

# Living in the Presence: a personal quest for the Baal Shem Tov

Rabbi Burt Jacobson, Monkfish, 2024

[Note by Alexander Massey: This document is the notes taken by Alexander Massey on the book 'Living in the Presence' by Burt Jacobson; the book weaves Jacobson's autobiographical and personal thoughts with the biography and teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of *Hasidism*. 'Besht', 'the Besht', 'Baal Shem', 'the Baal Shem' and 'Baal Shem Tov' all refer to Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698-1760). The number after a bullet point is the page number in the book. Where there is a name followed by a colon, the text after the colon represents an idea or a quotation from that person. BJ stands for Burt Jacobson. Text in italics is usually non-English, and almost always transliteration of either Hebrew or Yiddish. Everything written in square brackets are personal reflections and comments by Alexander Massey.]

- Zalman: "Hasidism is the willingness to make ourselves transparent to God's grace and will, to live in the authentic Presence of God—*nokhah peney ha-Shem*—as if facing God in every moment, allowing this awareness to change our behaviour, to make sacred acts out of potentially profane and purely secular moments."

## Foreword (Susannah Heschel)

- xi Understand through soul as well as mind
- xi Live in the presence of God, found in others, in Torah, in nature, in prayer – with joy and celebration
- xi Soothe others' suffering
- xii Hasidism → being in love with God and what God has created
- xii Enhance prayer life
- xii Cultivate inner life

## Introduction

- xv A J Heschel: religion is sourced in wonder, mystery and radical amazement [otherwise it's ethical humanism]
- xvii "God's goodness and love are streaming through the world, permeating every bit of reality, flowing through me and through everything."
- xix Besht: The Torah teaches us that 'A fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out.' (Lev. 6:6) The Baal Shem Tov taught, 'Let your heart be that altar, and in everything you do let a spark of that holy fire continually glimmer within you. And know that if you tend this flame, and never allow it to go out, no matter how small it may flicker, you will always be able to fan it into a great fire.'
- xix Ram Dass (Be Here Now): "In each one of us there once was a fire. For some of us it seems as if there are only ashes now. But when we dig in the ashes we find one ember, and very gently we fan that ember, blow on it. It gets brighter. And from that ember we rebuild the fire. The only thing that's important is that ember. That's what we are here to celebrate."

## Part One: Images of a Spiritual Master

### 1. Seeking a Jewish path

Wounds of childhood

In the Holocaust's shadow

Grandpa Goldberg

Other mentors and teachers

- 11 Judaism prism for value, purpose and meaning
- 13 Failure to suppress desires & appetites reinforces low self-opinion it's meant to correct

#### A Hasidic rebbe

- 16 [Beware parochialism between Judaisms or Judaism and the rest of the world.]

#### A pious Talmudist

- 17 Help to prepare for Shabbat
- 17 Greet everyone open-heartedly

#### A loss of faith

- 19 [God isn't bad, incompetent or uncaring; but generous in giving us room to make choices, and to strengthen us internally for good when we invite that, Bad comes from humanity's bad choices. Suffering is part of the legacy of Creation, and gives us the poignancy of expressing value.]

#### Abraham Joshua Heschel

#### A scholarly mystic

- 22 "although God could not necessarily act in the realm of history, this inscrutable presence was very much present in human consciousness, symbol, and myth."

#### My final year

- 23 Rabbinical training was halachah, philology and history, and lacked spiritual mentoring and God; correct observance, adherence to an archaic past
- 24 Besht: have love and compassion for those who do wrong; look at suffering as a catalyst for a life of meaning, virtue and decency

## **2. Encountering Dr. Heschel in San Francisco**

- 25 We all have the impulse to move towards connection and healing

#### The after-effects of LSD

- 27 "experiential approaches to teaching Jewish prayer"
- 27 [Ecstasy is not enlightenment, and can lead to ego inflation.]

#### Toward neo-Hasidic community

- 28 more intimate connection with like-minded, and Divine; longing for spiritual depth; interpersonal intimacy; experimentation; revitalise prayer through creativity; allow doubts about the tradition

#### On the road

- 30 how to break free from Jewish anxiety, guilt and morbidity

#### A passion for truth

- 31 Besht gave hope of inexhaustible meaning & heaven; Kotzker pointed out absurdity, challenge of darkness everywhere
- 32 Besht encouraged joyful imagination
- 33 Resistance to harshness, judgementalism, self-deprecation
- 33 Kotzker Rebbe counselled sober reflection, and looking to the darkness – resisted deceit and inauthenticity

#### Hiding from the truth

## **3. Opening to the Baal Shem Tov**

- 35 "Playful experimentation was the norm there [Bay Bridge Minyan], and Jewish tradition was honoured for its wisdom, not for its authority."

- 36 God can be found in everything
- 36-7 “Heschel wrote that to the Baal Shem Tov the physical world consisted of nothing but veils hiding the Oneness of reality. If we can just learn to see through the veils, we will be able to experience the immediacy of the Divine in every event and thing, in ourselves and in all being. ‘Since the divine is everywhere, one might easily experience the radiance of the Holy in any place at any moment. There is nothing that does not contain a glint of holiness, for without it nothing could possibly exist.’ (Heschel, A Passion for Truth, p.15) Even more important to me was the Baal Shem’s conviction that the Divine lives within every individual. And Heschel demonstrated that the Besht exemplified these truths in the way that he lived his life: ‘He thought of the holiness and beauty of every man’s soul contained, and whenever he met the plainest man, he would offer love first and only then ask him to divest himself of the shackles that prevented him from being in love with God. He related to people as if everybody were his equal. The glory in being human, in being a Jew, enchanted him. He could discover jewels in every soul, and wherever he went he sought to foster reconciliation.”(ibid. p.66) ‘And what does it mean to be a hasid?’ Heschel asked rhetorically. ‘To be a hasid is to be in love, to be in love with God and with what God has created. Once you are in love you are a different human being.’ And because people are divine at their core, loving a human being is equivalent to loving God.”
- 37 Besht illuminated human potential by nurturing mystery [Nurture human potential for holiness.]

#### Reconciling with the Kotzker

- 38 If there nowhere where God is absent, then in hard situations, look for God
- 39 engage in spiritual direction for discerning God’s presence in one’s life
- 39 [Yes, there is evil. And we can look more deeply to the causes of evil, and ensure our responses and solutions aren’t evil, or milder version of it.]
- 39 While maintaining positivity, important to acknowledge and face the darkness in oneself and the world.
- 40 “the tzaddik has the responsibility to transform God’s malevolence into goodness”
- 40 “‘How can the harshness of existence be sweetened at the core?’ the Baal Shem once asked his disciples. He then answered his own question: ‘By raising oneself toward the greatest desire of all: the longing for true goodness. And what is true goodness? It is perfect compassion.”

#### **4. Kabbalah, Vedanta and Hasidism**

- 42 Kafka (diaries): “Life’s splendour forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. If you summon it by the right word, by its right name, it will come.”
- 43 Zohar: there is a light that illumines the whole world

#### Unfolding the cosmos

- 44 Zohar describes God as an emanation from Ein Sof, unfathomable mystery
- 45 Tree of Life symbolises the Divine psyche

#### Healing a broken world

- 47 Luria: the Infinite desired the existence of something other than itself

#### Beginning a new life

- 51 “my essence was one with the essence of the universe”

#### Be here now (Ram Dass)

- 53 Hinduism appeared to say the world is illusory, and therefore ignored social and material inequalities, unlike Judaism

#### **5. The Baal Shem’s Truth**

- 55 Heschel (Passion for Truth): “The soul is ‘part of God from above,’ but man thinks he is all from below, all made of dust. Every man must think of himself as a stairway set on the ground, its

top reaching heaven. It is within his power to affect what should happen in the upper worlds.’  
‘Man has a soul which is itself a divine portion of Divinity and through it he can intuit something of the Divinity of God who is above.’

- 56 Hasidic tale: the Zohar spoke to a few, the Ari spoke to more, the Besht spoke to the hearts of people
- 57 Another version: Zohar taught we have a Creator, Ari taught how to travel to the Creator, Besht taught that Divinity is where we already are, and in everything

#### A radical kabbalah

- 58 Heschel: Can connect to God even in ordinary conversations
- 58 God is not king or father, but ground of our being
- 58 We live within the Presence [not just in front of it]
- 59 We can choose whether we accept God. [We can choose what aspect of God is in our lives by the metaphor (‘address’) we use and God also Gods without reference to our choice or perspective.]
- 59 Heschel disagreed with Ecclesiastes (‘There is nothing new under the sun’): “I would say there is nothing stale under the sun except human beings, who become stale. I try not to be stale. And everything is new. No two moments are alike. And a person who thinks two moments are alike has never lived.”
- 60 Heschel on Besht: everything we experience is both God in disguise, and God on display.

#### What did the Zhydatshover know?

#### The power of parable

- 61 Pantheism: all is in God. Acosmism: all is God. Zalman: existence itself is God. Whatever I experience, and however I do so, it is more than that, and manifestation of the essence of existence.

## 6. A Legendary Life

- 64 Besht teaches people to be joyful. When he’s sad, they bring joy to him, and that joy even disperses clouds.
- 65 [Fervour helps us see magic in the world.]

#### In praise of the Baal Shem Tov

- 67 [Help increase awe and love of God, seeing God in everything, bring hope and healing.]
  - Simon Dubnow: historian of Hasidism
- 69 Besht ‘son of Podolia’
- [Do we need to separate history and myth in what we receive from the story of the Besht, or Torah? Perhaps don’t treat his as a conflict between fact and fiction, but tension between meaning and despair, Ordinary and Non-Ordinary Reality.]

#### The historical Baal Shem Tov

- 70 Besht’s father “Remember this as long as you live: God is with you. You need not be afraid of anything.” [Same idea as last line of *Adon Olam*.]
- 70 Dubnow on Besht: “man is in a constant solitary encounter with his Creator”
- 71 Besht was mostly an auto-didact
- 72 [NB Besht quoted a Patriarch, but Gershon didn’t realise the Besht’s true learning from this clue. His prospective wife passed the test, because she honoured her father Reb Efrayim, despite the Besht’s apparent lack of learning.]
- 73 [Meditate on: “all the world is full of his glory”.]
- 74 “how to stay in mystical alignment with the Divine while conversing with others” [and interacting with Ordinary Reality, walking between worlds]
- 76 remarkable *mensch* and obviously feet of clay as well
- 77 never managed to reach Israel, though tried

### He begins to teach

- 78 Dubnow summary: 1) God is everywhere so we are always seeing and experiencing God, and every situation is a chance to serve God. 2) God and we influence each other.
- 79 see the wonder of Non-Ordinary Reality in the Ordinary

### His final years

## 7. The Quest of a Hero

- 84 History of Jewish mysticism has examples of feeling of sonship to God as king
- [Powers are not so much acquired as activated from their latency.]
- 84 The Divine is already within – and needs only to be accessed and released or manifested.
- Concealed from the eyes of the world
- 86 [If those wanting to know the hiding God can do so, then we who want to positively impact the world need not waste energy on trying to get seen or noticed. What's good enough for God is good enough for us.]
- 86 “human beings have the capability to see through the physical world that veils the truth, connecting with the Shekhinah, the Presence that is always present.”
- 86 Besht acted in the world and spent solitary time connected to hidden worlds
- [Obscurity might happen despite the merit of the work. This offers an opportunity for humility and avoidance of self-inflation, and focus on right purposes.]

### Introversion and extroversion

- 87 Jung: solitary, strong inner life, unseen by outside world, best work done on own initiative and resources, in own way; possess unusual knowledge
- 88 [How to find *sangha* as a mystic in today's world?]
- 87 [How to convey own inner experience to others? What merit or purpose could there be in doing so? To empower (and give permission) others to have them, and bring comfort and love.]
- 89 Jung: in later life, move away from ego “toward a concern with the greater Self ... realizing God within one's self and the world”

### Models for existence within time

- 90 Besht became a hierophany, a manifestation of the sacred. [Even if this is project or fantasy, it still serves the purpose of inspiring, and providing an ideal model to aspire to.]

## 8. The Disciples' Testimonies

### The Baal Shem Tov in Hasidic memory

- 98 Piaseczner Rebbe: physical forms are sparks of the Divine.
- 98 Zohar: There is no place devoid of the Divine.
- 98 “Focus your awareness on the miracles that infuse your daily lives and you will have all the evidence you need to appreciate how you are being cared for by God.”
- 99 spiritual awareness of Presence enacting daily miracles [making Existence exist]
- 99 [Remove Jewish parochialism from Besht's teaching: love God, love people, love Torah.]
- 100 sacred study, human kindness, serving with joy, prayer, lead as a heaven-Earth intermediary
- 101 [all aspects of Besht, but each teacher some of them]

### Uncovering a vision

- 101-2 1) Reality and God are One. 2) Evil has God present within it. 3) We can align our passion and desires with God, and thus sanctify them. 4) Goodness is at the core of everything, even evil. 5) Binding to anything [even the dysfunctional?!] is binding to God. 6) All comes from God. 7) Serve God through binding to goodness. 8) All lives are expression of the Divine when lived sacredly. 9) All prayers should be for benefit of *shekhinah*, not ourselves, or our awareness is too narrow. 10) God is behind every event, and there is underlying order.

### The underlying questions

- 106 **With spiritual looking, we can see the Divine in everything.**
- 107 If absorbed in outer imperfections, we can't see the Divine within something [but evil must be seen and address – and the visible world of *Assiyah* isn't a lie or illusion.]

### Mystical teacher

- 108 Torah study must be done with whole self, and be transformative

### The primordial light

- 109 'Let there be light' → cosmic consciousness
- 110 Besht: because God hid primordial light in the Torah, study of Torah can connect us to it and cosmic consciousness, activating shamanic abilities and healing potential.

### Scholarly skepticism

- 112 Besht didn't meet famous people, write books etc [but still had enormous influence, and does so now as well]

## 9. **The Baal Shem, Jesus, and History**

- 117 Eli Wiesel's Besht doesn't need to be historical – the legend and power to inspire an influence our imaginations is sufficient

### The Baal Shem and Jesus

- 117 Stories about Besht are as important as his teachings [messenger is the message]
- Who was Jesus?

### Was Jesus a hasid?

- 123 Daniel Matt: Jesus became Torah, carrying awareness of God, and evoking that awareness in others
- 123 Vermes: Jesus was a hasid, faith healer, folk healer, moral revivalist, presenting a love, forgiving and demanding God
- 124 Menachem Schneerson: Everyone is part of God, so 'loving our neighbour as ourselves' is loving God with heart, soul and strength
- 125 [Teaching to see through evil to the Divine that underlies everything – how to address the charge that this might simply be gaslighting?]
- 125 Besht: suffering can be sweetened if we can see God in adversity
- 126: Similarities between Besht and Jesus: through lived example, make God's presence immediate and palpable; there's a spiritual dimension that can't be perceived by the senses and reason alone; God is stronger than evil, and underlies all reality; they [unfortunately] put their primary focus on Jews; necessity of constant spiritual intentionality and avoid asceticism.

### Christian influence on Hasidism?

- 131 A J Heschel (Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity): "The religions of the world are no more self-sufficient, no more independent, no more isolated than individuals or nations. Energies, experiences, and ideas that come to life outside the boundaries of a particular religion or all religions continue to challenge and affect every religion.... Not religion is an island. We are all involved with one another. Views adopted in one community have an impact on other communities. For all the profound differences in perspectives and substance, Judaism is sooner or later affected by the intellectual, moral and spiritual events within Christian society, and *vice versa*."

### Experiencing Jesus' presence

- 134 Sermon on the Mount is a Jewish message of God the Comforter
- 134 Christianity has an overt religiosity and surrender to God

- 135 “the hidden presence of the Divine in all our experiences, whether beneficial or damaging”
- 135 [Look for the presence of God not just in the pushback against evil (thinking of Mr Rogers “look for the helpers”), but in the evil itself. That’s a deep *koan*.]

## 10. The Quest for the Historical Besht

### Myth versus history

#### Founder of Hasidism?

- What we know for certain (shaman/magician, mystic, teacher, community leader)

#### The little flute

- 146 [Why does historical authenticity matter so much? There is inspirational and educational value in the legends and myth.]

#### The crown of a good name

- 149 key aspects of Besht’s thought: “divine immanence, the nature and purpose of evil, worship through corporeality, the elevation of stray thoughts, and the dialectics of rises and falls in the worshipper’s consciousness”

#### Between ecstasy and magic

- 150 Besht’s mystical practices based on 12<sup>th</sup> century Abalufia and 16<sup>th</sup> century Cordovero
- 151-2 Three periods: 1) Inner struggle to experience the Divine. 2) Ecstaic practice using words and letters, channeling upper world into lower, and elevating lower world, and helping his community. 3) Seeing God as totally immanent – separation is illusion. Three models not mutually exclusive [Different ways of perceiving and experiencing single Reality.]

## 11. A Remarkable Resemblance

### Sufism and Hasidism

- 156 Sufism affected Jewish mystical practices
- 157 God created humans in order to be perceived and loved
- 158 *Hishtavut* / equanimity unaffected by external validation [focusing on God]
- 158 The more awareness we cultivate, the more God is reflected in us
- 158 Tzaddik channels the Divine for the benefit of others [and Creation]

### Constructing history

#### Imagination versus reason

- 162 Wiesel’s grandfather: “There will, of course, always be someone to tell you that a certain tale cannot, could not, be objectively true. That is of no importance: an objective hasid is not a hasid.” Wiesel: “He was right. The Baal Shem’s call was a call to subjectivity, to passionate involvement; the tales he told and those told about him appeal to the imagination rather than reason. They try to prove that man is more than he appears to be and that he is capable of giving more than he appears to possess.”

## 12. What the Archives Reveal

### The Glorious Presence

- 166 1970s wary of Judaism’s triumphalism and parochialism, authoritarian and orthodoxy
- 166 “Traditional Judaism begins with Torah, Talmud commentaries, and a religious lifestyle regulated by a mediaeval legal code. The new Judaism begins with you and me, with our personal experience of the spirit, with what I call the Torah of the Heart.”
- 167 Besht: don’t surrender to tradition; honour your own potential as well.

### Martin Buber’s ‘Tales of Hasidism’

- 169 A moment can be filled with light. Our fear can stop us receiving that.
- 170 Ethics 4:1 “Who is wise? One who learns from every person.”
- 170 If God is everywhere, we must open to learning from everything.
- 171 Richard Stone: to reach spiritual seekers, put yourself into your writing, and get beyond academic voice

#### Essential questions

- 173 Besht offered “a loving and joyful path to God anchored in my ancestral religion”

#### Literary resources

- 174 Anecdotes, teachings, aphorisms, parables, more complete teachings
- 174 R. Pinchas of Koretz: “One day a man complained to the Baal Shem Tov about his son. ‘My son has left the Jewish path, and is becoming a heretic, God forbid! What shall I do, Rebbe?’ he asked. ‘Do you love yours son?’ ‘Of course I do.’ ‘Then love him even more.’ The Besht later heard that the man’s son had repented of his heresy.”
- 175 Difficulty: an opportunity to open your heart more.
- 177 Robert Bly: consciousness gives off energy [Not the kind that instruments can measure! But sensitive humans can experience and receive it.]
- [Our quality of consciousness and attention matters. It affects everything, including people and God.]
- 179 Nachman: “The world is filled with lights and mysteries, but you place your tiny hand before your eyes, and you see nothing.”
- 180 Look with your soul, you will see God in the situation.
- 180 Story: Prince lives as a villager, on the king’s instruction. King sends two messengers to call him back, but prince has gone native, and doesn’t believe the king is his father. Third messenger dresses as a villager. [Start where your student is.]
- 181 Besht deliberately found interpretations not intended by others. [God communicates through authors in ways they don’t know – God is everywhere, in many hidden & revealed ways.]
- 182 Besht: what comes from us is from God. [How you experience God depends on you. You even create the aspect of God that you experience – so develop your creative powers and variety.]
- 182 A *tzaddik* can link his wilder, baser nature to God.
- 183 A *tzaddik* altruistically channels God for others.
- 183 A *tzaddik* speaks from a state of undisturbed union with the Divine.
- 183 [Seeing God in everything] a *tzaddik* can elevate everything, not just through explicitly religious activity such as sacred study and prayer, but also through ordinary acts and conversation
- [Act always with sacred consciousness and purpose. It is not necessary for others to know you are doing so, even if you are directly addressing or involving them. This brings great freedom.]
- 186 Meet people where they are, and bring them to the sacred and Divine
- 186 BJ: we are all princes, and we are all part of the ‘royal’ nature of the ‘king’ (Divine)

#### The practice of sacred study

- 187 Besht interpreting Hagigah 9b: qualitative difference between studying a passage a hundred times, and study a hundred times plus the One – i.e. in the Presence. [Torah study is not for knowledge, but for transformation, and connection to the Divine.]

## **Part Two: Penetrating a Visionary Life**

### **13. The Struggles of a Future Saint**

#### A perfect master?

- 192 Besht had an unkind, angry side. [So he knew his animal nature that needed taming.]

#### Kindness and haughtiness

- 195 Besht was arrogant and grandiose i.e. self-inflation [Perhaps because he never had a master?]
- 196 [Is this cruelty or arrogance? Or is it channeling God's *din* / judgement and *gevurah* / severity?]
- 198 Spiritual disciples were elevated by the Besht; others simply saw his marvels as outsiders to the process

#### The Besht's troubled childhood

- 200 D'veikut provides healing to the woundedness of abandonment

#### The path of 'turning'

##### Cultivating humility

- 202 Moses was once unaware, and a kidnapper / gambler – had to evolve. Besht said Moses was born a scoundrel, and reversed his bad traits.
- 204 [Find the antidote or counterweight to your regressive trait and cultivate and enact it.]
- 204 When pride triggered, did something to embrace humility. Besht: "because human pride displaces the Divine, it is the worst form of idolatry"
- 204 Remember achievements come through God, not yourself.
- 205 *Hishtavut* / equanimity enables us to reach highest spiritual rung. [Regressive traits become a lifelong *ezer* / helpmate, making us aware of our spiritual syllabus.]
- 205 Besht: you can't rid yourself of problem traits. [These traits are our *ezer*, our lifelong partners and teachers.]
- 206 self-worth needed in life, and also cultivate humility – it's a fine line for a leader
- 206 reveal the divine spark in your negative traits
- 206 *ga'avah*-pride, narcissism, anxiety, grandiosity, rage – can all arise from abandonment

#### The teshuvah path

- 207-8 Four guards steal some treasure. One disappears. The second returns through conscience (born of *chochmah*-wisdom); the king is happy and forgives. The third returns on the advice of a wise person; the king is unimpressed, but doesn't punish. The fourth returns out of fear; the king orders him to watch others being punished for the rest of his life. Besht said he was the 4<sup>th</sup> type. BJ: stealing God's glory for himself through pride. [What have I stolen from God? That's a painful question to sit with.]
- 210 Besht: conscience is born of *chochmah*. *Chochmah* is where we hear God's 'decrees'.
- [All our heroes and teachers are human, and therefore flawed. Don't discard their contributions just because you recoil at their behaviour. Their contribution is where you most clearly see God in them. I'd have to discount myself as a teacher otherwise!]
- Sainly imperfection
- 212 Besht: "For the wrongdoer who knows that he is a wrongdoer, and therefore considers himself lowly—God is with him, for He 'dwells with them in the midst of the uncleanness (Lev. 16:16)'. But concerning him who prides himself on the fact that he is unburdened by wrongdoing, God says, as we know from the Talmud: 'There is not enough room in the world for myself and him.'"
- 212 Spirits become such because of their honest wrestling with their shortcomings.
- Suffering as a catalyst for goodness
- 214 Besht: "Evil is a catalyst for goodness" – "i.e. the suffering we experience has the power to serve as an incentive for growth" [Not only can it motivate us to grow, but also provide exactly the right kind of seed that we most need.]
- 214 "the cosmos was derived from divine compassion, and that compassion is found even at the depths of evil."

## 14. Realizing Enlightenment

### The Baal Shem's Education

#### External influences on the Besht

- 218 The Besht “saw Godliness first and everything else afterwards”. “Every movement of his, every feeling, every thought, was also from God.” [I think of a person’s core self is ‘the voice within their voice’. God is the voice within the voice within the voice or a person.]
- 218 We can’t maintain consistent awareness, but we can keep returning to it. [This is natural ebb and flow of living as a human. We lose connection, and then we can God can experience the joy of re-connection.]

#### A radical form of mystical worship

- 223 BJ: daily ecstatic prayer conditioned Besht to a mystical outlook

#### Prophet of a new paradigm

- 225 T’shuvah is a step-by-step process, gradually separating from ulterior motives and self-interest
- 226 Miles Krassen: “higher non-dual consciousness, rooted in direct recognition of a pervasive and unifying Divine Presence that is manifest everywhere and in everything”

#### The castle of illusion

- 227 Story: king, illusory castle and obstacles, prince wanting to reach king

#### Metaphors for enlightenment

- 230 1) Lifting / seeing behind veil of illusion. 2) Liberation from obsessive desire. 3) Unification, from fragmentation to wholeness. 4) Reconcile inner enemy, and seeing it as Divine. 5) Returning to the Source, a place of vision.

#### Enlightenment and the brain

- [This seems to describe intense spiritual experience, rather than Enlightenment, which I would understand as a permanent of more enduring transformation.]
- 232 Besht’s spiritual elevation came through a life of worship, not study. [But others can arrive at it through acts, aesthetics & emotion, or mental work.]
- 233 “Through his continual attachment to the Creator he becomes a dwelling place for the letter *Aleph*, the silent origin of existence.”

#### Devekut and davening practice

- 235 Prolonged nigun; enter ensuing silence – Yah breath meditation; contemplative liturgy.
- 235 connect to now, and Presence

#### Niggun chanting

#### Yah breathing meditation

- [First comes inner silence and connection; then the chant; then a deeper silence & connection; then *davenen*.]
- 237 Feelings and thoughts that arise aren’t as important as Who you feel and encounter, and Who fills you with life.
- 239 take a break from meditation if it feels rote
- 239 pleasure and ecstasy aren’t the goal
- [Ps 150 ‘Let every breath praise Yah.’ 1) Imagine doing this on exhalation. 2) Now, instead on inhalation. (I find this harder to do. Think about why ...) 3) Imagine praising God with the whole breath cycle. (This feels huge!)]

## **15. Transforming the Self**

#### Three themes of *Musar*

- 240-1 The greatness of a *baal teshuvah*; doing penance; perfect repentance

#### *Musar* and the Baal Shem

- 242 Early *musar* had a harsh dimension [not present now], fear-inducing

- 245 the good heart of the exhausted worker who davens mincha in the evening to catch up
- 245 Rebuke with love, or not at all
- 246 speak with love when admonishing & include yourself with those who have erred

#### The gate of awe

- 246 Outer awe is fear of God's anger and punishment, the same fear of everyday danger. Inner awe is awareness of God as sustaining force of existence, amazement at being such.
- 247 Fear has a spark of Divinity in it [as does the thing that triggered my fear].
- 248 Convert outer fear into inner awe, love of God will be a gift from heaven.
- 248 Inner awe → love
- ['Love yourself' can lead to narcissism, egotism, solipsism, selfishness and lack of empathy or compassion. 'Revere yourself' → have reverence for yourself and be humble that you are a soul and child of God (Ps 2:7 'You are my son; today I have birthed you.'), worthy of love, but not at the expense of others.]

#### Moses Cordovero and the Besht

- 248 Evil cannot reach God. "If you engage in evil, how will that affect Me?" (Job 35:6)
- 249 "Divinity ... is the very Existence of all that exists."
- 249-50 Vocation of the tzaddik: "opening to the Divine; binding oneself to the Divine; drawing down the divine flow of goodness into the world and channeling it to the members of the community."

#### The palm tree of Deborah

- 251 God sustains everyone, regardless of their actions or intentions [so who am I not to do that for others?]; [theology: we're part of each other, because we're all part of Oneness]; don't be derogatory; be kind, regardless; [give due honour to those who make t'shuvah]
- 252 [Abstain from hatred.] Remember a person's good, and not their bad [How does that square with pursuing social justice?]
- 252 Be compassionate, not cruel, to the wicked.

#### A moral exemplar

- 252 Besht constantly did practical acts of kindness and social justice

#### Rabbinic psychology of good and evil

- 254 *Yetzer ra* is self-serving, which is not evil in itself. It can become so, and can also be generative.
- 254 God is the root of human and cosmic evil
- 255 We are accountable for how we stand against evil (or don't)
- 255 God underpins all reality, including desire and passion
- [Can I want to be transformed to serve more than just my private, separate self?]
- 256 *Yetzer ra* can trigger craving and suspension of consciousness [*mochin d'gadlut*] and conscience
- 256 sublimate lust into lust for Torah
- 256 Resist attempts of *yetzer ra* to demean you. [What is its motive?] [Think non-violent communication: all strategies are designed to meet a legitimate need. But the strategy might be badly designed.]
- 257 Besht wanted to free religion from repressive conscience arising from fire and brimstone version of *musar*.
- 258 Besht (from Cordovero): restrain and transform [redirect] *yetzer ra*. Cordovero: transform desire for sex, money, anger, honour
- 259 Besht: we can learn from our cravings.
- 259 Ex. 25:2 People must offer for the *mishkan* whatever moves their hearts. [So whatever the emotion or desire, offer it to God, so God dwells in it.]

- 259 *yetzer ra* is persevering [and has vitality. Put these in service of God.]

#### Individual liberation

- 260 “Draw near to my soul and redeem it” (Ps 69:19) → individual redemption from *yetzer ra*
- 261 Don’t ignore *yetzer ra*: train it.

#### Finding a way

- 262 Spretnak: “Find a way beyond the continuous chain reaction of craving, jealousy, ill will, indifference, fear, and anxiety that fills the mind. Find a way that demonstrates to you that ill will and greed are damaging your psyche. Find a way that grounds your deeds in wisdom, equanimity, compassion, and loving kindness. Find a way that reveals to you the joy of our profound unity, the subtle interrelatedness of you and every being, every manifestation of the unfolding universe. Find a way that will continually deepen your understanding of that knowledge.”

### 16. Steeped in Love and Compassion

#### Discovering a Jewish saint

- 267 R. Salanter: “even if one is not sure whether one’s act will save a life, a Jew is permitted to go without praying and even to break any of the laws of the Sabbath”
- 267 Safety before fasting
- 268 *Mussar*: self-awareness, ethical behaviour, personal morality

#### Ensnared in *musar*

- 269 Salanter: fear of God and hell needed [No!]
- 269 Salanter’s four principles: 1) Study *mussar* daily 2) emotional fervour 3) repent 4) learn with others
- 270 Healthy religious outlook needs radical amazement, not fear

#### Israel Salanter and Israel Baal Shem Tov

- 273 Besht: immersion in Oneness of Godhead
- 273 Every situation offers equal opportunity for service
- 273 Place fear in spacious context of mystery → awe. Can transform into love.

### 17. The Essence of the Baal Shem’s Truth

- 274 Ta’anit 22a: two comedians bringing people joy. Besht dream: they bring joy, releasing goodness so they can then enter a person’s consciousness and bring them to God.
- 275 Elevate the consciousness of those you’re with
- 276 bring “spiritual mindset” to interactions
- 277 “elevating those situations through empathetic attention and deep listening. This may necessitate putting one’s own preferences aside and adopting an attitude of equanimity. But it may also mean that the adept looks for ways to bring about greater trust and harmony among those who are engaged in dialogue.”

#### Only one love

- 277 How to relate to a “rascal” as someone who God loves
- 278 Maggid: “love of the other takes precedence over love of oneself” [Did Levinas echo this in asymmetry of responsibility towards the Other?]
- 279 Besht: links love of God with love of self and other, as we’re all part of Godf [and an image of God]
- 279 [This manifestation of God has infinite worth.] [A person must be given dignity and value.] [Beware treating persons as ciphers. When a cipher is a ‘secret’, and a clue to God, that is ok. But when a person is regarded as cipher in the sense of being a ‘cover’ for God, that makes the person irrelevant, which is not ok.]

- 279 Besht: “When you engage in an act of loving kindness, your intentionality and consciousness should be directed toward offer loving kindness to the Shekhinah who dwells at the core of the person you are serving.”
- 279 We’re extensions of God, with the power to affect ourselves, others, reality, and God
- 279 Besht: shun false humility
- 279 Acting compassionately arouses [and expresses] Divine compassion
- 280 Bring kindness to speech
- 280 Narrow focus on Jews was historical
- 281 “evil comes from God’s enigmatic harshness (*gevurah*)”
- 281 Zeitlin: ‘Torah’ can include the world’s literature and art

#### Compassion in the classroom

- 283 Empathy with where people are, in their pain, joy, state of (un)awareness
- 283 Diane Elliott (BJ’s wife) did a Shabbat visit to a Reform community, and struggled to find a connection or introduce more intimate spirituality. 284 Engage lovingly, rather than hanging back in disaffection. “Focused lovingkindness meditation, when I can do it regularly, helps me to excavate and witness the obvious and subliminal disappointments and hurts that keep me caught in judgement.” Hear people’s stories; value how people connect to their Judaism (whatever that connection is); offer what speaks to people where they are; help people feel the God-presence that’s already in their lives
- 284 Transmute judgement and fear of anyone into love [and equality]

#### Learning to love

- [Exercise: listen to someone – bless them for what they’ve done, what they need, what they aspire to do.]
- 285 Shabbat: share the week’s blessings; bless each other for next week.
- 285 Revise liturgy and language to make them accessible
- 286 adapted from translation of poem by Yehoash: “Happy is the one who says: Above all earthly might and fame I crave for love. Would that the words my heart and lips express were balm for wounds, to soothe and heal and bless. Oh, that my eyes would send forth a blaze of light, to be a beacon in another’s night.”
- 286 Rav Kook: love all creation, all humanity, all Jews [mirrors Genesis, and is not particularist]. Beyond all is love for God [I love you as part of God, creature, human, Jew.]
- 287 To love God and people, we must be able to love ourselves [I am too ready to exclude myself from this – I need to work on that.]
- 288 Need to recognise God loves me, and that I deserve this [regardless of my history]. God’s love is always available. Before the Sh’ma, we acknowledge God’s love for us.
- 288 *V’ahavta et Adonai* – love your own godliness
- 289 When we attack ourselves [or anyone else], we’re attacking God.
- 289 Hasidic: angels precede every human ‘Make way for the image of God’.
- 289 My existence, and ability to love and create are gifts. I choose to call the Giver ‘God’.
- 289 Loving God means loving all of Creation.

## **18. A Jewish Shaman in Poland**

### Baal Shem versus dybbuk

### Supernatural abilities

### What’s a shaman

### An ascent of the soul

### A shaman’s vocation

- 299 Trance, inner spirit guide, journey to hidden reality, acquiring knowledge, desire to serve community

- 300 Besht: trust own revelation as well as drawing on tradition
- 301 Zalman: should train sensitive Jews in shamanic techniques

#### Charisma

- 304 Usually someone is either shaman / healer, or mystic / teacher. Besht was both.
- 306 Scholem: Besht's connection with God limited his ability to communicate with people – wove novelty and mysticism into his textual interpretation
- 307 “everything was at one and the same time both natural and divine, physical and metaphysical, empirical fact and a wonder of God” – no distinction between God and nature

#### Is the magic real?

#### Science and shamanism

#### Historians and the Baal Shem's magic

- [Bible has supernatural elements: prophets talk with God; Moses burning bush, rod-snake, Reed Sea; Elijah healing & altar; Joshua & Jericho; Joseph & dreams; Ezekiel visions; Betzalel building Temple]
- Spiritual activism versus mystical surrender
- 314 BJ: trying to manipulate reality magically is ‘spiritualism’. More interested in spirituality.

### **19. Abyss of Despair**

#### The holocaust of 1648

- 316 Jews restricted in what jobs they were allowed. Worked as overseers for the Christian nobility, so hated by Greek Orthodox peasants. Pogroms from peasant uprising supported by Cossacks.
- 318 Holocaust in E. Europe a continuation in cultural mind of what had happened previously.
- The promises of a false messiah
- 318 1665ff Shabbatai Tzvi believed he was messiah – but forced to convert to Islam and survive (Poland, Lithuania, Turkey, Ukraine)
- 319 Isaac Luria's 16<sup>th</sup> century Safed *kabbalah* filled the vacuum.

#### Jewish suffering and a new birth

#### Historical development

- [Perhaps Hasidism emerged, in part, as a response to the 4-worlds ‘emergency’ of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.]
- 323 Writings of Besht and Piaseczner clearly influenced by previous and contemporary Jewish historical suffering without specifically naming it. [therefore becomes timeless and universal teaching]

#### Conditions of Jewish life in Poland

- 325 Jacob Joseph Polnoye: don't judge unfavourably; look for good in everyone.
- 326 [All hatred is ‘needless’.] [Inquire into the welfare of your neighbour.] [Deep social and political divisions have receded before – they can again. Consider how to hasten that. Midrash that Pharaoh repented after the Exodus.]
- 326 Polnoye: prayer had become empty, *mitzvot* routine. Educators now respected.
- 328 Antisemitism rife
- 328 Jacob Frank claimed to be reincarnation of Shabbatai Tzvi. Followers converted to Catholicism – anti-*halachah*.
- 329 Talmud publicly banned in 1757 in Podolia

#### A new type of spiritual leader

- 332 Besht went out to the people, while staying bound up with God.
- 332 *Tzaddik* channels divine *shefa* to the people.

- 333 The *tzaddik* brings people to God and heaven through bringing God to them. *Tzaddik* helps those who are preoccupied with getting on with the challenges of living.

## 20. Hasidism as Healing Community

### Disidentifying from trauma

- 335 Disidentify from victimhood through practices that facilitate experience of union with Oneness.

### A vision of meaning and hope

- 336 There's "no way to fall out of God".
- 336 Evil can be transformed into good.
- 336 A *tzaddik* can be a catalyst for transformation..

### The importance of being witnessed

- 336 *Tzaddik* as counsellor can offer witness to someone's pain [unconditional positive regard has a divine quality] – channelling *shefa* to person, connecting them to God.
- Breaking the pattern
- 337 Besht thought suffering was not 'deserved', but originated in God.
- 338 transform God's harshness into love

### Reclaiming embodied life

- 338 Besht encouraged enjoying the embodied self, including sexuality and dance, and the healing derived from fully experiencing

### Ending collective trauma

- 338 Tirza Firestone: "when we distance ourselves from those who are unlike us, when we make them into the faceless objects of our distrust and fear, we are only one step away from denying their humanity."
- 339 Hübl "trauma breaks relation"

### What about God and evil?

- 341 evil and suffering are God-made, and make no sense in human terms, but God made us able to transform evil into good.
- 341 "all life feeds on life"

### The Baal Shem and the Messiah

- 343 Besht: each of us has a part of the Messiah to realise. Collectively, we are the Messiah. [So help each other develop their bit that is the Messiah.] [Like the Besht, we can all aspire to play a part in community healing.]

### The transformation of suffering

- 347 Besht: *Akedah* moves from the severe, constricting *Elohim* to the compassion of *YHVH chesed*.
- [Ps 118:6 *Min hameitzar* 'From my narrow place I called to *Yah* – He responded to me with expansiveness. *Yah* is with me – I'll not fear!' I can connect to compassionate God – and my compassionate self - from any degree of narrowness and *gevurah*. That is the solution. "What can a person do to me?" in these circumstances. We called out in *Mitzrayim*-Egypt. God heard. And so began our journey to liberation.]

## 21. On Suffering and Joy – the Buddha and the Besht

- [We're created in the image of the Creator. Our ability to create is fundamental. This means we can transform, which also means we can choose. We don't have to settle for the circumstances in

which we find ourselves. We can move from *mitzrayim* to the *Beit Bechirah*, House of Choice (last verse of Dayenu song).]

- [Buddha's 49 days under the tree before enlightenment mirror 49 days of *omer* before *Shavuot*!]

#### The Buddha and the Besht meet

- 351 Sylvia Boorstein: "When we see clearly, we behave impeccably."

#### The Besht and suffering

- 352 Besht's father: "God is with you. Do not fear anything."
- 353 Loss, especially of a person can trigger or deepen our relationship to God and the 'invisible realm'

#### The origins of suffering

- 354 Besht: *tzimtzum* → separation → suffering. Inevitable cost of making creation possible.
- 355 Besht: through unifications, suffering is 'sweetened', and transmuted into compassion
- 355 Besht: "Every being lacks something that another can provide. Through giving, we may build a world of love."
- [Gen. 1:31 All creation was good – if no timeline in eternity, then Creation is always good.]
- 356 Besht: original goodness never disappeared and evil can never prevail
- 356 Besht: "Look deeply at all the things that happen to you, and at all the occurrences that trouble you, and find the source of goodness in them. Search carefully for the root of goodness that is glowing within them. For when you find the divine core that is present, that evil can become a foot stool for goodness. Yes, in this way evil can be transformed to good." Besht reinterpreted "Turn from evil and do good" (Ps 34:14) as "Transform evil into good", and 'do good in order to transform evil'.
- 356 Knowing God is present even in worst moments reduces suffering
- 357 BJ: 1) Yield to the truth that God has brought this. [Don't look for a reason.] 2) Find the spark of Divine goodness in it. 3) Focus on others, excluding the downside.
- 359 Besht: chant, meditate, pray; study teachings, write; don't give into negativity; deepen relationships; care for body as manifestation of God; attune to needs of others & allyship.

#### Fear of death

- 360 Turn outer fear (*yirah hitzonit*) into inner awe (*yirah phinit*) by meditating on own existence as part of everything. Our fears are expression of Shekhinah's exile and suffering. True awe naturally transforms to love (*ahavah*).
- 360 Besht: "Embrace life fully; embrace death fully."
- 362 Besht: death is leaving by one door only to enter by another.
- 362 Viktor Frankl: we can always choose our attitude [though NLP, hypnotists, and indoctrinators would disagree]
- 363 [False binary: we can also patiently enquire and sometimes heal and resolve.]
- 363 Grieve our suffering and bear it with God's help

#### The five certainties

- 364 *Tza'ar* suffering, *kabbalat tza'ar* acceptance of suffering, *tefillah* prayer, *ye'shuah* liberation, *ho'da'yah* thanksgiving
- 365 Besht: "The divine is present even where potent evil exists, and even where the demonic seems to rule, as it is written, 'You enliven all things' (Neh. 9:6)."
- 365 Besht: "When you know that the Master of the world dwells within every movement that occurs in the world, you can endure all things."
- [Remembering God is the root of all things is my way of bringing God into the current situation, and finding God here.] [Heschel: pray to bring God into the world.]

#### Alleviating suffering in the moment

- 366 Besht: “At the moment you find yourself experiencing suffering remember and affirm that whatever is happening to you is being energised by the Lifeforce of the EverPresent, and that this Lifeforce is entirely good.”
- 366 Shefa Gold: “enlarge the context”
- 367 [No. I won’t name pain and suffering these as ‘natural’ processes. The danger is that they become somehow normalised or acceptable. Where is the place for spiritual or inspired resistance?]

#### When suffering can’t be sweetened

- 368 Besht tried to push back evil
- 368 Our reframing and meaning-making powers come from God
- 369 [Beware ‘all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds’.] [Fight the evil, and look for the good. Fight the evil by being the good. We can be the good in the bad situation.]
- Living in joy
- 369 “Sacred joy asks the seeker to open his or her heart to the vast realm of the spirit.” [Open your heart to the realm of joy, and then wonder and joy come. Don’t try to manufacture feeling of joy – that’s inauthentic and unhealthy. *Simcha* arises from God-connection.]
- 371 Besht: cultivating joy is central. [But what is joy? How does it arise? How do we cultivate it? Or generate it? P.369 suggests we can engender it by opening our heart to spirit – joy is the natural consequence.]

## **Part Three: Excavating the Baal Shem’s Legacy**

### **22. Martin Buber’s Discovery**

- 375 [Rebbe’s ‘palace’ and community reverence [seem to favour leader’s charisma and risk idolatry and spiritual inflation. How to avoid these? How to avoid projection? Moses was humble leader but ... siblings complained about him, as did Korach, and Moses complained about burden on himself.]
- 376 Buber: no ‘content’ received, just Presence as power.
- 376 Buber “stated that religion is not the remembrance of something sacrted from the past, nor is it the hope for a perfected future. Rather, it is the ‘lived presence’ of the Divine in the here and now, as a presence that can never become past.”
- 377 Buber: authentic religiosity (BJ: spirituality) is universally accessible without necessity of religion [but religion provides valuable conceptual, supportive, guiding framework for us as fallible humans.]
- 378 Buber: The Presence appears in the ‘in-between’ of I-You.

#### The Baal Shem Tov as a living Torah

- 378 Besht’s interactions, how he prayed, how he demonstrated way to goodness, led people to God-connection. His life was a teaching.
- 378 Besht helped people make the everyday holy.
- 378-9 Besht: “One may and should live genuinely with all, but one should live with it in intentional holiness; one should make holy all that one does in one’s natural life. Not renunciation is commanded. One eats in intentional holiness, one savours the taste of food in intentional holiness, and the table becomes an altar. One works in intentional holiness and lifts the sparks that are hidden in all tools. One walks over the fields in intentional holiness, and the silent songs of all creatures, those they speak to God, enter into the song of one’s own soul. One drinks to one’s companions in intentional holiness, each to the other, and it is as if one studied together with them in Torah. One dances in intentional holiness, and a splendour radiates over the community. A husband is united with his wife in intentional holiness, and the Shekhinah rests over them.”

#### Buber and Jesus

- 381 “a life that valued the intellect but was centred on the importance of spirit”

### Teachers of presence

#### Present to his disciples

- 386 A text can reveal its mystical layers.
- 386 ‘Performance’ of a text can be a part of its spiritual impact
- 386 Besht willing to be blessed by a student

## **23. To Live in the Presence**

- 389 Ps 81:10 “There shall be no strange God in you” Besht: God won’t be a stranger to you ... when you always keep God before you.
- 390 Scholem: “It is communion with God through *devekut* that makes God an intimate friend of man, instead of a forbidding stranger.”
- Book: Brother Lawrence (1614-91) ‘The Practice of Presence’<sup>1</sup>: “The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several people are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were on my knees.”
- 391 God dwells in materiality, and the material can be sacralised.
- 391 We are a channel for a the Divine shefa [Priestly Blessing] – and thereby also draw people towards God (see pp.332-3).
- 392 “the Presence is always present”

#### Buber’s transformation

- 392 Buber: “a world of legendary reality ... apparent only to the gaze of fervour ... born in all innocence, unalloyed by invention and whimsy”
- 393 Buber: ecstatic practice led him to not notice a man’s suicide risk
- 394 “Buber argues that the world is not an obstacle on the way to God, but the way itself.”
- 394 Maggid’s father reprimanded him to pay attention to this world’s needs even when in other worlds.

#### Gershom Scholem’s assault

- 396 Buber: Hasidism asserted primacy of embodied existence.
- 396 Scholem: Hasidism was a body of theoretical teachings and other-worldly mysticism.
- 398 Zalman: know four things about a rebbe – disciples’ tales, recorded teachings, how he davened, *nigunim* he composed

#### An ongoing inspiration

- 398 Buber’s book ‘I-Thou’ taught BJ “to value my relationships as potential or actual epiphanies of the Divine”.

## **24. Jung, the Besht, and the Sacred Psyche**

- 401 BJ learned to treat himself as “an individual worthy of human concern”.

#### Discovering Jung

- 402 Scholem: Chabad holds that descending into oneself teaches about workings of God and the Universe [I would say penetrating anything will do the same, as God is in all things.]
- 404 We can know about other worlds only very dimly, through studying this world and our own psyches.
- 405 Scholem: Torah is “interpretations or definitions of what is hidden”

#### The archetypes

- 407 Besht: *sefirot* manifest in humans, historical events, archetypes in the 42 journeys.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5657>

### Archetype of Exodus

- 408 Besht: Passover in individual psyche and personal journey to liberation, so can apply it to ourselves [So we can also work it in the other direction. Out personal process can give us insight into collective processes.]
- 408 Besht: “In every generation each individual must see himself as though he personally came forth from *Mitzrayim*.”
- 409 [If I break free of my inner *yetzer ra*, I will also be free of outer *yetzer ra*.]
- 409 self-serving cravings enslave us
- 409 Besht: “The exile in *Mitzrayim* occurred because the people had lost their ability to perceive that the world has a single Creator; and that the universe is filled with divine splendour; and that each and every day the Creator is continually renewing creation.”
- 409 in *mitzrayim*, we give ourselves “to a false and narrow view of reality limited to the physical world” in which we live.
- 410 The Ari: “Consciousness of the Divine departed in *Mitzrayim*.” Besht: “dominion of Pharaoh [is] the place of forgetfulness.”
- 411 Estelle Frankl: “In exile we become disconnected from our own true nature and inner being; our outer lives slide out of sync with our inner essence. ... When we come home to ourselves we find that our innermost essence may be expressed in our outermost lives.”
- 411-12 “Every event is an expression of God’s simple will enacted through the divine plan down to the minute particulars. ... the Master of the world abides in every motion, for the power of the One who acts shines within the enactment. Just as the shell of the tortoise grows out of and is one with the tortoise itself, so the world grows out of and is one with the Divine.”
- [Wasp has no resources to work out how to fly through an open window. It uses up life energy flying randomly, frantically in all directions, even crawling near the exit, without any insight how to leave. That is us, in our lower state of awareness. We need higher awareness in order to escape to liberation. Lower awareness / ‘wasp’ would never develop that awareness. We need to, and can, with persistence.]

## **25. The Castle Within**

- 413 Jung: “Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakes.”

### Becoming One with the Divine

- 415 Parable of king in tower in castle with moat – 9 walls, each with guards and wild animals, and treasures & rewards – wanted to know who loved him. Prince reaches king, and all barriers dissolve.
- 417 Jung: vocation is a call of the infinite and inner person
- 418 Castle parable → all of us are ‘princes’ and children of God
- 419 Neumann: “The duty of self-sacrifice ... demands precisely that the mystic teach, write, establish schools.” Channeling Divine flow to people is the central work of the mystic.

### Finding my way to the self

- 420 De-centre the ego, make Self the centre

### Nothing within you but God

- 420 Besht: “You long for the Divine to descend upon you and enter your life? Then the most important thing for you to know and grasp is that there is nothing within you but God!”
- 421 Neumann: We are made by a Creator who made good and evil, so we are both. [Knowing ourselves as good and evil, and made in the image of God, tells me God must also be both.]
- 421 Hillel Zeitlin: Divinity descends into ever coarser levels until it can’t be perceived as divine – this level is call ‘evil’. [NB Divinity is still present.] A person attached to outer forms is called a sinner. [There is always a way to find God in this, and move higher again.]
- 422 Torah provides map for psychological development. [Treat Biblical passage like a dream, where everything is an aspect of oneself.]

### Erich Neumann's role

- 423 “no one is ever really isolated, for Divinity is always present within”

## **26. The Immanence of God and Contemporary Cosmology**

- 424 Arthur Green: Religious experience is of immanence, and points to something beyond.
- 424 Respond to outer oppression by deepening inner freedom
- 425 Rachel Elior: Besht always looked for *chesed* underlying reality, and Divine unity connecting everything.

### Ending separateness

- 425 Besht: “Whatever you are thinking about, that’s where you will find God, for God’s splendour fills all the earth, and there’s no place devoid of the Divine. And wherever you happen to be, that’s exactly where you will be able to bind yourself to the Creator.”
- 426 Older Judaism is based on ‘separation’, sacred / secular, and kabbalistic hierarchies. Elior: Besht blurred the distinctions [like his parable of the castle]. [Though he stressed unity, he creatively lived the tension of unity and separation.]

### Twelve mystical concepts [Elior]

- [All 12 ideas recognise separation, and only have relevance because of it.]
- 430 lower levels of reality abound with distinctions

### The Besht's thought as philosophy

- [Mystical thought embraces paradox more easily than philosophy does.]
- 432 “Just as the divine spirit emanates and withdraws, expands and contracts, ebbs and flows, so the human spirit experiences alternation of spirituality and physicality, expansiveness and contraction.”
- 432 Everything physical has the Divine hidden within it. Take nothing at face value.
- [Every part of me, in all four worlds, wants to return to God. E.g. seeking pleasure is seeking the pleasure of union.]
- [Some people have no language, and don’t have the power of speech. Despite this, we all have equal access to God, regardless of our endowments. BJ’s comments that “all humans have language” and that “every individual comprehends this world and has access to the higher worlds as far as their thoughts permit” is an ableist perspective that I reject.]

### Nondual reality

- 434 Tao is all things.
- 434 Hindu Upanishads: Self is everywhere.
- 434 Reality is non-dualistic

## **27. Kabbalah, Vedanta, and God**

### Sankara vs. Ramanuja

- 439 R. Jacob Joseph (Besht’s student): “What is contracted awareness like? Your service to God derives from neither awe nor love. Instead, you do what you know you must do without experiencing any pleasure.” We shuttle between *gadlut* expansion and *katnut* contraction, during which we must do what we know we should, even though the feeling and inspiration are weak.
- 440 God initiates *katnut* contraction to stimulate us to find greater *gadlut* expansion.
- [Katnut has God agency as well as mine bringing it about. God-in-me creates it.]
- [‘Sin’ is committed by contracted version of me, which is why it’s redeemable.]
- [Unification → harmonising dual and nondual consciousness. Harmony → coexisting and complementary to make greater than the sum.]

### God's presence and immanence in early Hasidism

- 441-2 Green on principles of early Hasidism: joyous service of God; everything in the service of God; no routinised deeds, keep spiritual enthusiasm, illuminate the soul; see and raise all sparks back to the Divine; prayer is paramount, everything should be seen an extension of prayer; transform oneself to be a vehicle for God, and have love and awe only for God; result of all this is to become a tzaddik bringing flow of God to the world.
- 446 What is God? What is the world? “Divinity is all. Everything is Divine.”
- [We can only know tiny bits of time and space, yet ... we can also connect to all of it.]
- 448 Swimme (The Universe is a Green Dragon, 2001): human as a dimension of the emergent universe.
- [God is doing the God project through more than just humans.]
- 448 Einstein: “I want to know how the Old One thinks. The rest is details.”
- [Why do duality, nonduality, God, and so on matter so much to me? Because I want to know how the bit that I am living and experiencing connects to everything else, and how to ensure I am focused on what is most important, in order to live a life worth living.]

## 28. Cosmic Consciousness

### Walt Whitman’s vision

### An irrepressible joyousness

- 457 Tell people what can be derived from cosmic consciousness, and how to achieve it.
- Plotinus and Neoplatonism
- 458 Neoplatonism as origin of kabbalah.
- [What might the Jewish equivalent of a shamanic journey look like? What elements already exist in our tradition? It would be a method to walk between worlds for practical purposes, to make a *tikkun* (mending) in Ordinary and Non-Ordinary Realities.] [Jacob’s ladder is a journey to the Upper World. Lower World includes cave symbols, like Elijah in the cave, Shimon bar Yochai (writing the Zohar, book of *kabbalah*, and learning to heal the world), Joseph being in the pit and in prison.]

## 29. The Hidden Light

- 461 Besht: consciousness is cyclic (between *gadlut* and *katnut*, expanded and contracted)

### Primordial light

- [Allow distinctions between literal and mythic truth to blur. We can learn metaphorically, to see with primordial light. What might be the value of that? Perhaps we don’t always need that level of sight.]
- 463 Besht: “If I love God, what need have I of the coming world!”

### Becoming like Moses

- 464 [The claim that anyone could contain the consciousness of a generation is more mythic than literal – description of an archetype rather than a real person.]
- [The EverPresent as a name for God.]
- [Write an essay on God-names as invocations of attributes. What might this achieve? Re-directing oneself, looking for positives in others and situations. God is in those ‘this world’ things, so we affect them. And insofar as I am an expression of God-in-me and God-as-me brings these aspects forward. Ps 51:17 “God open my lips” and Ps. 69:14 “I am my prayer”.]
- 465 God spoke to Moses as a friend.
- [Moses and God – their reciprocal humility is asymmetrical, in that God, as Supreme Being, is infinitely more humble to ‘mirror’ Moses’ humility.]
- [Moses as humblest of people. Does humility bring God closer?]

### Spiritual awareness in ordinary life

- 465 Prov. 3:5-6 “Know the Divine in all your ways.”

- 466 “the practitioner awakens to the infinite dimension hidden in finite action.”
- 467 Besht: Greater compassion is shown to the thief who will struggle to overcome wickedness, than to victims who will recover and forget the loss. [This is making a ‘heart’ point, rather than trying to argue for abolishing justice.]
- [‘And yet ... the practice of compassion, and fear of adverse publicity can lead to abuse cases in schools and faith spaces evading the law and disciplinary or corrective action.]
- 468 [Besht’s authority came from his lived experience working on his own personality challenges.]
- [Concern for the poverty of spirit in the perpetrator.]
- 469 “cosmo-psychology’
- [Besht’s ascents were like shamanic journeys for benefiting this world.]

### 30. Religion and the Quest for Meaning

- 472 Heschel (Passion for Truth): “It is hardly possible to revere Him and at the same time despise His creation ... Man must cherish the world, said the Baal Shem. To deprecate, to deride it was presumption. Creation, all of creation, was pervaded with dignity and purpose and embodied God’s meaning.” [If we are to cherish and not deprecate all Creation, that must include people whose actions we think are the most reprehensible.]
- 473 Every attribute of something is an expression of God [even the attributes we disapprove of]
- [If God is already in a thing, what does it mean to ‘draw divine energy’ into it? The literal meanings contradict each other.]
- [Perhaps it’s not so much ‘drawing energy’ but unveiling it for yourself, which changes the field. Human attention and intentionality changes a situation for that person – and creates an environment for others they might pick up on, (un)consciously.]

#### Judaism and meaning

- 474 [Huston Smith presented opinions, not factual description.]
- [No competing goals or narratives. Judaism explains everything with One God and author of everything. Unifying theory. Elegant, strong but mysterious and challenging. Square the circle.]

#### Heschel and ultimate meaning

- 477 [Possible ultimate goals: union with God; exalting God; serving God; seeing God in all things; be a blessing. Do these conflict or are they all expressions of one underlying idea? If they are, we don’t need to know the idea. We need only to pursue one or more of these at any given moment.]
- [Divinity is ubiquitous, and on a continuum from hidden to revealed. Revealed is preferable, and hidden is to be respected.]
- [BJ seems to think that when the world offers no meaning, we can find it in transcendence. No. That’s traumatic soul loss. When we find no meaning in lived experience, we must search until we find it or make it, not abandon or dismiss experience to look somewhere else instead.]
- [Flight into prayer is not a solution. Use prayer to stabilise life and to become resourceful.]
- 478 A J Heschel: “To live both in awe and consternation, in fervour and horror, with my conscience on mercy and my eyes on Auschwitz, wavering between exaltation and dismay? I had no choice ...”
- 487 “when we are engaged in making meaning, we manifest and enact the divine potential within us”
- 487 We can make meaning, and also devolve into absurdity.

#### Forgotten truth

- 481 [We create different projections onto the Shekhinah: 1) numinous, feminine, touchy-feely, transcendence, ecstatic. 2) Those aspects of the world apparently most devoid of or distant from God.]

#### A universal traditionalist

- 484 [BJ’s practice: write a question in his journal. Days later, let an answer come.]

### Huston Smith in synagogue

- 485 Smith: a *mitzvah* births an angel that lives on, affecting the balance of good and evil.

## **31. The Domain of Perennial Wisdom**

### Eyeless in Gaza [1963 novel by Aldous Huxley]

- 487 Huxley (through the words of his character Anthony Beavis): “One. We are all capable of love for other human beings. Two. We impose limitations on that love. Three. We can transcend all these limitations – if we choose to. (It is a matter of observation that anyone who so desires can overcome personal dislike, class feeling, national hatred, colour prejudice. Not easy; but it can be done, if we have the will and know how to carry out our good intentions.) Four. Love expressing itself in good treatment breeds love.”

### A philosophical discovery

### The problem of the ego

### The perennial truths

- 491 Huxley: 1) All is manifestation of Divine Ground. 2) Humans can directly intuit existence of the Divine Ground. 3) Humans can identify themselves with the Divine Ground. 4) Goal of life is to identify with the Divine Ground.
- 492 David Brooks (New York Times): people who feel unseen get angry and mean; good people listen well, ask forgiveness, end conversations gracefully.
- 492 Meaningful life → community sustained by tradition and service to others

### Ken Wilber and the perennial philosophy

- 493 Wilber: individual liberation leads to compassion for all.
- 494 Wilber: When traditions agree, they’ve found a universal truth. [No, I disagree. They’ve simply agreed on what could be a universal misperception, perhaps arising from bias. Intersubjective agreement is not the same as fact or truth.]
- [BJ seem to want to assess the Besht against Huston Smith, Huxley and Wilber. Does he think they are the yardsticks? BJ then says the Besht got there first. Is he saying they confirm each other? This would be the fallacy that arises from the metaphor of triangulation used in sociology. I don’t need the Besht to be validated by other people’s systems of thought.]

### The Baal Shem and perennial philosophy

- 495 [BJ description of Besht seems to tell BJ’s autobiography.]

### Deep ecumenism

- 497 Religious tribalism and triumphalism. One reason why secularists dismissed religion: exclusivist fundamentalism.
- 497 Ramakrishna (Hindu): “Many are the names of God and there are infinite forms through which He may be approached. In whatever name and form you worship Him through that you will realise Him.”
- 497 Muhyiddin ibn Arabai (12<sup>th</sup> century Sufi): “Do not praise your own faith so exclusively that you disbelieve all the rest; if you do this you will miss much good. Nay, you will fail to realise the real truth of the matter.”
- 498 Brother Wayne Teasdale (Catholic monk): “Interspirituality, and the intermystical life it entails, recognises the larger community of humankind in the mystical quest. It realises that we all have a much greater heritage than simply our own tradition. It acknowledges the validity of all genuinely spiritual experience. Interspirituality honours the totality of human spiritual insight, whether or not it is God-centred. To leave out any spiritual experience is to impoverish humanity. Everything must be included, that is, everything that is authentic and genuine, that springs from contact with the divine, however we know or conceive of this.”
- 499 Zalman: All faiths are vital organs of the world.

- 499 Zalman: Unlike Hasidism, neo-Hasidism is not triumphalist, but based on deep ecumenism.
- 499 The Divine is present in all faiths.

## 32. Cleansing the Doors of Perception

### Peak experiences

- 504 [Maslow's research populations were not randomised. He was an ideologue who wanted all of India euthanised, thought famine helped human natural selection, and celebrated deaths of drug addicts.]
- [What weight should we give to peak experiences? They might inspire, open faculties etc but we don't live on this level.]
- [Do people mean 'peak' when they say they've had a 'spiritual' experience? Or are they describing an endorphin high? I'm aiming for a more constant connectedness.]
- 506 Psychedelics can initiate changes in personality and thinking.

### Why do psychedelics matter?

- [BJ taking lots of people's speculations as evidence. Flawed thinking. And if this were so significant, why is it not more prominent, or more clearly described in ancient texts?]

### What about the Baal Shem?

- 508 Stories of Besht's trances, visions and altered behaviour and ergotic epidemics, and his ergotic-infused bread & respected journal articles.
- [BJ: "I've come to believe" "I would assume" "It is still uncertain" "no conclusive evidence" "it seems that" "strongly suggests" – this is all speculation.]

### Psychedelics in the Jewish world today

- 513 Zalman on the Besht's influence on him: the greatest miracle was "to take a person who had despaired of being able to attain anything spiritual or divine in the world, infuse him with the spirit, show him that possibility was still there, and what is more important, to show him how he can do it."
- 514 BJ believes Zalman's psychedelic experiences were crucial to his spiritual awakening and launching of Jewish Renewal.
- 517 Kabbalah texts attempt to devise religious language for actual mystical experiences.
- 518 "Psychedelics can help people end addictions, deal with trauma, anxiety, and depression, as well as prepare for death"
- 519 First Jewish Psychedelic Summit 2021
- [Don't use euphoria as a marker for authenticity in mystical or spiritual experience, Oneness, or meeting *Ein Sof*.]
- 520 Mainstream Judaism doesn't focus on Non-Ordinary side that we can learn from and heal with.
- 520 Could psychedelics be used to heal intergenerational trauma?
- 520 Israelis and Palestinians in ayahuasca circles.
- 521 "seeking a Judaism that feels less rigid and dogmatic, and more personal and spiritual"

### Some questions

- 522 BJ: psychedelics can give intense experience of supreme reality.
- [Conventional Judaisms, including Progressive, operate in the shadow of, and partly in codependent resistance to, orthodoxy as 'normative' Judaism, partly through its co-opting of the label 'traditional' which has subconscious associations with 'authentic', *kosher*, 'authoritative'. Come at Judaism without that baggage and therefore don't require a codified or socially sanctioned set of forms. Liberal Judaism doesn't realise how 'googdy-goody' it is.]

## 33. Renewing the American Synagogue

- 524 Share blessings from the previous week, and bless each other for next week. [I don't like the practice of focussing on dumping the bad stuff from last week, as though 6 days every week are something to be endured and unhappy about, to be jettisoned when Shabbat arrives. All days are special, and can be made holy through our intentionality. Don't demonise the 6 working days!]

#### Restoring the connection

- 525 Barry Barkan: see problems as God-sent opportunities
- 525 focus more on potential than on failure

#### Spirituality in the liberal synagogue

- 528 BJ: When blessing bread communally, all touch the bread or each other (1977)
- 528 BJ: much of the siddur doesn't evoke spiritual inspiration
- 528 The blessing begins *baruch atah*. BJ: *atah* with an *aleph* in the middle means you; with an *ayin* in the middle, it means now. BJ translates the blessing creatively as: "Blessed is this moment within the Whole of Existence and the Mystery at its depths."

#### Rethinking Jewish education

##### A prophetic versus mystical synagogue

- 531 Combine spirituality and activism
- 532 Abraham was commanded to be a universalist and 'Be a blessing'

##### Inspired by the Baal Shem Tov

- 533 "bring together in an integral fashion the personal and communal, the mystical and intellectual, the moral and political. ... seek to create a religious perspective ... at once imaginative and passionate, as well as clear-sighted and rational."
- 534 BJ: "the divine lives in the depths of every individual ... At its best, religious tradition can teach us how to listen to our own depths, and how to incorporate the teachings of the spirit into our daily lives."

##### The synagogue as caring community

##### Inspired by the Baal Shem

- 537 "becoming a congregational rabbi was what I had to do in order to repair certain defects in my character"
- 538 Overwork from trying to satisfy ego needs for success and praise, compensating for low self esteem
- [Serve people from a God-nourished place.]
- 539 Shefa Gold: "make my life into a spiritual practice that will help heal my own traumas and wounds ... My leadership becomes the overflow of my practice. ... My idea of leadership is staying true to my own soul's purpose and inspiration. I never know whether others will understand or come with me."

##### Jews and spiritual progressivism

- 540 Martin Luther King: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that, Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."
- 541 Michael Lerner: measure institutions on "how much they maximalise love and generosity, kindness and forgiveness, ethical and environmentally sustainable behaviour, social and economic justice."
- 542 like Christian liberation theology, see synagogues as centres for social and environmental transformation

### **34. Binding Spirit to Spirit**

- 544 [Zalman counselled me to find what is at the root of my *n'shamah*. My answer: God – *Eliyahu!*]

- 545 Upper three sefirot infuse love into the restrictions, tensions and evil experienced in the lower seven.
- 545 “You are eternally connected to the depths of the universe. ... Learn from your ancestors, for what they had to teach was holy, but don’t slavishly follow them. ... Find your way to the Divine in accord with the contours of your own soul. Use your power of discernment to discover which aspects of the traditional Torah have continuing validity for you and which lack moral legitimacy or spiritual relevance demanded by this new age.”
- 546 [Avot 1:1 Moses received Torah, not ‘the’ Torah – i.e. Moses received everything. And not ‘from God’, but ‘from Sinai’ i.e. from earthly life experience.]
- 546 Buber: “I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man’s life. As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change. So I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience.”
- 546 Buber: Sinai was receipt of Presence. Torah is the translation of that, and just one ‘account’ of the Presence.
- [Art Green: Oral Torah includes what we have to say.]
- 547 BJ: “If you attain wholeness, you carry within yourself Moses and Aaron—and also *Mitzrayim*.” [Torah is a fractal dream: it’s a representation of the universe, humanity, Jewish people, and a moment.]

#### Messages from the soul

- 550 still small voice of inner guidance [As Eliyahu, God is God, and speaks to me in the still small voice.]
- 551 “This expansion of consciousness is not constant. I am, after all, human. I experience passion and lust that can throw me off. I make errors in judgement. I sense that I have fallen from grace. But then I open again to the presence of the presence, and begin to pick myself up. In these states I often consult my inner guidance seeking help. At times I must offer others my apologies for having hurt them. With this tool I’m usually able to climb out of painful chasms that have temporarily trapped me. Without words I take up the thought: ‘These feelings are transient. They are not my true essence. I am here. I am alive. I am conscious. I am one with the web of love that links all things. I am grateful for this life.’ Whatever difficulties I might encounter in the course of my day, I attempt to follow the Baal Shem’s teaching about celebrating life and finding joy despite the trials I am undergoing.”

#### Conclusion

- 554 BJ: “holding such triumphant faith in the power of goodness is beyond my capabilities”
- 554 Find God in ourselves first, then in tradition

#### Taking refuge

### **Appendix – The Way of Service: a guide to transformative spiritual practice inspired by the Baal Shem Tov**

- 558 Service above all else
- 559 When we fail, there’s always another chance to do better
- [Transformation through ‘tiny steps’.]
- [Beware overwhelming remorse and shame, leading to despair, disempowerment and inertia. These too can become habits, ‘go-to’ comfort zones of familiarity that serve no useful purpose except to let the *yetzer ra* win. Identifying with shame can be easier than identifying as a pure soul and child of God. “You are my child; this day have I begotten you.” Ps. 2:7]

#### A daily practice of davening

- 560 Importance of community-centred devotion and ritual and personal transformational practices.

- 560 “traditional rituals can lose their power over time when carried out in a habitual way” [paradox]
- Experiencing divinity
- 560 Rabbinic Judaism found its religiosity in Talmud study. Kabbalists added the Zohar and Lurianic spiritual practices. The Besht focused on *davenen* [meditation and prayer] and *devekut* [cleaving to God].
- 561 “engage with daily life in ways that would disclose the holiness of every moment”

#### Six forms of neo-Beshtian practice

- 561-3 Liturgical words; solitude; silence; chanting; mantra; breathing.
- [Alone time is ‘all One’ time. Make Oneness meditation a regular practice.]
- 562 Besht: “You can daven in such a way that no one who sees you will know you are engaged in spiritual service.”

#### Developing personal practice

- 564 sheer volume of fixed liturgy can be overwhelming [Zalman: Judaism has become over-verbalsed and under-experienced.]
- 564 The siddur presents only dualistic aspect of God – and presents God as “magnified man”
- 564 *Nigunim* - joy; shabbat and holy days; contemplation & *devekut*.
- 565 Intention to connect; let go into the *nigun*
- 566 Besht never got to Israel [nor did Moses]
- [Divine is everywhere so Israel is not ‘the centre’.]
- 566 We can experience *Shekhinah* presence
- 567 [I distrust euphoria and ecstasy. I trust union as a grounded reality and perception.]
- 567 Take a break from regular meditation if it becomes rote.
- [Meditation should not be for reward, but to take us to better service.]
- 568 Accept distractions as manifestations of God. Acknowledge and stay with the breath.
- 568 Yah breathing restores equanimity and God-connection.
- 569 No place devoid of God.
- 570 Unitive love practice: “transcend subtle awareness: Wayne Teasdale p.265
- 571 Buddhists mention expanding circles of compassion.
- 571 Rav Kook: “Let love fill your heart and flow out to everyone and everything.”
- 571 Sequence: *Nigun*; receive God’s love (‘with great love You have loved us’); *Sh’ma*; send love to God (*v’ahavta*); love to myself, close people, sick and mourning, people I find difficult, trouble spots in the world; Adon Olam last verse (entrust my spirit at all times; You are always with me, I’ll not fear).
- 575 Sh’ma ‘One’ – no place devoid of God, and my soul is part of God’s soul
- 576 Study Torah after God-connecting
- 576 Remember that God has condensed into the Torah portion or text.
- 576 Tzvi Elimelech: “The purpose of studying Torah for its own sake is to bind one’s consciousness to the One hidden within it.”
- 577 R. Yitzchak Meir Alter of Ger: “It was a great Voice that did not stop.” (Deut. 5:24) – God continues to address us through Torah.
- 578 Study of Torah or a Besht text: What historical question is being addressed? What spiritual question is being addressed?
- 579 Now interpret this as being addressed to you personally. Could this have helped at some point? What action-directive or spiritual practice derives from this? What hope or prayer arises?
- 580 Help elevate people spiritually, in your own unique way.
- 580 We all need teachers. [I take all books and people I encounter as my teachers.] Tailor teaching to each student’s needs.
- 580 Helping elevate others is channeling the Divine.
- 580 Work on spiritual refinement in order to be more sensitive to people.
- 581 Besht has human personality challenges that he had to work through and transform.

- [Reach constantly for humility, which, for me, means to remember that there are things about this situation or person I don't know that might be relevant, and that others might know better than I do.]
- [God is always available as my guide and teacher.]
- 582 Recommended books on the Baal Shem's teaching: Buber 'Hasidism and Modern Man'; Sears 'The Path of the Baal Shem Tov: early chasidic teachings and customs'; Starrett 'Kesser Shem Tov: mystical teachings on the Torah'; Aryeh & Dvorkes 'The Baal Shem Tov on Pirkey Avoth'; Eliezer Shore, 5 books of Torah; Kallus 'Pillar of Prayer'
- 583 A J Heschel: "The pious man is possessed by his awareness of the presence and nearness of God. Everywhere and at all times he lives as in His sight, whether he remains always heedful of His proximity or not. He feels embraced by God's mercy as by a vast encircling space. Awareness of God is as close to him as the throbbing of his own heart, often deep and calm but at times overwhelming, intoxicating, setting the soul afire. The momentous reality of God stand there as peace, power and endless tranquillity, as an inexhaustible source of help, as boundless compassion, as an open gate awaiting prayer. It sometimes happens that the life of a pious man becomes so involved in God that his heart overflows as though it were a cup in the hand of God."
- 584 Besht: "Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, you can bind your awareness to the blessed One, linking whatever you are doing with the Whole of reality. God ordains everything, and it is God who wants you to travel, or to hold a conversation with a particular person, or to engage in whatever action you happen to be doing. And why? In order that you serve the Divine through each and every one of your acts."
- 584 "faith is staying aware at all times that one is a part of the *Shekhinah*"
- 584 *Omenet* means 'nursing mother' (i.e. loyally watching over) – the *Shekhinah* is our *ominet*. [We can nurse the *Shekhinah* within ourselves and channel the Divine Nurse for others, as an expression of our *emunah*.]
- 585 [God-connection can nullify all negativity. I can say that for myself. And maybe to a few others, but it could be unkind to say to a sufferer unless we can lead them ever so gently to discover that truth for themselves.]
- Book: Thomas Kelly 'A Testament of Devotion' (Quaker)
- 586 Kelly: practice for years with "Yours alone, Yours alone" and "My soul longs for You" [undeterred by lapses in commitment or connection]
- 586 "This is God", and smile.
- [Exhale into God.]
- 587 Charles Duhigg 'The Power of Habit': "your habits are what you choose them to be"
- 587 Do morning meditation
- 588 Spiritual direction: studying wisdom teachings; working with spiritual directors; inner voice.
- 589 Spirit guides: Besht had Ahiyah of Shiloh [Levinas had Shushani]
- 589 Rebbe helps hasid relieve their suffering, and align with God's will
- 590 Spiritual direction replaces *halachah*.
- 590 Halachah is "a body of prescriptions and strictures meant to fashion a fixed collective religious lifestyle"
- 592 Books on spiritual direction: Addison & Beitman 'Jewish Spiritual Direction'; Milgram (ed) 'Seeking and Soaring: Jewish approaches to spiritual direction'; Ochs & Olitzky 'Jewish Spiritual Guidance'; Shachter-Shalomi 'Spiritual Intimacy: a study of counselling in Hasidism'.