of the past, ensuring that a Rabbi's statement receives accurate attribution to preserve its "ancestry." *Pirkei Avot* even remarks that "whoever teaches something in the name of the one who originally said it brings redemption to the world."[97] Thus the first part of this *aggadah* could easily be about how important it is to honor those who came before us and to provide for those who will come after us.

But it is the second part that is even more relevant when looking at questions of social intelligence. Upon waking from a seventy-year-long slumber, Honi could not find a community – he ended up in complete isolation. He went to the place where he had always been welcomed and honored – the *beit midrash*, the house of study – and he was completely ignored. Indeed, the text says that not only would no one believe that he was Honi, but the scholars did not even give him the honor that was due to him. The Maharsha notes that although they could see that he was clearly a *talmid chacham*, a great scholar, they did not believe he was Honi himself.[98] It was simply not enough for him to be seen as a great scholar – he needed to be valued and appreciated for who he was. And so ending up alone and friendless, Honi prayed for death, and Rava applied the phrase או חברותא או מיתותא, *o chevruta o metuta*, "either companionship or death" – to him.

As with other rabbinic passages, on first glance, this passage may seem to utilize hyperbole in order to make a point. We may think that "either companionship or death" is a stretch, but in fact, current findings show just how important relationships can be

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[97] *m Avot* 6:6.

[98] Footnote 35 in *b Ta'anit* 23a in *Talmud Bavli The Schottenstein Edition* (Brooklyn, Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1993).

for our physical health. "[A] landmark study of elderly Americans who were aging successfully found that the more emotionally supportive their relationships, the lower their indicators of biological stress like cortisol...The sense of loneliness...correlates most directly with health: the lonelier a person feels, the poorer immune and cardiovascular function tends to be."[99] Considering that Honi was an elderly man when he went to the house of study to gain a sense of companionship, on a very real and practical level, "either companionship or death" is quite accurate. While Honi might not have understood that his loneliness had the potential to affect his cardiovascular and immune systems, it is undeniable that his sense of isolation directly connected with his physical well-being.

Yet even when people do not physically get better, relationships can help promote spiritual and emotional wholeness. Goleman shares this vignette:

> Kenneth Schwartz, a successful Boston lawyer, was forty when he was diagnosed with [terminal] lung cancer... [A] nurse conducted a pre-surgery interview...[and] when he told her he had lung cancer...[s]he took his hand and asked how he was doing...Though she ordinarily did not go to the surgical floor in her job, she said she would come to visit him. The next day, as he sat in a wheelchair waiting to be wheeled into the surgical suite, there she was. She took his hand and with teary eyes, wished him luck.
>
> This was but one of a series of compassionate encounters with medical staff, acts of kindness that, as Schwartz put it at the time, "made the unbearable bearable."[100]

We could see this story as the opposite end of the spectrum from the *aggadah* about Honi – this nurse showed that camaraderie could help lessen the pain of death. Honi was isolated, and could not find anyone who would appreciate or respect him for who he was, and that hastened his demise. He preferred death to eternal loneliness, and his wish was granted. Here, Kenneth Schwartz knew he was going to die, and what helped

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[99] Goleman, *Social Intelligence*, 239.
[100] Ibid, 261-2.

ease his pain was a personal connection. Even when death is imminent, companionship can help maintain a quality of life.

A "healthy relationship" can, quite literally, make us healthier, and isolation can lead us to illness. The phrase או חברותא או מיתותא (*o chevruta o metuta*) – either companionship or death – was not just a turn of phrase from the Rabbis, but is a very real situation for our lives. For our well-being, it is not the quantity of our interactions that matters, but rather, as Goleman notes, "the *quality* of our interactions."[101] If we can find even one person]who can be with us in our ups and downs, who can be fully present with us, our physical health can improve dramatically – and if we cannot, we will surely suffer.

Healthy and Unhealthy Marriages

Perhaps not surprisingly, when it comes to the person who most strongly influences our emotional health and stability, a person's husband or wife has the greatest impact.[102] The reason is quite simple: we are most deeply affected by the people we spend the most time with, and for the vast majority of North Americans, that means their spouse. The issue then becomes how to ensure that a marriage is a source of positive emotions, rather than negative ones. While no marriage is without its issues, both rabbinic thought and emotional intelligence can teach us about what makes a marriage healthy or unhealthy.

A good marriage, for the Rabbis, is a great blessing, while a bad marriage creates many problems. Perhaps the most famous and powerful statement in this regard comes in the midrashic text *Lekach Tov*:

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[101] Ibid, 239, italics in original.

[102] While Reform Judaism understands a broad range of loving and monogamous relationships, throughout this section, the rabbinic texts assume a heterosexual relationship. However, it would not be difficult to adapt these concepts as need be.

> The sages taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: A husband and a wife – the Presence, the Divine Name יה (*Yah*) – is between them: the *yod* in איש (*ish*, man) and the *hay* in אשה (*ishah*, woman). If they are worthy, the [Divine] Presence abides between them and they are blessed; if they are not worthy, the [Divine] Presence departs from between them, and the אשות (*eshot*, fires) in איש (*ish*, man) and אשה (*ishah*, woman) cling together, and a fire consumes both husband and wife.[103]

This is one of the most compelling images of what both a good marriage and a bad marriage would look like. The text says that "if they are worthy," God dwells between a husband and a wife. A modern interpretation of this could easily be: if a husband and a wife treat each other kindly and with respect, their lives will be blessed. This does not mean that it will all be smooth sailing, but rather, their life together will bring out the best in each of them. However, if they are not worthy, יה (*Yah*, a name of God) "leaves" from the איש and אשה (*ish* and *ishah*, man and woman) leaving אש – *esh*, fire – for each. Again, from a modern perspective, it seems clear if a husband and wife do not have mutual respect and honor, they will be burned – often by each other.

In fact, the phrase "consuming fire" may be particularly appropriate wording, as continued marital difficulties can be harmful to each partner's health. A study on the effect of marital stress on endocrine and immune systems shows how harmful arguments can be:

> …[N]ewlyweds – all considering themselves "very happy" in their marriages – volunteered to be studied while they had a thirty-minute confrontation about a disagreement. During the tiff, five of six adrenal hormones tested changed levels…Blood pressure shot up, and indices of immune function were lowered for several hours.
>
> Hours later there were long-term shifts for the worse in the immune system's ability to mount a defense against invaders. The more bitterly hostile the argument had been, the stronger the shifts. The endocrine system,

[103] *Lekach Tov, Bereshit*, Buber edition, 23.

> the researchers conclude, "serves as one important gateway between personal relationships and health," triggering the release of stress hormones that can hamper both cardiovascular and immune function. When a couple fights, their endocrine and immune systems suffer – and if the fights are sustained over years, the damage seems to be cumulative.[104]

On a very practical and physical level, arguments with hostility are destructive not only to a relationship, but to the individual parties as well. Now, neither the Rabbis nor any modern psychologist would say that fights should be avoided at all costs or even that they are always necessarily bad. Rather, it seems that the fundamental *character* of the marriage is what determines if it is one that will be blessed, or one that will be an all-consuming fire.

But this then raises a new question – what makes a marriage likely to succeed or fail? John Gottman is a professor at the University of Washington, and has developed a test entitled "SPAFF" (for "specific affect") that brings couples together to see how their interactions reflect the health of their marriage. In this test, couples come to his self-titled "love lab" and trained observers examine their exchanges. What Gottman and his researchers are looking for is not the content of the discussion, but rather, the emotions each partner exhibits – disgust, defensiveness, affection, humor, and so on. Gottman then records these emotions for each second of the interaction, and feeds them into an equation. He has found something remarkable – "If he analyzes an hour of a husband and wife talking, he can predict with 95 percent accuracy whether that couple will still be married fifteen years later. If he watches a couple for fifteen minutes, his success rate is around 90 percent."[105]

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[104] Goleman, *Social Intelligence*, 240.

[105] Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005), 21-2.

This may seem shocking to us – after looking at only fifteen minutes, Gottman can determine with 90 percent accuracy if a marriage is likely to survive?! However, this is not as surprising as it seems – couples often fall into a "set pattern" and interact in ways that frequently recur. And the more interesting and revealing piece is what Gottman looks for when he views these couples. He is not looking at the "what," but the "how," and he has found that a couple must exhibit far more positivity than negativity when they spend time together. It is not what they are saying that is the key, but how they are saying it. "One of Gottman's findings is that for a marriage to survive, the ratio of positive to negative emotion in a given encounter has to be at least five to one."[106] Indeed, the issue is not whether a couple *has* negative emotions and interactions, but rather, how they deal with them and whether or not they dominate the relationship.

> ...Gottman argues that when a primary need goes unmet – say, for sexual contact or for caring – we feel a steady state of dissatisfaction, one that can manifest itself as subtly as a vague frustration or as visibly as continuous rancor. These needs, when frustrated, fester. The signals of such neural discontent are early warning signs of a union in jeopardy.[107]

A short interaction can reflect a larger reality, almost like a *kal vakhomer*, a "how much the more so" rhetorical argument. If a couple shows disgust and anger in only fifteen minutes, how much more so are those emotions likely to surface over a day, a week, a year, or a whole lifetime.

Not surprisingly, there is a talmudic statement that cautions against entering a problematic marriage:

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[106] Ibid, p. 26.
[107] Goleman, *Social Intelligence,* 218.

> Rabbi Meir used to say: When a man weds a wife who is not right for him, he violates five commandments, [both] negative [and positive. Three negative]: *You shall not take vengeance; you shall not bear a grudge* (Lev. 19:18); *You shall not hate your brother* (Lev. 19:17). [Two positive]: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Lev. 19:18); *Your brother shall live with you* (Lev 25:36).[108]

What is interesting about this passage is that in some ways, it is unclear which is the cause and which is the effect. If the marriage is a bad match, is that what leads the partners to take vengeance and bear a grudge? Or perhaps could being non-empathic, not "loving one's neighbor as oneself," lead the marriage to end up on the rocks? It is quite likely that Rabbi Meir intentionally did not say which causes the other, but rather, informs us that a bad marriage is one where these commandments are violated, and a good marriage is one where each partner is concerned about the other.

For most people, the person they spend the most time with is their spouse. As a result, a person's emotional and physical well-being are highly dependent on how positively or negatively they experience that relationship. Both rabbinic thought and modern psychology would argue that even if two people are in love, not all interactions will be positive. Thus the real questions are: Do they respect each other? Do they "love their partner as themselves"? Do anger and distrust often rear their heads, or do humor and affection dominate? It is far from surprising that our interactions with the person we spend the most time with can have tremendous consequences for our well-being, so it is clearly a great responsibility – and potentially a great blessing – to make sure that relationship is positive.

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[108] *t Sotah* 5:11.

Creating Joy and Making Peace

One of the highest values in rabbinic literature is *shalom*, peace, and in the Rabbis' worldview, that meant more than a global statement – our day-to-day relationships were to be peaceful, as well. Not only did Shammai say, "Receive every person favorably,"[109] there is also a talmudic passage claiming that people who increase joy and peace deserve the highest praise.

> Rabbi Beroka Hoza'ah used to frequent the market at
> Bei Lefet where Elijah often appeared to him. Once he asked
> [Elijah], "Is there any one in this market who has a share
> in the world to come?" He replied, "No."...
>
> At that moment, two [men] passed by and [Elijah] remarked,
> "These two have a share in the world to come."
> Rabbi Beroka then approached [them] and asked,
> "What is your occupation?" They replied, "We are jesters.
> When we see men depressed we cheer them up;
> furthermore when we see two people quarrelling
> we strive hard to make peace between them."[110]

The first thing to notice about this passage is where it takes place. Rabbi Beroka is not in the *beit midrash*, the house of study, or the *beit k'nesset*, the synagogue – places we might expect as a location for a story about a Rabbi. Rather, Rabbi Beroka is in the marketplace of Bei Lefet – he is out "in the real world," asking the prophet Elijah who would be so worthy as to merit a place in the *olam haba*, the world to come. When Elijah points out two men did have such merit, Rabbi Beroka immediately seeks to find out what their occupation is. They identify two distinct but related aspects to their jobs. First, they cheer up those who are depressed and second, when they find people fighting, they strive hard to make peace between them. Notice that they do not necessarily say that they always succeed, but rather, their efforts in and of themselves have merited them a place in the next world.

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[109] *m Avot* 1:15.
[110] *b Ta'anit* 22a.

This *aggadah* emphasizes the power and value of creating positive feelings – simply by trying to cheer people up and making peace, these not-so-mere "jesters" have earned the greatest reward imaginable in rabbinic tradition. Why would this be the case? We can find the answer through one of the most important findings of emotional intelligence, namely that emotions are contagious. We have all experienced that one person's negative and sad disposition can affect a whole room, while a positive and happy outlook is equally infectious. A study done at the University of Wurzberg in Germany showed that even the most subtle of positive or negative emotions can influence other people:

> Students listened to a taped voice reading the driest of intellectual material, a German translation of the British philosopher David Hume's *Philosophical Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The tape came in two versions, either happy or sad, but so subtly inflected that people were unaware of the difference unless they explicitly listened for it.
>
> As muted as the feelings were, students came away from the tape either slightly happier or slightly more somber than they had been before listening to it. Yet the students had no idea that their mood had shifted, let alone why.[111]

One of the implications of this study is that our emotions do not stop at the border of ourselves – how we are feeling both influences and is influenced by how others are feeling. If we are exuberant and outgoing, others will feel that emotion, while if we are sullen and withdrawn, others will sense that as well. Thus the first part of what these jesters did – cheering up those who are dejected – is an often unacknowledged but critical part of helping society to function. Clearly, according to this talmudic passage, there is great value in being able to lighten a mood and bring more joy.

Even more crucial than raising spirits, though, is making peace where there is strife. With *shalom*, harmony and peace, being of paramount value to the Rabbis, these jesters

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[111] Goleman, *Social Intelligence*, 18.

were clearly doing a *mitzvah*. While today, when we think of "peace," we are often thinking on a grand scale, this passage seems to be about much more mundane matters – how two people interact. In our day-to-day lives, we have multiple encounters with a multitude of people. Some of these encounters are positive, some of them are not. Since these jesters gained a share in the world-to-come, we may very naturally ask, "What exactly did these jesters do to make peace where there is strife?" Sadly, we are never told the answer, but we can look towards current research for some possibilities, and see how others have brought quarreling parties towards reconciliation.

Roger Fisher is the founder of the Harvard Negotiation Project and the co-author of the groundbreaking book *Getting to Yes*. In 2005, he co-authored a book with Daniel Shapiro entitled *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate*, and it concludes with a personal recollection from Jami Mahuad, the former president of Ecuador, on how he helped create peace with a historically hostile neighbor. President Mahuad explains that a step towards international peace came about because of a developing personal relationship with Alberto Fujimori, the former president of Peru.

"The United States State Department had called the Ecuador-Peru border dispute the 'oldest armed conflict in the Western Hemisphere,'"[112] and President Mahuad had committed to pursuing peace with Peru. But he knew that he would have to take several steps before that could happen. One of these steps involved showing that he and President Fujimori could work together – rather than being seen as attacking each other, in order for peace to occur, it needed to be clear that they were attacking the common problem of the border dispute. Thus he arranged for a photograph of himself with

[112] Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro, *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate* (New York: Viking, 2005), 186.

President Fujimori, but the photo would not show them shaking hands, or at a podium. Rather, President Mahuad recalls,

> ...[it needed to show us] sitting, side by side, each with a pen or pencil in his hand, both looking at a map or a pad on which there might be some kind of draft proposal. We would not be looking at the camera or at each other but rather working. Such a photograph might help convince third parties, the media, and the public that things had started to change for the better. The photograph would make clear that the presidents were in a collaborative effort, tackling the boundary problem together.[113]

These two presidents recognized that international peace needed to start with interpersonal understanding. If the public and the media saw the two of them as adversaries, that perception would continue to intensify. However, if President Mahuad and President Fujimori could begin to make accord personally, they could help bring reconciliation to a troubled region. This photograph prompted the first in a series of conversations between the two men, and after much time together, they hammered out a workable agreement that started to resolve the conflict. They did not simply talk about peace, nor did they remain entrenched in their own interests and positions. Instead, they took both small and large steps to create an image of cooperation in order to facilitate *actual* cooperation. Like the jesters who simply attempted to bring people together, Presidents Mahuad and Fujimori simply sought to show people that they could be on the same side – and while things are still not perfect in Ecuador or Peru, the two men were able to help resolve the longest-standing border conflict in the western hemisphere.

From this example, we can begin to draw some conclusions about ways to "make peace where there is strife." Fisher and Shapiro outline five steps towards peace-making which President Mahuad consciously used. They suggest that we "express

[113] Fisher and Shapiro, *Beyond Reason,* 192.

appreciation, build affiliation, respect autonomy, acknowledge status and choose a fulfilling role,"[114] and throughout the book, they expand on each of these concepts. While we cannot explore all the nuances of Fisher and Shapiro's work, we should notice that the two jesters who earned a share in the world-to-come performed at least two of these steps. They built affiliation, bringing people together who might have otherwise remained distant, and they chose a fulfilling role – they *elected* to become jesters. Their role clearly provided them satisfaction, and so they helped bring peace to their corner of the world.

The Rabbis understood just how valuable those tasks can be. Emotions are contagious, and often, small actions can have significant consequences. By simply lightening a mood, helping lift people out of sadness or finding ways to peacefully resolve conflicts, we truly can help bring the world-to-come into this world.

Conclusion

Humans are fundamentally social animals. We are undeniably "wired to connect," and yet we cannot always know whether our relationships with other people will be positive or negative. One of the essential discoveries of emotional intelligence – an idea reinforced by rabbinic tradition – is that we can "catch" emotions from other people.
If we do not have a community, or if the interactions with the people closest to us are negative, then our emotional and physical health will suffer. But if we are close with our spouse, and find joy and peace in our relationships, then our lives will be more likely to feel blessed.

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[114] Fisher and Shapiro, *Beyond Reason*, vii.

Indeed, the goal of this thesis as a whole was to find ways of bringing more blessing, joy and peace to this world. And so now, having examined ways to control our impulses, create more engagement in prayer, and strengthen our social relationships, we conclude by entering the real world as Rabbi Beroka did, in order to see how we might apply our findings.

נשאלה שאילה זו בפניהם: תלמוד גדול או מעשה גדול?...
נענה ר"ע ואמר: תלמוד גדול. נענו כולם ואמרו:
תלמוד גדול שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.

**The question was asked: "Which is greater, study or action?"...
Rabbi Akiba answered, "Study is greater," and all [the Rabbis] answered:
"Study is greater, because it leads to action."**

***b Kiddushin* 40a**

CONCLUSIONS: BRINGING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE INTO THE SYNAGOGUE

From its inception, Reform Judaism has sought to interpret ancient texts through the lens of modern realities, with the ultimate hope of making Jewish tradition relevant to people's lives. These conclusions provide some of my own personal recommendations based on our study of ancient rabbinic ideas through the lens of modern psychological findings. Many rabbis today understand that psychology can be helpful in their work, and my feeling is that emotional intelligence in particular can be quite relevant for both rabbis and laypeople.

In the fall of 2006, I asked Daniel Goleman the following questions:

> 1. You speak about ways that emotional intelligence can improve (among others) the medical and educational fields.[115] Along those lines, what role can emotional intelligence play in improving how religious organizations act?
>
> 2. What aspects of emotional intelligence are most critical for religious leaders to develop? What is it about those aspects that make them so important?
>
> 3. What aspects of religious practice and religious ideas are most directly connected with emotional intelligence? How do they connect?

Perhaps not surprisingly, he emphasized self-awareness as the basis for an effective rabbinate: "Self-awareness allows attuning within ourselves to feel what truly moves and matters to us, and to articulate those values in genuine ways that resonate with others."[116] He also spoke about self-management, which "allows the expression of those values in our actions,"[117] as well as empathy, which is to be expected, considering that a rabbi's job innately means working with others.

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[115] See Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 164-185 and 261-287.
[116] Personal correspondence with Dr. Daniel Goleman.
[117] Ibid.

Most importantly, in response to the first question, he remarked:

> Emotional intelligence can help [rabbis and congregations] at two levels: individual and group. Any organization is but the sum of its people. To the extent that those who operate a religious organization exhibit emotional intelligence, I would assume that they would be better able to articulate the core ethical values of the religious mission in a way that spoke to the hearts of others; lived those values themselves; showed empathic concern for members of the congregation.[118]

An underlying claim of this thesis has been that aspects of emotional intelligence can be connected with classical rabbinic thought, showing that Jewish tradition and modern psychology can shed light on each other. Based on what we have seen in the previous chapters, I wish now to propose some ways we can use these ideas to "articulate the core ethical values [of Judaism,] speak to the hearts of others, live those values [our]selves, and show empathic concern for members of the congregation." In particular, I see three main areas where emotional intelligence can have significant impact in Jewish life today – in counseling, in prayer and in education.

Counseling

Let us start with the most obvious area where emotional intelligence can help the rabbi-congregant relationship, namely, in counseling situations. First and foremost, self-awareness – the first step towards emotional intelligence – is crucial to the health of that dynamic.[119] If both rabbis and congregants have a better sense of what they feeling at a given moment – and *why* they are having that particular emotion – each side can grow and mature. In particular for the rabbi, self-understanding can help them walk the fine line between

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[118] Ibid.

[119] See Chapter 2, "Rabbinic Psychology," pp. 30-31

their role as "moral authority" and their role as "comforting counselor." As Rabbi Robert Katz had noted, applying the framework, "Love unaccompanied by reproof is not love"[120] can be helpful in some situations, and much more complex to apply in others.[121] Emotional intelligence can help the rabbi address this challenge, since it could be seen as "psychology with morality." The tasks of building self-awareness, handling negative emotions, creating internal motivation, understanding others and improving our relationships – the five domains that constitute emotional intelligence[122] – are both grounded in psychological studies and intended to improve ourselves and our society.

Indeed, these aspects of emotional intelligence appear in many counseling situations. A congregant experiencing fear about what life may bring, a family coming to repair a strained relationship, or a pre-marital couple looking to prepare for their new life together are all issues facing a rabbi today, and are all issues where emotional intelligence can provide a rabbi with tools. Most of all, through helping people develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others, emotional intelligence can help people internalize the idea that God has stamped every person from the same mold, and yet no two people are identical.[123] While a rabbi is not a psychotherapist, if they can find ways to bring more emotional intelligence into counseling situations, then the rabbi can better walk the line between moral guide and pastoral caregiver, and lead people towards ways of "loving their neighbors *and* themselves."[124]

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[120] *Bereishit Rabbah* 54:3; see Chapter 2, "Rabbinic Psychology," p. 24.
[121] See Chapter 2, "Rabbinic Psychology," pp. 24-25.
[122] See Chapter 1, "Exploring Emotional Intelligence," pp. 4-5.
[123] *m Sanhedrin* 4:5; see Chapter 2, "Rabbinic Psychology," p. 16.
[124] Based on Leviticus 19:18; see Chapter 2, "Rabbinic Psychology," pp. 17-18.

Prayer

It is not just in counseling where emotional intelligence can have an impact – it can improve the power of communal prayer, as well. A major issue in the Reform Jewish world today is how to "revitalize" prayer. We use a lot of language to describe what we want prayer to be – it should be "spiritual." It should be "joyous." It should be "thought-provoking." It should be "emotional." Yet there is one phrase that encapsulates all of these ideas – I feel we should aim to make prayer a "flow experience."

First, the goals of a flow experience and the goals of Reform Jewish prayer are almost identical. Consider this description of flow, and imagine what would happen if people described their prayer experiences in this way:

> [Flow] provide[s] a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. It push[es] the person to higher levels of performance, and undreamed-of states of consciousness. In short, it transform[s] the self...[125]

If we seek to make our prayer experiences "moments of flow," we can begin to create all the aspects that prayer aims for: spirituality, joy, consciousness and personal growth. And our guide can be found in our classical texts on *kavvanah* – just as the Rabbis could not force *kavvanah*, but rather, emphasized concentration, preparation and intention in order to create the appropriate *circumstances*,[126] so too perhaps rabbis today should work primarily to create the conditions for flow. This would mean reframing the role of clergy, using methods that Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and other psychologists have advocated to help people achieve that state.

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[125] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1990), 74.
[126] See *m Berakhot* 5:1 and Chapter 4, "*Kavvanah* and Flow," pp. 51-53.

So how do we do it? How do we turn prayer into a flow experience? Creating flow is primarily about matching ever-increasing challenges with ever-increasing skills.[127] Thus first, we have to find out what our congregants are already good at – what skills do they already have? Perhaps surprisingly, this is *not* about what congregants are looking for in prayer, nor what they are interested in, but rather, what their inherent talents are – flow starts with people's natural abilities. For some congregants, this may be singing; for others, this can be learning languages; for still others, it can be about seeing their life as a whole. If we want to use this method, therefore, we may need to have more of a "skills-based" idea of prayer – we talk about congregational involvement, but perhaps there needs to be a broader range of what talents congregants can bring to prayer. Without a doubt, some of these "skills" might be foreign to many congregants, but just as we try to cast a wide net in terms of theology and prayer-practice, we may need to cast a wide net in terms of the skills we will use in prayer.

After identifying inherent abilities, the next stage involves increasing the challenges. Since "the flow experience acts as a magnet for learning,"[128] the introduction of knowledge is truly where a rabbi can help – these challenges can come through teaching about the structure of the liturgy, or introducing more Hebrew, or bringing in new melodies, or having people respond to new translations and new poetry. But again, this all needs to be done in the context of the congregants' areas of expertise – that is what will create the internal motivation. Yet if we *can* do this, if we can make prayer about flow, it can bring congregants to a state of psychological growth, increasing their understanding of themselves, their connection to the community and their relationship with God. As Abraham Joshua

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[127] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 74-75.

[128] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York, Basic Books, 1997), 33.

Heschel reminds us, "The issue of prayer is not prayer – the issue of prayer is God."[129] "Prayer as flow" could help us find new realities, find greater strength in ourselves, find joy in the everyday, and perhaps, find a greater connection with the Divine.

Education

Finally, emotional intelligence can also strengthen synagogue education. Over the last few years, a revolution has started to take place in how we instill Jewish values in the next generation. Through initiatives such as the CHAI curriculum,[130] Reform Judaism is trying to find ways of helping content "stick" in our students' minds, as well as ways to lay the groundwork for how they will view Judaism throughout their lives. Yet while Jewish content is undeniably important, the best way to teach is by example – in the end, the most crucial role a rabbi or a teacher can play is an exemplar.

Again, this inherently implies understanding, developing, and living out the ideas of emotional intelligence. As we saw with "the marshmallow test,"[131] if children can become more self-aware and develop more self-control, there are immeasurable benefits down the road. And yet Jewish tradition has also recognized the power of impulses, realizing that an awareness of their power is the first step towards reining them in. So the question is: have we used Jewish ideas to teach our children ways to subdue their urges? On the other side, when it comes to positive drives, we have also seen that internal motivation towards a goal is significantly more powerful than external motivation.[132] If we want our children to be motivated to remain Jewish throughout their lives – which from their perspective, is an external impetus – have we provided ways for them

[129] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology* (New York, Crossroad, 1998), 22
[130] For more information on this project, see http://www.urj.org/chai
[131] See Chapter 3, "Controlling Impulses – Subduing the *Yetzer Hara* and Managing Anger," pp. 38-39.
[132] See Chapter 4, "*Kavvanah* and Flow," p. 55.

to find that motivation within themselves? Finally, *sh'lom bayit*, peace in our homes, has always been a key value in Judaism. If this is indeed what we want, have we come up with ways to teach conflict resolution? These elements of emotional intelligence must be taught *and* lived, so that students might see Judaism as a guide for how we treat ourselves and others.

Indeed, Jewish schools prepare students for Jewish living, and if Jewish living means improving ourselves and improving our relationships with others, emotional intelligence can be instrumental in that regard. Several programs have tried to bring emotional intelligence into their schools, and evaluations have been done on the Child Development Project, Paths, Seattle Social Development Project, Yale-New Haven Social Competence Promotion Program, Resolving Conflict Creatively Program and The Improving Social Awareness - Social Problem Solving Project. Among the benefits recorded were that students displayed:

- More responsibility
- More consideration and concern
- More harmonious actions
- More thinking before acting
- More positive classroom atmosphere
- Better impulse control
- Improved behavior
- Enhanced coping skills
- Better coping with anxiety
- More empathy[133]

[133] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 305-309.

How wonderful would it be if students in our religious schools could develop these skills – and even more so if we can root them in Jewish values and Jewish traditions! We have seen the models of Rav Amram[134] and Elisha the prophet,[135] who exhibited self-awareness and self-control, as well as the jesters of Rabbi Beroka,[136] who showed an understanding of others' emotions and a desire to create more joy and peace. Emotional intelligence can indeed be found in our textual tradition, and since Jewish education is about Jewish living, we can emphasize that knowing oneself, building relationships and creating joy and peace are inherently Jewish values.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, Judaism is about finding ways to improve ourselves and our world, making sure our study leads to action. As we have seen, not only did the classical Rabbis have an excellent intuitive sense of emotional intelligence, today, we can connect traditional Jewish texts with modern psychological ideas, helping people enhance what is positive in life, and alleviate what is negative. This thesis has sought to connect rabbinic texts with the ideas of emotional intelligence in the hopes that we can improve our synagogues, our schools, our prayer experiences, our interactions with others, and ourselves. It is a very Jewish idea to bring more joy, more peace, and more blessings to this world – and now, having explored new methods, new studies, and new ideas, may we go out and do precisely that.

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[134] See Chapter 3, "Controlling Impulses – Subduing the *Yetzer Hara* and Managing Anger," pp. 36-38.
[135] Ibid, pp. 43-44.
[136] See Chapter 5, "Social Intelligence and *Mitzvot Bein Adam l'Chaveiro*," p.71.

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