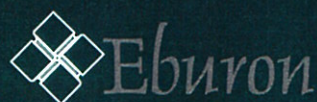


Y. Haruki, Y. Ishii
& M. Suzuki (eds.)

Comparative and Psychological Study on Meditation



COMPARATIVE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY
ON MEDITATION

Y. Haruki, Y. Ishii & M. Suzuki

(Editors)

Eburon Publishers

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JEWISH MEDITATION: CONTEXT AND CONTENT

Historical Background, Types, Purpose

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9. JEWISH MEDITATION: CONTEXT AND CONTENT

Historical Background, Types, Purpose

Mark Verman and Deane H. Shapiro, Jr.

"Man stands on earth with his head reaching
Heaven and the angels of God ascend and descend
within him"¹

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoye

"The World is a University for the Soul"
Epstein

"There is no One except God."

OVERVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines an attentional training technique, meditation, as practiced within the religious tradition and context of Judaism.² The first section provides a brief historical overview of the purpose and practice of Jewish meditation. The second section describes several meditation techniques: on "oneness"; breath;

¹ Cited by Elior, 1993, p.3. Please note that all spiritual traditions – East and West – are faced with a problem of sexism, and Judaism is no exception. We will keep the male pronouns, because that is the way the texts were written. However, it should be understood that the authors believe that contemplative practices are not the province of one sex, just as references to God both incorporate gender references (Adonai; Shechina) and transcend gender (Ha-Shem; Ayn-Sof).

² Virtually all of the material that we shall discuss regarding Jewish Meditation comes from Hebrew sources. Accordingly, the English word "meditation" does not appear in any of these texts. In fact, seldom are any technical terms utilized, though *hitbodedut* (self-isolation/seclusion) appears with some frequency. It seems appropriate, nonetheless, to characterize certain spiritual exercises developed by authoritative Jewish teachers over the last two millennia, as Jewish meditation, insofar as these practices fit the general characterization of meditation.

chanting; light imagery; and heart. The third section discusses topics of preparation (including the role of intensity, motivation, community) and body positions. The final section briefly explores questions about

- a the experience of oneness vs. duality;
- b the experience of Oneness as the highest goal;
- c future directions: comparison of techniques and purpose across traditions.

This exploration of Jewish meditation is timely for two reasons. First, it is impossible to consider Jewish meditation as a technique without also exploring the purpose and intention of the meditation: the sacred and spiritual context within which the technique is practiced. In the past thirty years there have been several books and several hundred articles examining the physiological and psychological aspects of meditation (Shapiro, 1980; Shapiro and Walsh, 1984; West, 1987; Murphy and Donovan, 1988; Kwee, 1990; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In the majority of these studies, the original philosophical and spiritual framework has been ignored, and meditation has been investigated as a technique for its effects as a self-regulation strategy in addressing stress and pain management and enhancing relaxation (cf. Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1985; Shapiro & Giber, 1978). Some studies have explored meditation's effects in helping individuals gain increased insight and self-awareness (cf. Goleman, 1981; Kutz, Borysenko & Benson, 1985). Very few studies have examined the issue of selfliberation / compassionate service (Shapiro, 1992) – the original impetus for the practice of meditation.

In previous work, the necessity of carefully examining the framework within which meditation is practiced and taught has been discussed. It was pointed out that from a scientific viewpoint, there are certain advantages of focusing on meditation as a technique without the spiritual context, but that we may also be losing something quite valuable by denuding meditation of its original religious and sacred milieu (Shapiro 1993b; 1994a). This essay demonstrates the value of exploring the spiritual context and purpose of Jewish meditative practices.

Second, most meditation research studies have involved an investigation of meditative techniques either developed within an Eastern philosophical and religious context, such as Buddhism (Vipassana, Zen) and Hinduism (TM), or secular techniques developed within a scientific context (e.g., Benson, 1975; Carrington, 1978; Kutz, Borysenko, Benson, 1985). It has, however, been noted that meditation has been practiced as the esoteric core of all contemplative religious and spiritual traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Goleman, 1988; Kaplan, 1985; Idel, 1988a and 1988b; Novak, 1984; Inayat Khan, 1989).

Therefore this article provides information on Jewish meditation that might be helpful for those looking for material congruent with their Jewish identity.

Further, by describing Jewish meditation, an invitation is afforded to compare the goals and practices of this approach to other traditions.

2. PURPOSE AND PRACTICE: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The purpose of Jewish meditation is clear: to increase an individual's understanding and experience of the Divine. Meditations were developed as techniques to inhibit the constant flow of everyday thoughts by replacing random, mundane musings with focussed contemplation of the Ultimate. This concentration on the Divine helps the individual gain wisdom and understanding (hokmah and binah); liberates the individual from the egoistic self; creates an emotional transformation in which evil inclinations are decreased, and opens the heart to healing the world (tikkun olam) – through compassionate service to others, social justice, and ethical living. At its deepest level, the mystic "reaches a state in which the mizvot (biblical commandments) are performed as if God performed them through" the person (Idel, 1988a, p. 70).

For almost 4,000 years, since the time of the biblical figures, Abraham and Sarah, the focus of Judaism has been Ha-Shem, (literally "The Name," i.e. the ineffable and sacrosanct name of God that is unutterable and inscrutable.) This Hebrew name can be transliterated YHVH. It connotes eternal existence and is commonly rendered in English translations of the Hebrew Scriptures as "Lord." The Hebrew Scriptures are replete with directives, which have and continue to form the basis of Jewish meditation. "For you, who adhere to ?Ha-Shem? your God, are all alive today" (Deut. 4:4). From this verse the Rabbis deduced that attachment (?devekut?) to God is lifesustaining.³

The seminal, biblical formulation for achieving devekut is ascribed to King David, "I have continuously placed (shiviti) Ha-Shem before me; He is at my right hand so that I shall not falter" (Psalm 16:8).⁴ The ancient Rabbis cited this verse as indicating that "one who prays should perceive the Divine Presence before him" (B. Sanhedrin, f. 22a). This verse also gave rise to various meditative techniques in which the Divine Name is visualized, as illustrated in section 2:4.

In addition to directives, there are indications that specific biblical figures engaged in meditation. Admittedly this material is very sketchy. In examining this issue we shall first consider references to two of the biblical Patriarchs, Isaac

³ The Rabbis also claim that this spiritual pursuit will ultimately result in resurrection. See B. Sanhedrin, f. 90b.

⁴ Beginning in the middle ages and continuing until today, domestic amulets bearing this verse and referred to as a shiviti have been popular in certain Jewish cultures; See Schrire, 1982, p. 87-90 and p. 147-149.

and Jacob, and then continue with a discussion of biblical prophecy. To aid in our understanding of this material and its connection with meditation we shall consider the explanations of medieval rabbinic commentators.

According to the account in Genesis 24:63, Isaac would venture out into the fields at sunset la-suah, "to commune/meditate." During one such excursion, Isaac was encountered by his bride-to-be Rebekah, who was so overpowered by his intensity that she fell off her camel.

Regrettably, Isaac's meditative method has not been preserved. Nor do we know what technique Jacob, his son, utilized. Nevertheless, R. Abraham b. Maimonides, a 13th century sage asserted in his commentary on the verse "Jacob was left alone" (Gen. 32:25):

Jacob isolated himself (hitboded) physically: no servants nor objects remained with him. He ascended from physical self-isolation into spiritual self-isolation.

In this brief discussion of seclusion as a preparation for spiritual elevation, R. Abraham reflects the teachings of his illustrious father, Maimonides. In the Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah 7:4, Maimonides examined the nature of biblical prophecy and, in so doing, makes explicit the connection between biblical prophecy and meditation.

The biblical prophets did not prophesize whenever they wanted. Rather, they directed their minds and sat joyfully and contentedly in a state of self-isolation – for prophecy does not occur in sadness or lassitude, but only in joyousness.

In the previous two citations the term "self-isolation" is utilized by both R. Abraham and Maimonides in a twofold manner. It simultaneously refers to physical withdrawal from social interactions, as well as a synonym for the act of meditation itself.

In the post-biblical period, beginning around 200 B.C.E. and continuing for many centuries, we find evidence of various Jewish groups that developed an intense form of spirituality, which included meditation. We shall now consider three distinct movements: the hasidim rishonim, the Therapeutae and finally the hekhalot mystics.

The hasidim rishonim (early pietists), referred to by scholars as Hasideans are first mentioned in historical documents from the second century B.C.E. According to a later rabbinic tradition, they incorporated meditation into their daily prayers. The Hasideans would be still (shohin) one hour prior to each of the (three) prayer services, then pray for one hour and afterwards be still again for one hour. Since they were still and prayed nine hours each day, how was their Torah knowledge preserved and their work accomplished? Because they were pietists, their Torah knowledge was preserved and their work was Divinely blessed (B. Berakhot f. 32b).

Although the specifics of their practice has not been preserved, Maimonides notes the following in his commentary to the Mishnah, Berakhot 5:1:

The explanation of shohin is that they restrained themselves; that is to say they restrained themselves for one hour prior to praying in order to settle their minds and quiet their thoughts. Only then would they pray.

Two thousand years ago, a second group of Jewish contemplatives built a community around the Mareotic Lake near Alexandria, Egypt. The only historical account of their activities is by Philo of Alexandria, a seminal Jewish philosopher and statesman. Philo labels them Therapeutae, healers, namely therapists of the spirit. For six days of the week the Therapeutae would reside separately, each in his/her own dwelling. Their days were devoted entirely to spiritual pursuits, in fulfillment of the biblical directives to be continuously mindful of God. Then, on the Sabbath they would gather together for communal prayer, study and meals.

It should be emphasized that both men and women were members of the Therapeutae. This deserves special mention, insofar as the involvement of women in ancient Jewish religious praxis and especially spirituality is severely underrecorded. Note that the Therapeutae were so successful at being ever mindful of God that this impacted their dreams, as well.

In each house there is a sacred chamber, which is called a sanctuary or closet, in which in isolation they are initiated into the mysteries of the holy life. They take nothing into it, neither drink, nor food, nor anything else necessary for bodily needs, but laws and oracles delivered through the prophets, and psalms and the other books through which knowledge and piety are increased and perfected. They always remember God and never forget Him, so that even in their dreams no images are formed other than the loveliness of divine excellences and powers. Thus many of them, dreaming in their sleep, divulge the glorious teachings of their holy philosophy (Winston.1981, p.46).

Beginning with a text from the second century B.C.E., known as I Enoch, there is an extensive collection of Jewish writings that describe celestial journeys to the seven Heavens. Most of these works can be classified as pseudepigraphic, in that they are attributed to legendary figures. One of the few, genuine autobiographical accounts is the apostle Paul's first century C.E. discussion, found in 2 Cor. 12:2-4. He is undoubtedly referring to himself, though modestly in the third person.

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

It is quite interesting that Paul himself is uncertain if this event was an out

of body experience or physical teleportation.

At least a century later, there emerged a corpus of texts known as Hekhalot (Celestial Palaces/Temples) literature. The central figures in these writings are second century figures: Rabbis Akiva, Yishmael and their companions, who ascended to the Heavens and gazed upon the Divine Chariot. An example of the praxis advocated by these compositions is the following,

R. Akiva said, Anyone who wishes to master this authoritative teaching and fully explicate the Divine Name shall sit and fast for forty days. He shall place his head between his knees until the fast has conquered him. Then he shall whisper to the earth and not heaven, for the earth shall hear him, but not heaven (Elior. 1982, p. 36).

Ostensibly, this text offers specific directives on how to become a hekhalot mystic. The requirement for fasting forty days, however, is presumably symbolic. It alludes to Moses' forty day sojourn on Mt. Sinai, after the revelation of the Ten Commandments; (cf. Ex. 24:18).

This concludes our historical overview of ancient Jewish references to meditation and related spiritual activities, including prophecy. The earliest sources concerned specific individuals, such as Isaac, who meditated in private. In the postbiblical period, groups like the Hasideans and Therapeutae emerged, indicating that entire communities were devoted to this pursuit. In general, we lack information about the specifics of their meditative praxis. In the next section, however, we shall offer a detailed presentation of an ancient Jewish meditation.

MEDITATION TECHNIQUES

This section describes several different meditation techniques. We begin with a meditation on "oneness," one of the oldest Jewish meditation techniques. We then discuss meditations on breath, chanting, light imagery, and on the heart.

1. MEDITATION ON ONENESS: AN ANCIENT TECHNIQUE

The Jewish liturgical declaration of faith is the Shema:

"Hear (Shema) Israel, Ha-Shem is our God, Ha-Shem is one."
(Deut. 6:4).

According to the rabbinic sages in the Talmud,⁵ this biblical passage and its successive verses are to be recited morning and night, in fulfillment of a biblical commandment, (as reflected in Deut. 6:7). The initial verse – with its compel-

⁵The Talmud is a multi-volumed collection of rabbinic discourses, pertaining to all aspects of Judaism, compiled from first century through sixth century C.E. sources.

ling affirmation of faith – requires special attentiveness. This is inherent in the word shema (hear/listen) itself.

There are various meditative practices associated with the Shema. One ancient technique is concerned with the proper concentration that an individual should have while reciting the final word of the verse, ehad (one). The Rabbis taught the importance of a slow, sensitive, careful, and fully concentrated approach to the way in which this word was uttered.

This meditation was subsequently incorporated into many medieval Jewish religious law codes. Owing to its "canonization", it has been continuously practiced for almost two millenia. Even today, countless Jews use this technique twice daily.

The Rabbis attached particular importance to the last letter of the word ehad – the dalet – which is written overly large in all Torah scrolls. Since the letter dalet corresponds to the number four, it was interpreted as alluding to the four compass points. The pivotal discussion of this issue in the Talmud is the following.

And it was taught: Symmachos said: Anyone who prolongs the pronunciation of ehad [one], his days and years will likewise be prolonged. R. Aha b. Jacob said: This refers to the letter dalet. R. Ashi said: Moreover, one should not shorten the letter het. R. Jeremiah was seated before his teacher, R. Hiyya b. Abba. The latter saw that he was greatly prolonging [the recitation] and said to him: Once you have acknowledged His sovereignty above and below, and in the four directions, more than that is not required of you (B. Berakhot f. 13b).

The text continues by noting that the leading rabbinic authority, Rabbi Judah the Prince would cover his eyes with his hand, while reciting the Shema, presumably to focus attention. This too has been incorporated into the normative practice.

A much expanded discussion of this issue is found in the seminal twelfth-century legal code, Sefer Ha-Eshkol, compiled by Rabbi Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne. According to the testimony of Rabbi Abraham, it was the custom of the eleventh century sage, Rabbi Hai Gaon, to nod his head in the six directions: that is up, down, east, west, south, and north, while reciting the word ehad. This particular order was derived from a key passage in the classic mystical work, Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Creation), in which God is described as sealing the six planes of our three-dimensional universe with permutations of the Ineffable Name.

After referring to the above-quoted passage from the Talmud, R. Abraham comments:

And we have learned that one does well to shorten the alef, and it is commanded to do so. We can deduce this from R. Ashi's stipulation that specifically the het should not be shortened. The fact that he

did not mention the alef implies that one does well to shorten it. It has been stated that one should lengthen the het to a count of three and the dalet to twice three. First, one should acknowledge sovereignty below and above while reciting the het, and then do the four directions during the dalet. When contemplating the four directions, one should nod one's head first east, then west, then south, then north. We learn this practice from the *Hilkhot Yetzirah* (The Laws of Creation), as is taught there (chapter 1:13).⁶

Although there have been numerous rabbinic discussions of this technique, one of the most informative is the brief comment by R. Joshua Falk, in his sixteenth-century commentary on the *Shulkhan Arukh*. In order to appreciate his reasoning, it is necessary to be aware of the numerical significance of the three letters that constitute the word *ehad*: alef=1, het=8, and dalet=4.

When reciting the alef, one should consider that He is One; at the het, that He is united in the seven heavens and on earth, which makes eight; and, at the dalet, which alludes to the four directions. In the future, all will declare that He is One.⁷

Falk's conclusion that during the messianic era everyone – Jew and Gentile alike – will participate together in this act of unification echoes Zechariah's prophecy, "On that day Ha-Shem will be one and His name one" (14:9).

A profound extension of this meditation is reflected in the writings of R. Hayyim of Volozhin, the early 19th century pioneer of the *Yeshivah* (rabbinical seminary) movement.

Concerning the unification process associated with the first verse [of the recitation of the *Shema*], in conjunction with the word "one," the individual should contemplate that Ha-Shem, may He be blessed, is unique. He is one in respect to all of the worlds and all of the created beings. He exhibits a pristine oneness and everything else is considered to be none existent--for there is nothing else other than Him, at all Hayyim, 1989, p.162).

In these statements R. Hayyim is expressing a doctrine which is known as *acosmism*; literally a negation of the cosmos (Verman, 1987). It is the teaching that God is the only reality and that everything else is ephemeral and without true being. Although this doctrine was not particularly evident in Jewish circles until the late 18th century, R. Hayyim and certain Hasidic masters based themselves upon a literal interpretation of Deut. 4:39, "And you shall know today and place it upon your heart that Ha-Shem is God in Heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other."

⁶ This text was translated from the printed edition and corrected by referring to Paris ms. H-91-A, 3b.

⁷ Prisha, O.H. 1:9.

2. MEDITATION ON BREATH

Within Jewish spiritual literature there is much discussion of the importance of breath. What follows is an exploration of some of this material. After examining the fundamental concept that all life is dependent upon the breath of God, we shall consider the biblical connection between breath and the soul. This will be followed by an exploration of medieval and early modern – kabbalistic and hasidic – material, culminating with an extended presentation of R. Nachman of Bratzlav's teachings on the mystical significance of breath. The thrust of all of this material is theoretical, though one could easily develop specific techniques based on these sources. We shall conclude with one such example.

Divine breath animates. God blew the "breath of life" into the nostrils of the primordial human (Gen. 2:7). Similarly, in Deuteronomy 8:3 it is stated that we are not sustained "by bread alone, but each individual shall live on that which comes from God's mouth." Thus Job affirms, "The spirit (*ruah*) of God has made me; and the breath (*nishmat*) of the Almighty has given me life" (Job 33:4). This is then extended to all of creation. "By the word of Ha-Shem the heavens were made, and all the hosts by the breath of His mouth" (Ps. 33:6).

Philo, the pioneer of Jewish philosophy, offers an important insight in commenting on Gen. 2:7. He asserts that had it not been for this act of Divine infusion, humans would not have the capacity to contemplate God.

'Breathed into' (Gen. 2:7) is equivalent to "inspired" or besouled" the soulless...that which inbreathes is God, that which receives is the mind, that which is inbreathed is the (divine) breath. What, then, do we infer from these elements? A union of all three is produced, as God extends his power through the mediant breath to the subject. And to what purpose, save that we may obtain a conception of Him? For how could the soul have conceived of God had He not infused it and taken hold of it as far as was possible? For the human mind would never have made bold to soar so high as to apprehend the nature of God had not God Himself drawn it up to Himself, so far as it was possible for the human mind to be drawn up, and imprinted it in accordance with the (divine) powers accessible to its reasoning (Winston. 1981, 127).

All biblical words that express the concept of the soul are related to Divine breath: *ruah*, the spirit; *neshamah*, the soul/breath of life; and *nefesh*, the sigh of tranquility, as evidenced in Exodus 31:17 "and on the seventh day He ceased and rested (*va-yinafash*). Commenting on this verse, the medieval exegete, Rashi, explains that the root word *nefesh* indicates a restoration of one's soul and tranquil breathing.

The linguistic link between *neshamah*, i.e. soul, and *neshimah*, i.e. breath, is noted in classical rabbinic literature:

Rabbi Levi taught in the name of Rabbi Hanina, With every breath (*neshi-*

mah) that one breathes, one should praise his Creator. What is the scriptural basis for this? "Every living soul (neshamah) shall praise God (Psalm 150:6). [Read instead] each breath shall praise God (Bereshit Rabbah 4:11).

A Hasidic writer used this explanation as a basis for viewing prayer as a cosmic cycling of breath from the individual to God and back again. "For breath goes out from him, from below to Above, and returns to him from Above to below. Certainly with ease, each person can join the Divine part within himself to its root..." (Likkutei Yekarim, f. 12a).

We have previously discussed acosmism in connection with the affirmation of Divine unity. This issue also arises in conjunction with breathing. A key facet of the Hasidic theory of *devekut*, attachment to Ha-Shem, is that through the negation of the ego, one can actualize the Divine spark within. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liady applied this theory of self-negation to breathing:

One who contemplates this matter will thoroughly understand how all that has been created and exists, is in reality to be considered as nought and veritable nothingness to the power of the Actualizer and the breath of His mouth, which is within the actualized and which animates him...For it is the breath of His mouth which alone, continually transforms him from nothingness and nought into that which exists, for it animates him. Accordingly, 'There is nothing outside of Him.' (cf. Isaiah 45:6), in truth (Shaar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, ch. 3).

The power of God-centered breathing is considered immeasurable. Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, the early Hasidic leader, discussed the function of breath and its celestial impact, as it clears the Mind. In so doing he focussed on the metaphor of clouds as spiritual obstacles.

The reason that the Heavens sometimes cloud over inexplicably is because there are clouds that cover the Mind, as is mentioned in the Tikkunim (a supplement to the Zohar). The proof is found in the Talmud (B. Berakhot f. 32b) for Rava did not declare a fast on a cloudy day, as it is written, "You have covered Yourself with a cloud, [so that no prayer may pass through] (Lam. 3:44)."

The dispersion of the clouds is by the breath, namely the movements – the way one moves during prayer. For the movements come from the lung which corresponds to breath, as is mentioned several times in the Zohar and the Tikkunim. Understand this."

Rabbi Pinchas added, "If I would have said this several years ago, everyone would have dispersed the clouds, but now no one pays any attention" (Midrash Pinhas, p. 26).

In the Zohar, the jewel of medieval Jewish mystical literature, there are highly technical discussions of the Divine Anthropos, namely God imaged humanly. Therein the left nostril is associated with Divine Power and Judgment, whereas the right nostril is related to Divine Grace.

Rather in the house there are two windows: concerning the left (nostril), it is written, 'and smoke arose in His nose' (Ps. 18:9). What is the significance of 'arose?' Rather, it ascended from the heart which is the left, corresponding to Power. From the right, from the side of Grace, descended the breath to cool it and quiet His anger. For the brain is there, which is Wisdom, located on the right (Zohar, 3, f. 224a).

According to the Zohar, each nostril has a distinct function: the right nostril draws the cool, compassionate air down from the brain, and the left uplifts the hot air from the heart. Although no specific technique is advocated; nevertheless, this theory could obviously form the basis for one.

Among the Hasidic masters who emphasized the significance of breathing, R. Nachman of Bratzlav, the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, stands out.⁸ In a straightforward discussion, preserved in one of R. Nachman's own manuscripts, we read about the role of sighing in the process of repentance.

One who truly wants to return to God, may He be blessed, must transform himself into a new creature. Know that in a sigh one can transform himself into a new creature...There is the good air of the righteous and the bad air of the wicked. The righteous person continually draws air from the realm of holiness and the wicked draws air from the realm of impurity. When one wants to undertake teshuvah, (returning to God), he must ensure that he prevents the bad air from entering. Accordingly, he should sigh. This sigh lengthens the inhaling and the exhaling, and extends the air by increasing it. This increase is referred to as "they increase their breath and perish" (Ps. 104:29), that is death. Before death, air fills the individual and at death the air departs...By means of sighing for one's transgressions, an individual can release himself from the root of impurity and connect himself to the root of holiness" (Hayyei Moharan #27, 28).

A more complex discussion is found in three of R. Nachman's discourses, each time in a somewhat different format. In the following, multi-leveled exposition, he explicitly connects breathing with the purifying of intellect. He compares this process to a candle burning. Implicit are basic kabbalistic associations, which he explicates in statements scattered throughout his homilies. In the same way that flames are sustained by oil, we are nourished by our physicality and the Divine realm is supported by the lowest realm. The ultimate goal is to elevate and transform matter, on every level, into pure light, i.e. intellect. This is accomplished through the medium of breath.

This is the meaning of 'an understanding individual is a cold wind' (Prov. 17:27). By means of a cold wind that is the cold wind of the breath, by these

⁸ Presumably, he was attuned to this issue owing to his persistent breathing problem – ultimately he died from tuberculosis.

means they merit understanding...This is the meaning of "The breath of the Almighty causes them to understand" (Job 32:8) – for the basis of understanding is by means of the breath, which is associated with the cold wind, as discussed above.

Moreover, the basis of the restoration (tikkun) of the intellect is by means of the breath. The essence of the intellect functioning properly, enabling it to contemplate, is dependent upon the oils/fats in the body. For the intellect is like a burning candle and it burns by means of the oils that are drawn to it and they are like the oil that is drawn to the burning wick. When there are no oils in the body, the intellect cannot burn in contemplation. This results in insane people, when the moisture in their bodies dehydrates. Consequently, the brain becomes defective when there are no oils to burn.

All the moisture and oils in the body are a result of the breath. 'If it were not for the wings of the lung that blow on the heart, the heart would set the whole body on fire' (Tikkunei Zohar #13, f. 28a). Accordingly, the basis of the existence of oil and moisture in the body is due to the breath. The lungs receive the cold wind from outside, in order to cool the heart, and this also enables the intellect to burn in contemplation, as discussed above. This is the significance of 'the candle/lamp of God is the soul/breath of man' (Proverbs 20:27). The existence and restoration of the candle of God, namely the intellect, is dependent upon the breath.⁹

Breath requires a twofold movement, in and out. So too is the pendular bond between humans and God. The primal Divine act is exhalation, blowing the life-force into Adam's nostrils. This parallels the flow of the Divine energy, channeled downward through the intra-divine levels. We inhale this energy and then exhale, redirecting it upward through our spiritually oriented activity. By connecting kabbalistic symbolism with the image of the burning candle, R. Nachman offers a powerful tool for appreciating the mystical significance of breathing. The flame is within, glowing with each breath that is devoted to Divine awareness.

Below is a brief breath meditation adapted from three souls described in the Zohar. (To better appreciate this meditation, it should be noted that the Hebrew word, mitzrayim means Egypt; however, the same letters, when vocalized differently; metzarim refers to narrow passes. There is a multi-level pun here, which has both a physiological element referring to the breathing process, as well as an historical element: Exodus from the slavery of Egypt. By focusing on our breathing, we can learn to help remove ourselves from slavery to our narrow places).

⁹ Likkutei Moharan, 1, 60:3; cf. 225 and 2, 8:12.

A Breath Meditation:

On our inbreath, we should concentrate on receiving life from God. That inbreath is life-sustaining. On our outbreath we should give everything we have back to the universe. Our outbreath may be the last we ever take, and, at the end of our life, we want to make sure we have given everything we have back to the world.

Imagine on each outbreath letting go and giving forth all you have to the world. Then, if a new inbreath occurs, there can again be a feeling of gratitude and thanksgiving. The "pause" between the inbreath and outbreath is referred to in the Zohar as "metzarim," narrow passes or straits. These narrow passes can be understood as the parts of us that want to keep taking in, and are not ready to shift the cycle into letting go. Focusing on our breath, therefore, can be an opportunity to breathe in with thankfulness, notice the parts of us that cling and hold on inappropriately, our narrow places; and then allow ourselves to experience letting go and giving back all that we have received.

3. CHANTING

The practice of chanting is intrinsically connected to breathing. Any discussion of this issue within the Jewish tradition revolves around the 13th century savant, R. Abraham Abulafia.¹⁰ He developed a special technique that he taught to his disciples and which was revived in the 16th century, when his voluminous writings enjoyed a renaissance.

Representative of Abulafia's approach are the following directives concerning the proper vocalization of the Divine Name.

One should take each letter and nod according to the duration of the breath, such that one would only breathe once between each pair of letters – a breath as long as possible and afterwards resting the length of one breath. In this manner he should proceed with each letter, such that there would be two breaths for each letter: one (breath) to allow for exhalation at the time of expressing the vowel of the letter and a second (breath) for resting between each letter.

It is known to everyone that each breath (cycle) is composed of taking air in from outside, that is from bar (outside) to gav (inside). The secret of this points to the truth of the attribute of gevurah (power) and its essence – for with it an individual will be called gebor (hero), that is to say gav bar, according to his

¹⁰ A veritable treasure trove of material pertaining to Abulafia's meditative techniques is to be found in Idel, 1988b.

ability to conquer his passions.¹¹

We see that Abulafia's technique entails regulated breathing, vocalizing each syllable independently and accompanying this chanting with certain head movements. R. Yehudah al-Botini, a 16th century scholar, provides an excellent description of this process. It is necessary to be aware that Hebrew letters are essentially consonants. The different vowels are simply dots or lines that are associated with the various letters. The following text describes the pronunciation of the holam, i.e. an "oh" vowel, that consists of a single dot placed above a consonant.

Know that the nodding of each letter is according to its vocalization with the inner heart and external limbs, in this manner. Behold, when the High Priest, prophet or any righteous person would conjure the Holy Names, or when you will pronounce any letter that is vocalized with a holam, you should direct your heart and mind and nod according to the form of this vowel, as follows. Do not turn your head either to the right or left at all, nor down or up, rather straighten your head, as if it hung in a balance, as if you were talking face to face with someone who was as tall as you. As you begin to pronounce the vocalized letter move your head upwards, towards heaven. Close your eyes and open your mouth. Speak clearly and clear your throat of any phlegm, so that it will not interfere with the pronunciation of the letter. The upward movement of your head should correspond to the duration of your breath, such that your breath and head movement will stop simultaneously. The vocalization of the holam entails moving your head upwards, as if you were acknowledging the sovereignty of your Creator – ever higher above all the celestial beings (Al-Botini, 1945).

4. MEDITATION ON LIGHT IMAGERY

The most common metaphor in Jewish mystical writings to connote Divine manifestation is spiritual light. This is readily evident in the titles of the classic books of Jewish mysticism: *Sefer ha-Bahir* (The Book of Brilliant Light); *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Radiance); *Shaarei Or* (The Gates of Light). In discussing this topic we shall initially focus on the writings of the renaissance mystic, R. Eleazar Azikri, who expounded extensively upon contemplation of Divine light. This sustained discussion will be followed by several short techniques involving eye movements and we shall conclude with the Zohar's candlegazing meditation.

¹¹ Abulafia's test *Mafteah ha-Shemot* was cited by M. Idel, Hebrew U. Thesis, p. 257 from whence it is translated; cf. Idel, 1988b, p. 24-25.

More than any other Jewish mystic, R. Eleazar Azikri, a 16th luminary from Safed in the Galilee region, focussed on Divine light. He often asserted that one must be ever mindful of being enveloped by Divine effulgence. In his extremely popular handbook, *The Book of the God-Fearers*, he wrote:

In several treatises from the early authorities it is recorded that the Jewish pietists used to engage in seclusion (*hitbodedut*), asceticism and attachment; that is to say when they were alone they would remove all worldly concerns from their thoughts and connect their thoughts to the all embracing Lord. Similarly, our teacher and rabbi, Rabbi I. (Isaac Luria), the aforementioned kabbalist, taught that it is sevenfold more beneficial for the soul than study. According to the perseverance and capacity of the individual, one should withdraw and go into seclusion one day a week, or once a fortnight, or at least once a month. Nachmanides of blessed memory, commented on the verse referring to the patriarch Jacob, "Get up and go to Beit El and dwell there" (Gen. 35:1), what does the phrase "and dwell (*veshev*) there" mean? It is the same as "in sitting still (*be-shuvah*) and rest you shall be saved" (Isa. 30:15). That is to say, one should direct one's thought by securing one's mind with Him, may He be blessed.

It is taught (M. Berakhot 5:1) that the ancient pietists would wait for an hour and then pray, in order to direct their hearts to the Place (i.e. God). The commentators explained that this indicates that they would empty their minds of worldly matters and attach their thought to the Lord of all, may He be blessed, with awe and love. Behold, for nine hours (daily) they would desist from their study and be engaged in meditation and attachment. They would imagine the light of the Divine Presence upon their heads, as if it had spread out all around them and they were sitting inside the light. So I have found in an ancient pamphlet of the early pietists. Then they would tremble naturally and rejoice in the trembling, as it says, "Serve Ha-Shem in fear and rejoice in trembling" (Ps. 2:11) (Azikri, 1981, p. 254).

R. Eleazar also kept a diary spanning many years in which he jotted down a series of observations on spirituality. This work, which is unpublished, has been preserved in a unique manuscript. What follow are two selections from it.

Realize that you are standing before your Creator. When you are studying the Torah, you are gazing on the light of His garment. When you are walking in the market-place or sitting anywhere, you are encountering the light of the Divine Presence. For "His glory fills the whole world" (Isa. 6:3); face to face you shall meet Him. When you speak with someone it is as if He is speaking, for from His power everyone speaks (Verman, 1985, p. 65).

Another selection from his diary:

Let the light always shine on your face. Speaking with Him, and walking with Him, and being silent with Him, and asleep with Him, and awakening with Him; and sitting with Him, and standing with Him, and lying down with Him; all my movements are for Him...I unify His Names,¹² may He be blessed, at every moment, in joy and trembling, and flee from social contact, as much as possible. Complete silence in the fiery light; alone, fearful and crawling. Make the light that is always upon your head a teacher, and acquire it for yourself as a friend (Verman. 1985, p. 65f.)

In tracing influences on R. Eleazar Azikri's spiritual praxis, it can be noted that Azikri referred to "an ancient pamphlet of the early pietists," who advocated the visualization of sitting inside the Divine light. An important, though somewhat enigmatic, text has been preserved which is entitled "A Chapter on Concentration (kavvanah) by the early Kabbalists, of blessed memory." Evidently, it was written in the 13th century. Near the beginning of this short work, one finds a statement which corresponds exactly to R. Eleazar's assertions:

You should imagine in your mind that you are light and that all of your surroundings, from each corner and side, are comprised of light. In the midst of the light is a throne of light.¹³

Jewish mystics also developed specific techniques to promote the contemplation of Divine light. For example, the Zohar recommends special eye movements.

This is the secret. Close your eye(s) and roll your eyeball(s). Those colors which are luminous and radiate will be revealed. For it is not permitted to see them, except with closed eyes for they are hidden (Zohar, 2, f. 23b).

In an early 13th century text by R. Elhanan b. Yakar there is an even more dramatic procedure. It is potentially harmful and could cause permanent eye damage. Accordingly, we are not suggesting that anyone experiment with it.

The soul is a red light that resides on the brain, between two membranes. It is the size of a hazelnut. If you shut your eyes and place your finger at the tip of your eye adjacent to your nose and massage there with your finger, you will perceive a red, circular light on your eyeball. This is the light of the soul shining on your eye. At the time of death this small light grows and assumes the shape of the individual from whom it emanated. The proof of this is the prophet Samuel; (see 1 Sam 28), (Sod ha-Sodot, f. 61b).

¹² See below, f.n. 14.

¹³ This text was originally published by Scholem (1934), from whence we have translated it; see also Kaplan (1982), p. 119-122.

The Zohar also advocated candle-gazing as a meditational technique. Not only does the relationship between the flame and the candle exemplify the union of upper and lower, but even within the flame itself there are two dimensions, paralleling the upper and lower realms within the Divine Being. This material is a good example of the interplay between light and colors in Jewish mystical writings.

But come and see: One who desires to know the mystery of the Holy Unity should gaze on the flame that rises from the coal or from a lit candle, for a flame cannot ascend except if it is holding on to coarse matter.

Come and see: An ascending flame has two lights, a white luminous light, and another which clings to it and is either black or blue. The white light is higher and ascends in a straight path. Underneath is either a blue or a black light which acts as a throne for the white, and this white light rests on it. Each grasps the other, such that everything is one.

For the black or blue light is a Throne of Glory for the white light. This is the secret of the takhelet (the blue thread of the prayer shawl). The blue/black throne is attached to something else, which is below it, enabling it to burn, and it (i.e., what is below the blue/black flame) encourages it to grasp unto the white light. Sometimes the blue/black light becomes red. The white light which is above it never changes, for white is perpetual but blue changes to these colors: sometimes blue or black and sometimes red.

This light is joined on two sides. It is joined above to the white light and joined below to what is under it, which is transformed because of it, enabling it to shine and grasp onto it. This light constantly consumes and destroys whatever lies beneath it. The blue light destroys and consumes whatever is attached to it from underneath and it rests on, as it is its nature to destroy and consume. For the destruction of everything and the death of all is dependent upon it. Accordingly, it consumes everything that is attached to it from below. But the white light, which rests on it, does not ever consume or destroy, and its light never changes.

Moses had this in mind when he said, "For Ha-Shem, your God, is a consuming fire." (Deut. 4:24) [This fire] assuredly consumes, it consumes and destroys whatever resides underneath it. Accordingly, Moses specified "your God" and not "our God," for Moses was associated with the upper white light, which does not destroy or consume (Zohar, 1, ff. 50b-51a).

5. MEDITATION ON THE HEART

Another focus of Jewish spiritual literature is the heart. The ancient Rabbis

summarized this in the pithy statement, "The Holy One, blessed be He, desires the heart" (B.Sanhedrin f.106b). This notion was oft-expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures.

For example, Deut. 11:22 ends "...to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to attach yourself to Him." R. Isaac of Acco, an early 14th century figure, formulated one of the most powerful heart-centered techniques based on this verse.

I, Isaac the youth, the son of Rabbi Samuel, may the Compassionate One guard him, from Acco, may it be rebuilt and restored, say both to specially trained individuals and the general public, that one who wants to know the secret of connecting one's soul above and attaching one's thoughts to the Supreme Lord, will acquire the World to Come through this perpetual, uninterrupted thought process. Ha-Shem will be with you, now and in the future.

You should place the letters of the Unique Name, (i.e. YHVH) may He be blessed, against the eyes of your mind and thought, as if they were written before you in square letters in a book. Each letter should appear infinitely large to your eyes; that is to say, when you place the letters of the Unique Name opposite your eyes, your mind's eyes should focus on them and your heart's thought should be concentrate on the Ayn Sof (The Infinite). Together, both your visualization and your thought should be as one. This is the true attachment as it is written, "And adhere to Him" (Deut 30:20), "and in Him you should adhere" (Deut. 10:20), "and you who adhere" etc. (Deut. 4:4).

As long as your soul is attached to Ha-Shem, may He be blessed, in this manner, no evil will befall you...Owing to the honor of Ha-Shem, may He be blessed, be careful not to attach your thought to Him except in a clean place, not in dirty alleyways, nor with unclean hands, nor in a place of idolatry, etc." (Isaac, 1975, p. 278f.)

Rabbi Isaac stressed that this meditation is for anyone who sincerely desires to adhere to God. It can be practiced any place that is appropriate to divine contemplation. There are two distinct, yet simultaneous concentrations. With your mind's eye, visualize the four letters of the Unique Name as if they are infinitely large. At the same time, open your heart to the Ayn Sof, the infinite, hidden-most aspect of the Divinity. Two different modes: a conceptual exercise designed for the mind, and an encounter with infinity for the heart – simultaneously, two complementary meditations, like arms reaching out to embrace the Divine that is within.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES

1. PREPARATION

There is a general awareness that whereas any time or place can offer infinite possibilities for spiritual elevation; nevertheless, some circumstances are more conducive than others. In the following discussion we shall present texts that consider such issues as: the physical environment; time of day; the person's attitude; and private or communal practice.

An excellent example of sensitivity to all of the basic, preparatory issues is the following exposition by the aforementioned R. Yehudah al-Botini. By way of background, it should be noted that alBotini utilized standard, medieval psychology in discussing the various levels of the soul: vegetative, animal and rational. Al-Botini contended that meditation could only succeed once the lower souls, namely the vegetative and animal, had been satisfied.

When he will continuously strive to acquire this behavior, (namely equanimity which is the starting point for hitbodedut), he will choose for himself a house where he can sit completely by himself. If he has a house wherein his voice cannot be heard outside that is even better. At the outset it is necessary to adorn the house with one's nicest and most important possessions, as well as various spices and other pleasant smelling objects. If the house has trees and lush bushes, it is very beneficial that his vegetative soul should take pleasure in all of these things when he meditates, for it is a partner with the animal soul. Moreover, he should try to play on all types of musical instruments, if he has them and know how to play them. If not, he should sing verses from Psalms and the Pentateuch, in order to please the animal soul, which is a partner of the rational soul and intelligence. If he undertakes this during the day it is fine, but it is necessary that the house be slightly dark. It is better, however, if he does so at night and he should have many candles burning in the house. Also, he should wear proper, clean clothes. It is preferable that they are white, for all of this promotes concentration on Divine fear and love (Al-Botini, 1945).

This exposition, like most that we have already seen, focussed on private meditation, referred to in Hebrew by the term hitbodedut, namely self-isolation/withdrawal. The basic issue of how often one should practice hitbodedut is left up to the individual. In an above-cited text from R. Eleazar Azikri, he recommended one entire day a week or at least one day a month. R. Nachman of Bratzlav, however, encouraged his followers to practice his particular form of hitbodedut, for one to two hours daily (Buxbaum, 1990).

Al-Botini and others, such as Maimonides cited in section 1:2, assert that spiritual ascension depends upon being in joyous frame of mind. In this regard, we find that music played a significant role in germane biblical narratives. For

example, the prophet Samuel encouraged the newly crowned King Saul to join "a band of prophets coming down from the shrine, preceded by lyres, drums, flutes, and harps, and they will be prophesying" (I Sam 10:5). Similarly, the prophet Elisha summoned a musician. "While the musician played, the hand of Ha-Shem came upon him" (2 K 3:15). On the basis of this incident the Rabbis concluded that happiness was a prerequisite for receiving "the holy spirit," namely prophecy (B. Shabbat f. 30b). By extension, joyousness is also congruent with successful meditation.

In addition to private meditations, we have also seen examples of communal practices, such as the ancient meditation during the shema, which is undertaken twice daily during public prayer services.

Another form of meditation, which is also associated with the daily liturgy and hence communal is referred to as yihudim (unifications). In its most basic form yihudim involve concentration on the merging of two distinct Divine Names, which correspond to upper and lower intradivine states, as well as male and female divine characteristics. This technique originated in the 13th century and was comprehensively developed in the 16th century. Although vestiges of it remain, it is not now widely practiced.¹⁴

2. NIGHT PRACTICES

One of the interesting features of the preceding directives by Al-Botini is the preference given to meditating at night. Rebbe Elimelekh of Lizhensk, an early 19th century Hasidic master developed an intense, nighttime technique.

Each moment when one is unoccupied with Torah study, and especially when sitting idly alone in a room, or lying in bed and unable to sleep, one should contemplate this positive commandment, 'And I shall be sanctified amidst the children of Israel' (Lev. 22:32). He should think and imagine in his mind that a great and awesome fire is burning before him, ascending to the midst of heaven. In order to sanctify Ha-Shem, he should act against his nature and throw himself into this fire, for the sanctification of Ha-Shem. 'And the Holy One, blessed be He, joins a good thought to a deed' (cf. Tosefta Peah 1:4). He will discover that he is no longer sitting or lying idly, but rather is fulfilling a positive biblical commandment (Noam Elimelekh, Introduction).

It can be noted that the standard, biblical word for sacrifice is korban, based on the root signifying "drawing near." This is indicative of all sacrifice, in that

¹⁴ The technique of yihudim is too complex to be adequately presented in this chapter. Its origins are discussed in Verman (1989), cf. Kaplan, 1982, p. 219-260.

it enables the individual to come close to God. Furthermore, the typical biblical sacrifice is referred to as an olah, a burnt-offering that is totally consumed by fire; (see Lev. 1:3ff). The word olah means "that which ascends," emblematic of the ascension of the soul.

3. BODY POSITIONS

Body work is legitimated within the biblical tradition owing to statements such as, "From my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:26). In relation to body position, most of the texts under discussion assume that the individual is seated and do not develop this issue further. The above-cited text from Hekhalot Zutarti made reference to a particular posture, referred to as "head between the knees." There is biblical precedent for this. "Elijah ascended to the summit of Mt. Carmel, prostrated himself on the ground and placed his face between his knees" (I K 18:42). The following Talmudic discussion may also be related to this issue. It concerns the symbolism of the eighteen benedictions that form the basis of the thrice daily prayer service: R. Tanhum reported that R. Joshua b. Levi said, 'this corresponds to the eighteen vertebrae in the spine.' R. Tanhum also reported that R. Joshua b. Levi said, 'one who prays must bow such that all of the vertebrae of the spine are released' (B. Berakhot 28b).

More evidence of the importance of the spine is found in medieval mystical literature. The Sefer Bahir, one of the earliest kabbalistic works – from around 1200 – offers an anatomy lesson that has significance, for humans and the Divine Anthropos, as well.

For the brain is the root of the spinal cord. The body constantly draws sustenance from there. If not for the spinal cord, the brain could not exist and without the brain, the body would not exist...therefore the spinal cord dispenses to the entire body from the brain (Bahir, f. 9a).

SUMMARY/CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has presented various techniques from Jewish meditation focusing on: "one", breath, chanting, light imagery and meditations of the heart. Further, different preparations and body positions were discussed. One of our main points is that the techniques themselves should not be divorced from the context and purpose for which they were developed. The purpose was to know and serve God, the deepest source of wisdom in the universe. Although meditation may contribute to stress management and self-regulation, this relaxed feeling is not seen as the goal, but as either a byproduct, or a stepping stone. In other words,

equanimity may help one focus one's attention even more clearly on God. Similarly, the goal of meditation is not self-exploration, even though greater self-awareness may occur as part of the meditative experience.

In these final comments we would like to examine in more detail some open questions regarding the purpose of Jewish meditation: a) the experience of oneness vs. partial experience; b) is experience of oneness the ultimate goal? Finally, a few words about the relationship between the belief in one universal reality and different paths used to reach an experiential understanding of that reality.

1. EXPERIENCE OF ONENESS VS PARTIAL EXPERIENCE

Moses asked to see God's glory. He was told to hide in a rock and was only allowed to see the back side of God, and not God's face (Ex. 33:23). Some contend that the unitive mystical experience in Judaism is neither possible nor desirable. God is the holy Other, the Infinite, of which we, as finite individuals can only have partial glimpses (e.g., Scholem, 1961).

However, Ex. 33:11 and Deut. 34:10 insist that God spoke to Moses "face to face." Thus, Moshe Idel, in re-examining Kabbalistic literature, notes that Scholem's view is limited by his own experiences and approach – a historical view of Jewish mysticism. Idel argues that a phenomenological approach shows that there has been a strong current within Jewish mysticism of "unio mystica" – the unitive experience (cf. Idel, 1988a, Chapter 4). There can be and has been both partial experiences and fully unitive experiences of God, (where no duality exists), within the Jewish tradition.

2. IS EXPERIENCE OF ONENESS THE HIGHEST GOAL?

There are two strands of thought on this question. One approach suggests that the unitive meditative experience of transcendent oneness is the ultimate goal of Jewish meditation, and that such an experience is transformative. For example, the Shema meditation on oneness we have previously discussed, can be understood as part of a journey of transformation. The individual is required to hear (shema). What is the person asked to hear? One meditation says to hear "Israel" which, in Hebrew, means the one who is wrestling with God. Thus, the first two words of the Shema call upon us to wake up to that part which is separate from and wrestling with God. The last word of the Shema, echad (one), informs us that even in the act of wrestling with God, all is One.

A second view is that ethical behavior is the ultimate goal and not unitive

experience. This perspective, echoed in several other spiritual traditions (cf. Novak, 1989), suggests that experiences of transcendence may, but do not necessarily transform the individual. In psychological terms, altered state experiences do not inevitably become altered traits of behavior (Goleman, 1988). This strand of Judaism highlights the importance of ethical action, that individuals try to act in accordance with the image of God, the universal architect, by doing deeds of service and making efforts to repair the world.

As noted earlier, however, these two views are not mutually exclusive, and the person can feel that one's ethical deeds are actually being performed by God through human agency (cf. Idel, 1988). Further, ethical actions can be both a preparation for and a consequence of meditation. For example, one interpretation of the biblical story of Jonah is that it illustrates the ethical outcome of meditation. Jonah is called upon by God to go to the city of Nineveh to help its inhabitants become more moral. Jonah, however, flees the service of God, by boarding a ship to a distant land. In the words of the Shema, he was wrestling with the lower part of himself, his evil inclination.

Thrown overboard, he was swallowed by a huge fish, in whose belly he dwelled for three days. A mystical interpretation of this incarceration is that Jonah underwent a period of intensive meditation, away from the normal stimuli and events of everyday life. Once he leaves the fish, God calls to him a second time, and this time "Jonah went at once to Nineveh in accordance with the Ha-Shem's command" (Jonah, 3:3). Thus, meditative experience can lead to ethical action.

3. COMPARISON ACROSS TRADITIONS: TECHNIQUES AND PURPOSE.

Perennial philosophy and psychology (Huxley, 1945; Smith, 1965; 1976, 1983; 1988; Wilber, 1977, 1980, 1980a, 1983; 1986) asserts that beneath polarity and cultural differences, theistic and non-theistic approaches, there is one universal ultimate reality. A second view of the perennial philosophy is that there are many paths to reach that reality. Third, meditation within different traditions has been an essential contemplative tool to help individuals gain experience of the universal. The claims, counterarguments, and implications of these three positions has been dealt with elsewhere (Shapiro, 1993).

Hopefully, our presentation, incorporated in a book such as this, will promote an understanding of the goals of distinct traditions, as well as the context in which meditation practices are performed and the specific contents of those practices. At the least, this sharing of information should generate greater cross-tradition understanding and openness.

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