

ENVISIONING THE NEW PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL PARADIGM

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Jewish Renewal,
and the Rebbe of the Future

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Assume as a given that there is an evolution of consciousness, seder hishtal'sh'lut, and that we living at the end of the 20th century are in the throes of a major paradigm shift. In the Chinese language, the word crisis consists of two characters, one meaning danger, one meaning opportunity. At this time of global, spiritual, and personal crises, we as a species are faced not only with the danger of unparalleled disaster to our planet and existence, but also with an unprecedented opportunity to re-birth ourselves into the next evolutionary level. In this shift, what role will science play? what role religious wisdom --from Judaism? from other spiritual traditions? Who might be the future leaders for such a shift, and how can s/he be best trained?

To address these questions and to examine how this next phase of the evolution of consciousness might best mature and unfold, this paper argues that our task is ^{to} seek more carefully not only a dialogue, but also a more thorough effort at cross-fertilization between science and religion on the one hand, and between differing religious traditions on the other. Five points are highlighted. Although these five are not exhaustive, they may certainly be considered essential.

1. God at the Center; "There is no One except God"; Meditation and the contemplative path. The term religion comes from the Latin root Re-legio, to reconnect. Religion is a means by which individuals can reconnect to their Source. Reb Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi, in his book Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counseling in Hasidism and in the way he has led his life, illustrates the importance of this aspect of religion. Reb

Zalman received his basic kabbalistic orientation from the Lubavitcher school of Hasidism, from whom he acknowledges receiving strong philosophical training, a deep appreciation and experience of davening--vital prayer and meditation-- and the importance of placing God at the center of life.

In addition to his work within Hasidism, Reb Zalman earned his Ph.D. at the Reform's Hebrew Union College and helped found the Conservative Movement's summer camp program. He also studied and learned from Thomas Merton (Catholic), from Sufis (in honor of which he has taken a hyphenated last name Shalomi), and from transpersonal and humanistic therapists and theorists. With this background and knowledge he founded P'nai Or, a Jewish renewal community in Philadelphia, which is now the network for the Jewish renewal community worldwide. It can safely be said that within the world of Jewish renewal, there may be no one who has not been touched by Reb Zalman's work and person.

In his book he examines in detail the Rebbe--Hasid encounter (yehidut), showing how Hassidic training of the Rebbe emphasizes the importance of placing God at the center:

The Rebbe knows that the actors--his hasidim--are sparks of God...that he also is part of God...and the audience is none other than God.

The encounters with the Hasid student are an effort to help the student recognize and leave the "inner Egypt" that keeps the Hasid in bondage, to help the student align himself with God's will, and to recognize the cosmic insight that "There is no One except God."

Throughout history and across religious traditions, medita-

tion has been utilized as a vital and significant technique to help individuals phenomenologically experience the universal truth of God's Oneness. Examples from the contemplative core of other spiritual traditions include the following:

The Kingdom of heaven is within you (Christianity)

Look within, thou art the Buddha (Buddhism)

Atman (individual consciousness) and Brahman (universal consciousness are One (Hinduism)

God dwells within you as you (Yoga)

He who knows himself knows the Lord (Mohammed)

By understanding the Self all this universe is known (Upanishads).

It is being increasingly recognized within the Jewish Renewal Movement that there is and has been an important current in Judaism honoring the contemplative life that needs to be acknowledged. Moshe Idel, in his crucial and influential book Kabbalah: New Perspectives notes that the unio mystica (oneness with God through mystical experience) has a long history in Judaism. He cites many examples, including the following:

human faculties, through contemplation, after many hard, strong, and mighty exercises...the particular and personal <faculty> will turn universal, permanent, and everlasting similar to the essence of its cause, and he and He become one entity. --- Abraham Abulafia

She (the soul) will cleave to the divine intellect and it will cleave to her...and she and the intellect become one entity, as if somebody pours out a jug of water into a running well, that all becomes One.

---R. Isaac of Acre.

Those who cleave with all their mental powers to God<they have lost their> existence like a drop which has fallen into the great sea and has come to its root and therefore is one with the waters of the sea and it is not possible to recognize it as a separate thing at all.

---J. Weiss: Via Passiva in early Hassidism

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan has written several books on Jewish meditation, of which Jewish Meditation is an excellent compilation of different meditative techniques used throughout Jewish tradition. As one example, Rabbi Kaplan suggests that the Shema is actually a journey of transformation, in which we are asked (or are being asked) to Hear (SHEMA) that part of us which wrestles with God (ISRAEL) and is bound by restricted modes of consciousness:

The Shema tells Israel to listen, to quiet down the mind completely and open it up to a universal message of God's unity.

ADONAI is the name for the eternal, infinite God, outside of categories, time and space; and ELOHENU means "Our God," a God with whom we can have a close, personal, intimate connection. And the first line of the Shema ends with ECHAD, is one. As Kaplan states, no matter

how many different ways we experience the Divine, they are all one and have one source....there is no plurality. If there is no plurality, then we are also one with God.

Meditation and the contemplative path involve a mode of knowing which has been honored by the esoteric core of all religious traditions, but not respected by traditional science. As Thomas Szasz has noted (cited in Reb Zalman's book The First Step) if you talk to God you are considered a religious person; if God talks back, you are considered psychotic! The Shema prayer calls for us to wake up from our bondage, to struggle through the wilderness with (and toward) God, and finally through an even deeper level of mystical understanding, to reach the promised land--a Unity with Oneness, a unity which was already

present, once we listened carefully enough to experience it.

2) Ethics and Values as Part of Science. In terms of ethics, Reb Zalman notes that the Rebbes sought to impart the wisdom that the Hasid's task was to "remain socially effective while unification was achieved; not to lose track of the Above and the Below." Some within science have argued that the area of science and ethics should be kept separate. In the emerging paradigm this need not be the case. For example, Roger Sperry the Nobel Laureate for his work in split brain research, has called for a new scientific theology. He notes that a more expanded science would involve a "union of religion and ethic with science, a new global ethic, one which acknowledges that brain function is intrinsically goal oriented and value guided."

Thus, the lessons of honoring God as the source, emphasis on the importance of contemplation and prayer as a way to experience God and as a mode of knowing (equal in validity to hypothetic-deductive scientific knowing), and the importance of service are all universal timeless lessons illustrated by Habad and Hasidism which can and should be brought forth and included in an emerging new psycho-spiritual paradigm.

3) Removing Religious Baggage: Lack of Equality; Exclusivity; Non-Scientific Superstition. Even though he found advantages and great learnings in Habad, Reb Zalman notes that the experience of Habad for him was ultimately limiting, and he recognizes several frailties within the Hasidic tradition. First, he notes from an egalitarian viewpoint, it has been, and will continue to be patriarchal, and the Rebbe and the Hasid will always be male.

A second weakness was exclusivity: when a tradition believes there is only one particular path to universal truth, ^{there often is} a concomitant devaluing of other traditions or different paths within a tradition.

An assumption of the perennial philosophy is that behind and beneath the forms of different cultural and linguistic based traditions, there is a universal truth. A second assumption is that different particular paths can lead to this universal truth. For the first time in human history, all different religious traditions are available to us, and it is now possible to delineate similarities and differences between paths. Interestingly, myths of uniqueness are present in every religious tradition. The question is whether that specialness in the eyes of God is considered to mean that every particular path is special and unique, or to mean that one's own particular path is the "exclusive" path to universal truth and wisdom, what Schuon has called the "scandal of particularity." It is clear that as part of the emerging paradigm, myths of exclusivity are no longer helpful. As Reb Zalman has said elsewhere, if "chosenness helps to divinize the planet, yea; if not, let it go."

A third area of weakness was Habad's inability as well as an unwillingness to acknowledge and honor the lessons of the sciences. Reb Zalman points out that no empirical understanding has been (or, he believes, ever will be) brought to bear by the Hasidic tradition. However, he argues that for an emerging paradigm, a larger "empirical science of soul-guidance" is also needed.

Similarly, Roger Sperry, points out that just as, ^{in ancient times} ~~by~~ abandon-

ing the view that the sun was driven across the sky each day by the sun god led to a more sophisticated theology, so too ^{a similar} transformation can happen today if we abandon those aspects of religion that are still superstitious and primitive. He asks what form religion would have taken if Copernicus, Darwin, and Einstein had come before Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tse and other religious founders. Envisioning that new form is ^a contemporary challenge facing us today.

4) Honoring the Lessons of Science and Other Paths. In terms of Reb Zalman's own individual path, he recognized that "Habad fostered too strong a connection to the realities it described and prescribed, so that as a result it was inevitable that I transfer my allegiance to the wider, global life." He talks of "mutant Rebbes" who have undergone specific training but broken away to pursue their own path; who will "probably be more consciously empirical and will utilize Western liturgical and symbolic modes."

A large thrust of Reb Zalman's book provides a scholarly, thoughtful, informative, and disarmingly honest case study which has its analog in psychotherapy research. Psychotherapy research asks the question, "What technique within which school of therapy is best for which specific individual with what particular concern or problem." Framed as part of a religious journey of transformation, the question facing the new Rebbe, the new therapeutic Tzaddik, involves clearly paying more attention to the different means of creating personal and experiential awakening; and finding which techniques or combination of techniques are

most effective for which individuals. For example, Hinduism has several modes in which the individual can express the sacred: the way of knowledge/ philosophical inquiry (jhana yoga); the way of service (karma yoga); the way of ecstatic celebration (bhakti yoga); the contemplative/ meditation path (raj yoga); and a body, psycho-physiological path (hatha and kundalini yoga). Certainly the list is not exhaustive (e.g., the way of faith in Anand Buddhism's Free Land School), and there are counterparts within Judaism in terms of Mitzvot representing service, study, contemplation. Framed in this way, issues of faith versus deeds; mystical experience versus legalistic doctrines; collective understanding and tradition (roots) versus individual experience and progressive change become not "versus" but rather different paths for different individuals, and perhaps for the same individual at different stages of the journey. An empirical approach may help us better match an individual's personality characteristics ^{and spiritual needs} to a particular approach.

Empirical study can help determine the nature, motivations, and precursors of enhancing profound commitment to using one's life to raising the sparks of God, both in oneself and in others; explore the personality types of people attracted to being ^{spiritual} healers; more precisely define the nature of the ^(spiritual) help sought by the client; examine the motivations, dynamics, defenses and personality type of those seeking help; refine the nature of the therapeutic interaction process; and delineate what are the most effective ways to transmit knowledge and wisdom given the personalities of teacher and student.

A new emerging scientific theology could examine individual

personality styles to see which variations within a ^{particular religious} path (a suggestion mildly threatening to traditional religion) (or which paths (most threatening to traditional religion), including religious, psychological, or some as yet developed psycho-spiritual paths are most effective in this next stage of the evolution of consciousness. ~~They~~ ^{the} Rebbe of the future would need to have an understanding of the empirical sciences as ~~they~~ relate to religious belief, experience, and practice. This would include research in mystical and altered states of consciousness, the phenomenology of meditation, personality types and development along the lifecycle; issues of ego and self; stages of faith and moral development.

5) Source of Control: mind or MIND?. A seemingly difficult chasm to bridge between science and religion involves the source of control. At its most materialistic and reductionistic, science has stated that laws of physics and chemistry exert "control upward" in which the lower levels of matter --atoms, molecules-- ~~were~~ presumed to control higher levels of functioning. Roger Sperry, however, has argued that emergent higher order properties--mind, values, ethics, goals, purpose--which initially developed from lower ones, now

determine in large part the movement through time and space of most of the atoms on our planet...and evolution as it progresses acquires a directionality with higher level controls.

He calls this the control downward model of evolution.

This is a major paradigm shift in science, for it acknowledges the role of human agency, free will, and notes an evolutionary progression in consciousness. Although Sperry's view of

control downward is a major improvement on more traditional scientific views, some within the scientific community, such as Brian Josephson, argue that one higher level of control still needs to be investigated:

Among the mental forces and intentions which enfold and supersede lower level entities one should include a Mind.

Josephson, following the lead of Bohm in physics, argues there is an unmanifest, or implicate order which we cannot directly observe a "God or Mind". He therefore argues that religion, via mysticism, needs to be brought back into science:

I see mysticism to be universal like science, and religions are based on the facts of this science. Thus, mysticism is a kind of universal foundation for the diverse and different religions. Mysticism is concerned with very fundamental laws: God and his relations to humans and other worlds.

This relation ^{between} human agency and Divine agency is an issue in the psychological, anthropological, and religious literature. In Judaism, Rebbe Nachman says,

We must have faith that everything is in our hands, and that everything is sent to us only through God.

Certainly this issue of self- and other control can be found within other traditions. For example in Hinduism, Ramakrishna says:

The winds of God's grace are always blowing. But you must raise your sail.

The rebirthing of a paradigm shift involving an evolution of consciousness may necessitate developmental stages along this self-agency/ Divine agency continuum. Reb Zalman notes that within psychologies, there is a model of increasing

maturation and growth to higher levels. Using the issue of control, all secular psychotherapy and counseling is to help individuals gain more control over their own lives. Depending upon the school of therapy, that will involve learning about unconscious processes and defenses (psychoanalysis); becoming more aware of the internal, self-actualizing nature within (humanistic); relearning negative behavioral and/or cognitive thoughts patterns (cognitive/behavioral).

All of the above schools involve some form of increased self-awareness. A fourth force in psychology, transpersonal psychology, is concerned with the preceding levels of awareness as well as the awakening of the individual to a relationship with the spiritual. The goal of transpersonal psychology is not only to enhance the individual ego, as in the other three schools, but to go beyond the individual ego to experience one's larger Self, one's interconnectedness with others, and with the Universe itself. Further, ^{from a transpersonal perspective} an increased "sense of control" comes not only from self-agency, but from surrender of one's active control to God.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: Self-awareness, humbleness, caution for teachers and students. As we pursue the outlines of a new psycho-spiritual paradigm, and consider teaching what we know to others, we need to be cautious in the task because of our own human limitations and flaws. Reb Zalman tries to address this issue by distinguishing between teacher as person, and teacher as actor doing certain behaviors. He tells the story of when he went to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe, but was denied a visit and told to return a few days later. When he returned, he was allowed in,

and the Rebbe said, "The other day when you wanted to see me, the one whom you came to see was not here. Today he is." Clearly, the wise teacher is one *who* is aware of his or her own personality limitations, and how those can be a disservice to those whom they are trying to counsel.

Reb Zalman notes in his book that the task of the Rebbe is conceptually simple. He must be "an experienced traveler along the way to self-realization." Rebbes are human, and as such, have personality flaws, and ego conflicts. According to Judaism, all wise people, both current and historical have flaws. The seeker's task is to learn from the wisdom of the teacher. But, when the teacher's behavior is not wise, one should not try to spiritually justify it. This has historically been a problem in Judaism (e.g., Sabbatai Zvi), and is a current danger in both Judaism and other traditions, including the Christian Televangelists, certain cults using ends to justify means, and certain Eastern spiritual communities in the West, among others. This raises the potential problem of all non-empirical spiritual systems that rely on charismatic human intervention as the reflection of the divine will. *are vulnerable to similar problems. In Hasidism,* The assumption is that the Rebbe is "privy to the divine will and mind." Although the surrender of personal ego is an important aspect of any spiritual path, there is also an inherent danger in the total relinquishment of individual responsibility to another individual, no matter how awakened.

We can only teach what we know. Clearly our task is to seek to expand our knowledge, both through self-exploration, contem-

plative paths of knowing, and information from the sciences. In this time of shift, a certain dose of humbleness and sensitivity also is appropriate. We face a modern tower of Babel, with people "scattered over the face of the earth." The Bible derives the word Babel from the Hebrew root balal "to confuse." As we seek our new paradigm, the goal is not a Waring blender of particulars, but an honoring of the multiplicity and diversity of forms which reflect the universal. Etymologically "Babel" is thought to mean "Bab-ili"--Gate of God. Perhaps a new scientific theology can be a guidepost for us as we enter this new paradigm, can help point the way for the next stage of our evolution of consciousness, so that the Rebbe/Counselor/Teacher of the future will be able to more carefully, systematically, and still compassionately help individuals find their own unique "Gate of God," a gate that will assist us all in our much needed self and societal transformation.

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