# Judaism as a Psycho-Spiritual Guide to a Healthy Relationship: A Midlife Perspective

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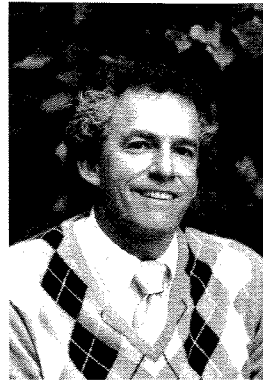
This article examines, from the developmental perspective of mid-life, the potential interconnection between the psychological construct "healthy relationship" (interpersonal dyadic love) and spiritual teachings. To examine this interconnection, several universal themes of mid-life reflected in both the psychological life cycle literature and in cross-cultural fairy tales are discussed: Exile: the slumber of devotion; Yearning: the renewal of the search; and Return: transformation and reconciliation. Throughout the paper, a Jewish metaphor is utilized as an example of a particular spiritual path reflecting these universal psychological and cross-cultural themes.

> O give me the kisses of your mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine.
> Song of Songs 1.2 (*Tanakh*, 1985 literal translation)
>
> In the beginning is relationship. The primary word I-thou can only be spoken with the whole being (p. 3). The extended lines of relationship meet in the eternal Thou...Every particular thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou (p. 75).
> Martin Buber, *I-Thou* (1970)
>
> Communicate your innermost wisdom to me again in loving closeness, for your friendship is dearer than all earthly delights. Song of Songs 1.2 (Scherman & Zlotowitz, 1986, allegorical translation)

There is an increasing recognition, on theoretical, clinical, and research levels, that a strictly pathology-based model of individual health is insufficient (Jahoda, 1958; Jourard, 1968; Walsh and Shapiro, 1983). As the World Health Organization noted in its 1946 Charter, "Health is more than the absence of disease, and includes mental, physical, and *social wellbeing* (italicizing ours). Further, with the increasing acceptance of marital and family therapies (e.g., Green and Framo, 1981; Hoffman, 1981), it has become even more important to examine and refine what we mean by one critical aspect of "social wellbeing"—the dyadic relationship (Campbell, 1980; Shapiro and Shapiro, 1983)."

In this article we will examine the dyadic relationship—the "couple"—based on three perspectives. First, drawing from our own personal and professional experience, we will be speaking of a male/female dyad. Second, we will be framing our exploration of "healthy" relationship within spiritual (trans-personal) context and understanding (Boorstein, 1979). Finally, we will discuss the issue of spiritual wisdom and healthy relationship from the developmental perspective of mid-life, (cf. Chinen 1987, Erickson, 1951; Levinson, 1978; Vailliant, 1977; 1986), delineating three stages of relationship.

The first stage is *Exile: The Slumber of Devotion*. This topic includes a loss of connection to the relational other, and to the Source, worshiping of false idols; a loss of magic; disillusionment; disorientation; facing mortality, limitations, and internal demons. The second stage is *Yearning: The Renewing of the Search*, which identifies an awareness of the state of exile, and a longing to draw close again to the lost love.

The third state is *Return: Transformation and Reconciliation*. This stage involves efforts to reconcile relational issues of secularism and spirituality; self-control and "other" control; doing and being; freedom and commitment; masculine and feminine; anger and forgiveness. In this stage, we also find the transformation of suffering and stagnation into healing, generativity, and humor.

Although there are some spiritual traditions that see relationship as antithetical to spirituality (cf. Shapiro and Shapiro, 1983), there are many traditions, both psychological and religious, emphasizing the importance of human relations in transpersonal development, such as Jung (1925). Even earlier, Catholic doctrine equated the working out of the relationship between husband and wife and working out of one's relationship with God" (Chinen, 1987, p. 123).

Relationship can be a vehicle for spiritual understanding. For example, when Adam and Eve make love, the Bible says "Adam knew Eve"; and the Hebrew word used for know is "yada" (Genesis 4.1). The root of that word is the same for "daat" or knowledge—one of the sefirot (numbers) that, according to Jewish mystical tradition, connect humans and God (Steinsaltz, 1980). To truly love someone is not only to "know" them, but also is to gain knowledge of the divine.

Reciprocally, and the primary thrust of this article, is that a spiritual perspective can create a context for and the enhancement of relationship. In this article, we are defining spiritual as that deepest source of wisdom, compassion, meaning, and harmony that exists within the universe and

within each of us.[1] The interface between a religious perspective and a psychological one can be clarified by looking at the roots of each of the words. Psychology, from the Greek, means knowledge (logos) of the mind (psyche); religion, from the Latin, means to re-link, re-connect (legio) back (to one's life, the Source). Depending upon which psychological theory or religious belief one espouses, the knowledge of one's mind (psychology) may, or may not, link one back to the Source (religion). Further, that Source may be created, innate, developed, and/or uncovered, again depending upon the theory one accepts.[2]

In this article we utilize metaphors and teachings from the mystical and spiritual teachings of Judaism[3] as the particularistic path for addressing these universal issues of relationship and spirituality. We also use themes from a Jewish fairy tale *The Golden Tree,* (cited by Chinen, 1987; complete work in Schwartz, 1985) as well as quotes from the Biblical *Song of Songs* (Tanakh, 1985). In both works there can be found the themes alluded to earlier of exile; yearning; return—reconciliation and transformation. Also, both fairy tale and song can be understood on several levels. For example, the Song, on the literal level, is a beautiful and sensuous erotic poem of love between man and woman. The Song can also be understood symbolically, as representing the relationship between the individual and God.[4] Finally in Buber's terminology, the Song can be seen as an example of God expressed *in* the relationship itself—that is, it is only in relationship that one can find the Eternal Thou, the particular thou of one's relational love, and even the thou of one's core self. The fairy tale similarly can be considered multi-leveled: a king searching for his queen; Israel (that part of us that wrestles with God) searching for God. In examining these texts, we are asking what can Jewish teachings and wisdom contribute to helping

[1]For the purpose of this article, we are using the terms "spiritual"; "transpersonal"; "the ultimate nature of the Universe"; "God", "the Source"; interchangeably.
[2]Some psychological theories, such as behavioral and existential, would argue that the highest Source, if it exists at all, is created by humans, based on education, models of others, existential and authentic action (May 1961; Skinner, 1953, 1971; Shapiro, 1978). Even within psychological schools that believe humans to be innately good, there is disagreement about whether the fundamental nature of humans is really a reflection of the fundamental nature of the universe. In other words, is wisdom uncovered by human actions and unique to each person; or is it "received" from a "higher Source" and/or is a reflection of the basic nature of the universe and therefore shares a common essence across humans? (Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1969; Walsh and Vaughan, 1980).
[3]Within a traditional Jewish approach, there is a view that no individual should begin a spiritual search (and study of the mystical tradition) until they are married (and over 40). One way to understand this approach is that the solidity of relationship (and the completion of certain early adulthood developmental tasks) can provide the context within which and from which mystical study begins.
[4]In Judaism, the traditional view of the *Song of Songs* is of a love song between God and the community Israel.

understand, create and enhance healthy relationships at mid-life along the universal dimensions being discussed.

ISSUES AT MID-LIFE

Exile: the Slumber of Devotion

Upon my couch at night I sought the one I love—I sought but found him not...
(3.1, Song of Songs)

I let my devotion slumber... (5.2)

I opened my door for my beloved But my beloved had turned and gone. I was faint because of what he said. I sought but found him not; I called, but he did not answer... (5.6)

Chinen notes that mid-life is probably the most secular developmental period through which an individual passes, a stage characterized by what Hans Kung (cf. Chinen, 1987) called the "repression of the religious." In mid-life fairy tales, the tasks are the most "mundane" and the outcomes the least clear. There is neither the struggle for victory and ultimate triumph of the early fairy tales, nor the transcendence of the elder fairy tales.

Mid-life is a time when many people are most fully committed in their careers, having overcome some of the early hurdles, only to be laden with increasing professional duties and obligations. It is also a time when many individuals are most involved in building a family.

It is at this time that what Chinen calls "a loss of magic" seems to occur. This loss can be understood on several levels. There is a loss of youth, perhaps the loss of parents, often the loss inherent in the contrast between the lofty ideals, goals, and aspirations of youth and the increasing recognition of limited realities. As Levinson noted (1978, p. 192), the structure of early adulthood is based on illusion—the dream. During the phases of settling down and becoming one's own person, a "man must believe in himself—even in the face of reality, if need be." But then comes the subsequent task of "deillusionment." The goals and aspirations of youth either have been met (and not found totally satisfying) or it is seen that the dream has not, and maybe cannot ever, be met. A ladder has ended, there are no more rungs, and no new ladder is readily apparent to take its place. The all-gracious and protective mentor; the unlimited beliefs of youth in its own invincibility and its ability, through personal efforts, to triumph; the magical *deus ex machina*—all seem distant memories.

These losses occur concomitantly with the recognition of the depth and range of our own shortcomings. For example, although we begin to

see the limitations of exclusive reliance on certain coping strategies that may have served us well in early adulthood, we are not sure what to substitute as we are "not much more individuated at 38 than at 25" (Levinson, 1978). Further, in the fairy tales of youth, the enemy is defined as external, and it is often the innocence and purity of youth that defeat it. No such claims of purity and innocence can be made for mid-life. In mid-life, there is recognition that evil dwells not only without, but within. We have all made compromises and choices we regret. We have all (at least fleetingly) encountered the demon lurking in the dark places of our hearts.

We see simultaneously the truth and the rationalization in using family as an excuse to avoid devoting ourselves totally to an important cause; we see the conflicting motives in our "service" to the world—the mixture of altruism with egoism, desire for fame, and worldly success. Relationally, we are no longer princes and princesses, but fallible human beings, who squabble about decision making; sexuality; sex-roles; financial issues; and "mundane" areas of life that often do not seem worthy of the energy with which we embellish them. Try as we might, we are no longer able to blame our problems only on the external factors of our youth—parents who opposed our marriage, pressures of money and finding our first jobs, the stresses of having young children. Instead, we begin to realize that some of the "evil" in our relationship we have created ourselves.

We also become aware that there does not appear to be any magical force that can rescue us, and the rest of the world, from the evil we find in the world, in our relationships, and in ourselves. We have become the parents who are supposed to be able to create magic, but who no longer have limitless belief in our own powers.

Amidst all these external and internal losses and uncertainties, it is easy, relationally, to "let my devotion slumber" and to poignantly feel the exile—both interpersonally and spiritually—that can appear in our lives. How many times at mid-life, although we long for closeness and acceptance from our relational other, do we find ourselves isolated and alienated. This isolation has a spiritual parallel as well. Just as often, in fact frequently at the same moments, we discover we are also in exile from God, wandering in the wildness without a clear sense of direction. Sometimes the gulf between us and our loved one, between us and God appears unbridgeable.

In summary, mid-life is a potential time of confusion and disorientation. It is a time when we may be forced to confront the dark side of life; to address our own mortality and fear of death; and to face elements of ourselves that have been repressed or neglected. At those times, we are quite aware of the "descents" in life (Nachman, 1980); a "loss of magic" (Chinen, 1987); a sense of "deillusionment" (Levinson, 1978); a feeling of being in bondage "to Pharaoh"; "in the wilderness"; worshipping

false idols (Tanakh, 1985); all of which can create, for the individual, and the couple, the theme of "Exile" reflected in the Song of Songs.

Yearning: The Renewal of the Search

> O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks, Hidden by the cliff, Let me see your face...
> (2.14, Song of Songs)
>
> I must rise and roam the town, Through the streets and through the squares; I must seek the one I love... (3.2)
>
> I was asleep,
>
> Hark, my beloved knocks! "Let me in, my own, My darling, my faultless dove For my head is drenched with dew My locks with the damp of night"... (5.2)

In this state of exile, there is lamenting and yearning for one's former status as God's chosen beloved on a spiritual level; and a simple longing for the individual beloved from whom one has become separated, and who feels "far away."

Yearning cannot begin until individuals acknowledge that they are relationally in exile. Just like the Israelites in Egypt, it is possible to be so enslaved to the secular that the bondage itself remains unrecognized. The secure and comfortable ways of normal existence, the worshipping of "false idols," the fear of the unknown and of appearing deviant, the tyranny of peer pressure can keep us physically as well as psychologically trapped in stagnant relational patterns.

At the beginning of the Jewish fairy tale, "The Golden Tree," we meet a "middle-age" Emperor who has five wives, four of whom have provided him with children. The Emperor finally yields to the pressure and constant harping from the four fertile wives, and agrees to banish his fifth and heretofore childless wife. He "sent her from the palace alone, without providing her with any silver or gold or the least amount of food or water" (Schwartz, 1983, p. 127). The fifth wife immediately feels the pain of her exile, and is filled with tears of shame and fear. The Emperor, however, at first does not realize that he is also in exile until one night he dreams of a golden tree

> and there in the golden trunk he saw the reflection of the queen whom he had banished from his sight. Then he was filled with remorse at having sent her away, for he understood that she had been precious to him, and he tried to take hold of the trunk. But as soon as he touched it, it disappeared and he awoke (Schwartz, 1983, p. 130)

After his dream, the Emperor is filled with grief, great longing and shame, both for the loss of his queen, and the loss of the golden tree. He becomes "ill because of his bitterness" (Schwartz, p. 131). At last, after

much resistance and avoidance, he "finally concluded that he must undertake the quest to find the golden tree himself" (Schwartz, p. 131).

What is the Emperor searching for? On the one hand, it is his relationship with the lost queen, whom he himself banished. At the same time, it is the golden tree, which is a tree of life. Judaism is often referred to as the tree of life (Werblonsky and Wigoder, 1986; Proverbs 3:17-18; Pirke-Avot 6:7) (etz hayyim) for "those who hold fast to it." The tree of life may be understood, in the mystical tradition of Judaism, as representing the transpersonal, the spiritual dimension of life (Scholem, 1977; Cordovero, 1974). Finally, the Emperor is also searching for himself, to learn to reclaim responsibility for his own decisions, actions, and life. As part of his internal exile and bondage, he has blamed his other wives; he has tried to get messengers and goldsmiths to accomplish the search for him; he has offered possessions in exchange for this tree. He even allows himself to become sick rather than seek personally to redress the exile he has brought on himself. In the end, however, he realizes he himself must begin the search for the golden tree, in which his youngest queen is reflected. There is no magical solution, no longer any hope of others to do it for him. There is also the realization that that which is most important to him has been lost.

Ironically, it is often precisely this awareness of the loss of magic in our lives, the absence of the spiritual that can prompt a yearning to recommit to, return to and deepen one's own spirituality and connection with both the Source and one's relational other. As a further irony, the Emperor is only able to recognize the slumber of his devotion during sleep! Individuals may begin to realize that, like the Jews in Egypt, they are in bondage, bound by the "narrow places" of their own choice and creation. What follows is a longing to be reunited with the beloved, to regain that precious sense of unity and harmony that, like the Emperor, we have thoughtlessly abandoned. Yet precisely at this time when the yearning is strongest, the goal seems most distant. One feels totally alone in the search. The magic of youth is gone. So it was that the

> Emperor traveled throughout the kingdom, and everywhere he went he asked if anyone knew of such a tree. But... all his efforts were in vain. After many months had passed, he despaired of ever finding the golden tree, and thought of returning home, resigned to being cursed with the recurring dream until the end of his days. (Schwartz, 1983, p. 132).

Return: Transformation and/or Reconciliation

Scarcely had I passed them (those who patrol the town) When I found the one I love. I held him fast, I would not let him go... (3.4, Song of Songs).

Every part of you is fair my darling There is no blemish in you... (4.7)

Vast floods cannot quench love Nor rivers drown it... (8.7)

As the above lines from the Song of Songs suggest, the Jewish tradition believes that no matter how great the exile—from one's relational love, and/or from God no one is ever too far to return. All that is needed is the yearning, the willingness to renew the search. As the Talmud says (Steinsaltz, 1977), "where people truly wish to go, there their feet will take them."

EFFORTS FOR RETURN: RECONCILIATION OF PERSONAL AND OTHERS' EFFORTS; DOING AND BEING

Personal Efforts Toward Mastery

Jewish tradition requires action and effort on the part of the individual in order to effect a Return. Buber recounts a Hassidic tale entitled "When It Is Good to Deny the Existence of God, which argues that when you are approached for help, "you shall act though there were no God, as though there were only one person in all the world who could help this man—only yourself" (Buber, 1947). Similarly, one of the teachings from the Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Elders) states that everything is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is given (Avot 3:19). Thus, the effort for Return needs to be undertaken by each individual, even if that feels lonely and frightening. In the fairy tale, "The Golden Tree," when the Emperor finally sets off by himself, he has no luck for the first several months and becomes discouraged and resigned. The banished queen, too, is fearful and despondent when she first enters the forest. Even though both feel a lack of confidence in their own ability, a "loss of magic," the Emperor must search by himself, and the queen must learn to protect herself in the woods. The task of Return requires individual control and effort.

Acceptance of Benevolent Other (Human and Divine) Assistance

On the other hand, the return is not solely under our control, nor are we totally alone in the process. There is a midrash that tells of a King's son who had traveled a hundred days' journey from his father. His friends advise him to return home, but he replies, "I cannot, the trip is too long." Then his father sends him word, "Come back as far as your strength permits, and I will go to meet you the rest of the way" (Pesikta Rabbati 44,

182a-185b). Thus God says to Israel, "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (Malakhi, 3:7).

Reconciliation of Efforts toward Return: Self and Other

This interweaving of personal efforts (self-control) and efforts by others, both human (benevolent other control) and divine (the purposiveness and compassion of God) also is illustrated in the story of "The Golden Tree." As noted, the exiled queen must learn, using her own skills, to survive in the forest; while the Emperor must put aside his pride and his power and seek her alone, on foot. But both receive the help of a benevolent other, an old man who at various times cares for both Emperor and queen, and in one way or another, guides each of them to the golden tree. In Jewish tradition, this old man probably represents the prophet Elijah, God's emissary on earth who often appears in dark times to help individuals in distress. He also may symbolize the important intergenerational linkages uniting middle to old age, the transformative to the transcendent.

The golden tree, symbolic of God's word, or help from the highest Source, is also available to nurture and support the efforts of both exiled queen and Emperor. It is the knowledge of the existence of the golden tree that gives both queen and Emperor hope. The old man gives the queen an amulet in the shape of the tree which she wears for protection. The emperor, for his part, is drawn effortlessly down a current toward the golden tree. Even in exile, God, or God's sign, is there, for those who open their hearts to search for it and accept it. Finally, the Emperor must return to the world to express this encounter with the transpersonal in everyday life. Carrying a piece of the golden tree, he makes his way to the old man's hut to return a pair of shoes. As we learn, this task is not a simple one, for "it required all of his strength to carry the golden tree back to the old man's hut." Thus, in effecting the Return, both individual efforts, in relation to him or herself and to others, and the efforts of benevolent others (human and divine) have a part to play (cf. Shapiro 1992, in press a,b).

In contemplating the possibility of Return, we may ask, who is in control of this process? This fairy tale, as well as other Jewish sources, suggest that it requires the efforts of all of us, including God. But for the individual at middle life, these are no longer the confident, even arrogant efforts of youth. They are efforts tempered by suffering and much self-doubt, a keen sense of one's own unworthiness for the task. Having discovered significant limits to one's ability to control either oneself or the world, there is a concomitant willingness to yearn with all one's heart, to cry out for help. It is precisely this yearning, this cry, this acknowledgment

of one's own inadequacy, this state of openness and broken-heartedness that allows the efforts of the benevolent other to be accepted, and concepts of God as master, God as protector, God as nurturer to be embraced with gratitude and relief. "You are the potter, and I am the vessel. Mold me according to thy will" (Gates of Forgiveness, 1980) becomes a reassuring, rather than a restricting admission. It becomes possible to rely not only on oneself, but also on the expression of God's will in the universe.

Yet this attitude does not imply a passive acceptance. Paradoxically, as Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1980) observed,

> In order to live simply we must have faith that everything is in our hands, and at the same time believe that everything is sent to us only through God. It may be impossible to do this. But through living this paradox in practice, you will never be far from God, nor will you ever fall. Certainly we must serve God with all our strength, as if everything depends on us.

The exercise of personal control and mastery can thus be understood as complementary to and in harmony with surrender to God (Smith, 1965). Alone, each is incomplete. Together, they contain the potential to make a perfect whole.

This perspective has important implications for relationship at middle life. In the formative years of relationship, control of the relationship often becomes a key issue. Partners power struggle back and forth, experimenting with different distributions of dominance, submission, and mutuality. However, these struggles are often perceived to occur only within the context of the specific relationship, and no larger context is apparent. With the addition of a transpersonal perspective, the relationship is more easily understood not as the sole creation of the partners, although certainly they have a role in creating it, but as a gift or trust from the Ultimate Owner (Hacohen, 1976), of which the partners are the guardians and caretakers. At the same time they are aware of their obligation to nurture this trust to the best of their ability, they also may begin to glimpse that its purposes and directions are not wholly penetrable or accessible to them. At these moments of fragility, risk, and pain, it becomes necessary to cry out for help, and accept the response as an expression of the ultimate benevolence of God's will.

One of the interpretations of the festival of Hanukah is especially relevant relationally in terms of the complementarity of personal efforts and help from the "other". According to legend, after the holy Temple in Jerusalem was reclaimed from the Assyrians, the Maccabees and their supporters found only enough oil to keep the Ner Tamid (Eternal Light) burning for one day. The "miracle of Hanukah" refers to the fact that this oil somehow continued to burn day after day, for eight days, until new oil could be brought. Relationally, this legend might suggest that at times it

will feel as though there is not enough energy to make the efforts to keep the flame lit in relationship. Yet there is a hope that, when personal efforts appear insufficient, a "miracle" may occur, and the necessary "oil" to keep the relationship kindled will appear, surpassing our limited beliefs and expectations.

Reconciliation of Doing and Being

Just as there can be a reconciliation between self- and other-control, so too there can be an interweaving of doing and being. Most of mid-life involves doing. Being allows appreciation of the *process* of creation and acknowledgement of the *wholeness* of what already exists. In "The Golden Tree," the tree is both an ever-changing creation and the deeper source of being from which creation flows. Reflecting a similar balance, the old man in the fairy tale is a great craftsman, who creates beautiful objects of gold. But he does not create these objects to be sold: "Rather, when I have finished one, I beat it down and begin again. For it is the creating that matters to me, and nothing else" (Schwartz, 1983, p. 129).

In Judaism, this interplay of creation and being is represented on a weekly basis by the Sabbath, the day when, after six days of creation, God rested. As Heschel observes, the Sabbath is a time to turn from the task of creation—doing—to an appreciation of the joy, awe, and mystery of creation—being (Heschel, 1959).

Individually and relationally it is easy to see the incompleteness - what we can do to improve ourselves, what our partner can do to improve, and what efforts we might both put forth to improve the relationship. It is easy in relationship to focus on how the other might better meet one's needs—by being more attentive, more loving, less self-centered. However, it is also important, individually and relationally, to take time to experience the wholeness and completeness of the relationship. The Sabbath is such an opportunity. The blessings husband gives to wife (A Woman of Valor, Proverbs 31), and wife to husband (Psalm 112) are a way of appreciating and enjoying the loved one. One of the benefits of spending some time at a quieter, more contemplative pace is that it frees up energy to devote to the other. It is even a special mitzvah (good deed) to make love to one's spouse on the Shabbat (Greenberg, 1983).

There are also daily opportunities within Judaism for experiencing this sense of completeness and wholeness of the moment. The morning prayer contains a line acknowledging God, "Who provides for my every need;" and after each meal there is another blessing (the Birkhat Hamazon) which is a time to experience the joys of fullness and satiation, not

only with the meal, but also with life. These blessings provide an opportunity—amidst the fragmentation, striving, and disarray of a day—to feel the completeness, wholeness, and blessing of the relationship as well.

THE RECONCILIATION OF FREEDOM WITH COMMITMENT

It appears that at some point in each individual's life there comes a time of feeling trapped and limited. This entrapment may be a bondage of one's own limitations and bad habits, a feeling of external enslavement, as in the case of the Israelites in Egypt, or a feeling that something is missing, as in the case of the Emperor of India in "The Golden Tree." Mid-life is frequently equated with lack of freedom. Individuals may perceive themselves to be "trapped" by relationship, and similar feelings may come from obligations incurred to family and jobs (Levinson, 1978).

The central metaphor for freedom in Judaism is Pesah, or Passover. This yearly festival recounts the liberation of the Jews from Egypt, which in Hebrew is Mitzraim and means literally "narrow place." The narrow place of entrapment and slavery is that which keeps us in bondage to our internal Pharaoh, and that cuts us off from our relational other, and from God. Passover holds out the possibility of transformational freedom—by challenging the Pharaoh within who hardens our hearts to change, and by listening carefully to what God requires of us, we can begin to leave the bondage of slavery.

This perception of the importance of freedom extends not only to one's relationship with God, but to one's relational partner as well. It is clear that freedom must be an essential component of a transformed relationship—that true commitment cannot come from bondage (e.g., economic needs or psychological dependency). Individual freedom is necessary before there can be relational commitment. Passover can remind us to examine the "narrow places" of our involvement with the other, to discover where we have allowed ourselves to be held in bondage by our perceptions of the other.

But the events of Passover make clear that freedom from bondage is a multi-stage process. After the escape from Egypt came seven weeks of wandering "in the wilderness," with the Israelities continually complaining and mistrustful of God's (and each other's) benevolence. It is only with care and preparation that *freedom from* bondage can evolve into *freedom to* choose the yoke of God's commandments at Mt. Sinai. Thus, true freedom requires that it be used for commitment. This commitment can be to false idols (money, professional status, ego) to restore the security of enslavement, or it can be used to yoke oneself, in love and respect, to

the relational other, and to God. *The Ethics of the Elders* (Avot, 3.6) observe that freedom without commitment is an impossibility. As long as we are alive, we will be yoked to something, whether it be money or fame or work. Thus, the real issue is to choose well what we wish our yoke to be. We learn from our fairy tale what choices the Jewish tradition recommends.

Initially, the Emperor is unable to perceive the ways in which, although a mighty ruler, he is in bondage (to his other wives, to his need to exercise power, to his desire to have his last queen bear him a child). In leaving his kingdom and commencing to wander in search of the queen, the Emperor experiences the seeking "in the wilderness." He leaves the "narrow places" of his kingdom, but neither is he truly free, for it is unclear where his freedom is leading. According to the story, the Emperor uses his freedom to continue his searching and, eventually, to yoke himself back to the queen and to the Golden Tree. Thus the freedom from our narrow places becomes an opportunity for freedom to seek and ultimately to reconnect and recommit both to God and to the relational other.

Just as the Israelites did not find the initial responsibilities of freedom easy, and often lamented over their abandonment of the security and certainty of Egypt, so the Emperor at time grumbles and doubts, longing to restore the security of enslavement. In this context, it is useful to remember that wandering in the wilderness culminated in the receiving of Torah from God at Mt. Sinai. Similarly, in the end, the Emperor, in seeking the golden tree, transforms himself, leaving his narrow place behind. By so doing, he is able to reconcile and be reunited with the banished queen. This offers the relational hope that personal transformation, guided by the transpersonal, while often afflicted with aridness, uncertainty, and pain, also has the potential to become the vehicle for receiving great wisdom, and reuniting us with God and the relational other.

MASCULINE AND FEMININE: RECONCILIATION AND TRANSFORMATION

During early adulthood, certain instrumental qualities often appear necessary to survive in the external world (Levinson, 1978), and certain nurturing ones are required for raising a family. The literature on traditional sex roles suggests that men have tended to be more instrumental, and women, more expressive (Bem, 1976; Broverman, 1970). Based on this traditional model, the masculine and feminine principles are often regarded as antithetical to each other. However, we suggest (Shapiro & Shapiro,

1984) that this duality represents a state of exile, and that at mid-life, there is an opportunity, perhaps even the necessity, for reexamination. Using the Jungian construct, middle life presents an opportunity for individuation: exploration and enhancement of those dimensions of personal development previously neglected in early adulthood — in this case, the animus and anima (Jung, 1930).

It is possible that our views of God's wholeness may be constrained by our own limiting sex-role beliefs. How we understand God will be shaped by and will in turn shape our sex-role issues. In Judaism, God is both male and female, as well as "The Name," which integrates and transcends sex-role duality. Images in Judaism emphasize both the masculine and feminine dimensions of God. For example, the Shechinah, or manifestation of God's presence on earth, is generally considered to be feminine (Epstein, 1978; Steinsaltz, 1980). Traditionally, God's attributes of compassion and mercy are identified as feminine, while His attribute of justice is regarded as masculine (Gen. R. 12:15; Steinsaltz, 1977). Thus, the unity of God's truth and justice must be framed by God's love and mercy. God judges, but also enfolds and nurtures.

Further, we as humans are created "in the image of God." According to the first Genesis myth of creation (Genesis 1:27), both men and women have qualities of the male and female within them, and our completeness requires reassessing and reintegrating both. Our understanding of the transpersonal suggests that we must right the balance to find the same complementarity reflected in the male and female within us.

In "The Golden Tree," the Emperor shows several signs of such a transformation, based on his search for and encounter with the transpersonal. Many of the transformations the Emperor undergoes have traditionally been associated with the stereotypic "feminine" sex-role: increased generativity, nurturance, intuition. For example, in the presence of the golden tree, the Emperor reaches out and grasps a branch because of "an intuition that came to him from nowhere."

In relationship, this masculine-feminine issue involves the challenge of each partner accepting gender-opposite sex role qualities in the other, and in the self as well. At times, this phenomenon may take the form of sex-role reversals, in the sense of reversing traditional role designations: for example, the woman may assume greater professional involvement and financial responsibilities, while the man becomes more involved with home and family life. Psychologically, it may mean experimenting with the woman being more assertive and initiating in the relationship, and the man more accepting and yielding. However, it is ultimately the complementarity, rather than the polarity, of these principles that is important, less who is capable of manifesting which attribute than that they fit together to form

a whole. Thus, the relational goal from a transformative perspective may be to incorporate the masculine and feminine into the relationship in ways which are fluid, dynamic, and relationship-enhancing, rather than divisive and power-struggling.

The Song of Songs and other sources teach that the Shehinah is often in exile, separated from her Beloved, and longing for return. It is believed that the Shehinah will be permanently reunited only when the world itself is restored to a state of perfect wholeness. Relationally, we can hope that, just as there is the promise of the masculine and feminine being reconciled in God, so they can achieve unity in men and women as well. In "The Golden Tree," this is represented symbolically at first by the queen developing survival skills; and the Emperor learning more expressive qualities of humility and helpfulness. In the end, Emperor and queen, masculine and feminine, are reunited.

FORGIVENESS: TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION

True reconciliation also requires forgiveness on both sides. The Bible is filled with many examples of God forgiving the Israelites, and makes it clear that this forgiveness was not based on their worthiness, but rather on God's compassion. Similarly, we might speculate that, in order to remain true people in faith, Biblical characters such as Sarah or Job might have had to forgive God for some of the anguish they suffered.

Forgiveness as a precursor to Return is a potent Jewish concept. On a nightly basis, the evening prayer provides an opportunity to forgive any person who may inadvertently or intentionally have harmed us during the day; and to seek forgiveness from this individual(s) as well. This is seen as a way of moving closer emotionally not only to those who have wronged us and whom we have wronged, but closer to God as well. The ten day period of the Days of Awe, beginning with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, culminates in Yom Kippur, or the Day of Repentance. The themes of this time are those of repentance and forgiveness. It is a time to put in order one's relationship to God. It is also a time to literally seek forgiveness from other people. The Jewish tradition teaches that God can forgive the sins we commit against God; but God cannot forgive those wrongs we commit against a fellow human being (Asheri, 1978). Only that person has the power to extend forgiveness. Thus, Yom Kippur encourages us to stand before the other with remorse and humility, seeking and extending forgiveness, and cleansing the relational slate for yet another year of ascents and descents.

In the fairy tale of the Golden Tree, although the Emperor has encountered the golden tree and possesses a golden branch, he still has not been reunited with his wife. A transcendent, transpersonal encounter is not sufficient. It is only when he decides to return a pair of shoes that the old man lent him that he has an opportunity for reconciliation.

Once at the hut, the Emperor confesses how he had banished the queen, further evidence of transformation in that he is accepting responsibility, in front of God's representative, and therefore in front of God, for the wrong he has committed. With that confession, the queen, who has been living in the old man's hut, lifts her veil, and reveals her identity. The Emperor asks her forgiveness, and she accepts his apologies. The fairy tale thus emphasizes the equal value of both the asking and the granting of forgiveness. It is this release, on both sides of the relationship, that allows the process of transformation to continue.

For the Emperor, until he can ask for and receive forgiveness from the queen whom he has hurt, the transpersonal is a weight and he is still full of grief. Once he takes responsibility for his past actions, his "narrow places", he is able to recognize that he was in bondage, and seek forgiveness. At this point, the heavy weight of the transpersonal is itself transformed and manifest in the relationship: "And when the Emperor went to pick up the golden tree, he discovered that it had become almost weightless, and that he could carry it without effort" (Schwartz, 1983, p. 135).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SUFFERING AND STAGNATION INTO GENERATIVITY, HEALING, AND HUMOR

Unlike youth, "middle-aged individuals have suffered defeats and injuries, both physical and emotion" (Chinen, 1987, p. 109). Further, with the "loss of magic" and the dreams of youth, there may also be a pervasive sense of stagnation and burden. One of the great challenges of midlife becomes how to respond to this suffering and stagnation. One way to address this challenge is to attempt to transform the suffering into healing, and the stagnation into generativity (Erickson, 1951).

The experience of suffering can increase a person's compassion and sensitivity, and thereby deepen one's ability to empathize, share in, and help heal the pain and suffering of others. We can learn this lesson of healing and generativity through our search for and encounter with the transpersonal. For example, as noted the Golden Tree is a transpersonal symbol that "never stopped flowing". In like manner we can learn the lesson of receiving from that source and in turn sharing with and supporting others.

The mature individual understands both the meaning of suffering, and by extension, the importance of healing. Jewish tradition enjoins us not to turn away from the needs and miseries of others. Saving the life of another is considered the equivalent of saving the whole world (Mishnah, Sanh. 4:5). Relationally, the challenge becomes to transform the suffering which has accrued into acts of love and healing. This may mean using insights gleaned from one's own relational struggles to treat others more compassionately. It may also mean directing healing toward the relationship itself to act more lovingly and compassionately toward the other. The basis for a Jewish home is *shalom bayit*, peace in the house (ARN 28; Scherman & Zlotowitz, 1986). Returning to our fairy tale, both Emperor and queen suffer physical and psychological torment during the exile. In the end, however, the Emperor has learned to cherish and revere his queen; and the queen to accept the Emperor's apology and forgive him. Thus pain and suffering can become the soil for healing, compassion, and wisdom, which then can be turned to sharing with others.

The conclusion of the tale of the Golden Tree emphasizes the potential for generativity inherent in the transformative process. Emperor and queen return home (after all, he still has a kingdom to rule) with the son she bore while in exile, carrying the golden branch with them. Just as the old man shared the transpersonal wisdom with the Emperor and the queen, they in turn feel the responsibility and desire to share that wisdom with each other. "Henceforth he treats the queen with the greatest love and respect."

Emperor and queen both have recognized and returned to their responsibility in midlife to the world. At the same time, they both have been reconciled to the highest Source of wisdom and compassion, and indeed have brought a piece of this back to their lives, thus bringing transpersonal inspiration into secular society (Chinen, 1987). This spiritual wisdom has become a source of nurturance and sustenance for their young child, symbolic of future generations. "As for the golden tree, he planted it in the royal garden outside the window, where the child often played." As the V'havta, part of the central prayer of Judaism requires, it is not enough to experience the transpersonal oneself: one must teach its precepts "diligently to (one's) children."

Finally, humor and joy play an important role in the execution of both healing (Cousins, 1979) and generativity. The fairy tales of youth are magical and enchanting, but they tend to be rather humorless, perhaps because we take ourselves so seriously at that age. By contrast, in midlife, the tales are filled with humor, often quite earthy. In part this may be because humor is an empowering response to the many uncontainable and uncontrollable pains and tragedies which have beset us by middle age.

In terms of Judaism, the role of humor has a long and honorable tradition. Midrash delight in gently mocking kings, sages, scholars (HaCohen, 1976). Especially in the Hassidic teachings, Judaism contains what might be considered an imperative to joy. "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (Psalm 32). While the openness of a truly "broken heart" (Nahman, 1980) is recognized and commended, despair is forbidden. Beyond every personal tragedy, every individual anguish, God's greatness and glory are transcendent. The Mourner's Prayer, recited to honor the dead, does not refer to sorrow or loss. Instead, it is a paean glorifying, exalting, and honoring the Great and Eternal One (Donin, 1980; Scherman & Zlotowitz, 1986).

The importance of joy is further reflected in the Jewish holiday of Purim, celebrating the defeat of the evil Haman (the Grand Vizier of the Babylonian King Ahasuerus) who wanted to put all the Jews to death, by the good Mordecai who, with the help of Queen Esther, saved his people. On this holiday we allow ourselves to become "joyous fools," mocking the Torah, the rabbis, the tradition. Humor and joy can be the catalysts in helping us to gain the strength, perspective, and inspiration to transform suffering and pain experienced in the years preceding midlife into generativity and healing.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF DUALITY (GOOD AND EVIL) INTO UNITY

Judaism's fundamental premise has to do with the unity of God, and therefore the world, which is His creation. This is expressed in the central prayer of Judaism, the Sh'ma, which states, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God; the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). The altered state of consciousness described in Purim—giving free rein to that dimension of our personalities signified by "the state of not knowing the difference between Haman and Mordehai" (Strassfeld, 1985)—may be understood as a mystical experience in which duality is transormed into unity; the difference between good and evil disappears. For, within a unitive universe, there is only one God, "Who created light and darkness, made peace and created evil" (Isaiah 45:7). This concept is so important in Judaism that it is said that, in the Messianic Age, "when all other festivals will be abolished, Purim will remain" (Midrash Mishle 9:2).

If we look carefully, we can see that this is exactly the message of the Golden Tree. At the start of the fairy tale, the world is in fragments: The Emperor is enslaved by the bondage of his "narrow place," the "evil" in him that wrestled with God, and banished the queen. The kingdom is

in disarray, the messengers are unsuccessful, the craftsmen fail, the Emperor falls sick, the queen is lost and frightened, the golden tree itself is undiscoverable.

Similarly, the teachings of the 16th century Jewish mystic, Rabbi Isaac Luria, based on the Kaballah (Book of Splendor) and the Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation), assert that when God created the world, God attempted to fill it with God's perfect Light, which was contained in certain vessels (Kaplan, 1982). But the Light was so strong that the vessels shattered. Because of this shattering, everything in creation contains a spark of God's light and holiness. However, sometimes these sparks of light are covered and hidden by husks (kelipot). Part of our task is to overcome these obstacles, these husks, through the process of repair (tikkun), to elevate the sparks back to the Source, to their intended state of unity.

The pieces must be put back together, both in the fairy tale of the Golden Tree, and in relationship. In fact, by the conclusion of the fairy tale, this process has occurred. The Emperor is reconciled with the exiled queen, the individual is reconciled to God. Further, evil has been reconciled with good, (Gen:R. 9:7) for it was the act of banishment that led the Emperor to wake from his "slumber of devotion" and, eventually, to yoke himself to God and to his relational other. On one level, the Emperor's evil, his "narrow place" becomes conquered and transformed. Further, on another level, the essential unity and purposiveness in the world is revealed.

The mystical lesson is that that which wrestles with God—Israel—is really part of the one God. From a transpersonal perspective, each narrow place—in oneself and in one's love relationship—can be seen, not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity to remove the husks, to free the sparks of love, and to learn how to grow closer to God, to one's loved one, and to oneself.

In relationship, this provides a different vantage point from which to regard one another. In exile, there is a tendency to experience relationship in more dualistic terms. There are the "good" aspects of the relationship, which one wishes to preserve and expand on. There are also the "bad" parts, which the partners wish to eliminate. Rabbi Nahman (1980), however, refers to the continually cycling spiritual ascents and descents of the human soul, all within the context of God. Thus, one can begin to regard the various aspects of the relationship differently. Earlier efforts to eliminate "evil" in interactions can be replaced by efforts to investigate the possible meanings and purposes of those rapid descents into hostility and mistrust. In this interpretation, evil can be seen as the husks that separate one from self, other and God. Nevertheless, a husk can always be removed, and the core goodness revealed. Slowly, one can become a bit more adept at occasionally seeing God in the other.

This belief and trust in a unitary God both reinforce and enrich trust in one's relational partner and vice versa;—trust in one's partner reinforces trust in a benevolent universe and in oneself. It is apparent that the process of repair toward unity is an interactive one; it is through the healing of the relationship with God and the relationship with one's loved other that unity is achieved. The implication is that in tending one's relationship—opening one's heart in I-Thou relationship to the other (Buber, 1970)—one is contributing to bringing to fruition a small piece of God's divine plan—the *unity* of the Eternal Thou. Thus God requires that we care deeply about our relationships, not only for our own sakes, but for God's sake. Through healing our relationships and making them whole, we can contribute to a healing wholeness and unity in the world.

Not that this process of repair is an easy one. The word "Israel" in Hebrew means to wrestle with God. Thus, the relationship between man and God is not seen as smooth and uncomplicated, but filled with ascents and descents, alienations and reconciliations. However, as is suggested in the Sh'ma (Kaplan, 1985; Zohar 2:216a), all this duality, this struggling with God, is contained within a context of unity, the "echad," the Oneness of God.

Given the complexities of interpersonal relationships, particularly in the intimacy of marriage, this model of struggle is reassuring and somehow validating. It suggests that the process of struggle, so long as it is in the service of God (Avot, 5:28) may lead to resolutions of increasing love and respect. It also suggests that, at the deepest level, beneath the husks that hide the light, is found a certain inherent wholeness or completeness in any relationship. Thus, while we can rejoice in relational ascents, or the "running" of the relationship toward the other and toward God, the descents no longer need be so terrifying. It is possible to remember that, "Even when I make my bed in hell, You are with me," (Psalm 139) and this can provide a contextual comfort for times of relational drift and difficulty. It suggests that even though the partners in relationship have temporarily abandoned each other, they are not abandoned by God.

SUMMARY: SOME FINAL COMMENTS AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

In this article, we have tried to delineate certain midlife issues, examine transpersonal insights as demonstrated through Jewish fairy tales and metaphors, and explicate their relational implications. We have shown that, in midlife, the goal of the search for and encounter with the transpersonal is not to transcend the world, but to reconnect with the transpersonal, feel its transformative powers, and then return to the world, to one's relational

love. Relationship with other and relationship with God may work to enhance each other. Knowledge of the transpersonal can provide a strong and enduring context for relationship; yet the primary relationship also becomes a way of drawing closer to God.

Using Judaism as a metaphor, this article has presented a spiritual map by which to guide a relationship, a framework within which to practice skills of acceptance, tolerance, truth, forgiveness, compassion, thankfulness, generativity, and healing. The spiritual journey depicted in Exodus from slavery to freedom, from the constriction of the "narrow place" to the confusion of the wilderness, the temptations of worshipping false idols, the seeking to consciously choose to yoke ourselves to the deepest Source of wisdom, and the hope of glimpsing the Promised Land, becomes a metaphor for understanding the trajectory of relationship. With this as a context and vision to help us in the darkness, the often overwhelming ascents and descents of relationship become more understandable and meaningful. No matter what joys and pains we experience relationally, we can continue to follow the spiritual map God has given us. It reminds us to ask ourselves the question, within the context of God's plan, of how, at the deepest level, are we meant to be together, and for what purpose.

What lessons of transformation and reconciliation do we want to carry forward from this period? We want to be able to learn acceptance of the other, and ourselves in relationship; to recognize the essential beauty and unblemished nature of the other. We want to see the truth that our relational other shares with us, no matter how hard that truth sometimes is to hear. We want to continue our efforts toward generativity and sharing; and to understand, from our encounters with demons and death, the meaning of suffering, and the value of healing. Finally, we hope to stay focused on, and yoked to God, that highest Source of meaning, compassion, and wisdom in the universe; and to recognize that our love toward each other can be an important vehicle for becoming close to God. We want to acknowledge and deepen our trust in God as our "Ultimate Owner," and to be appreciative and thankful for the blessings in our life; and to be willing to learn from those sufferings which, though not sought, can become "opportunities" for growth and deepening understanding.

The spiritual journey, as expressed through our Jewish observance, has deepened and enriched our relationship. It has also provided it with a profound contextual meaning. We are aware that our relationship is at once an infinitely small and infinitely necessary piece of a world in fragments that needs to be made whole again. We experience that brokenness every day through the flaws and struggles of our relationship. But we simultaneously experience its great potential for wholeness. Each time we work toward repairing our relationship, it is possible to believe we are contributing

a small portion of the repairing of the world. Through our struggles with relationship—through experiencing the lessons of exile, yearning, transformation, and returning—we come to learn the deepest Source of wisdom—in the universe, in each of us, in the relationship. And that wisdom becomes One with itself. "And all of those (golden) trees were different, but at the same time they all had the same essential form" (Schwartz, 1983). The loved one is reflected in the golden tree and in our hearts. As the unity of the universe completes us, so we complete its unity. We are all princes and princesses, made in the image of God.

In the words of the Song of Songs (2.16):

I am my beloved's And My beloved is mine.

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