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"To Create a Dwelling Place for God"

Life Coaching and the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic Movement in Contemporary America

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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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2014

Abstract

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Chai Life International and The Method for Self Mastery are two life coaching programs created within the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic community. Chai Life tried to implement mainstream life coaching practices and beliefs directly into a Chabad environment and experienced many conflicts between these two belief systems. These tensions are one reason Chai Life ultimately failed. The Method, by contrast, developed over a period of twenty years, and more fully integrated the cultural and psychological resources it relies upon with Chabad cosmology, rituals and language, thereby, presenting a much more unified system of religious and psychological healing. By investigating why Chai Life International struggled to integrate mainstream life coaching into a Chabad environment, this dissertation suggests mainstream life coaching is like religion in many ways, embedding its own ontology of the self, theory of agency, value structure and sacred narratives. This "religion" is unmarked as religion as such, as they are conveyed through the contemporary language of "spirituality," reflecting life coaching's roots in the human potential movement. The Method, by contrast, utilizes its own conceptions of self, agency, values and sacred narratives, drawn from Chabad cosmology and blended with psychological theories, methods, and language, as well as other cultural resources. Through this system, the Method works to try and transform the moral subjectivity of its participants, giving them a new way to understand themselves and their place in the world.

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Next I would like to thank all of the individuals who helped me with my research. This includes all of the Chai Life International coaches and coaches who agreed to allow me to interview them for this project. I also want to thank Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman and Ben Pargman for welcoming me into the planning and execution of Chai Life International and being so open with me during their meetings. I especially want to thank Ben, a long-time friend, who spent countless hours meeting with me individually to discuss his thoughts and experiences in creating Chai Life. Without Ben, this project never would have happened, since it was my encounter with him that gave me the idea to launch this study in the first place.

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experiences. Your stories make up the bulk of this dissertation and form the basis for my conclusions. Thank you for trusting me with your stories.

Although he is not a subject of this dissertation, I want to thank Rabbi Shmuel Elbinger. Shmuel and I spoke almost every week for the year I participated in the Method for Self Mastery, as he became my coaching partner for the program. We worked through all of the exercises together each week, and I came to understand the Method in much greater detail because of my experiences working with Shmuel, and his deep knowledge of Jewish law, kabbalah and Hasidic philosophy.

I especially want to thank Shimona Tzukernik, the Kabbalah Coach. Shimona has been remarkably generous and patient with me throughout this process. She has shared with me her voluminous body of work, including written, audio and video pieces, and been available to me to answer all of my questions. She also gave me full access to the Method for Self Mastery, allowing me to participate fully in the program and encouraging other participants to take part in my study. She was also very open with me about her own life and how her life effected the development of the Method. Her amount of generosity towards me and my project were staggering. Clearly, this project could have never been accomplished without this generosity, and for this I am deeply grateful.

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I have dragged her down many winding twists and turns in my endless journey along the path of life. Like always, when it came to getting my Ph.D. she was incredibly patient, supportive, understanding and loving. I cannot thank her enough for enabling me to live my dreams.

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Illustrations

Introduction

The life coaching industry emerged from the human potential movement in the mid 1970s. It characterizes itself as a way to help individuals and organizations reach their maximum potential. As opposed to psychotherapy, life coaching is not interested in pathology and assumes every individual already contains within him- or herself everything he or she needs to flourish and be successful. One simply needs to identify one's innermost values, define goals that are in alignment with those values, set an action plan to achieve those goals and remain accountable to that plan to flourish. A coach is the professional who helps a person move through each of these steps.[1] The coaching industry has grown rapidly in the early decades of the twenty-first century. In a worldwide survey conducted on behalf of the International Coach Federation, PriceWaterhouse Coopers estimated that there are currently 41,300 active coaches worldwide, of which 15,800 reside in North America. Life coaching has become a multi-billion dollar industry.[2]

When I started this project I knew nothing about life coaching. I was interested in conducting ethnographic research into the blending of religion and personal development in contemporary America, particularly in Jewish communities, but had not yet settled on a research topic. Then I ran into an old acquaintance, Ben Pargman, in a coffee shop in Atlanta. As Ben and I were catching up, I told him about my research interests. He shared with me that he had been working with a local Chabad-Lubavitch rabbi, Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman, to launch Chai Life International, a life coaching organization dedicated to training Chabad rabbis and rebbetzins (rabbi's wives) in what he called the "modern tools of

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[1] Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance*; "Institute of Coaching | Coaches Training Institute | CTI"; Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*; Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*.

[2] PricewaterhouseCoopers, *2012 ICF Global Coaching Study*; PricewaterhouseCoopers, *2014 ICF Global Consumer Awareness Study: Executive Summary*.

life coaching" and then to market their services to individuals around the world through its website and the global Chabad network. Ben turned his laptop around to show me a video presentation he had been working on when I walked up. The presentation showed images of many of the most popular contemporary self-help "gurus," such as Tony Robbins, Suze Ormon, Deepak Chopra, and Robert Kiyosaki, on one side of the screen, and on the other side was a picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the leader of the small but influential Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic Jewish sect. His presentation argued that unaffiliated, secular Jews were reaching out to these gurus, when Chabad rabbis and rebbtzins could be offering these Jews the same types of services and, ultimately, bring them back to Judaism. After my chance encounter with Ben, it seemed like Chai Life would be a perfect research site for my project with its overt blending of Judaism and personal development. This chance meeting prompted me to ask what would become my first research question, which was simply, why would a Chabad outreach center decide to offer a service as seemingly secular as life coaching?

Because of my previous relationship with them, Pargman and Schusterman invited me to join them during their planning meetings and to attend the first Chai Coaches training seminar. During this training, Carl Gould, a veteran coaches trainer who has purportedly trained over 6,000 coaches worldwide, trained ten Chabad rabbis and rebbetizns over a two-day period in the methods and theories of life coaching. The training taught me a great deal about mainstream life coaching, but what struck me most while I sat there was how many times the training went off course because of lengthy debates over how what Carl was teaching seemed to conflict with the beliefs and values of the rabbis and rebbtzins in attendance. For example, a disproportionate part of the conversation over the two days involved questions that centered on how a Chai Coach would handle a coaching situation

involving a client who wanted help with a relationship involving a non-Jewish partner. The Orthodox rabbis and rebbetzins were adamant that they could not participate in any way in helping a Jew foster a romantic relationship with a non-Jew, as a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew is against Orthodox Jewish law. Yet, a major tenet of life coaching, as Gould explained, is not giving advice and not imposing the coach's values onto the client. The coach is there to help guide the client on his or her individual path, not impose a particular route. Although the training moved through to completion, and the rabbis and rebbetzins seemed genuinely enthusiastic about what they had learned, a number of issues like this were tabled for future discussion and hopeful resolution.

My experience at the training led me to my second research question, which was why these tensions were present and so pronounced? If the founders of Chai Life viewed life coaching as a value-neutral technology—like the television, radio or internet—what were the underlying beliefs and assumptions embedded within mainstream life coaching that made it so difficult to integrate into Chabad cosmology and practice? I understood that in order to study Chai Life effectively and understand it more fully I would have to learn a great deal about non-sectarian life coaching. In order to accomplish this task, I turned to industry publications, websites, and training manuals, as there is currently no scholarly literature about the history or current state of the industry, outside of publications attempting to measure the efficacy of various forms of coaching. I realized, that by studying Chai Life, I could not only learn about this contemporary Chabad community and its appropriation of psychological and personal development techniques, I could also gain insights into the larger mainstream life coaching world.

While starting my field work with Chai Life and archival research into mainstream life coaching, I set out to conduct research into other Jewish life coaching services in an

effort to provide context for Chai Life. This research is how I met Shimona Tzukernik, who again shifted the trajectory of my research. Shimona is the founder of The Method for Self Mastery, a yearlong self-improvement and "Kabbalah Coaching" certification course. Shimona developed and teaches the course to both observant and non-observant Jews from around the world. The Method emphasizes the therapeutic applications of Chabad teachings, constructing a Hasidic psychology designed to help individuals heal psychological wounds and live more meaningful lives. When I met with Shimona and she described her personal evolution and the development of the Method for Self Mastery, I heard none of the tensions that I witnessed within Chai Life. I realized that the Method was a very different model of Jewish life coaching than Chai Life, one that was much more tightly integrated with Chabad cosmology and was developed largely without explicit reference to any of the contemporary forms of mainstream, non-sectarian life coaching. This meeting with Shimona led me to ask my third set of research question, which was why did the Method for Self Mastery not exhibit the same tensions as those that were so pronounced in Chai Life? What was it about the way Shimona constructed her program that seemed to enable it to be integrated so seamlessly into Chabad cosmology and what was it about Chabad cosmology that made it conducive to this integration?

All of my questions thus far could be considered institutional questions, but I also had a set of questions that related to the individuals participating in these programs. Why were these individuals turning to Chabad for life coaching rather than seeking more mainstream less overtly religious alternatives? Furthermore, to the extent that these individuals felt that these interventions were efficacious, what was it about the programs that proved effective? How had the participants adopted Chabad religious resources to try and effect psychological healing and cultivate new moral dispositions and subjectivities? When I

speak of efficacy here, I am not speaking about whether these programs "work" in a medical or scientific sense. My data is based on qualitative observation and participant self-reporting over a relatively short-term period of approximately one year, without any quantitative measures applied, control group, or other attributes of a scientific study. Instead, I am speaking about the kinds of "work" these programs did for the individuals in terms of shifting their moral subjectivity and therefore their experience of themselves and the phenomenal world.[3]

Based on my research questions, I decided to engage in a multi-sited ethnography of these two very different Jewish life coaching initiatives—Chai Life, an ultimately failed attempt to create Chabad life coaching on the model of mainstream secular coaching and The Method, a more sustained promotion of coaching as a ritual therapeutic system more in line with popular psychology. By researching both, I reasoned, I would be able to compare and contrast them to learn more about each, but also to use them to shed light onto Chabad-Lubavitch more generally, American Jewish life, the larger life coaching industry and religions in America more broadly. By studying these two very different models against the backdrop of mainstream life coaching, we can understand each better. By understanding ritual as performance and categories of performance as genre, we can learn much about the differences in particular performances within that genre.[4] By studying two "performances" of Jewish life coaching—within Chai Life International and the Method for Self Mastery—against the backdrop of the larger genre of mainstream life coaching, we learn a great deal about both the performances and the genre as a whole.

To summarize the questions that I had as I proceeded with this research, they were: 1) Why would Chabad institutions turn to life coaching as a way to satisfy its religious

[3] {Citation}
[4] Flueckiger, *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India*, 22.

mission? 2) Why were there so many tensions when Chai Life tried to implement mainstream life coaching within a Chabad environment? 3) Why weren't there the same kinds of tensions within the Method for Self Mastery? And finally, from the individual perspective, 4) Why did they turn to Chabad for coaching and healing and how did these programs deploy Chabad religious resources to try and effect psychological healing and cultivate new moral dispositions and subjectivities for participants? Before I turn to a summary of my findings, I first will provide a brief history of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement in order to provide context for these findings.

A Brief History of the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic Movement

Both Chai Life International and The Method for Self Mastery are located within the Chabad movement, a sect of the Hasidic movement with its roots in the small Russian town of Lubavitch (thus, its followers are often called "Lubavitchers" or Lubavitcher Hasidim). Hasidism was founded by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezar Ba'al Shem Tov (1698-1760, also known as "the Besht," an acronym for Ba'al Shem Tov) around 1840 in Eastern Europe. According to his hagiography, the Besht was a charismatic mystic, whose goal was to reinfuse Judaism with joy and the love of God, Torah, and fellow Jews. At the same time, he tried to minimize the more traditional emphasis on guilt deriving from sin and ascetic practices. Hasidic philosophy is heavily based on mystical teachings, particularly that of Kabbalah and its primary text, the *Zohar*. There is still much scholarly debate over whether the Ba'al Shem Tov was a fringe figure or part of the established Jewish community and whether his ideas were as radical and revolutionary as has frequently been portrayed.[5] Nonetheless, after the death of the Besht, Hasidism experienced tremendous growth throughout Eastern Europe at

[5] Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, Leader*; Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*; Rosman, "Miedzyboz and Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov."

the hands of his successor, Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Metzrich (1704-1772), and later disciples. The Maggid sent his disciples to various regions throughout Eastern Europe to establish centers of Hasidic learning and practices. Many of these Rebbes would go on to establish long-term dynastic courts with leadership passing largely along bloodlines.[6]

One of the primary disciples of the Maggid was Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1813). He founded the Chabad movement among the Jews of Lithuania and White Russia towards the end of the eighteenth century. Schneur Zalman emphasized a more intellectual approach to Jewish practice than other Hasidic movements, which focused on ecstatic prayer and emotional fervor. "Early leaders of the movement, including Schneur Zalman, tended to criticize merely emotional excitement in prayer as a form of egoism focused on the experiencing self rather than God." The name Chabad is a Hebrew acronym for the terms wisdom, understanding and knowledge, which have both psychological and cosmological referents in Jewish mystical literature. In place of ecstatic prayer, the early Chabad leaders "developed a set of contemplative practices designed to elicit constant awareness of the divine and to cultivate moral and perceptual qualities like *bittul* (self-nullification), *hishtavut* (equanimity) and *ibergegebnkeit* (literally, 'the quality of giving one's self over,' or caring for others before self)."[7] R. Shneur Zalman's central work of Hasidic philosophy is called the *Tanya* originally published anonymously in 1797.

Chabad continued to be concentrated in Eastern Europe until the sixth leader of the Chabad dynasty, Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak Schneersohn (1880-1950), moved the headquarters of the movement to the United States as he fled the Holocaust in 1941. He did not explicitly

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[6] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*; Idel, *Hasidism*.
[7] Seeman and Karlin, "Mindfulness, Meditation and Hasidic Modernism: Towards a Contemplative Ethnography"; Seeman, "To Pray with the Tables and with the Chairs"; Jacobs, *Tract on Ecstasy*; Loewenthal, "Habad Approaches to Contemplative Prayer, 1790-1920"; Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite*; Schatz, "Contemplative Prayer in Hasidism."

name a successor before dying, but the Hasidim chose his son-in-law Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994) in 1951 to be the movement's next leader. Menachem Mendel came to be known simply as "the Rebbe" in Chabad circles. In America the Rebbe built a global religious network, largely driven by a messianic vision for the world. His predecessor often told his followers that the messianic age was close at hand, and Schneerson continued this message with added zeal, encouraging his followers to step-up their efforts to perform *mitzvoth* and persuade other Jews to do the same as a way of hastening redemption.[8] Schneerson brought the Lubavitch movement from a small and relatively obscure Hasidic sect, to a worldwide movement with influences across Jewish and secular societies. In 1958, about seven years after he assumed the leadership of the movement, he initiated a large-scale outreach campaign to reach out to unaffiliated and unobservant Jews around the world, Jews who he believed other Hasidic Jews were ignoring.[9] He did this, primarily, by sending young rabbis and their wives, called *shluchim* or "emissaries," to the four corners of the globe to live and setup outreach institutions to reach out to these Jews. Although the previous Rebbe had also sent out *shluchim*, he did so on a much smaller scale and for the primary purpose of keeping his Hasidim connected with him and the movement. The new wave of *shluchim* was on a much larger scale and with a new mission. Although these Chabad centers catered largely to observant Jews at first, in the late 1960s and 1970s these centers took on new significance, especially on college campuses, as many students associated with the counterculture began to look to tradition for meaning and direction.[10]

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[8] Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army*.
[9] Heilman and Friedman, *The Rebbe*, 156–157.
[10] Ariel, "Hasidism in the Age of Aquarius."

Because of its focus on outreach to non-observant Jews for the past half-century, Chabad today is comprised of many adherents who are *ba'alei teshuva* or whose parents are *ba'alei teshuva*. One ethnographic study of a Chabad girl's seminary reported that the students estimated that ten percent of the graduating class in 1990 had *ba'alei teshuva* parents, while the class of 2000 was closer to seventy percent. Although the author admits the girls' estimates may be overstated, the specific numbers are less important than the self-perception that *ba'alei teshuva* are today an important and growing part of the Chabad demographic.[11]

Today, approximately 4,000 emissary families direct more than 3,300 institutions worldwide in 77 countries.[12] This global network has continued to grow exponentially since the Rebbe's passing in 1994. While it has continued to emphasize traditional practices, such as text study, prayer, and the promotion of the performance of *mitzvoth*, it has also adapted over time, developing such hybrid practices as "kosher meditation", as well as appropriating language and practices derived from psychological approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).[13] Chai Life International and The Method for Self Mastery are two excellent examples of the types of adaptations and creativity that are so prevalent within Chabad.

Chabad and Life Coaching

With that brief historical context, I will now turn to my research questions and what I discovered as a result of my study. First, why would Chabad institutions turn to life coaching as a way to satisfy its religious mission? Although a Hasidic Jewish enclave may

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[11] Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, 34.
[12] Heilman and Friedman, *The Rebbe*; Fishkoff, *The Rebbe's Army*; Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*.
[13] Seeman and Karlin, "Mindfulness, Meditation and Hasidic Modernism: Towards a Contemplative Ethnography."

seem like an unusual place for life coaching to take root, I argue there are many characteristics of Chabad that make it a logical place for Jewish life coaching to be attempted. From a theological perspective, one key imperative of Chabad practice is *hamshakha el ha-Yesh* (drawing down the Divine influx). This is a process of making the world a "dwelling place" for God and is based on what Jewish Studies scholar Rachael Elior has called Chabad's "acosmic view of reality." In short, this view asserts a dual nature of reality whereby the physical world is both real and illusory simultaneously. From the human point of view, it seems that the world is separate from God, yet, in fact, all of reality is contingent upon God and shot through with divine vitality. A key element of worship, therefore, is one that embraces the reality of creation and the importance of transforming creation into a place to reveal divinity. "The 'abode for Him among the lowly' or 'lower indwelling' (*dira batahtonim*) refers to the manifestation of the light of the infinity in the lower reality as in the upper worlds," explains Elior.[14] Every act has the potential to reveal this divinity. Even seemingly mundane acts have the power to create this divine indwelling. For example, when one says a blessing over a glass of water before drinking it, he or she elevates the water and reveals its divinity. By utilizing life coaching as a way to infuse one's seemingly mundane existence with divinity, it accomplishes a more fundamental religious imperative. Both Chai Life International and the Method for Self Mastery emphasize this religious imperative in its programs.

Related to this imperative, the Rebbe was focused on making sure all of the theological and philosophical ideas of Chabad were connected to a practical application. As Rabbi Simon Jacobson, one of the rabbis responsible for memorizing the Rebbe's Sabbath afternoon speeches and later transcribing them (it is forbidden in Jewish law to record or

[14] Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, 29.

write during the Sabbath), the Rebbe ended every lecture, regardless of topic, with a rhetorical question—"How can all this be concretely applied to our daily lives?" The Rebbe would then go on to answer how the Torah teaching could be enacted in everyday life. "All the virtuous thoughts do not produce a single virtuous act," he would argue.[15] Therefore, it was critical to make the connection between theory and action. The Rebbe's pedagogical style, which linked religious teachings with every day actions, is another reason why there seemed to be a natural bridge between Chabad and life coaching. Although life coaching is ultimately interested in helping one realize his or her maximum potential, this is traditionally accomplished through every day domains, such as relationships, health, and career.

An additional reason there is a seemingly natural connection between life coaching and Chabad is the role of the *mashpia* (spiritual mentor) within Chabad social structures.[16] The idea of a spiritual mentor has a long history in Hasidism, and within Chabad in particular. The Rebbe re-emphasized the role of the *mashpia* during a talk he delivered the last week of March 1977. He made this call again in August 1986. The purpose of this *mashpia* was to enable one to be "examined and evaluated" on a regular basis. "How are you progressing in Torah study, what about *tzedakah* [charity], and your general Divine service?" the Rebbe suggested. "Are you careful that all your actions should be for the sake of Heaven? This evaluation will lead to helpful and wise advice," he concluded.[17] The Rebbe argued, simply, "knowing that you must report and be 'examined' from time to time will sharpen your desire to advance even more."[18] Although the role of *mashpia* is in many ways very different from a mainstream life coach, both Chai Life International and the Method for Self Mastery argue that a life coach is a natural outgrowth of the role of the *mashpia*.

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[15] Jacobson, *Toward a Meaningful Life, New Edition*, xii.
[16] Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, xii.
[17] Schneerson, "Essays: Provide Yourself A Teacher."
[18] Ibid.

Related to the position of the *mashpia* is the fact that Chabad conceives of itself in many ways as a Hasidic psychology.[19] The *Tanya*, the central text of Chabad, focuses on the complexities of the soul and an understanding of the self. As anthropologist Stephanie Levine writes, the *Tanya* "enumerates psychic conflicts, physical urges, evil impulses, ethical dilemmas, struggles toward self-improvement." She also notes that Nissan Mindel, a Chabad rabbi and popular expositor of the *Tanya*, writes, "The philosophy of the Tanya begins with the self and ends with the self."[20] Furthermore, Chabad.org, the official website of the Chabad movement has hundreds of articles and audio and visual resources under the heading of "Psychology & Behavior," including Rabbi Ben-Tzion Krasnianski's 26 part video series entitled, "Kabbalah and the Psychology of the Soul: The Innerworkings of the Mind and Soul According to Tanya."[21] This self-conception of Chabad and the *Tanya*, in particular, as a psychological resources creates a natural segue into perceiving of Chabad as a vehicle for life coaching.

Another reason there is a natural bridge between Chabad and life coaching is its heavy focus on outreach to non-observant Jews within contemporary Chabad and the large number of *ba'alei teshuvas* within the movement. Chabad emissaries (*shluchim*) are constantly looking for ways to reach out to Jews who have historically eschewed traditional forms of religious observance, such as prayer services, Torah study, and the practice of the *mitzvoth*. As such, *shluchim* must find ways to communicate with and appeal to these non-observant Jews. Chai Life International explicitly turned to mainstream life coaching as a way of reaching Jews that it felt unable to reach in other ways. It believed that these unaffiliated

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[19] Seeman notes, based on Gershom Scholem, that the founders of early Hasidism made this shift from more theosophical concerns about the "dynamic process of divine emanations" to psychological ones, finding anthropopathic equivalence between individual emotional experience and "aspects of unfolding divinity" (Don Seeman, "Ritual Efficacy, Hasidic Mysticism and 'Useless Suffering' in the Warsaw Ghetto," 470).
[20] Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, 222.
[21] "Psychology & Behavior - Jewish Knowledge Base"; Krasnianski, "Kabbalah and the Psychology of the Soul - The Innerworkings of the Mind and Soul According to Tanya - Torah Classes."

individuals are turning to other forms of self-help, and that it needed to figure out how to offer similar services in order to attract these unaffiliated Jews to Chabad. Particularly given the underlying theological understanding of the importance of mundane existence, life coaching provides both a theologically sound and potentially practical way to connect with non-observant Jews.

This competition to reach unaffiliated Jews is a reflection of the current state of American Judaism. American Jews today are more assimilated into mainstream culture than ever before. A 2013 Pew Research Center survey of Jewish Americans reported 22% of those surveyed described themselves as having no religion. These numbers are even more dramatic when looking at younger Jews. The number of those describing themselves as having no religion jumps to 32% among those born after 1980, also called "Millenials." These Jews of no religion identify as Jewish on the basis of ancestry, ethnicity or culture. This reflects a generational shift, as older American Jews (born between 1914 and 1927) identify themselves as Jewish on the basis of religion, while this drops to 68% for Millenials (those born after 1980). With this shift in the nature of Jewish identity in America, Chabad is looking for new ways to attract these unaffiliated Jews.[22]

Furthermore, in an attempt to reach these unaffiliated Jews, the Rebbe called on his followers to utilize technology in service to their mission. The Rebbe did not shy away from technology or science. In fact, prior to moving to the United States, he and his wife lived in Paris where he studied engineering at the École spéciale des travaux publics, du bâtiment et de l'industrie. Jewish Studies scholar Jeffrey Shandler has documented the multiple ways in which Chabad has utilized television, radio, and the internet, at the urging of the Rebbe, to further its mission. Particularly since the Rebbe's death, the use of his images and audio and

[22] Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, *A Portrait of Jewish American: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews*; Seeman, "Pew's Jews: Religion Is (Still) the Key."

video recordings have been vital to the continuity of his spiritual leadership.[23] As we will see, the founders of these life coaching organizations, particularly Chai Life, understand life coaching as simply one more secular technology to be appropriated for the Chabad mission.

Finally, the economic model under which Chabad *shluchim* operate is another reason why life coaching seemed like an attractive possibility, particularly to Chai Life. *Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch* (Central Organization for Education), the Chabad institution responsible for the *shluchim*, initially sends out each *shaliach* with a limited amount of funding. If they are moving to a new territory, they will typically receive two years of funding to help them establish themselves in a community. After that, each *shaliach* is responsible for raising all of the money necessary to support his family and all of their outreach efforts. As such, they are constantly looking for innovative ways to generate revenue, such as offering courses or hosting events. Life coaching, they hoped, would provide an economic model that would allow *shluchim* to accomplish their mission while generating revenue at the same time. Additionally, the founders launched Chai Life as a way to generate revenue and employ young rabbis and their wives that are now struggling to find mission-relevant career opportunities. For all of these reasons, both theological and practical, Chabad was a natural place for life coaching to emerge. Having said that, as we will see, the seemingly natural alignment between life coaching and Chabad was fraught with tensions and conflicts.

So, why were there so many tensions when Chai Life tried to merge contemporary mainstream life coaching into a Chabad environment? I argue that, although mainstream life coaching is assumed to be a "secular" institution, it embeds many of the discourses and practices of what has commonly been referred to as "spirituality", with its own soteriology, conception of the self and its agency, value system and sacred narratives. These elements of

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[23] Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape*, 265.

life coaching reflect a modern, western, religiously liberal discourse of spirituality that reflects a preference for individualism, interiority, privacy and non-judgmental progressivism.[24] I argue that life coaching's fundamental assumptions reflect life coaching's origins in humanistic psychology and its offshoots, the human potential movement and transpersonal psychology. As will become apparent, these elements, though unmarked as religion, become central sites of contestation when implemented within a non-liberal, overtly religious (and non-Christian) context, such as Chai Life International.

The conflicts I witnessed within Chai Life show how the discourse of spirituality is carried within the mainstream institutions, texts and practices of life coaching. As religious studies scholar Courtney Bender argues, although it is popular in academic and popular discourses to assume spirituality to be an individual venture, this belief simply extends a false dichotomy between spirituality and religion that places spirituality within the domain of the individual and religion in the domain of the institution.[25] Bender argues that in many unmarked ways institutions also carry spirituality, and I argue mainstream life coaching is such an institution.

This project also extends Gary Laderman's argument that the sacred is revealed and revered in American culture in secular forms. In fact, what is often defined as secular should be included in the ways that Americans are the most actively and expressively religious.[26] I will show that, the fundamental problems Chabad-Lubavitch seeks to address and the goals to which it points are very different than mainstream life coaching, even if many of the claims they are making may on the surface not seem so different. By looking closely, I will show how definitions of the nature of the self, agency, and moral subjectivity all change

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[24] Herman, "The Spiritual Illusion: Constructive Steps Toward Rectification and Redescription," 13.
[25] Bender, *The New Metaphysicals Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination*.
[26] Laderman, *Sacred Matters*.

when coaching emerges in this religious environment. Finally, by looking at life coaching from the perspective of religious studies, and juxtaposing it with life coaching in American Jewish contexts, we can see how life coaching is not a value-neutral technology, but is itself religious. The underlying sacred narrative, conception of the self and its agency, and moral system of life coaching are at odds with many of the fundamental assumptions of Chabad cosmology and these tensions became very apparent in my research.

While these tensions were prominent within Chai Life, they were not present in the Method for Self Mastery, which led me to ask, "why?" How are the sacred narratives, sense of self and agency and moral system that were so problematic for Chai Life different within the Method? Shimona developed the Method over an extended period as a result of her own work of utilizing Chabad ideas and beliefs as a form of psychological healing. In many ways, just as mainstream life coaching can be seen as emerging from the human potential movement, The Method has similar roots. Shimona came of age during the tail end of this movement and was influenced by it. She was what Wade Clark Roof would call a "highly active seeker." When she encountered Chabad she began a long process of integration and adaptation of Chabad cosmology with ideas of humanistic psychology and the human potential movement. As such, to use Tweed's aquatic metaphor, The Method and mainstream life coaching have many of the same tributaries and have developed in parallel. So, instead of a clash of narratives the Method represents many years of integration into a single narrative that posits a unified conception of the self, agency and moral constraints. Furthermore, in Shimona's presentation of these concepts, Chabad cosmology is at the core and elements from the broader culture are brought as means of scientific support and modes of translation into language she believes her participants will better understand. Because of

this, ultimately, the Method is very different than mainstream life coaching and Chai Life International.

While these answer many of my institutional questions, I was also interested in the individuals and why they turned to Chabad for coaching and psychological healing. In particular, how did these programs work to transform the moral subjectivity of the individuals and enable them to try and move forward from trauma? Ultimately, I had much greater access to the participants of the Method and was able to explore this question in much more depth with these participants. In the end, I argue Shimona provided the participants with a new narrative, concept of the self, theory of agency, and moral limits that enabled them to reimagine who they are, why they endured what they endured, and how to move forward with a sense of cosmic significance in their lives. For example, by claiming they have a Godly soul (*nefesh elohit*), which is infinitely valuable, perfect and unwoundable, and by providing contemplative practices to help them discover that Godly soul, Shimona provided them a way to elevate their sense of self. At the same time, by incorporating lessons and practices that emphasize the importance of self-annihilation before God (*bittul*) and creating a dwelling place for God in the material world (*dira bitachtonim*), Shimona offered a form of agency that emphasized both individual action and surrender into God's divine plan. One's individual agency in this dynamic is sublimated to God's agency and moderated by the Torah, which prescribes proper action. Furthermore, by acknowledging God's ultimate agency and omnibenevolence participants could envision God as "loving them like an only child," where everything one experiences, whether good or bad, is ultimately part of this plan and ultimately for the good. In these ways, while influenced by humanistic psychology, elements of the human potential movement, and now positive

psychology, the Method for Self Mastery provides very different resources to try and effect change than mainstream life coaching.

This project contributes to the fields of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies more broadly. I already discussed the way in which this work expands on that of Bender, Laderman, and Kripal. Additionally, by conducting ethnographic research into the ways in which the Method adapts Chabad concepts, such as *nefesh elohit* (Godly soul), *bittul* (self-annihilation), and *dira bitachtonim* ("lower indwelling"), this work extends the current scholarly literature about the theosophy of Chabad. Books like Rachel Elior's *The Paradoxical Ascent to God* and Elliot Wolfson's *Open Secret* show through textual analysis central elements of Chabad theosophy.[27] This project, however, shows through ethnographic evidence the way some of these central tenets are transformed into healing modalities and experienced by practitioners to make sense of past traumas, cultivate new moral subjectivities, and live moral lives. By providing ethnographic evidence this project shows how these complex mystical concepts are adapted by contemporary women and men to a cultural context in which personal healing and the quest for meaning are paramount.

In the larger field of Jewish Studies, this dissertation is the first scholarly work to explore the ways in which contemporary Jews have integrated psychology into Judaism and how that integration has influenced the practice of Judaism. Historian Andrew Heinze has written about the ways Jews have influenced the field of psychology, but not how psychology has influenced Judaism.[28] Several psychologists have written about the ways in which they believe Jewish concepts resonate with contemporary psychological theories.[29] Historian Ellen Umansky has written about the ways that Jews, through Jewish Science and

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[27] Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*; Wolfson, *Open Secret*.
[28] Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century*.
[29] Hoffman, *The Way of Splendor*; Rabinowitz, *Judaism and Psychology*; Rich, *Jews in Psychology and the Psychology of Judaism*; Rotenberg, *Hasidic Psychology: Making Space for Others*; Weiss, *Connecting to God*.

Jewish New Thought, integrated psychology into Judaism, but her study essentially ends in 1930, leaving a large historical gap.[30] Other scholars have written about the ways in which Jews in America responded to and participated in a variety of other forms of professionalization and the rise of expert culture in America.[31] Finally, there are a number of books written for Jewish religious practitioners and adherents that integrate psychology and Judaism, but these are not written for an academic audience.[32] In short, there are no scholarly works on the integration of psychology into Judaism since 1950 and no ethnographic studies. As this is an important aspect of contemporary Judaisms, I argue that my work will fill a meaningful lacuna in Jewish Studies. Furthermore, as stated above this work extends the current scholarship about both contemporary Chabad and contemporary American spirituality.

Theoretical Background

This project has been influenced by my understanding of all religion as "lived" religion. The concept of "lived" or "vernacular" religion recognizes that religion cannot be neatly separated from other aspects of life. The clear definitional boundaries and neat dichotomies that earlier scholars of religion tried to imagine, like sacred and profane, chaos and cosmos, ritual and belief, are too simplistic and do not accurately describe the religious lifeworlds that people inhabit.[33] Religion is complex and enmeshed in daily life. This complexity of religion is what religion scholar Robert Orsi refers to as the "messiness of

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[30] Umansky, *From Christian Science to Jewish Science*.
[31] See for example Berman, *Speaking of Jews : Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity*; Bauer and McAdams, "Eudaimonic Growth"; Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture*; Klingenstein, *Jews in the American Academy, 1900-1940*; Hart, *The Healthy Jew*.
[32] See for example Friedman, *Jewish Pastoral Care = [Livui Ruhani]*; Wolf, *Practical Kabbalah*; Weiss, *Connecting to God*; Cutter, *Healing and the Jewish Imagination*; Twerski, *Happiness and the Human Spirit*; Twerski, *Life's Too Short*; Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*.
[33] See for example Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*; Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*; Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*.

religion." Lived religion is a call, he argues, "to seeing religious spaces as always, inevitably, and profoundly intersected by things brought into them from outside, things that bear their own histories, complexities, meanings different from those offered within the religious space."[34]

Defining characteristics of vernacular religion are its hybridity, atomism, and protean nature. "In the religious vernacular," Catherine Albanese asserts, "everybody creates; everybody picks and chooses from what is available to constitute changing religious forms."[35] As such, religions are fluid and ever changing. In this way, as religious studies scholar Thomas Tweed argues, religions are like flowing water. They are defined, in part, by their boundaries and environment; yet, over time, they also change those boundaries and environments. In fact, like the mud along the banks of a river, in places, they are almost indistinguishable from their environment. Additionally, like flowing water, they run into other streams and combine with them. As such, religions are hard to pin down for any length of time with a strict definition.

As a result of this fluidity, often, religions can best be observed and understood when in confrontation and interaction with each other and their environments. "This aquatic metaphor avoids essentializing religious traditions as static, isolated, and immutable substances," Tweed argues, "and so moves towards more satisfying answers to questions about how religions relate to one another and transform each other through contact."[36] Both Chai Life and the Method for Self Mastery are examples of this fluid nature of religion, blending elements of popular culture and Chabad cosmology, in order to construct new ways

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[34] Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, 167.
[35] Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*, 9; See also Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*, 2; Primiano, "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife," 44 for discussions of vernacular religion.
[36] Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*; See also Albanese, "Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History" for more about religious exchange.

for practitioners to engage with religion. Mainstream life coaching, as well, as we will see, is an excellent example of this same type of religious hybridity. As Tweed suggests, by studying Chai Life and The Method side-by-side and further to set them against the broader phenomenon of mainstream life coaching, we can better reveal what makes each unique in the American context.

Tweed also notes that, in addition to their fluidity, religions also orient individuals and communities and construct boundaries. Tweed introduces the idea that religions create "dwellings." These dwellings exist on multiple levels, including the body, home, homeland and cosmos. Among other things, religions, he argues, "delineate domestic and public space and construct collective identity." Furthermore, "religions distinguish us and them—and prescribe where and how both should live."[37] Chai Life and The Method for Self Mastery construct boundaries to varying degrees, such as who is a Jew. The construction of these boundaries and the way in which they are enforced are significant ways in which these programs differ from mainstream life coaching. Mainstream life coaching also has its boundaries, but they seem less apparent, as we will see, because they are more in concert with the dominant assumptions of twenty-first century American culture.

In order to maintain a methodological commitment to lived religion, I adopted an "experience near" ethnographic methodology influenced by performance theory and moral anthropology. Ethnography enabled me to see how religion was being embodied and experienced in daily life. As Don Seeman argues, "Ethnography is not just another way to gather sociological data or to embellish social theory with provocative and sometimes heartrending anecdotes. Ethnography is, at its core, always about the relationship of the theoretical to the lived and existential heart of social life—to the *content* of social

[37] Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, 75.

experience."[38] This content, when coupled with an examination of the social structures and cultural representations that inform it, enabled me to gain a better understanding of Jewish life coaching as a lived religious practice.

Performance theory fosters an awareness of the interplay between individual agency and innovation and the influence of community and culture on practices. "Intrinsic to these concerns," argues Catherine Bell, "with the dynamics of performance is a fresh awareness of human agents as active creators of both cultural continuity and change rather than passive inheritors of a system who are conditioned from birth to replicate it."[39] This awareness is especially important, as Jewish life coaching is an innovation of historical forms of Jewish practice and life coaching, yet it tries to integrate it within a traditional Jewish framework.

Performance theorists have emphasized the importance of taking into account social and cultural context, including the researcher's own, when trying to understand a performance.[40] Focusing on the social and cultural context within which a performance occurs helps the researcher recognize that no two performances are alike, since no two contexts are identical, and forces him or her to pay attention to what is emergent in the performance, rather than relying on accounts of what a performance or ritual is *supposed* to engender, or what effects it has produced in other contexts.[41] Although liturgy, manuals, sacred texts, ritual objects and the history of a practice are important elements of understanding the context of a performance, they do not determine what emerges in any given performance. Additionally, by paying attention to the emergent nature of a

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[38] Seeman, *One People, One Blood: Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism*, 13.
[39] Bell, "Performance," 209.
[40] Bauman, *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments : A Communications-Centered Handbook*, 41.
[41] Ibid., 42.

performance, one can recognize its multivocality.[42] At the most extreme, there are as many experiences of a performance as there are participants and performers.

Within this broader theoretical framework, standpoint theory breaks down the traditional barrier between self and other that was historically a major issue in the field of anthropology. It recognizes that we are all multiply situated selves. The division between self and other is always permeable and changes from situation to situation and even from moment to moment. Recognizing this situatedness also helps to break down the myth of objectivity. There is no objective vantage point from which to observe one's "data." As Lila Abu-Lughod writes, "we are always part of what we study and we always stand in definite relation to it."[43] Although I came to this project with a general understanding of Chabad, having participated in many Chabad events during the past fifteen years and knowing many rabbis, rebbetzins and community members in Atlanta, I am not an Orthodox Jew and do not share many of their religious commitments or beliefs. I chose to bracket my own beliefs as best as possible in order to try and understand what is at stake for them in this work, instead of sitting back and assuming some privileged vantage point.

In a similar way anthropologist Michael Jackson cautions anthropologists to suspend judgment when working with people, and not to assume they have the answers to other people's suffering or know best how they should live. This suspension of judgment requires the anthropologist not to assume a separation between him and the people he studies.[44] "Only in this way," Jackson writes, "can one avoid behaving as if one knows best what the other needs, or committing the error of condemning difference on the egocentric or

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[42] Bell, "Performance"; Bauman, *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook*.
[43] Abu-Lughod, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?," 27.
[44] See also Abu-Lughod, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?"; Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*; Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.

ethnocentric grounds that alien beliefs or practices belong outside the pale of what is human."[45] As anthropologists we do not stop condemning or condoning, he cautions, but by "suspending our accustomed ways of thinking" through a process of "displacing ourselves from our customary habitus," he argues, "such value judgments are less likely to precede than to follow from our investigations."[46]

Similarly anthropologist Saba Mahmood, in writing about the women's piety movement in Egypt, encourages anthropologists to leave open the possibility that we may be changed by what we encounter. We should be willing to "occasionally turn the critical gaze upon ourselves" and be open to being "remade through an encounter with the other."[47] This requires humility, she argues, "which does not assume that in the process of culturally translating other lifeworlds one's own certainty about how the world should proceed can remain stable."[48]

When one suspends judgment and engages with humility, one can realize what is at stake for the subjects being studied. Anthropologist Don Seeman draws the anthropologist's gaze to what is at stake for the people we study and the necessity of employing a "hermeneutics of generosity" when analyzing our data.

> Informant claims almost always make more sense when we start from a consideration of what is at stake for them in some local setting than when we start from abstract research questions alone. Generosity means serious consideration of how certain claims might make sense given a particular position in the world, and how counterevidence might be tempered by that realization.[49]

These theoretical commitments to standpoint theory, the suspension of judgment and humility were important to me as an ethnographer as I approached my research.

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[45] Jackson, *Lifeworlds Essays in Existential Anthropology*, 259.
[46] Ibid., 260.
[47] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 37.
[48] Ibid., 199.
[49] Seeman, *One People, One Blood: Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism*, 106.

Although I believe that ethnography is the best methodology for understanding how life coaching is situated within Chabad, I understand that ethnography, too, has its limitations in understanding what is at stake for another. Ethnographers can never fully inhabit or comprehend another's world. Ethnographers can simply construct "plausible narratives" about other people's lives through participant-observation. As Don Seeman writes, "Lived experience is never merely transparent to the observer, any more than it is to the experiencing subject, and…there is no realm of pure experience devoid of the need for interpretation."[50]

Moral Anthropology and The Moral Laboratory

During my research, I became interested in the ways the women I worked with in the Method cultivated or attempted to cultivate new moral dispositions using the Method and how these shifting dispositions affected their perceived wellbeing. In addition to everything else, I consider this a work of moral anthropology. Moral anthropology has developed largely within the last two of decades, although its roots stretch as far back as the beginning of the discipline. In the 1980s, scholars within medical and psychological anthropology, such as Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good, began to emphasize the moral dimension of social life.[51] In the 1990s, a sustained conversation began around the subject, focusing on the necessity for anthropologists to begin to attend seriously and methodically to this element of life.[52] Building largely off of the theories of Emille Durkheim and Michel Foucault, anthropologists such as Joel Robbins, Veena Das, Don Seeman, Jarrett Zigon, Cheryl Mattingly, Michael Lambek, James Laidlaw, and Leela Prasad have been writing

[50] Ibid., 4.
[51] Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*; Good, "The Heart of What's the Matter the Semantics of Illness in Iran."
[52] Laidlaw, *The Subject of Virtue*, 10.

ethnographies about the way in which cultural institutions impose and/or influence individual moral worlds and, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the scholar, how individuals interact with cultures and social environments to construct moral or ethical lives.[53]

In summarizing this recent ethical turn in anthropology, Cheryl Mattingly outlines two "moral imaginaries" or "inaugural scenes" that have been used by anthropologists to analyze ethnographic data.[54] Inaugural scenes are the situations in which one constructs and modifies the moral self. These two scenes replaced the Durkheimian understanding of morality as the simple reproduction of the traditions and customs of the ancestors. The new imaginaries, influenced by post-structuralism and, particularly, the work of Michel Foucault, replaced this traditional analytic lens. The first scene Mattingly calls the "Trial," where one is called to account by a system of justice and punishment for some transgression. One is blamed for the suffering of others and must make account for one's actions. In this moment of defense the "I" as a causal agent emerges and the moral self is born as one creates a self-narrative to defend one's actions in the face of this judgment. This analytic lens focuses on individuals' "unfreedom" and unmasking the work of power, a power that produces particular forms of moral subjectivities. By focusing on regimes of power, this imaginary necessarily diminishes the role of the individual.

The second scene is the Artisan's Workshop, whereby one subjects oneself to a master of a craft guild who helps train one to embody a particular moral subjectivity with a

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[53] See Robbins, "Between Reproduction and Freedom"; Robbins, "Value, Structure, and the Range of Possibilities"; Das, "Engaging the Life of the Other: Love and Everyday Life"; Seeman, *One People, One Blood: Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism*; Zigon, "Within a Range of Possibilities"; Zigon, *Morality: An Anthropological Perspective*; Mattingly and Garro, *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*; Mattingly, *The Paradox of Hope Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland*; Mattingly, "Moral Selves and Moral Scenes"; Mattingly, "Two Virtue Ethics and the Anthropology of Morality"; Lambek, *Ordinary Ethics Anthropology, Language, and Action*; Laidlaw, *The Subject of Virtue*; Laidlaw, "For an Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom"; Prasad, *Poetics of Conduct*.

[54] Mattingly, "Moral Selves and Moral Scenes"

particular *telos* towards which one is striving. The Artisan's Workshop is based on Foucault's later work, particularly his return to pre-modern virtue, such as Aristotle's conception, and the care of the self and technologies of the self in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*.[55] In these Workshops, moral selves are crafted through the "voluntary disciplining and monitoring of thoughts, acts and especially bodies in line with the stylistic norms of the 'guild' to which one has pledged oneself."[56] This moral imaginary is useful for anthropologists, as it reveals greater individual freedom to act to shape oneself and trains the anthropologist's gaze on practices, for it is through the practices prescribed by the guild that one cultivates the virtues of the moral self as defined by the guild. This approach also tends to focus on power, as it can reveal how moral technologies of self-care can become "tools of subjugation,"[57] or "practices of normalization of a particular regime of truth."[58]

The limitation of the Workshop approach, according to Mattingly, is it focuses too much on what takes place within the school or workshop and occludes the everyday where life is messier, where what might constitute the most morally appropriate action is often unclear. It also does not sufficiently help us see how people can move between different moral worlds that have competing moral claims and virtues or how they move in and out of well-specified traditions. The workshop approach seems to assume each school or guild is self-contained. Finally, it also presumes that the moral technologies of the guild are firmly in place when the individual encounters them and does not sufficiently foreground the ways in

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[55] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2*; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3*; See also Fornet-Betancourt et al., "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom an Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984"; Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self."
[56] Mattingly, "Moral Selves and Moral Scenes," 3.
[57] Ibid., 4.
[58] Mattingly, "Two Virtue Ethics and the Anthropology of Morality," 173; See Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* for an excellent example of this type of ethnography, in which she writes, "The kind of agency I am exploring here does not belong to the women themselves, but is a product of the historically contingent discursive traditions in which they are located" (32). .

which apprentices challenge, critique and experiment with the traditions they inhabit as part of their self-making projects.[59]

While both models are useful, Mattingly argues, anthropologists need a third moral imaginary that creates an image of individuals who are neither simply enslaved nor members of a particular craft guild. Anthropology needs a model that recognizes that people are "complexly motivated creatures who, even if they strive mightily, frequently find themselves befuddled about 'the good' or about who they should become, morally speaking," she argues, "and continue over time to revise and critique their past selves or revise and critique their future hopes in light of the things that have happened to them."[60]

What Mattingly is looking for is similar to what Michael Lambek calls "ordinary ethics" and what Veena Das calls "moral striving."[61] She is looking for a moral imaginary that brings the "moral ordinary" into full view, one that foregrounds individual agency and the messiness of daily life, where it is often difficult to discern the proper moral course. Mattingly calls this imaginary the Moral Laboratory.

> The *moral laboratory*, is a metaphorical realm in which experiments are done in all kinds of places and in which the participants are not objects of study so much as researchers or experimenters of their own lives – subjects and objects. It is a scene of action in which the 'new' is inaugurated, where new experiences are created….In this moral laboratory, participants are not working with the odds but also, in important ways, against them. The possible is pitted against the predictable. This is a laboratory of unique human actions: that is, a space for the production of beginnings, which turn out to be miracles of a sort.[62]

The moral laboratory is particularly useful in illuminating non-obvious spaces of moral reflection, practice and deliberation and the quotidian acts that carry immense moral weight, as opposed to focusing attention on the more dramatic "moral breakdowns" that produce

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[59] Mattingly, "Moral Selves and Moral Scenes," 3–4.
[60] Ibid., 9.
[61] Das, "Engaging the Life of the Other: Love and Everyday Life"; ibid.; Lambek, *Ordinary Ethics Anthropology, Language, and Action*.
[62] Mattingly, "Moral Selves and Moral Scenes," 9.

radically transformative moments.[63] Furthermore, the moral laboratory emphasizes the way in which moral tragedy can be a pervasive state for some individuals, whereby they never reconcile competing conceptions of the "best good."

The laboratory metaphor and ethnographic approach are useful for understanding the women described in the later chapters, because it recognizes that the ideal that is posited by the craft guild is often not simply morally unproblematic and cannot always be inhabited without issues. For some participants described in these chapters, the traumas and chaos of their lives are such that, in Mattingly's words, "turbulence, uncertainty, and drama are such pervasive qualities that ordinary routines are not the daily expression of a habitual way of life culturally inherited so much as a fragile achievement, a hard won moment of mundaneness. Under such circumstances the ordinary is freighted with a special moral weight and it can acquire an unexpected symbolic density."[64]

Accordingly, after the first two chapters of this dissertation, when I turn my attention to the Method for Self Mastery, I chose to focus my data on a small subset of the women I interviewed. I had much greater access to these research subjects as opposed to those within Chai Life, as I participated with them in the Method for Self Mastery every week for over a year. I did not want to reduce the complexity, nuances, contradictions and struggles of each individual life by smoothing over them with generalities. By appreciating each individual's life as an ongoing experiment in moral becoming, I was more content with the contradictions and changing nature of each individual whom I studied, keeping me from oversimplifying them. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod argues that anthropologists have

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[63] Robbins, "Between Reproduction and Freedom"; Robbins, "Value, Structure, and the Range of Possibilities"; Zigon, "Within a Range of Possibilities"; ibid.; Kleinman and Seeman, "The Politics of Moral Practice in Psychotherapy and Religious Healing"; Seeman, "'One People, One Blood.'"
[64] Mattingly, "Moral Selves and Moral Scenes," 23.

had a tendency to smooth over distinctions in their efforts to describe culture.[65] By writing each narrative in great detail, I am hoping to reveal some of the complexity, contradictions, and struggles that invariably occur in individual lives.

In these chapters, I stay close to each subject's description of her life history and her own explanatory frameworks for her perceived healing, in order to try and get as close as possible to her experience. I recognize that these stories are not unvarnished historical "facts" of what happened or necessarily and accurate explanatory models for why the women felt an increase in their well-being. I use their stories and explanations as ways to understand their shifting moral landscapes and to understand what is at stake for them in participating in the Method. "A story is not neutral. Nor is it a hidden text which the anthropologist somehow unearths like buried treasure," write Linda Garro and Cheryl Mattingly. "Narratives never simply mirror lived experience or an ideational cosmos, nor is a story a clear window through which the world, or some chunk of it, may be seen. Telling a story, enacting one, or listening to one is a constructive process, grounded in a specific cultural setting, interaction, and history. Text, context, and meaning are intertwined."[66]

In foregrounding the individuals, I also am trying to move away from reifying culture and assuming that culture determines individual lives. Although the cultural narratives and institutions influence individual lives, they do not reduce these lives to "mere epiphenomena, the local results of global forces and discursive practices."[67] Therefore, while I have considered the role of culture and history as important factors in defining the lives of the individuals in this dissertation, by adopting a commitment to moral anthropology and to the lens of moral laboratory, specifically, I hope I have introduced a sense of moral complexity

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[65] Abu-Lughod, *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*, 9.
[66] Mattingly and Garro, *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*, 22.
[67] Mattingly, *The Paradox of Hope Journeys Through a Clinical Borderland*, 45.

in that is evident in the ways the people I am writing about try and integrate religion and healing into their lives.

Methodology

My research with Chai Life took place over a year and a half. It started, informally, in the fall of 2011 with several conversations between me and Ben Pargman, one of Chai Life's founders. Pargman was an acquaintance, and given my interest in the blending of psychology and religion, he shared with me his early ideas for the formation of Chai Life. My research began formally about six months later with my attendance at the first Chai Coaches training in the spring of 2012 and ended around the time that it was obvious that the organization was not going to actively pursue its mission any longer in the spring of 2013. During this time, I met with the founders individually or together more than twenty times to observe Chai Life planning and strategy sessions and to conduct interviews with them. I also traveled with them to three venues in the northeastern United States over a three-day period to attend three "Breakthrough" events at Chabad Houses, designed to raise awareness about Chai Life and to sign up clients. I also conducted unstructured, hour to an hour and a half interviews with seven Chai coaches and five clients, as well as a two-hour interview with coach trainer Carl Gould, in his offices in New Jersey.

I started my research with Shimona Tzukernik and the Method for Self Mastery in August 2012 when I first met with her in Brooklyn. Over time, Shimona and The Method for Self Mastery became the primary focus of my research because I came to have greater access to the program because of my full participation in the Method and the fact that Chai Life had difficulty attracting clients. I started by participating in Shimona's weekly online lectures, reading the extensive array of articles on her website, listening to recordings of a

seven-week "trial-run" she had recently concluded of the Method, interviewing six of the participants in that trial run and conducting many interviews with Shimona.

From Monday January 8, 2013 to Monday January 15, 2014, I participated in the full Method for Self Mastery course. The Method was broken into four quarters over a year. Although each lesson did not always occur in this exact sequence, in general, each Monday Shimona uploaded a lesson to the Member's website. This lesson was a video of a PowerPoint presentation with Shimona's voice over explaining the slides. These lessons were approximately 30 to 40 minutes in length. She would also upload Suggested Steps for each lesson at the same time. The Suggested Steps are writing exercises that are designed to help one personalize the general ideas taught in the lessons at the same time.

On Wednesdays, Shimona conducted a live coaching conference call for ninety minutes. During these calls, Shimona answered participants' questions about the lessons, as well as did one-on-one coaching of volunteers. These coaching sessions often centered on the Suggested Steps, but could be anything related to that week's lesson. Shimona also uploaded eleven different meditations during the course of the year, which were all tied to the particular themes being taught at that time. She also asked each participant to partner up with a "co-coachme" partner, with whom the participant could meet regularly, either in person or by phone, to work through the lessons and Suggested Steps together. There was an online forum on which people would post their comments and engage in dialogue around topics pertinent to the Method.

Finally, there were two in-person gatherings that took place in Brooklyn over the course of two days. Shimona called these the "Method Masterminds," and were designed to be more intensive sessions that also enabled the participants to get to know each other. The first Mastermind occurred in March and the second in October. I participated in the full

course, including working weekly with a "co-coachme" partner and attending both Masterminds.

I conducted approximately twenty interviews with Shimona via Skype, telephone and in person. I also conducted ethnographic interviews with twenty of the fifty-five participants in the Method, many of them on as many as five occasions. Some of the individuals with whom I spoke in detail volunteered to participate after I introduced my project to the participants during the first session of the Method, while Shimona specifically asked others to contact me, based on their particular situation. Some of the stories I share in these pages deal with emotional, physical and sexual abuse. I am very sensitive to the continued anonymity and right to privacy of my subjects. In order to protect the identity of my subjects, I have utilized pseudonyms for all of my research subjects, other than those individuals who are public figures in the two organizations with which I worked. Additionally, in order to obscure their identities further I have changed some of the personal details, such as where they live or were born. In some cases, I even shared draft chapters with subjects to ask them to review them to make sure they were comfortable with these details. I do not believe these changes have any effect on the data, but have served the more important goal of maintaining my informant's anonymity. I am also very sensitive to the fact that I am a man who conducted most of my research with and among women. Although many of these women opened up to me and shared many intimate details during the course of our conversations, I am not a woman and understand that limits my ability to understand some of the many gender issues at work in their lives.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter 1: Mainstream Life Coaching and Its History

In order to provide a basis for comparison and a context for the rest of the book, this chapter provides a history of the cultural formation and present state of the life coaching industry. In this chapter I also begin to argue that mainstream life coaching embeds many of the discourses and practices of what has commonly been referred to as "spirituality", with its own soteriology, conception of the self and its agency, value system and sacred narratives.

Chapter 2: Psychology as Cosmology: The Difficulty of Integrating Life Coaching into Chabad

In this chapter I will introduce ethnographic data on Chai Life International and demonstrate the ways in which the unmarked religious ideologies of mainstream life coaching conflict with many of the religious beliefs and practices of Chabad. I will show how life coaching is viewed by Chai Life as a value-neutral technology—like the telephone, television or internet—simply to be appropriated and integrated with Jewish beliefs and practices, but this proves to be problematic during the Chai Coaches training program. This chapter will focus on the issues that arise out of the clash of cultures that occurs when "secular" techniques are appropriated for use within a specific religious milieu. Finally, this chapter reveals some of the challenges facing contemporary Chabad in its outreach efforts and the need for economic models that will sustain the movement and deploy their new rabbis and rebbetzins in mission related careers.

Chapter 3: Cosmology as Psychology: Therapeutic Hermeneutics and Ritual Innovation

After presenting the tensions that arose within Chai Life, I will turn to the Method for Self Mastery to examine how it was created and how it escaped these same conflicts. This

chapter introduces in detail Shimona Tzukernik, the Method for Self Mastery and Shimona's path to its creation. Unlike Chai Life, the Method was developed over a period of twenty years, and, by the time I came into contact with it, Shimona had more tightly and organically integrated Chabad cosmology with its life coaching theories and practices. In contrast to Chai Life, which looked like two rivers colliding into rapids, to use Thomas Tweed's aquatic metaphor, the Method was farther down river, where the two tributaries had already settled into one river. The chapter concludes by presenting the soteriological narrative that undergirds the Method, based on Chabad cosmology, and the way in which Shimona frames the fundamental problem the Method comes to address and the answer it provides

Chapter 4: Lily's Story: Sacred Narratives and New Moral Subjectivities

With this chapter, I turn to the participants of the Method and the way in which the narrative and practices Shimona taught were experienced by these participants and how they helped shape their lives and changed their moral subjectivity. In particular, I will focus each chapter on one of the major components I have been focusing on throughout this project that are present in both mainstream life coaching and Chabad cosmology—sacred narrative, conception of self, agency, and moral limits. These concepts are all intertwined and interdependent, so, while I will focus each chapter on one of these concepts, the others will be present in some respects in each.

In this chapter, in particular, through the ethnographic account of Method participant Patricia, a middle-aged Latina professional who is married with two children, I show how the narrative that the Method puts forth and the conception of the self embedded within that narrative provides culturally appropriate resources to help Patricia emplot her life history, particularly past traumas, in a meaningful life narrative. This sacred narrative is very

different than that put forth in a mainstream life coaching model. Whereas, Chai Life encountered cultural dissonance when it tried to implement life coaching practices within a Chabad environment, in this chapter we will see how The Method has used Chabad soteriology and ontologies as a healing modality.

Chapter 5: Traveling to the Mountain: Adopting a New Self

This chapter shares the story of Shira, a middle-aged divorced mother of two who was struggling through the final stages of her settlement with her husband when she joined the Method. This chapter describes the Godly Soul (*nefesh elohit*), or what Shimona calls the Sticky Self, and the way this definition of the self is designed to shift the participant's moral subjectivity. Although Shira was not a *ba'alat teshuva*, this reconceptualization of the self and the surrender that it engendered seemed to have an important impact on her. The self that is put forth within the Method is a very different definition of the self than a traditional life coaching environment.

Chapter 6: Sexuality and the Limits of Jewish Life Coaching

This chapter tells the story of Yocheved, a 48 year old married mother of two struggling with drug abuse and her sexual identity. This chapter will show how the Method constructs boundaries and works within limits. In a mainstream life coaching relationship, the agenda is completely client-driven. As the client is thought to be "creative, resourceful and whole," the coach's only agenda is to try and enable the client to achieve his or her goals. The coach is not to impose his or her values onto the client. That is not the case in the Method, where, for example, it is not acceptable to act out on one's homosexual desires. At the same time, through the presentation of data gathered during a coaching session, we will

see that Shimona does not simply admonish Yocheved, but instead tries to co-create a new moral narrative with Yocheved that is deeply embedded in Chabad *hasidut*, and does not suffer the same kind of tensions as Chai Life.

Chapter 7: "Let there be light…": Becoming a Sun to Many Moons

This chapter focuses on the life of Hadassah, a married mother of four daughters and a grandmother of two. This chapter will present the complex theory of agency asserted in the Method, based on Chabad cosmology, that includes God, the Torah, the Rebbe, and the individual. Whereas in mainstream life coaching the individual is the primary agent, in the Method, God is the primary agent and one must sublimate oneself to that agency and to Torah and the Rebbe, which are transmitters of God's agentive power. Although the individual has agency in this model, it is a subordinated agency and does not have to be experienced as oppressive. As we will see through Hadassah, this model engenders a very different moral subjectivity than in mainstream life coaching. This chapter will discuss the importance of *bittul* (self-annihilation) as a form of transformation of moral subjectivity constructed within Chabad and *dira bitachtonim* (lower indwelling). In this chapter I will also discuss some of the ways in which the Method is providing contemplative practices to cultivate meta-cognition, emphasizing the power of thoughts in Chabad *hasidut*.

Conclusion: Exchange and Religious Innovation

I will conclude by discussing Tamar, a Method participant who learned during her participation in the Method that she was not Jewish by Orthodox standards. She discovered that her mother, whom she knew was a convert, was not converted in an Orthodox conversion. As such, according to Chabad cosmology, she did not have a Godly Soul, a

central component of the healing model of the Method, and one that had particular impact on Tamar. Although this realization at first devastated her, she later decided that she believed that she had a Godly Soul, no matter what Chabad theology may have to say on the matter. Although these institutions of Chabad life coaching are largely in opposition to the liberal, western, modern agenda of life coaching that privileges individualism, interiority, privacy and nonjudgmental progressivism, many of those they are trying to reach understand their religious life in those terms. Although Shimona claims from the in the very first lesson that the Method is "not New Age", Tamar shows that even though life coaching has been adapted to this environment, the participants bring their own worldviews to the practice and continue the process of religious innovation through the encounter.

Chapter 1: Mainstream Life Coaching and Its History

Since its inception in the late 1970s, life coaching has quickly become a global cultural phenomenon. Despite a very difficult worldwide economy in recent years, membership in the International Coaches Federation (ICF) grew from around 11,000 in 2006 to almost 25,000 in over 100 countries by early 2014.[68] Further, the ICF estimates, based on their most recent study conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, there are 41,300 active coaches worldwide, of which 15,800 reside in North America. Annually, life coaches generate $707 million in revenue in North America and close to $2 billion worldwide.[69]

Of note, the 2012 ICF Global Coaching Study found the profession remains concentrated in the higher-income regions of North America, Western Europe and Oceania. These regions contain more than three in four coaches, which well exceeds the 11% share of global population living in these regions. Yet, even with the critical mass of coaches found in the higher-income regions, the study indicates faster growth in coaching has emerged in markets outside these regions, such as in Latin America and the Caribbean. Subjectively, according to the study, coaches are "looking confidently to the future," with expectations over the next 12 months of "increasing demand (clients and sessions) leading to growth in annual revenue and income from coaching."[70]

In another recent study conducted by the International Coach Federation on global consumer awareness that included 18,810 respondents in over 25 countries, they found that 58% of the respondents were aware of coaching. This figure jumped to 70% when they limited the findings to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia, or

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[68] PricewaterhouseCoopers, *2012 ICF Global Coaching Study*, 2; PricewaterhouseCoopers, *2014 ICF Global Consumer Awareness Study: Executive Summary*, 3.
[69] PricewaterhouseCoopers, *2012 ICF Global Coaching Study*, 5–7.
[70] Ibid., 13.

what it calls "the Big Four."[71] Of those aware of coaching, 17% had utilized coaching between 2010 and 2013 (the study period), and this figure was growing.[72] Finally, 47% of those who were aware of coaching and even 19% of those who were previously unaware of coaching said they would consider being coached.[73]

Along with this rapid growth, the industry is trying to implement standards and processes that will help professionalize the industry and oversee its practitioners. Although there are several dominant training institutions and one main certification body (the ICF), there is still nothing that can prevent someone from calling themselves a coach and beginning to practice.[74] In addition to establishing professional training institutions and industry trade groups, the ICF has been driving forward a research agenda to try and legitimize coaching practices and beliefs. It has a portal on its website that provides access to studies that have been conducted and articles that have been published. An excellent example of its desire to increase its legitimacy is the Institute of Coaching, an organization affiliated with Harvard Medical School, whose mission is "dedicated to enhancing the integrity and credibility of the field of coaching by awarding $100,000 in research grants each year."[75]

Although there is a vast array of definitions, methodologies, and styles of coaching, in this chapter I will attempt to provide a basic definition of what I will call "mainstream life coaching" and its history to provide a context for the rest of the chapters. I want to locate coaching within American cultural and religious history, specifically as it grew out of humanistic psychology and the human potential movement, and how it is located within the

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[71] PricewaterhouseCoopers, *2014 ICF Global Consumer Awareness Study: Executive Summary*, 8.
[72] Ibid., 13.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Seligman, "Coaching and Positive Psychology"; Brennan, "Coaching in the US."
[75] "Institute of Coaching | Coaches Training Institute | CTI."

popular discourse of an assumed dichotomy between spirituality and religion. This context will help the reader understand where and how mainstream life coaching is similar to and different from the Jewish life coaching environments I present following my ethnography. At the end of this chapter, I will also suggest that mainstream life coaching has its own unexamined religious epistemologies and ontologies that reflect its emergence from humanistic psychology and the human potential movement.

Before I begin I want to make a brief note on my sources. There is, at present, no scholarly literature that documents the history of life coaching from outside of the industry. The most comprehensive study to date is the 713 page self-published *Sourcebook of Coaching History* written by Vikki G. Brock, which was based upon her dissertation *Grounded Theory of the Roots and Emergence of Coaching*.[76] Brock is a practicing life coach who is very much a part of the industry. Although her texts have been immensely helpful in tracing the history of life coaching, she is not a historian. In addition to Brock, I have also relied on texts and websites from inside the industry that recount parts of the history of coaching. In any case, I have supported my telling of this history with secondary sources about the movements and individuals that went into this history. For example, I utilized many outside sources to tell the story of the human potential movement, which had a large influence on the field of coaching. As will be discussed in the next chapter, I also conducted limited participant-observation research and ethnographic interviews with some key figures in what I would call mainstream life coaching. Although I will be citing these sources in the next chapter, my discussions with them have informed my understanding of the industry in general. Through all of these sources, I have been able to piece together enough of a history of life coaching and its influences to provide the reader a general understanding of life coaching, its basic

[76] Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*; Brock, "Grounded Theory of the Roots and Emergence of Coaching."

principles, and how it fits into American cultural and religious history. This history and a description of the basic principles of life coaching will help inform the rest of the book. Before I move into this history, however, I should first define what a life coach is.

What is a Life Coach and How Life Coaching Began

> The International Coach Federation, defines coaching as
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> > partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today's uncertain and complex environment. Coaches honor the client as the expert in his or her life and work and believe every client is creative, resourceful and whole. Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:
> >
> > - Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve
> > - Encourage client self-discovery
> > - Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
> > - Hold the client responsible and accountable
> >
> > This process helps clients dramatically improve their outlook on work and life, while improving their leadership skills and unlocking their potential.[77]

The key words and ideas in the above definition, which are used over and over in the mainstream coaching literature, are "maximize…potential," "honor the client as the expert," "every client is creative, resourceful and whole," "self-discovery," and "hold the client responsible and accountable." All people, this definition claims, are already creative, resourceful and whole, and are, therefore, their own best expert. They need a coach, however, to help them discover their best, authentic self. According to Thomas Leonard, who many credit with founding and popularizing the coaching profession, "Humans operate

[77] "Coaching FAQs - Need Coaching - ICF."

at 1% or less of their potential. Coaching increases this figure."[78] Furthermore, a coach helps a client remain accountable to his or her decisions.[79] As the website of one popular coaches training institute states, coaches exist to enable "The Pursuit of Human Greatness," "unleashing the very best of our humanity…"[80]

Hitting on these same themes, the founders of Coaches Training Institute, the largest in-person coach training organization in the world, delivering courses in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, claim "coaching is chiefly about discovery, awareness, and choice. It is a way of effectively empowering people to find their own answers, encouraging and supporting them on the path as they continue to make important life-giving and life-changing choices."[81] The coach "evokes transformation," enabling the client, coachee, or player to better able "live lives of meaning and purpose."[82] In this way, they claim, coaching "exists to serve the client's higher purpose." By enabling the client live in concert with his or her higher purpose, coaching has a ripple effect, creating the means for "transformative change" in clients' families, organizations and the world.[83]

The coaching industry is very careful to differentiate a coach from a therapist, mentor, or consultant. Unlike therapy, coaching is "non-pathological;" it is not about diagnosing psychological problems and trying to fix them. It is future directed and results oriented.[84] Unlike a mentor or a consultant, a coach requires no domain expertise about one's problem. A coach needs no specific expertise, because he or she is not there to provide solutions. Instead, the coach "skillfully uses a series of questions to prompt the thinking and emerging understanding of the coachee so that they are themselves able to identify, own and

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[78] Buck, *Basic Coaching Skills and Ethics*, 11.
[79] Ibid., 6.
[80] "CoachVille | Remarkable Coach Training"; "The Pursuit of Human Greatness | CoachVille."
[81] Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives.*
[82] Ibid., 7–8.
[83] Ibid., 14.
[84] Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, 5944–5947.

implement the courses of action."[85] As one of the founders of the industry claims, "Coaching requires expertise in coaching but not in the subject at hand."[86]

The Emergence of Life Coaching

There are many people who influenced the creation and promotion of the life coaching industry. From her research Vikki Brock identified thirty-five individuals whom she called "originators" of life coaching, individuals whose ideas had some important influence on the ideas that would come to be known as life coaching. These people come from many different disciplines, including psychology, business, motivation, sports, philosophy and liberal arts, with psychology far outweighing the others. Brock then identified eighteen "transmitters" who codified, institutionalized and promoted the current life coaching industry.[87] Yet, of all of these originators and transmitters, she argues that three continually are identified as the most important figures—Timothy Gallwey (b. 1938), Werner Erhard (b. 1935), and Thomas Leonard (1955-2003).

Timothy Gallwey is credited by many for creating the life coaching industry with the publication of his book *The Inner Game of Tennis* in 1974, which he wrote while a student at Harvard University. His book posited, for the first time, the importance of understanding and cultivating the "inner" world of the athlete as a key component of his or her success. This inner world, he argued, is equally as important as, if not more important than, the outer world (e.g., strength, skill and stamina) to the success of the athlete. In simple terms, this was the beginning of the appreciation of the mental side of sports.[88]

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[85] Hyson, *Coaching with Meaning and Spirituality*, 279–283.
[86] Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance*, 14.
[87] Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, 3791–3793.
[88] Gallwey and Carroll, *The Inner Game of Tennis*.

Gallwey believed that his coaching principles could be applied to any domain of life. He went on to write eight *Inner Game* books that applied these techniques to other sports and areas of life, such as skiing, golf, work, stress, music and winning. In 1980, Gallwey brought his Inner Game principles to businesses in the United States in the form of executive coaching, and his student Sir John Whitmore did the same in the United Kingdom.[89] Based on Gallwey's ideas, Whitmore created the GROW model of coaching, which has become a very influential model in the United Kingdom and Europe.[90]

Although never a coach himself, Werner Erhard is another person who is often cited as one of the key influencers of life coaching and is intimately associated with the human potential movement. Werner Erhard and Tim Gallwey were well acquainted. In fact, for a period of time Gallwey was Erhard's tennis instructor. They also participated together in a workshop on coaching in 1987 held at Esalen. Erhard founded est, Erhard Training Seminars, in 1971. Est seminars were large group encounters—typically consisting of 250 people—designed to enable participants to transform their lives and to begin to live authentically whole lives. The seminars took place over a period of nine days—two full, consecutive weekends and evening classes during the weekdays between them. During these sessions, participants were not allowed to speak unless spoken to, wear watches, or eat, go to the bathroom or leave their seats unless it was a one of the few specified break times. According to historian Grogan, "A typical 'est' experience involved the systematic demoralization and imperious reconditioning of 250 people gathered in a large auditorium."[91] Est became very controversial because of its unconventional methods, but Erhard's methods and ideas influenced many people. Werner Erhard and Associates

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[89] Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, 3115–3117.
[90] Ibid., 3116.
[91] Grogan, *Encountering America*, 297.

estimates that Erhard trained approximately 750,000 people between 1971 and 1981, and that 1.4 million people were exposed to his materials. His emphasis on self-responsibility and his demonstration that transformational ideas can be taught to large groups of people have had a lasting effect on coaching and self-help in general.[92] Many of Erhard's ideas and methods are delivered today through Landmark Worldwide, founded in 1991, which purchased the intellectual property from Werner Erhard and Associates.[93] According to Landmark Worldwide millions of people on six continents have participated in Landmark's programs and seminars, including life and family coaching.[94]

Called the "patriarch of the personal-coaching movement" by some, perhaps the most influential figure in modern mainstream coaching is Thomas Leonard, a financial advisor who worked for Erhard in the early 1980s. Leonard began to do what he called "life planning" on the side, believing that his clients needed more to succeed in life than simple financial planning. Leonard began a personal coaching practice in 1982 as an evolution of this work.[95] In 1988, Leonard piloted the first life planning workshop called "Life Creates Your Life." He brought in Laura Whitworth, whom he had hired while working for Erhard, to work with him in this endeavor. Leonard went on to found the most influential training institutions and industry organizations in all of mainstream coaching. In 1992 Leonard launched Coach University (later changed to Coach U), a virtual online coaches training company.[96] Leonard sold Coach U in 1996 and launched Coachville in 2001, another online training institution and online community. He also founded the two most important industry trade groups and certifying bodies, the International Coach Federation in 1997 and the

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[92] Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, 2494–2497.
[93] "Landmark Worldwide."
[94] "Landmark Company Overview, Landmark Corporation Profile."
[95] Leonard, *The 28 Laws of Attraction*, Introduction.
[96] Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, 3913–3914.

International Association of Coaches in 2002.[97] Additionally, Coaches Training Institute, now the largest in-person coaches training organization in the world, was founded in 1992 by Whitworth, utilizing similar ideas and methodologies.

The methods and ideas represented by Gallwey, Erhard, and Leonard, and the individuals and institutions that carried forward and expanded upon their methods and ideas, are now firmly embedded in the worldview and pedagogy of the major training and governing bodies of the life coaching industry. These organizations carry forward assumptions about the nature of the self, human potential, higher purpose, individual authenticity, and religion that have a long history in American discourse. Most specifically, the life coaching industry has its roots in humanistic psychology and the human potential movement it engendered.

Life Coaching and the Human Potential Movement

Sir John Whitmore, one of the earliest popularizers of Gallwey's theories and practices and one of the world's leading life coaches, explains that the emergence of life coaching was integrally tied to developments in psychology and Gallwey's understanding of those developments. "Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance," he writes.

> It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them…. Gallwey's books coincided with the emergence in psychological understanding of a more optimistic model of humankind that the old behaviorist view that we are little more than empty vessels into which everything has to be poured. The new model suggested we are more like an acorn, which contains within it all the potential to be a magnificent oak tree. We need nourishment and encouragement, but the 'oak-tree' is already within us.[98]

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[97] Brock, "Grounded Theory of the Roots and Emergence of Coaching," 50.
[98] Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance*, 10–11.

Whitmore told Brock, "People like Abraham Maslow provided the crucible in which Tim Gallwey could do what he did."[99]

Abraham Maslow (1908 –1970) founded humanistic psychology with the publication of his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in 1943.[100] This paper claims that once people's basic needs are met, they will strive to achieve their highest potential through a process he called "self actualization."[101] Self actualization "refers to the desire for self-fulfillment," writes Maslow, "namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming."[102] Although Maslow's ideas would revolutionize the field of psychology, he was in many ways returning to the questions and ideas of earlier American Romantic writers, philosophers and psychologists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Walt Whitman and William James. Furthermore, these ideas of individual worth, human dignity, rights, responsibilities, and fulfillment have a long history in American culture.[103]

Humanistic psychology and the resulting human potential movement were in many ways a reaction against the conformist culture in the United States leading up to and following World War II. This conformist culture was famously described in the social critique *The Lonely Crowd*, written by sociologist David Riesman in 1950, which argued that Americans had shifted from being "inner-directed" to "outer-directed," being hyper-concerned with what others think, as a result of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization.[104] Additionally, the management best seller *The Organization Man*, written by

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[99] Brock, *Sourcebook of Coaching History*, 1940.
[100] Ibid., 1938–1942, 1983–1985.
[101] Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation."
[102] Ibid., 382.
[103] Grogan, *Encountering America*, 1598–1601.
[104] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd.*

William Whyte in 1956, similarly argued that corporate America had created an environment that encouraged conformity and stifled individuality and creativity.[105] In addition to pushing back against this conformist culture, humanistic psychology was also a reaction in psychology against the increasing scientism and medicalization of psychology that began with John Watson's *Behaviorism* in 1925, which posited that human beings are mere machines that simply reply, without consciousness or intent, to stimuli. Humanistic psychology endeavored to return human subjectivity and complexity to the study of psychology.[106] Finally, as a Jew, Maslow was influenced by the rise of the Nazis and his belief that contemporary psychological theories, particularly behaviorism, had little to say about the evils of anti-Semitism and racism.[107]

In 1950, seven years after Maslow proclaimed his initial theory, he published the first article that presented his research on his new theories, entitled, "Self-Actualizing People: A Study of Psychological Health." In this study, he attempted to identify the qualities of healthy, or "self-actualized," people, whom he defined as those making full use of their potentialities, talents, and capacities while opposing the social norms that got in their way.[108] Although he spoke from the discipline of psychology, Maslow's goals for humanistic psychology went far beyond the academy or even the narrow practice of psychology. "By changing the way psychology approached the study of people," argues historian Jessica Grogan, "[Maslow] hoped to incite a cultural paradigm shift. He wanted to transform our view of human nature on the most basic level. In doing this, he would make it the job of

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[105] Whyte, *The Organization Man*.
[106] Grogan, *Encountering America*, 44.
[107] Ibid., 93.
[108] Ibid., 10.

psychology to answer philosophical, moral, and existential questions that were central to human experience."[109]

After publishing his initial ideas, Maslow was joined by a host of other psychologists who began to work with him and were included under the rubric of humanistic psychology, by then known as the "Third Force" in psychology (following psychoanalysis and behaviorism). These figures included, among others, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, Erich Fromm, and Erik Erikson. Additionally, the works of Carl Jung, once Freud's chief disciple, were now being utilized as key theories within humanistic psychology. Further, given the grand scale of the movement's agenda and the blurring of the boundaries between psychology and religion associated with it (discussed below), many liberal theologians, such as Martin Buber and Paul Tillich, were both influenced by and contributed to the discourse, and became considered part of this psychological and social movement.[110]

The contributions of these scholars would come to have a lasting impact on humanistic psychology and eventually on life coaching. Psychologist Carl Rogers, for example, who came to be known as the co-founder of humanistic psychology, is probably best known for elevating the role of the client in the therapeutic relationship and acknowledging the client's innate strengths and internal powers for transformation and growth. While increasing the importance of the client, he also diminished the need for and aggrandizement of the analytical prowess of the therapist.[111] Therapists do not cause the client's psychological growth; they merely enable it to occur.[112] Existentialist psychologist Rollo May's therapeutic approach was goal oriented. It encouraged the client to focus on the present, his or her potential for the future, and the decisions he or she would have to make

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[109] Ibid., Introduction.
[110] Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century*, 262.
[111] Grogan, *Encountering America*, 555–556.
[112] Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious Understanding Unchurched America.*, 41.

to create that future. This idea was in opposition to psychoanalysis' focus on the past.[113] Carl Jung's theory of individuation also had a significant impact on humanistic psychology.[114] Individuation, as defined by Jung, is a life long process of psychological development, "a process by which a man [sic] becomes the definite, unique being he in fact is."[115] This process was important because, according to historian Andrew Heinze, a chief concern of humanistic psychology was "how to construct an authentic identity, a solid core of personality that would allow the individual to withstand the pressures toward mindless conformity…was the defining question of the postwar era."[116]

These key elements of humanistic psychology are easy to recognize in the current definitions, methods and goals of coaching. The goal of helping an individual maximize his or her potential, the client-centered nature of the method, the emphasis on process, growth and transformation, and the assumption of an innate, authentic self that dwells beneath an outer shell that has been built up through conforming to others' wants and needs are all hallmarks of coaching that find their origins in humanistic psychology.[117]

Humanistic Psychology, Seeker Spirituality, Buddhist Modernism and the "Religion of No Religion" of Mainstream Life Coaching

Humanistic psychology rapidly became a cultural force through the human potential movement that, according to historian Jessica Grogan, has had widespread, and in many ways unconscious, impacts on American culture, despite having been largely discounted by

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113 Grogan, *Encountering America*, 1289–1293.
114 Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious Understanding Unchurched America.*, 137.
115 Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 174.
116 Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century*, 271.
117 Brock, "Grounded Theory of the Roots and Emergence of Coaching," 177.

the academic community since its precipitous decline in the 1970s.[118] According to Grogan, the human potential movement's "language has seeped into our relationships, our self-expression, our self-talk. We speak regularly of our 'potential' and our need for 'growth.' We look for marriages to be growth-fostering, therapeutic. We may even ask of our spouses the very things one could expect of a humanistic psychotherapist (unconditional acceptance, impeccable emotional attunement, and empathy)." The ideas of humanistic psychology quickly seeped beyond the boundaries of the academy and influenced civil rights, the psychedelic drug culture, and even executive management.[119]

One area where this broad cultural influence has been felt most dramatically is in the area of religion. Humanistic psychology opened the door to greater integration of psychology and religion after an almost three decade hiatus. As we will see, this blurring of the boundaries between psychology and religion becomes an important element of life coaching. Although the field of scientific psychology had a major influence on religion during the period 1880 to 1930, influencing or engendering such movements and institutions as New Thought, Christian Science, Jewish New Thought, Jewish Science, the Emmanuel Movement, pastoral counseling, and the psychologization of many theological ideas, such as sin, hell and Satan,[120] towards the end of the 1920s the new theories emerging from the field of psychology were becoming increasingly antagonistic to the idea of religion. John Watson published *Behaviorism* in 1925. In it he defined human beings as machines that were capable only of reacting to external stimuli. His theories of human behavior left no room for consciousness, real thought or free will. Further, his idea of "conditioning," the process of

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118 The term Human Potential Movement was actually coined at Esalen in 1965 by Michael Murphy and George Leonard (Kripal, *Esalen*, 207).
119 Grogan, *Encountering America*, Introduction.
120 Umansky, *From Christian Science to Jewish Science*; White, *Unsettled Minds*; Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*; Meador, "'My Own Salvation': The Christian Century and Psychology's Secularizing of American Protestantism"; Schmidt, *Restless Souls*; Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*.

training one how to react to stimuli (e.g., Pavlov's dog), replaced the idea of moral education and traditional moral injunctions. In this scheme there was no room for God.[121] His theories were to have a major impact on the field of psychology through the 1960s. Freudian psychology, rapidly gaining popularity in the 1920s and 1930s, was equally inhospitable to religion. In *The Future of an Illusion*, written in 1927, Freud claims religious doctrines are illusions, if not delusions, that have "no basis in any reality but the psyche of the believer." In it he writes the famous quote, stating that religion is "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity."[122]

It would not be until 1946 that a rapprochement between psychology and religion would emerge again in popular culture, when Joshua Loth Liebman, a Reform rabbi and an early proponent of "human potential," published *Peace of Mind*, a self-help book integrating ideas from rabbinic Judaism with psychological theories. Humanistic psychology, and later its progeny transpersonal psychology and positive psychology, opened the doors again for an integration of religion and psychology.

Maslow was explicit that he was intent on utilizing humanistic psychology as a replacement for religion. He despised organized religions, because he associated them with the superstitions of his mother, whom he hated. Instead, he wanted to develop what he called a "life philosophy, the religion-surrogate, the value-system, the life-program" that he believed people could not find in religion or science. He set out this agenda in 1962 in *Toward a Psychology of Being*.[123] In 1964, Maslow published *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, in which his purpose was to break spirituality from the confines of organized religion. "I want to demonstrate that spiritual values have naturalistic meaning," he argued, "that they

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[121] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 315.
[122] Ibid., 315–316.
[123] Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century*, 285.

are not the exclusive possession of organized churches, that they do not need supernatural concepts to validate them, that they are well within the jurisdiction of a suitably enlarged science, and that, therefore, they are the general responsibility of all of mankind."[124]

In a preface to a later edition of the book, written in 1970, Maslow warned of the threat to spirituality posed by religion. "When people lose or forget the subjectively religious experience," he wrote, "and redefine religion as a set of habits, behaviors, dogmas, forms … at the extreme [this causes spirituality to become] entirely legalistic and bureaucratic, conventional, empty, and in the true meaning of the word, antireligious."[125] He further argued that "peak experiences," a particular form of psychological state, were actually the basis of all religions, but did not rely on these religions. "This private religious experience," Maslow argued, "is shared by all the great world religions including the atheistic ones like Buddhism, Taoism, Humanism, or Confucianism." This view clearly reflects a perennialism like that first introduced by Aldous Huxley in *The Perennial Philosophy* in 1945.[126] Maslow's perennialism was not limited to world religions. "As a matter of fact," he argued, "I can go so far as to say that this intrinsic core-experience is a meeting ground not only, let us say, for Christians and Jews and Mohammedans but also for priests and atheists, for communists and anti-communists, for conservatives and liberals, for artists and scientists, for men and for women, and for different constitutional types, that is to say, for athletes and for poets, for thinkers and for doers."[127]

Peak experiences were a sign of psychological health, according to Maslow. A "non-peaker" is someone, according to Maslow, "who is afraid of [peak experiences], who suppresses them, who denies them, who turns away from them, or who 'forgets' them"

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[124] Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 4.
[125] Cited in Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious Understanding Unchurched America.*, 4.
[126] Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*.
[127] Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 14.

because he or she is too rational or afraid of losing control or going insane. Organized religions, according to Maslow, developed as ways for "peakers" to explain and teach peak experiences to "non-peakers."[128] The publication of these texts and the psychological theories they proffered were important for giving theoretical credence and an air of scientific support for the rhetorical distinctions between spirituality and religion in the public discourse, as we will see. Commenting on this impact, historian Jeffrey Kripal argues, "If [Maslow] did not…actually coin the term 'spiritual but not religious'….[he] did as much as anyone in the modern era to lay the psychological foundations for the present prominence of these notions."[129]

Carl Rogers too had specific theological commitments that influenced his theories of humanistic psychology, which later came to influence life coaching. He was studying to become a minister at Union Theological Seminary when he decided to reject this path because he felt even a liberal Christian path was too limiting and decided to become a psychologist. Historian Andrew Heinze argues that Rogers' client-centered approach was based on the idea of self-acceptance as a fulfillment of the Protestant ideal of forgiveness as first conceptualized by psychologist Rollo May and later theologian Paul Tillich. Based on this liberal Protestant idea of acceptance, Rogers developed his theory that individuals are already healthy and self-fulfilling and merely need to be freed of their social constraints to manifest this potential.[130] Furthermore, Rogers believed that the human potential for growth originates outside the purely psychological realm. "Our organisms as a whole have a wisdom and purpose which goes well beyond our conscious thought," he argued. He arrived at his

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[128] Ibid., 24.
[129] Kripal, *Esalen*, 150;According to cultural historian Leigh Schmidt, spirituality emerges as a distinct cultural force with the rise and flourishing of religious liberalism in America in the 19th century. (Schmidt, *Restless Souls)*.
[130] Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century*, 274–275.

"client-centered" approach based on what he considered to be "the existence of a causal power that transcends all the instinctual or environmental forces ordinarily described by academic psychologists."[131]

Carl Jung's theories also had a particularly pervasive and long lasting influence on many Americans' understanding of religion and its interiority. First of all, historian Robert Fuller argues that the "collective unconscious" was Jung's way of referring to God in psychological terms. In this way Jung relocated God "deep within the human psyche." Jung's psychology then focused on the "individuation process," "a lifelong path of self-discovery and self-transformation."[132] Jung defined individuation as "becoming an 'in-dividual,' and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self realization.'…In other words, it is a process by which a man becomes the definite, unique being he is in fact."[133]

In summary, these theological beliefs—perennialism, the private nature, the primacy of religious experience, and the immanence of God, what Peter Berger called the "subjectivization" of religion—were integrated deep within the themes and motivations behind the founders of humanistic psychology and taken up by the proponents of the human potential movement.[134] They would come to have a major impact on the rhetorical dichotomy between organized religion and spirituality in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Grogan, "when people seemed eager for ecstatic experience, and anxious to be free of institutional constraints, humanistic psychology introduced new avenues of spiritual

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131 Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious Understanding Unchurched America.*, 142.
132 Ibid., 138.
133 Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, 173–174.
134 Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*.

experience."[135] Humanistic psychology offered people an alternative to institutional religion at a time when people were trying hard to break free of institutional constraints. The spiritual quest to find one's authentic self beneath the layers of conventional behavior that one's family and society imposed, what philosopher Charles Taylor has called a "quest for authenticity."[136]

Seeker Spirituality

The "spirituality" of humanistic psychology and the human potential movement that it engendered coincides with a period in American religious history when a growing number of people shifted from what sociologist Robert Wuthnow called a "spirituality of dwelling" to a "spirituality of seeking."[137] A growing number of Americans began to accept that one's spiritual identity was not something that was inherited from one's family, but was constructed.[138] Sociologist Wade Clark Roof also identified this shift towards what he called "seeker oriented spirituality" as a cultural force in the 1960s with the emergence of what he called "highly active seekers."[139] Roof found that many of his respondents were seeking an experience of the divine by journeying inward to find an authentic self. "The source we must connect with is not external—for example, God, or some notion of the Good—but deep within us. And if we are beings with inner depths, the ideal of authenticity encourages inner discovery and an instrumental approach to religion as a means to that discovery."[140] He attributed much of this shift on the "rediscovery" that "psychology and spirituality are not

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135 Grogan, *Encountering America*, 153.
136 Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century*, 262; Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*.
137 Wuthnow, *After Heaven*.
138 Ibid., 8, 53–57.
139 Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*; Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*; Wuthnow, *After Heaven*.
140 Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 66.

exclusive domains but are themselves integrally related." The theories of Jung and Maslow, he argued, had people "asking questions about meaning in life; peak experiences; searching to find ways of feeling, and not just thinking about their relationship to the surrounding universe….The result is that psychology has become the vehicle for an emerging form of religiousness."[141] Robert Fuller recognized this cultural shift from organized religion to psychology as he studied those that define themselves as "spiritual but not religious." "Historically, Americans have turned to religion when they were confused, lonely, or in need of an emotional pick-me-up," he argued. "Today the situation has changed. Psychology has become the secular successor to religion, providing a new vocabulary and new set of theories by which to understand ourselves."[142]

Buddhist Modernism and the Eastward Journey

The seeker spirituality that Roof and Wuthnow observed in their studies was also tied up in the effects of Buddhist modernism of the 1960s and 70s. Buddhist modernism is a term scholars use to describe contemporary forms of Buddhism and the process by which these forms have adapted to the "discourses of modernity," namely, western monotheism, rationalism and scientific naturalism, and Romantic expressivism, along with their successors.[143] Humanistic psychology was both influenced by and influenced Buddhist modernism. In general, psychology would become one of the most commonly used lenses for the interpretation of Buddhism,[144] Buddhism itself was often cast as a kind of

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[141] Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*, 68–69.
[142] Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious Understanding Unchurched America.*, 123.
[143] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*; Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience"; Wilson, "New Perspectives on Buddhist Modernism."
[144] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 14.

psychology.[145] This psychologization of Buddhism was a key part of its detraditionalization and demythologization.[146]

Historian Anne Harrington locates the Buddhism of the 1960s within a larger American narrative she calls "Eastward journeys," which includes the medicalization of meditation, the embrace of the Chinese practice of Qigong, and the recent rise in research into the health benefits of Buddhism.[147] In short this narrative states that modernity has made westerners stressed, unhappy, and sick. Although they do not have the answers to these ailments, others do. They are the people of the East and are everything those in the West are not.

> We are modern; they have stayed in touch with ancient traditions. We are harried and tense with stress; they speak and act wisely from a place of deliberate repose and contemplation. Our medicine is aggressive and treats the body as if it were a broken machine; theirs is gentle and guided by an appreciation of the suffering of the whole person. We are doggedly dualistic in our ways of thinking about the mind-body relationship; they understand the extent to which mind and body are intimately intertwined and have found ways to translate that knowledge into uniquely effective healing practices. The solution to our woes, then, is simple: we must find ways to learn from these people of the East, and in that process of learning, discover ways to heal ourselves.[148]

Although in many ways Buddhist modernism evolved as a different branch than life coaching, the influences of Buddhism and Eastern thought on humanistic psychology and the human potential movement can be seen in the underlying ontologies and epistemologies of life coaching. These movements developed in the wake of a growing interest in Zen Buddhism in America primarily because of the works of D.T. Suzuki and his student Alan Watts. Zen became popular among the Beat writers Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Allen

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[145] Ibid., 52, 57; Harrington, *The Cure Within*, 14.
[146] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 57.
[147] Harrington, *The Cure Within*, 29.
[148] Ibid., 206–207.

Ginsberg. Through the effort of these teachers and writers, Zen Buddhism, in a distinctly American, modernist form, became popular amongst many students associated with the counterculture, a disproportionate share of whom were Jewish.[149] Buddhism and other eastern philosophies, such as Vedanta based on Hinduism, became influential on the human potential movement.

Although the discourse of Buddhist modernism, like spirituality, had its start in late nineteenth century, humanistic psychology had a significant influence on its development in the 1960s and 70s. In particular, Maslow's ideas of "peak experiences" and "self-actualization" significantly influenced the western understanding of awakening and meditative insight.[150] Furthermore, many popular ideas of Buddhist interconnectedness, wholeness and ego-transcendence are indebted to the ideas of psychologists such as Carl Jung and Abraham Maslow.[151] American-born Theravada monk Bhikkhu Thanissaro identifies William James, Jung and Maslow as the three key psychologist to shape the "expectations many Americans bring to the dharma."[152]

Like humanistic psychology, the Buddhism of the 1960s and 70s in America was also seen as a way to escape conformist culture and to break free of the bonds of an oppressive society. Buddhist awakenings were interpreted as an overcoming of all "conditioning." Mediation became a way to dissolve the ego, with all of its condition from family, society and institutions, to be able to live authentically, spontaneously from one's inner being.[153]

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[149] A disproportionate number of the early followers and eventual leaders of Buddhist modernism are of Jewish descent, including Mel Weitsman, Norman Fischer, Alan Lew, Alen Senauke, and Bernard Glassman, who originally came out to San Francisco chasing the Beat boom. Other important early Jewish leaders of Buddhism are Sharon Salzberg, Lama Surya Das, Jon Kabat-Zinn, Sylvia Boorstein, and Jack Kornfield (Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India*; Sigalow, "Jewish-Buddhist Encounters: An Exploration of Multiple Religious Belonging").
[150] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 56.
[151] Ibid., 109.
[152] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Romancing the Buddha."
[153] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 195.

The discourses of Buddhism had an impact on Maslow as well, who cites Suzuki in some of his works on religion and peak experiences. Later in his life, he integrated the ideas of Buddhism into what he termed the "bodhisattvic path," which tried to extend humanistic psychology beyond the individual.[154] This motivation led to the creation of a new subsidiary school of humanistic psychology in 1969, which also came to influence coaching. This new branch, called transpersonal psychology, focused specifically on topics such as unitive consciousness, mystical experience, and cognitive blissfulness.[155] As I will argue later, many of the basic ideas of seeker spirituality have come to be embedded as unexamined assumptions in mainstream life coaching.

Humanistic psychology was more than a school of psychology; it was an important cultural movement that has helped shape the contemporary understanding of the rhetorical dichotomy between spirituality and religion. This spirituality was embedded in life coaching from its inception. For example, in addition to being a tennis player and coach when he developed the ideas of the *Inner Game*, Timothy Gallwey was also a spiritual seeker. Gallwey was a devotee of Guru Maharajji, the spiritual leader of the Divine Light Mission, a movement that began in India and claimed 6 million followers at its peak. Gallwey had met Guru Maharaji in 1971, when Maharaji was fifteen years old, and became a believer in his teachings. He moved to India and meditated there with Maharji for two months. Upon his return to the United States, he moved into an ashram where he wrote the *Inner Game of Tennis*.[156] He dedicated the book, in part, to Maharaji and credited him for changing his definition of success. It reads, "For my mother and father, who brought me to the Game,

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[154] Grogan, *Encountering America*, 250.
[155] Ibid., 250–251.
[156] Morgan, "Middle-Class Premies Find Oz in the Astrodome."

and for Maharaji, who showed me what Winning is." Gallwey integrated this "seeker spirituality" into the Inner Game method and his understanding of an effective coach.

The religious assumptions in mainstream life coaching remain largely unconscious or unarticulated. In a way it is similar to what Kripal calls a "religion of no religion." "It does not profess any single religion, yet embraces an "infinitely expressive mystery that…overflows the social boundaries and relative truths of each and every religion: a religion of no religion; a religion of all religions."[157] Just as "spirituality" is often considered neutral and *sui generis*, this spirituality within mainstream life coaching, with its epistemologies and ontologies are uncritically woven into the fabric of mainstream life coaching.

The Religious Epistemologies and Ontologies of Mainstream Life Coaching

After placing the coaching industry in its historical context, and after reviewing the available published literature of the major coaching institutes, the International Coach Federation and many published accounts, as well as the ethnographic data I will present in the following chapter, I have identified several underlying epistemologies and ontologies associated with what I have been calling mainstream life coaching. In addition to seeing these themes emerge over and over in the literature, I was also drawn to them when I began to study Chai Life International (the subject of the next chapter). I've selected these because they conflict with what I have seen in Judaism. I will cover these briefly here and in more detail in the next chapter when we will see how they generate tensions when placed within an Orthodox Jewish context. Although I will present these ideas as discrete units, they are each intertwined and mutually reinforcing. It should be clear the ways in which these

[157] Kripal, *Esalen*, 9.

attributes are associated with their origins in humanistic psychology and the human potential movement.

Narrative

First of all, life coaching suggests a particular narrative about the nature of the self, the problems it faces and the solutions it offers to overcome these problems. Embedded in this narrative is a particular theory of value neutrality and individual agency. The assumption is that we do not live our lives as authentic selves. This authentic self has been covered over by expectations set upon us by family and society. As a result we do not know our values and therefore do not live in accordance with them. Thus, we do not live up to our maximum potential and achieve the greatness of which we are capable. The solution is to look inward to discover one's own, unique, authentic values and live in accordance with those values. This is not an easy process, so a coach will help one discern his or her values, set a course, and be held accountable. In the following sections, I will try and unpack this narrative a bit more, using mainstream coaching resources to expand on these ideas.

The Nature of the Self

This narrative assumes a particular ontology about the nature of the self. This self is "creative, whole and resourceful." It has an authentic core that must be discovered. At the core of the person is the "higher self" or the "soul." This core is the "source of our purpose and of wisdom." This is one's spiritual intelligence. If one is in touch with this "higher self," one can feel its "gentle pull on us to 'get back on track'." There is even recent scientific research that is quoted to try and ground this idea in science, referencing what is called the "God spot" in the temporal lobes of the brain that "could be 'a crucial component of our

larger spiritual intelligence.'"[158] A coach should help a client "peel back the accumulated layers of identity and old roles to uncover the authentic person within."[159]

The coach is also an authentic self, and, in fact, being an exemplar of authenticity is one of the key roles of a coach and his or her effectiveness. The coach's "authenticity" is a model for the clients' increasing "authenticity" in their lives.[160] This why one of the required courses at Coach U, called "Coach's Personal Foundation," focuses on "the *inner you*: what is most easily understood and who you really are. The **who** contains your being, your source for all else and your place of personal awareness. All sustainable shifts and solutions begin at your **who**."[161] The coach is instructed in another manual to "be yourself, authentically, so that clients can feel the honesty and integrity of who you are." In this way, the coach is a model of "what risk taking looks like, what it means to be real and honest. When you are authentically yourself, and not playing the role of 'professional coach,' you create more relationship and more trust, and clients will swing out more in their own lives."[162]

Value Neutrality

Life coaching characterizes itself as staunchly value neutral (which is, of course, itself a value). The client sets his or her own agenda. The coach's only agenda is to help the client actualize their maximum potential. As one coaching manual states it, "In order to truly hold the client's agenda, the coach must get out of the way."[163] Only the client can dictate, through a process of dialogue with the coach, what to focus on and the best course of action to take.

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158 Whitmore, *Coaching for Performance*, 208–209.
159 Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*, 25.
160 Williams, *Becoming a Professional Life Coach*, 50.
161 Corbin, *Coach U's Becoming a Coach*, 83.
162 Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*, 79.
163 Ibid., 14.

The life coach is supposed to be agnostic to the path a client chooses to pursue, even if the coach doesn't agree with the client's choices. "The coach continues to care about her clients, their agendas, their health and growth, but not the road they take to get there, the speed of travel, or the detours they might make along the way— as long as they continue to move toward the results they want. Ultimately, coaching is not about what the coach delivers but about what clients create."[164]

This value neutrality also means that the coach does not impose his or her values onto the client. The key is to enable to client to discern his or her own values and to help the client live in accordance with those values. "Our particular set of values is unique to each of us," writes one prominent author and instructor. "Values are not chosen. They are intrinsic to you and are as distinctly yours as your thumbprint," writes another.[165] These values must remain separate and distinct from the coach's own values. "We may not expect others to do what we do or derive the same sense of self-worth from it," explains an instructor. "The coach must suspend judgment about the clients' values and help the clients identify and articulate their values. The values then become compass points— the true north— for directing the clients' life journey and choices."[166] One's values, as expected, are found and lived from the inside. "Values are the qualities of a life lived fully from the inside out," advises one manual. "There is nothing inherently virtuous in your client's values. What is to be admired is not the value itself but your client's ability to live that value fully in his life. When we honor our values and the choices we make in our lives, we feel an internal 'rightness'." Helping a client to define and live in concert with his or her values is critically important, according to mainstream life coaching, for if one does not live in accord with his

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164 Ibid., 19–20.
165 Ibid., 178–180.
166 Williams, *Becoming a Professional Life Coach*, 212.

or her values, the client will feel a lack of harmony and a sense of dissonance that could lead to psychological and physical issues.[167]

Perennialism

Related to this value neutrality is an underlying perennialism inherent in mainstream coaching. Coaches are not supposed to care which religion, if any, a client chooses, but "spirituality" is considered an important component of any life. Coach U, for example, offers a course on *Spiritual Path.* They define spirituality as "the notion that we are all one, connected somehow with every other human being, yet distinct in our own gifts, views, direction and choices." They go on to claim "everybody has their own unique version of spirituality and has the ability to develop their spirituality by conscious effort."[168]

The founders of Coaches Training Institute argue that "spirit is a key element to any "whole" person. This "spirit dimension" influences the choices people make. Although this "spirit" has "many different names and different expressions," at the core, it is the same for everyone. "It is the sense of living according to values or a calling or a power greater than oneself," they explain. "Sometimes it is intuition, a gut feeling or a conviction that guides our lives. It is a spirit dimension that transcends this one decision; in fact, we know it is spirit because it feels transcendent."[169]

Embedded in this perennialism is an assumption that religion and spirituality are two separate *sui generis* categories. Peter Hyson states this dichotomy most emphatically in his recent book *Coaching with Meaning and Spirituality*.

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[167] Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*, 121–122.
[168] Corbin, *Coach U's Becoming a Coach*, 87.
[169] Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl, *Co-Active Coaching: Changing Business, Transforming Lives*, 5.

> Let me be clear at the outset (and repeat with frequency): spirituality is not the same as religion. It is perfectly possible to have spirituality without religion -though arguably more difficult to have religion without spirituality. At the risk of initially over-simplifying in the cause of brevity: spirituality is 'an innate need to connect to something larger than ourselves'; religion is one of the ways that people may express that externally and organisationally.[170]

This is a common claim within life coaching and serves to extend the bifurcation of the sacred that was so important to many of the leaders of the humanistic psychology and the human potential movement.

Agency and Attraction

The idea of an autonomous authentic higher self also implies a particular theory of agency. Coaching is about the client taking responsibility and the coach holding the client accountable. The client is the only one capable of making the changes in his or her life that are necessary to live in accordance with his or her values and unleash the higher self. One component of this theory of agency is a belief in the Law of Attraction. In addition to roots in humanistic psychology, the Law of Attraction also emerged as an important element of the New Thought movement of the late nineteenth century.[171] The important popularizer and systematizer of life coaching, Thomas Leonard was a big believer in the Law of Attraction, authoring a best-selling book on the topic entitled *The 28 Laws of Attraction: Stop Chasing Success and Let It Chase You.*[172] Both Coach U and Coachville offer programs on Attraction, which teaches "Attraction is about being whole and present, so you effortlessly draw to you what you want in life, versus having to sell, seduce or promote yourself. You will come to fully understand the principles of attraction, and learn what is required to

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[170] Hyson, *Coaching with Meaning and Spirituality*, 5.
[171] Horowitz, *One Simple Idea.*
[172] Leonard, *The 28 Laws of Attraction.*

become irresistibly attractive, which will get you more of what you want and less of what you don't want in your life." By being "attractive" one can manifest one's best life.

Another popular life coaching author and trainer explains the law of attraction in this way:

> One of those laws is the law of attraction. Through this law, living things attract what they most need for their existence at any given time, based on what they are communicating. How it works, very simplified, is that everything in the universe is in a constant state of movement, of vibration. The impulses communicated by this vibration draw other moving, vibrating things that match in some way the impulses that are emitted. People and other living things resonate with one another. We are all composed of electrical and cellular impulses, and we resonate with what is similar to our being or what our thoughts are holding. You might say that the vibrations attract similar vibrations, much as a logical person often is drawn to other logical people or an emotional person often is drawn to other emotional people. We even use language that reflects the physics of this phenomenon— we say that two people are on the same wavelength. As coaches, we can harness the law of attraction to assist clients in examining and refining their intentions.[173]

This concept of agency locates full responsibility for one's life within the autonomous self.

These unexamined epistemologies and ontologies—the underlying narrative, life's problems and their solution, the nature of the self, value-neutrality, perennialism, and agency—all reflect an unexamined "religion of no religion" embedded within mainstream life coaching. This religious undercurrent is so unexamined that Peter Hyson wrote his book *Coaching with Meaning and Spirituality* to fill what he believed was a significant lacuna in resources to help coaches integrate these concepts into their practice. The religious nature of coaching, however, becomes even more apparent when they are brought into sharp relief when mainstream life coaching comes in direct contact with an Orthodox Jewish environment. In the "Spiritual Illusion: Constructive Steps Toward Rectification and Redescription," Jonathan Herman argues that many of the "marks of spirituality"—

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[173] Williams, *Becoming a Professional Life Coach*, 264.

individualism, interiority, privacy, and non-dogmatic progressivism—are really no more than "a projection of modern, western, cosmopolitan, religiously liberal values."[174] Spirituality is not a discrete aspect of nor distinct from religion. It is, more often than not, simply those aspects of religion that its proponents esteem.[175] This kind of spirituality exists within mainstream life coaching, and it becomes very apparent when one tries to take mainstream life coaching and fuse it with another religious culture that does not share all of the same underlying religiously liberal values.

[174] Herman, "The Spiritual Illusion: Constructive Steps Toward Rectification and Redescription," 13.
[175] Ibid., 8–9.

Chapter 2: Psychology as Cosmology: The Difficulty of Integrating Life Coaching into Chabad

On March 26 and 27, 2012, I participated in the first Chai Coaches Training program of Chai Life International, a Jewish life coaching training and services organization affiliated with the Chabad Lubavitch Hasidic movement. Five Chabad rabbis and five "rebbetzins" (wives of rabbis) from around the United States took part in the training (of the ten, only one couple participated). These ten were to be the first batch of Chai Life coaches, trained to provide telephone- and internet-based life coaching services to Jews from around the country. Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman, a co-founder of Chai Life International, opened the session by explaining why he launched Chai Life. "I have been bothered by a fundamental question in the world of *shluchus* [outreach] for many years," he explained. "And that question is we have so much to offer and we know that we carry with us a profound truth, and we have a lot of people participating [in our programs] but we don't have a lot of people whose lives are transformed….They've been impacted, people have been touched, but transformed? We do not have that kind of transformation taking place."

Schusterman lamented that most of their outreach efforts miss the mark. They come in contact with a lot of people and offer a wide variety of services, but these interactions rarely engender the kinds of Jewish transformation that the Chabad Rebbe sent them into the world to try and achieve. "It's almost like we are trying to market our product, but we are not actually marketing our product, we're marketing something else," he complained. "We're trying to sell this ultimate product, but we're selling everything else but the product with the hope that maybe somebody will be inspired by what we're selling, and they'll get inspired to buy the product. Now I'm not going to sit here and say that Chai Life is the answer to that

question. The *big* question. But what it is the answer to is that anybody that buys into Chai Life is buying into our product. It's not a by-product to an ultimate destination; it *is* the product." Here Shusterman is equating life coaching with Chabad *hasidus*. "What is the product?" he asks. "The product is Jews who are connected, who have a conscious relationship with God that impacts them in their day-to-day life, in their mundane life, in their mitzvah observance, and their Torah study. That's the ultimate product." This can take many forms, he allows, but they are all connected with a more religiously observant Jewish lifestyle. "For one person," he explains, "it looks like a completely *shomer Shabbos* [Shabbat observant], *shomer kashrus* [kosher observant] Jew, for another person it's somebody who puts on *tefllin* [phylacteries], for another person it's somebody who thinks about God in the workplace, but it's a consciousness, a conscious relationship with God. So over the years I've been bothered by this question, I've struggled with it, and [co-founder] Ben [Pargman] and I had the opportunity to sit down about a year ago and begin a conversation about this. I didn't really know where the conversation was going to go…but here we are." In short, after fifteen years of outreach in Atlanta, Rabbi Schusterman decided that life coaching is a key component to transforming the Jewish people and the world. Life coaching is "what *chasidius* [Hasidic teachings] is all about," he claims.

Life coaching techniques are viewed by the founders of Chai Life as a value-neutral technology—like the telephone, television or internet—simply to be appropriated and integrated with Jewish beliefs and practices. For example, within the Chai Coach training materials it states, "The Rebbe advocated the use of new technology to unite the world and make it more fertile ground for a unified spiritual life. Coaching is a 'tool'—like the phone, the internet, or the printing press—it is not the end in itself. It does not 'provide content'"[176]

[176] Pargman and Schusterman, *Chai Coach Training Manual.*

As a value-neutral technology, it can be appropriated, it believes, like other technologies, and be placed in service to the Chabad mission. Chabad has appropriated other technologies to great effect in the past.[177] Schusterman further articulates the way life coaching technology can be used in the service to the Chabad mission on his website, "Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman's Practical Tools for Your Shlichus," geared to Chabad emissaries, in part to help recruit rabbis and rebbetzins as coaches and as referral sources for clients. In the "Practical Tools" section of the website, Schusterman reveals the way life coaching can be appropriated for their mission as an outreach tool. He explains, although "Chai Coaching provides the tools and techniques, to help people deal with their mundane," it can ultimately lead the client to a more Torah observant lifestyle. He argues, "Fix the weight problem, they'll show up at your Purim party. Fix the financial problem, they'll say yes to your Capital Campaign. Fix the relationship problem, they'll show up for Shabbis [sic] – with their family. Yes, it can be that simple. And life coaching can be the tool that gets the job done."[178] In another section of the same website, he argues,

> Life coaching is currently offered from numerous places – including Self Help and Personal Development Gurus like Tony Robbins, T Harve Ecker, and hundreds of others. And your audience is going to these sources outside of our community for this service. We are missing out on this opportunity to serve our audience, and share with them the wisdom of the Rebbe and what Judaism has to say about the very same problems they are running elsewhere to get help with. It's not right. It's a wasted opportunity – right here under our noses and Chai Life Coaching fixes that.[179]

Yet, as I argued in the last chapter, life coaching has its own embedded ideologies and sets of practices that carry particular conceptions of the moral good, agency and ontologies. Life coaching has its roots in humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, and imported forms of Eastern spirituality. These systems of thought and practice have been

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177 Shandler, *Jews, God, and Videotape.*
178 "Chai Life Opportunity on Myshlichuscoach.org."
179 Ibid.

institutionalized in varying degrees over time into life coaching. As a competing system of beliefs and practices, life coaching can run counter to the beliefs and practices of the Jewish institutions, coaches and individuals trying to implement them. These conflicts require conscious and unconscious reconciliation and compromise that affect the coaches, clients, and institutions in complex, subtle, and powerful ways.

In this chapter I will provide ethnographic evidence of Chai Life International to illustrate how these conflicts can occur when they are adapted to a non-secular, non-liberal context. As in the last chapter I will focus on issues of value-neutrality and agency, which will also deal with issues of the nature of the self and perennialism. Most of the ethnographic data I present in this chapter will come from my participation in the Chai Coaches Training, which occurred over two full days, because this was when the two different religious cultures—Chabad and mainstream life coaching—were most overtly in contact. My general impressions and conclusions are drawn, however, from my overall research with Chai Life, which took place over more than a year, between the coaches training in the spring of 2012 and the time that it was obvious that the organization was not going to actively pursue its mission any longer in the spring of 2013. During this time, I met with the founders individually or together twenty times to participate in Chai Life planning and strategy sessions and to conduct interviews with them. I also traveled with them to three venues in the northeastern United States over a three-day period to attend three "Breakthrough" events at Chabad Houses, designed to raise awareness about Chai Life and to sign up clients. I also conducted extensive unstructured interviews with seven Chai coaches and five clients, as well as a two-hour interview with coach trainer Carl Gould, in his offices in New Jersey.

Chai Life is an excellent case study for understanding the embedded spiritualties of life coaching because it self-consciously tried to merge the world of personal development

and life coaching, with only minor alterations into a Chabad environment. This reflects the makeup of Chai Life's founders. One of the founders, Benjamin Pargman, comes out of the personal development industry and the other founder, Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman, is a Chabad *shaliach*, or emissary from the Rebbe. Pargman and Schusterman launched Chai Life in mid-2011 to train Chabad rabbis and rebbetzins as life coaches and to market its coaches' services to the general public. Before founding Chai Life, Pargman spent many years in the corporate world. He first practiced law at a large Atlanta law firm and then launched a real estate investment company. Through his real estate endeavors Pargman became a teacher and lecturer within the national real estate investment community, and in an effort to help audiences obtain financial and personal success Pargman developed coaching programs and gained experience within the information marketing and personal development industries.[180] Pargman traveled the country speaking to ballrooms filled with eager investors hoping to make a significant amount of money buying and selling real estate. He sold personal development tools and coaching services to enable these individuals to achieve their dreams of financial success. Further, Pargman became an expert in the business models and marketing strategies of the personal development industry, of which life coaching is a part.

Pargman says he and his wife spent many years exploring the self-help shelves for guidance on how to live their lives. They read many books by personal development gurus, such as Anthony Robbins, Deepak Chopra, Suzie Ormond and Wayne Dyer, attended conferences and retreats, and utilized life coaching. While they felt like these programs were exceptionally beneficial, according to Pargman, "he continually noted that 'the content' being offered by personal development and life coaching programs was vastly similar to what he pulled out of Torah study and conversations with [Chai Life] co-founder Rabbi Eliyahu

[180] "Co-Founders – My Chai Life!"

Schusterman." Based on his own professional and personal experiences with the personal development world and Judaism, he decided to try and synthesize these two worlds into Chai Life.[181]

Rabbi Eliyahu Schusterman is Head Rabbi of Chabad Intown of Atlanta, Georgia. Although not a synagogue in the traditional sense, Chabad Intown provides many of the functions and services of a synagogue, such a religious school education; daily, Shabbat, and High Holy Day prayer services, adult education programs; and social services. In addition to traditional rabbinic credentials and trainings, Rabbi Schusterman has been a student of business-coaching programs that played a role in helping him develop Chabad Intown into what he considers "a thriving center of Jewish life and learning in a short period of time." According to Schusterman, he has counseled and coached hundreds of individuals with their own issues, problems, and opportunities, "finding answers, insight and wisdom in our rich Jewish tradition."[182] Schusterman was motivated to launch Chai Life because he felt he was not "transforming" enough people through his work at Chabad.

Schusterman was lamenting to Pargman about two issues he was facing and wanting to solve. The first was he felt he, and his fellow Chabad *shluchim*, were not being as effective in achieving the Rebbe's mission as they could be. On a surface level this mission is to bring more Jews to the practice of Orthodox Judaism. On a deeper and more important level, this is in service to the larger mission of "hastening the coming of the moshiach," the messiah. Schusterman's second issue was he saw many hundreds of newly ordained, young Chabad rabbis emerging from yeshivas with no mission-related employment opportunities. Through the efforts of the Chabad Rebbe and his institutional successors, Chabad has been very successful at filling the world with its emissaries. In very practical terms, there were simply

[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.

fewer and fewer places these rabbis could go to start their own Chabad House, or find employment working within an existing Chabad House. Schusterman was looking for a way to both advance the mission of the Rebbe and employ these young rabbis and their wives.

After this conversation, it struck Pargman one night that they could adapt the personal development world of life coaching for Chabad. As Pargman would later argue in a presentation on the idea he delivered to Schusterman, ninety percent of the individuals Chabad is trying to reach are turning to "outside gurus" for their personal development advice on issues such as money, relationship, health, and even spiritual matters. By providing Jewish life coaching, they could reach the "90%." Chabad could use the life coaching opportunity to expose these secular Jews to Torah, mitzvahs and God, as Pargman explained in his presentation, by way of two examples:

- The 90% isn't looking for a class on 'how to put on tefilin'
- They're looking for 'Yoga Retreats', 'Health Retreats', and 'Health Seminars'
- Where . . . the agenda could include the meditation, acupuncture, and disciplinary health benefits of tefilin
- You just reached the 90%"

Or in another example,

- The 90% isn't looking for a class on the Mikvah
- They're looking for help with 'Relationship, Family, and Parenting'
- Where . . . the agenda includes an introduction to the Purity Laws
- You just reached the 90%

By launching a Jewish life coaching program—hiring and training Chabad rabbis and rebbitzins and marketing them to the larger, unaffiliated Jewish public—Pargman reasoned,

they could solve both of Schusterman's pressing concerns.[183] As Pargman also noted in his presentation, the coaching model fits nicely with the Rebbe's general penchant to make Jewish wisdom applicable to everyday life. The Rebbe would end almost every lecture by rhetorically asking how what he had just taught could be used for practical benefit, and he would go on to provide the answers. Schusterman loved Pargman's idea, having used a coach himself in previous situations. After working through many details, they launched Chai Life in 2011 with a training program for a small beta group of coaches, with the following vision: "To use the modern tools of Life Coaching infused with Jewish wisdom to help Jews address their daily challenges, obstacles, and opportunities and by 'removing the fog' of the daily concerns and distractions create opportunities for Clients to explore and develop their Judaism, their relationship with G-d, and their capacity to elevate the mundane of the lower world and make it holy."[184]

Training Chai Coaches

From a training perspective the plan was simply to train Chabad rabbis and rebbitzins to be life coaches using "secular" life coaching practices, or what I have called "mainstream life coaching" methodologies. As a value-neutral technology, they reasoned, this should not engender any significant problems. Of course, there would need to be some adaptation. For example, they decided from the start that a Chai Life coach would not be allowed to suggest a mitzvah as a solution to a client's issue until at least the third coaching session, and even then, with caution.

Pargman and Schusterman hired Carl Gould to help them design and implement Chai Life and to train the coaches. Gould is a mainstream life coach and trainer. According

[183] Pargman, "Chai Life: Personal Development Through a Life Elevated."
[184] Pargman and Schusterman, *Chai Coach Training Manual*, 3.

to Gould, he has trained over 6,000 coaches in thirty-five countries. Gould previously worked for the Tony Robbins organization as a coach and a trainer and was, in that capacity, Pargman's personal coach for many years. After he left the Robbins organization, Gould started his own executive coaching practice and training company. He now has a network of coaches affiliated with him in over ninety offices throughout the world. Pargman turned to Gould when he launched his successful real estate coaching business, and he turned to him again to launch Chai Life. Gould is not Jewish and had previously had no interactions with Chabad before this engagement. He was raised Catholic, but appears to have only a limited involvement in the religion at this stage of his life.

When I first sat down at the Chai Coaches training, I knew almost nothing about "mainstream life coaching." I was still early in the process of trying to figure out my dissertation topic, and simply knew I wanted to explore some arena that merged Judaism with psychology. I did not know what to expect. What struck me most during the training, however, was how often there seemed to be conflicts between what the trainer was trying to teach and the beliefs of the rabbis and rebbetizns being trained. These continued to create delays, as the training went off onto philosophical and theological tangents and discussions about these topics. These disagreements centered primarily on the professed value-neutrality of life coaching and the implied model of agency it employs. I argue that these problems arose because life coaching was being appropriated a value-neutral technology, while it has unspoken and unmarked elements of religious belief and practice that are embedded within it, as discussed in the previous chapter. The Chabad concerns were voiced in terms of religion and religious texts, while the beliefs of life coaching were spoken of in terms of secular authorities, such as science.

The Morality of Neutrality

The first challenge arose with the conflicting ideas of the ultimate moral good. The Chabad rabbis and rebbetizins came to life coaching with an agenda, a specific set of values in which they believe and a mission they were pursuing. As encapsulated in Chai Life's vision statement, Chai Life coaches want "to remove the 'fog' of daily life in order to help individuals come closer to Judaism and to God." This agenda is different than the agenda of mainstream life coaching, which is to have no agenda or remain value neutral with respect to the client. This value neutrality is itself an agenda based upon its own underlying value system, including notions of the autonomy of the self and perennialism. Trying to merge these two agendas proved to be difficult, at least on a theoretical basis.

The founders of Chai Life recognized the potential for this conflict, as the anticipation of it is integrated into their Principles of Chai Coaching in the training materials, which attempts to negotiate between these two competing agenda. None of these accommodations to mainstream life coaching philosophy, as written in these Principles, would be particularly remarkable—one would expect accommodations to be made for this environment—if it were not for the fact that both Chabad and life coaches perceive life coaching as a value-neutral, secular technology.

The second Principle states, "A Coach is a strategic partner committed to the achieving the client's result (provided the result is at least 'neutral')" [SIC]. First, this principle modifies the strictly value-neutral ethos of life coaching and inserts that the client's goals must at least be "neutral." In other words, a Chai Coach would not be expected to help a client achieve a goal that would be considered a sin. Furthermore, this principle goes on to state, "By helping the client reach their results, we bring them closer to their ability to connect to Mitzvos." So in this formulation, coaching is designed to help the client practice

Judaism. The principle concludes by trying to reconcile coaching with core Chabad cosmology. Coaching is "a tool to tame the animal soul and free the G-dly soul," it asserts. As an example, it offers, "Make a plan to deal with your financial issues and handle it so they don't occupy so much of your time and mental space."[185]

In the same way that mainstream coaching is clear to try and differentiate a coach from a therapist, consultant or mentor, Chai Life distinguishes a coach from a rabbi, as well. While a rabbi may understandably be used to giving direct advice or being overt with how someone coming to them should solve his or her problems, this is not the role of a coach. The fourth of the Chai Coaching Principles states, "The Role of the Coach is different from the role of Rabbi. Coaching is about Listening and asking Questions, not giving answers or advice." In order to legislate this, the fifth principle states, "Mitzvos may be offered after the 3rd session and only when the Client opens the door either by explicitly asking or after enough rapport has been established and the Coach asks permission to offer a specific action or suggestion" [SIC]. To motivate the Chai Coach, it goes on to state that this should not be an issue, because they again assert at the end, "Remove the fog, you'll get to the Mitzva." Although the Chai Life founders anticipated many of these issues, their accommodations did not resolve the conflicts, which continued to emerge throughout the training.

After Pargman and Schusterman opened up the training, explaining the origins and purpose of Chai Life International, they turned it over to Gould to start the training. He explained that he believed that the combination of life coaching and Judaism is a brilliant idea, as long as they remember to remain neutral. Explaining how life coaching would be pressed into the service of Chabad's mission, creating a life coaching niche, he explained, "How you create a niche is simply to take the how and match it to the what. You're

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[185] Ibid., 4.

thousands of years of wisdom and tradition is the what; what should I be doing, but what we are going to focus on in the next two days is the how. How do you deliver that in such a way that someone actually wants to take it on. They are in a secular world for a reason." Utilizing the utilitarian, economic language of life coaching, he explained that they could not "sell" Judaism, but would have to present it in such a way that the client would want to "buy" it. "We can't sell them on Chai Life; they have to buy it, and that's a huge distinction. If we tell them, we own it; if they tell us, they own it. Present it in such a way that they grab onto it….That's the ultimate in coaching that you present something in such a way that they take it on as their own and come back to you and say here is what I am going to take on." In order to support his claim, he brought in psychological research. He told them that in "Harnessing the Science of Persuasion" a Harvard Business Review article written by Robert Cialdini, he found that ninety-two percent of people are likely to follow through on their voluntary commitments.[186] By allowing the client to make the decision for themselves, the client is much more likely to follow through on the commitment.

Gould explained that although the ultimate purpose of Chai Life would be to advance the Chabad mission (i.e., bringing Jews closer to the performance of *mitzvoth*, the study of Torah, and being closer to God), they could not push this agenda as a coach. The clients cannot think that you are trying to "convert" them, he warned. Explaining how they must approach their clients, he also embedded a traditional, mainstream model of the self as autonomous and capable.

> How do I literally put my agenda aside and be present for the other person and plant some seeds with them that if I believe that the client is resourceful, they are not broken they don't need to be fixed, and if I give them some seeds, with their natural intelligence and creativity, they will plant those seeds. The more you hand them the seeds and hand them the dirt and hand them the water, the more they put it together and start farming.

[186] Cialdini, "Harnessing the Science of Persuasion."

One of the rebbetzins said, "We also have to be honest with them…" And then she changed this into a question on further consideration, "Or do we have to be honest with them about where are we going with this," she continued, "or do we really have any agenda at all, just help them get better at what they're doing, regardless of how far they are going to go with that?" Gould replied quickly and emphatically, "The second one." At all costs, one must remain value-neutral.

Gould then made the reasonable assertion that the clients they would have would know that they are working with life coaches who are Chabad rabbis and rebbetzins. They have come to a Chai Coach, not a secular life coach. "Chai Life combines three thousand years of Jewish wisdom, study and debate and modern life coaching, he argued. They know who they are getting as their coaches." One of the rabbis challenged, "They know who we are, but they don't know what we think or what the Torah says on each topic." Reinforcing the core belief of mainstream life coaching, Gould replied, "What you think about each topic, unless they ask, to some degree is irrelevant." The most effective thing they could do, he argued, to ultimately convince clients to want to be more connected with Judaism was "by being your best authentic self."

Trying to clarify the rules of life coaching more, one of the rebbetizns asked, "Even not in Judaism, how much of your opinion are you supposed to give? If somebody wants to do something and you think they should definitely not do it?" Gould replied, "In pure life coaching your opinion never enters…never enters, because you are just a conduit for the client to process on their own. Your opinion will pollute or cloud that process….I would advise this group to put in as little of your opinion as possible."

In a creative move, to drive home his point, Gould gave them an example of what he was trying to teach them. He asked, "What if I told you I had a Catholic priest outside right now." Knowing where he was going with this, the group began to laugh. "I'm going to bring him in here now," he continued, "so he can explain to you why Catholicism is the truth and why it's so much better than Judaism, and why you should all convert to Catholicism. How do you think you would react to that?" The rabbis and rebbetzins immediately saw his point. There was nothing he or the priest could say that would convince them to give up Judaism. They began to understand the logic behind his assertions. On a utilitarian level they could see why it might be better to allow their coachees to ask rather than tell them, to let them buy rather than sell. While this was beginning to make sense from a practical perspective, they continued to struggle with the ramifications of value-neutrality from an ethical perspective.

Struggling to understand what it means to be value-neutral in the spirit of mainstream life coaching, one of the women asked, "What if what they are asking is directly against our beliefs? Say a Jewish girl wanted to marry a non-Jewish man?" According to Orthodox interpretations of Jewish law, Jews are not allowed to marry non-Jews. Remaining committed to his beliefs, Gould replied, "Our job is to help them make the best choice for themselves." The woman pushed the question farther, looking for a way out of a moral dilemma. She asked, "Is there a way to say, I can't be a fair coach to you in this situation because I have a personal bias, not bias, an agenda?" Not letting her off so easily, Gould replied, "You can just explore all of the implications and ramifications of [her marrying a non-Jew], and they may decide on their own that …is marrying this person going to get me to where I think I want to go in my life?"

At this point, Rabbi Schusterman interjected himself into the conversation to try and defuse the situation. He could tell the training was getting off track and there could be real conflicts with this approach for the rabbis and rebbetzins. He tried to remind them of the value of using secular life coaching to achieve their mission. At some level, they had to have faith that this is a way to reach the people they have been unable to reach thus far. He explained that most of the Jews they come into contact with are those who have already chosen for one reason or another to increase their level of Torah learning or their practice of mitzvahs. "What we're doing here is taking it from the other angle," he explained. "We are going to people in their space, in their mundane space. Not in their mitzvah space, not in their Torah space, in their mundane space, and they are opening it up to us to say, I'm here, I want you to tell me without being too frontal." Schusterman claimed that these clients are reaching out to them as life coaches because they are longing for a deeper relationship with God, even if they do not know it or say it. Speaking of the mundane issues they are likely to come to them with, such as financial, relationship and health, he claimed they are asking, "how this can be enhanced, how this speaks to a deeper relationship with God, how can I take my financial life, my health life, my relationship life, how can I bring God into that experience. Now they are not asking you for that in those words, they are asking for advice and guidance on how I can manage my life." These life coaching encounters are the opening that allows for all else, he argued. "When it's coming from you, a Hasid, a religious Jew, that breaks their shell to be open to everything else that's Jewish as well."

He gave some logic for his reasoning, quoting the Rebbe, and then referenced back to the Chai Coaching Principles, and reminding those gathered that the Rebbe wanted them to use technology to accomplish their mission. "This is very much in line with what the Rebbe wanted from us to deliver on our *shlichus*," he argued. But he was also very clear with

them about what is their ultimate goal. "Let's not confuse the issues, however, the end goal is not the technology or the tool but the objective which is to create inspired Jews, passionate Jews, so on; but if a tool is available to make that happen, let's use that, and let's maximize on that to do that."

By using the technology of coaching, they can accomplish this goal on two levels, Schusterman continued. "So much of life is preoccupied in the mundane world," he explained. By helping clients with their mundane issues, "coaching creates the space to ask the deeper questions." It simply frees up their minds to explore their spiritual life. Secondly, he reminds them that the Torah states, "You should know God in all of your ways." Through coaching, he insists, "work life becomes Godly life. Life should not be compartmentalized – work, health, relationships are all to serve *Hashem*. Coaching is not just a means to an end," he concluded. After this extended diversion, the training got back on track, although I had a sense that this conflict had not been fully resolved. All those present seemed to be trying in good faith to reconcile these competing conceptions of the ultimate moral good.

As we gathered together the next morning, the training session opened up on this issue of value-neutrality. Feeling concerned that this issue was still unresolved, Schusterman felt the need to clarify the issue further. He opened the day up by assuring them, "When you are working with a client your *shluchis* hasn't changed. You are still trying to uncover their *neshama* [soul], light their fire, and to the extent that they are going to grow with that, they are going to." Again by placing words into the fictional clients' mouths, he stated, "What they are saying to you is that you have six months [the term of the standard Chai Life coaching contract] to nurture my *neshama*. I'm giving you six months. That's what they are saying in not so many words."

A rebbetzin asked the direct question, "What if someone is coming as a client that wants to be coached on that relationship [i.e., marrying a non-Jew]? That is what they are bringing to the table." This question opened up another lengthy conversation that finally ended with the agreement that this issue had to be tabled for further conversation, with the organizers claiming that these situations would be exceedingly rare. Who would knowingly come to an Orthodox rabbi or rebbetzin to work on this kind of issue, they reasoned. A rabbi said, it may not be so unusual, because the moral issues they might deal with could not be so obvious. For example, an unemployed man who is being coached to help him find a job may come to the coach elated to have an interview with a company that will require him to work on Saturdays. The client could ask the coach to help prepare for the interview, not realizing that it would be against the coach's moral values to help the client obtain a job that required working on the Sabbath. The organizers decided to table this conversation for good, admitting that they may need to look to an outside Jewish legal authority to answer these issues as they come up in the future, despite the fact the men in this gathering were all ordained rabbis.

The purpose of presenting these debates is not to evaluate Chabad or to judge their approach. Despite the underlying agenda, I found the coaches to be genuinely excited about becoming life coaches and having the opportunity to help others with their "mundane" issues, whether or not it lead directly to them practicing more *mitzvoth* or doing more Torah study. Although, on the two occasions when this did occur, the coaches were overjoyed. As I mentioned earlier, it seems obvious that changes would need to be made to accommodate life coaching into an Orthodox Jewish environment, just as I am sure there are similar accommodations that are made when delivering evangelical Christian life coaching. The point I am making is less that Chabad has an overt agenda that needs to be considered, but

that mainstream life coaching also has an agenda that is seen as secular and not marked as religious because it is masked by an assumed American religious liberalism. In laymen's terms, the conflict in the agendas can be summed up in a statement made by one of the rabbis after hearing Schusterman's strained attempts at reconciling the competing agendas. "I hear from you a lightly more *yiddishkeit* driven approach to the coaching than what I was hearing from Carl and Ben. From them I get the purpose is life coaching and from you I get the purpose is *l'shaim shmayim* ['for the sake of Heaven'] Shusterman, trying again to reconcile these agendas, replied, "Yes, but the method is life coaching, and it has to remain life coaching. The words you use though will be peppered with *yiddishkeit*. That's what they are *really* asking for. They are not going to necessarily say that. That's what you have to believe."

In a follow up conversation with Gould, he admitted to me that Chai Life's commitment to an agenda concerned him. He again explained to me that a coach must be value-neutral to be effective. "The coach is supposed to at least park their agenda to the side," he explained. "It's not about them at all. The focus is on the client and what the client needs and wants during that session, and our job is to not only help them with what they want but also give them a bit of what they need, but present it in a way that the coachee chooses to take it on, not that it's handed to them." Although he thinks Chai Life is a tremendously good idea, he worried that the agenda could undermine its success. "It has to be careful…that it does not try to impose the Judaic agenda on the coachee….Now, if the coachee asks, then you have permission, and you can tell them whatever you want to tell them if you're the coach. But it just can't come to the party with the agenda. If [Chai Life] allows the client to ask, then this thing's a home run. It'll be unstoppable. If it gets the reputation of just being another form of preachy or being lecturey or prescriptive, then it won't survive as a coaching program."

Gould returned to the utilitarian model upon which much of life coaching depends. He explained to me, in more direct terms than he used during the training, that Judaism is one of many options in the market. If Judaism is the best, then it will succeed and the clients will embrace it. "In the end, life coaching is designed to help the coachee make better choices. So I think if Judaism is confident enough that it is one of the better choices, not just for the rabbis that are there, but for the average Jew, if you will. If they believe their product is strong enough that it is one of the better life choices for Jews to make when they're given the choice, then that box could be almost wide open." Although seemingly purely utilitarian—pick the best religion for you, or no religion—there is also a kind of latent perennialism at the heart of Gould's assertions. He explained to me how life coaching understands God. "In the world of life coaching, they refer to something called a universe, not necessarily a god. Although, I think we're wrapping the same thing in a different package." He later explained to me that this is an energy that permeates the universe. This understanding of the universe directly relates to Gould's conception of individual agency, which conflicts significantly with Chabad cosmology.

Agency and the Autonomy of the Self

The issue of agency came up during the second day of the Chai Coaches training and led to another extended tangential discussion. It began when one of the women asked Gould if he thought their job as coaches should be to enable the client to stop needing a coach. In other words, should they aim to work themselves out of a job. Gould replied that every stage of someone's life requires different tools, and a coach can continually enable someone to achieve greater and greater goals by helping the client discover new tools and capacities. For example, he said, the tools that are required to become a millionaire are different than the

tools that are required to become a billionaire. He then clarified by emphasizing the individual's role in the circumstances of his or her life at any given moment. "Everything you have in your life right now is because you've asked for it," he explained. "You may not like what you have. You might not totally want what you have, but everything you have in your life today, you've asked for it. You've designed it. You have put yourself here. There are no coincidences, you have designed your life…." Although the purpose of this clarification was seemingly in support of his claim that one can always use a coach, this explanation set the stage for a much broader conversation about agency that later stopped the training dead in its tracks for an extended period.

The issue emerged when Gould asked the group to write down three things that they would want to be coached on at this moment in their life. One key element of the training for that day was for Gould to model a coaching session. After they all wrote down what they needed coaching on, he would then ask for a volunteer and publicly coach the volunteer through one of these concrete issues. "Write down three things that you want to be coached on," he instructed. "Three things that are not perfect yet. If you can't think of anything to write down, then write down 'lying to oneself,'" he said facetiously. One of the women, who seemed to be confused, asked, "Yeah, but what if I don't need to be coached on it? If something is not perfect that's what God has to do, so I'm not ready to be coached on it. It's His business." Many of the people seemed to agree with her assertion, which elicited a question about Gould's previous comment. "You mentioned before that 'everything in your life right now is what you wanted,'" a rabbi said. "'Everything in your life you have asked for. You might not want what you have, but you have asked for it.' I want to ask a theological question. Where does God come into that?" "Where does God come into that?" Gould repeated, seeming a little caught off guard at the question. "It sounds like you are saying that

each person is really responsible for their own life," the rabbi went on, "and is not just responsible, but is responsible for the effectiveness and success of their life…"

A rebbitzin chimed in to continue the thought and to argue for God's agency.

> When I listened to your webinar [in which the trainees had participated in advance of the in-person training] I actually felt uncomfortable because you said you have to hold the thought of empathy and accountability at the same time. If you are overweight, it took you years…to get where you are, and I agree with a lot of things like that...a bad relationship, a lot of that could be your fault, but then there are issues like someone has cancer; it's not their fault, *has v'shalom*, as we say, 'God forbid.'…We believe in the concept of Divine providence. God orchestrates everything in life, and the issue is what do you do with it, and that's really the responsibility. But for me personally to say that you got yourself there to begin with, I don't believe that it's true that every single thing you got yourself there to begin with.

Gould replied that they had made a fair point, but, he asked, "What if cancer was a choice? What if someone made decisions in their life that made them susceptible to it?" At this point, a respectful conversation ensued whereby Gould and the participants tried to gain some clarification and agreement on this issue. The rabbis and rbbetzins could agree that one could likely do some things to make them susceptible to cancer, but that hardly made cancer someone's personal responsibility, only God could do that. Gould then asserted, "We as human beings have the ability every day to choose our destiny, to choose our experience. In some ways your experience will determine your destiny."

At this point, Pargman intervened to try and bridge the gap between their understandings. He had anticipated this conflict. "I've been waiting for this moment to come up," he admitted. "I can try and make a bridge. *Hashem* has a master plan. We may not know what that is and that's pre-determined, but he gives us certain agencies and certain responsibilities and certain choices to operate within that plan. What Carl is saying, in my view of this, fits squarely within that context." The group seemed unconvinced. They were all very quiet as they considered his assertion that his explanation had reconciled the two

very different models of agency. In order to get a read on how his explanation solved the contradiction, he asked, "Survey says…??" and then after getting a lukewarm response, he concluded, "Unimpressed."

"Choosing cancer is not within our bucket. Choosing how to deal with it is," one participant chimed in. "We didn't choose natural disasters. We didn't choose tornadoes," said another, clearly disturbed by the implications of Gould's view. Undeterred, Gould replied, "I understand that, and if I move to Kansas or the Caribbean Islands, I don't have the right to complain about a hurricane that passes through, because I put myself in the path of a hurricane. That's all I'm saying. We put ourselves in the environment where things can or cannot happen." This seemed to be a compromise that everyone could agree on. It seemed to suggest that he agreed that people have agency and responsibility, but there are some situations beyond one's control.

After seeming to come to this understanding with each other, where the rabbis and rebbitzins believed that Gould had understood that there are situations where the individual does not have agency, the conversation seemed to be over. One of the rebbetzins, however, asked, "Does coaching have anything to say in a situation where there *really* is no choice?" Instead of giving an answer to what seemed like a legitimate question given where the conversation had ended, Gould replied, "What would be an example of that?" as if he was still completely at a loss to think of *any* situation where the individual would have no agency and responsibility.

He again tried to explain, "In the personal development world there is a belief that you are born with certain tendencies and susceptibilities. There are certain sciences that have shown that family history and genetics that ninety-five percent of all family disease and tendencies can be reversed and the other five percent can be managed quite well, so there

are sciences that would say that you can influence and improve whatever condition you've been handed." A rebbetzin finally replied, "We believe that too but it wasn't your choice to have heart disease." At this point, the conversation was tabled for another time, in order to stay on track in the training.

This exchange was, at the same time, frustrating and fascinating to witness, as it seemed so obvious that the two sides were working off of two very different conception of agency. In Chabad, God (and the Rebbe) is the primary agent. The individual also has agency, but on some level this agency is itself an illusion. In the world of coaching, the individual alone has agency. This idea of individual agency is based, in part, on the Law of Attraction discussed in the previous chapter.

In an interview with Gould several months after the training, we were discussing what he believed are the core ideas of life coaching. He was explaining the importance of self-awareness and coaching's belief that the client is "not broken, does not need to be fixed, and that they have within them everything they need to solve their own problems." They have within them "all of the intelligence needed to handle this on their own," which he said "conflict[s] a little bit with religion," because it is "man-centered," as opposed to looking to God. He went on to explain that

> In the life coaching world, there's a lot of what would be considered esoteric concepts that are out there, quantum physics and the belief in the vibration in your aura and all that. And there's enough around now, if you watch that movie 'What the Bleep Do We Know!?' That's a good movie. That explains some of it. Essentially, the life coaching world gives a lot of credence to energy, the transfer of energy between two people and between you and other objects….So there's a feeling in life coaching that if you align, if your energy is congruent, meaning what you say is what you believe, it's how you live your life, it's the action you take, and you're aligned with who you believe you are and how you identify yourself, you will have more self-awareness, you will be more resourceful, most powerful, and the most able to be at the cause of your experience, not at the effect.

This concept of agency is very different than that employed by Chabad, which grants God significant agency.

Conclusion

The ethnographic data that I have presented in this chapter supports the claims in the previous chapter that there is a religious belief system that undergirds the modern mainstream life coaching industry. By looking at the way in which the ideas and techniques of life coaching conflicted with the moral imperatives of the Chabad rabbis and rebbetzins gathered at the Chai Coach training program, we could see the underlying assumptions about the nature of the self, agency, and the morality of being value-neutral. Despite these issues, Chai Life, nonetheless, launched its programs to the marketplace, believing that these issues could be overcome. Again this faith in its ability to overcome these challenges is rooted in the fact that they do not consider these religious differences as much as challenges related to integrating a purely secular technology. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, and deserves a full treatment of its own, as Chai Life tried to roll out to the potential market, they quickly realized that they would need to figure out a logic behind the merger of modern life coaching with Chabad. In other words, for most people they were marketing to, it did not make any sense why they should turn to a Chabad life coach when trying to deal with such seemingly secular issues such as money, health or relationships. Why it made sense to attend a "Breakthrough" event at a Chabad House, which concluded with participants breaking a board with their hand to prove they could achieve their life's goals with the proper focus and sense of purpose brought by coaching. They needed to answer the question, if Judaism has three thousand years of wisdom to confer, why are they turning to the seemingly secular world of life coaching for its techniques. I am not suggesting that this

is the reason Chai Life ultimately did not succeed. The clients I spoke with were largely happy with their coaching, and the coaches were very enthusiastic about their training and were eager to continue coaching. In the end, however, due to a lack of demand, Chai Life International ceased operations. While Chai Life tried to overtly merge modern life coaching with Chabad with significant issues, the remaining chapters will present Chabad life coaching from a very different perspective.

Chapter 3: Cosmology as Psychology: Therapeutic Hermeneutics and Ritual Innovation

You are big enough to fail.

You can be sad but you can never not be happy.

You have to die in order to live.

--Three "Isms" from the Method for Self Mastery

While conducting contextual research for my project on Chai Life International, I came across Shimona Tzukernik's website, *The Kabbalah Coach*. Her site intrigued me, because of all of the Jewish life coaching sites I was able to find, hers was the most content rich and the most theologically grounded. In other words, the other sites,[187] seemed to offer traditional, secularized life coaching services within a Jewish context, rather than having the techniques and philosophies themselves based in the religious texts and practices of Judaism. While both are hybrid forms that reflect the exchange and integration of ideas from Judaism and the broader culture, Shimona's seemed to be more tightly blended. I learned that Shimona was based in Brooklyn, New York, and when I knew I was going to be in New York City to conduct research at the American Jewish Archives, I found Shimona on Facebook, messaged her about my project, and asked her if we could meet. She agreed, and in late August 2012 we met in her brownstone in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, just two blocks from 770 Eastern Parkway, the worldwide headquarters of the Chabad Lubavitch movement.

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[187] "The Kosher Coach Orthodox Jewish Life Coaching Coach"; "Orthodox Jewish Life Coaching- Frum Life Coach Women"; "Jewish Heritage Foundation - Life Coaching"; "Close To Torah » Jewish Life Coach"; "The Notorious R.A.V.: Jewish Life Coaching Is for NOW"; "Refuah Institute"; "My Chai Life! - Personal Development with Jewish Insight."

When I first walked into her door, Shimona was simply going to be context for my primary study on Chai Life. When I walked out of her door, however, I knew my project had dramatically changed. During our interview, I learned about her many years of doing private coaching with clients and the soon to be launched Method for Self Mastery course. She explained to me that she had recently concluded four ten-week trial runs for groups of eight participants each. She and the participants thought these trial runs were successful, and she was ready to do a full-scale launch in the coming months. I learned how she had become a *ba'alat teshuva* (literally "master of return," which means one who turns to an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle in the common vernacular); how she believed that the lessons she learned through Chabad had saved her life; and how she felt compelled to teach these lessons to others. Shimona came to Chabad and developed the theories and practices of the Method as a way to deal with her own psychological suffering. As she shared with me, "If I didn't have *hasidut*, I think that I might be insane. I can teach these techniques because I looked in the text for ways to help myself." Through her own process of suffering and healing, Shimona translated Chabad cosmology into a Hasidic psychology. Most importantly, while I sat speaking with Shimona on that first day, I didn't hear any of the tensions that seemed so prevalent within Chai Life. When I asked her about the institutions of mainstream life coaching, such as the Coaches Training Institute or the International Coach Federation, she said she had never heard of them. It seemed that instead of trying to adopt and adapt mainstream life coaching techniques into Chabad cosmology, Shimona had developed her own coaching system based on Chabad sources over a period of more than twenty years. As we will see, this system was also heavily influenced by Shimona's own experiences with many of the hallmarks of the human potential movement, such as Transcendental Meditation and yoga, as well as psychological resources. In the end, Shimona developed a version of Jewish

life coaching that is integrated much more tightly with the beliefs and practices of Chabad *hasidut* than Chai Life International. After our first interview I knew that I wanted to study what she was developing and after several follow-up conversations, she invited me to participate, as a researcher, in The Method for Self Mastery course.

Unbeknownst to me, Shimona had her own reasons for meeting with me on that first day. After many months of working together, Shimona shared with me why she originally agreed to meet with me and that she was reluctant to meet with me at first. She was simply too busy at the time, and could not imagine fitting one more meeting into her hectic schedule. Shimona is the primary breadwinner in her family, is the principal caregiver to her four children, and runs the domestic household, so her time is at a premium. She then began to worry about the fate of my Jewish soul, my *neshama*. Based on my initial correspondences, in which I simply described myself as a Ph.D. student at Emory University, she envisioned a young, single, wayward, Jewish student living alone in Atlanta. She wanted to be sure I married a Jewish woman. Perhaps, she could even find a nice girl for me, she thought. Because of this concern, she decided to make the time to meet with me. Little did she know that, at the time, I was forty-four years old, married with three children. Her concern over my *neshama*, however, while unnecessary, proved to be auspicious for me, because it enabled me to meet Shimona and dramatically change the trajectory of my project.

In this chapter, in order to illustrate the way in which Shimona developed the Method for Self Mastery based on her life history, I will provide a brief sketch of her life as she has narrated it to me, including the way in which she came to Chabad, became a life coach and, ultimately, developed the Method for Self Mastery. I will also use this chapter to describe the basic sacred narrative that underlies the Method, including its soteriology, ontology of the self, and agency. I will do this in part by describing one of the most

fundamental lessons of the Method, the Iffy-Sticky Self lesson. This description will not only give the reader a basic understanding of the underlying nature of the self posited by the Method and the soteriology, it endeavors to provide a feel for the experience of a lesson in the Method, including the pedagogical framework that Shimona uses to scaffold each lesson. show the fundamental sacred narrative that underlies the Method, including its soteriology, ontology of the self, and theory of agency.[188] These elements of the Method for Self Mastery are very different than mainstream life coaching.

From South Africa to Crown Heights

Shimona Tzukernik grew up in an upper-middle class Jewish family in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her maternal grandmother was born in South Africa, but the rest of her grandparents immigrated to South Africa between the two World Wars, escaping intense poverty and growing anti-semitism. The tragic history of the Holocaust weighs heavily on Shimona's family, especially her paternal grandmother, whose entire family, other than a sister, was killed in the Holocaust. Shimona remembers as "one of the deepest moments" of her life the time her grandmother shared with her why her grandmother wore false teeth. When she was in high school, Shimona would take the bus after school to her grandparents' home every Monday afternoon and wait there for her father to pick her up. She spent hours

[188] I think of sacred narratives in much the same way that Leszek Kołakowski uses the term myth. Shimona's process of translating Hasidic ideas and practices into a Hasidic psychology is a form of mythmaking, as defined by Kołakowski. In his book, *The Presence of Myth,* Kołakowski argues mythopoesis serves to transform a contingent and uncertain existence into a non-contingent one, enabling individuals "to avoid acceptance of a contingent world, which expends itself on each occasion in its impermanent state, which is what it is now and bears no reference to anything else" (5). Mythic consciousness, he argues, underlies every concept of truth, no matter how it is labeled (e.g., science, history, love, nature). Kołakowski's theory relies on an epistemological argument that claims there are no unmediated experiences—"we do not experience an object and the awareness of an object separately….there is no nonhistorical view of history; there is no truth which would be free from the conditions of its acquisition, which would not, in other words, be tied to the partial production by the species"(10-12). In other words, there is no way of stepping outside of our embodied perspective to ascertain some form of truth with a capital "T". Myth undergirds our sense of reality and gives meaning and direction to our lives, he argues. We are always in the "presence of myth" (Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth*).

each Monday talking with her grandmother, oftentimes about her grandparents' years in Russia and their early days in South Africa. One day, as Shimona was reminiscing with her grandmother, softly brushing and braiding her grandmother's hair, Shimona asked, "Bubbie, why don't you have any teeth?" Her grandmother explained that she was very unhappy during her child-bearing years. It was at the height of the atrocities taking place in Nazi Europe. Her family was suffering and dying in Europe and Russia. She did not want to bring children into that world. So each time she got pregnant, she attached a thin string to a tooth and attach the other end to the door. "Then," her grandmother explained to her, "I would climb up on the dining room table. I would take a ball or a heavy object, and I would throw it at the door. I was told it would yank out my tooth, and from the shock of it yanking out my tooth, I would abort the baby." "She wasn't that successful, thank God," Shimona adds at the conclusion of the story, "but she did lose most of her teeth." In the end she aborted six fetuses and had four children. Shimona's father was the second child. She describes her father as the "unseen child." His older brother was the first child, who gave his mother "solace in the face of so much loss." His younger sister was the first girl, and the youngest boy was the baby of the family. Each child had a special place in the family, it seems to Shimona, except her father. She also feels at some level her father felt this same sense of neglect in utero. He gestated in the womb of a woman who did not want to bring him into the world, and tried to abort him.

Despite Shimona's loving relationship with her grandmother, she describes her as an angry woman: angry about the Holocaust and the poverty in which she lived. Growing up in Russia her father had been a very wealthy furrier, but they lost everything when they came to South Africa. Her husband, Shimona's paternal grandfather, by contrast, grew up a peasant, living in a Polish *shtetl* in a one-room house, which they had to share on occasion with the

family horse. Shimona's grandmother turned much of her anger on her husband for being simple and poor. Growing up in this environment, in addition to the neglect, had a huge negative impact on her father.

Shimona describes her father as an incredibly gentle, generous and clever man. Yet, there was another side to her father. He was also a very angry man and fought constantly with Shimona. He verbally abused her, viciously, on many occasions. Her mother, on the other hand, was timid and weak, and did not protect Shimona from her father's abusiveness. Her father's "steel-like strength" and mother's "weakness" was a terrible combination, according to Shimona. "They fed into each other's weaknesses." Shimona's mother had "surrendered," so "I could not surrender." Shimona became very combative with her father and would not back down.

As an adolescent, Shimona endured tremendous psychological pain. She describes herself in her teen years as "too tall, too clever, dark hair, and curly hair. I haven't grown an inch since I was twelve, so I was this really tall lanky five foot seven inch twelve year old. It was very hard. I had this image of being really ugly." She called herself names and felt like she was "bad." She adopted her father's language and opinion of her to constantly berate herself. Eventually her depression and self-loathing led her to start cutting herself on her arms with a razor, thinking, "I am so unhappy I am in so much pain, and I do not know how to survive." Looking back she believes the physical pain was the only way out of experiencing the psychological pain.

Although Shimona was attending regular psychological counseling with a therapist, these sessions did not seem to have any effect. If anything, according to Shimona, they were making matters worse. She continued to struggle with what she describes as "existential questions," such as "what is the purpose of my life," "what is my identity," "how can I

simply survive." She turned to her mother with these questions, but her mother felt ill equipped to deal with her daughter's angst. Even though they did not live an observant Jewish lifestyle, when Shimona was fifteen, her mother suggested she seek answers to these questions from the head Chabad Rabbi of Johannesburg.

On her first visit, the Rabbi kept Shimona waiting for over three hours before he met with her. While she waited she perused the shelves of the library situated in the Chabad House. She settled on a book, *The Philosophy of Chabad* by Nissan Mindel, and sat for the bulk of the three hours reading the book. Although her meeting with the rabbi was brief, as he suggested it would be more appropriate for her to meet with his wife, this book had a lasting impression on her. Although she says she didn't understand it, her "soul resonated" with it, and she checked it out of the library and brought it home, although she never read it after that first encounter. In her words, "something definitely said that this was the truth, but I was too overwhelmed by its light to read it. I kept it and renewed it, but never read it after sitting in the library."

Her meeting with the Rebbetzin, the Rabbi's wife, took place shortly thereafter in a dentist's office waiting room while the Rebbetzin waited for her children's teeth to be cleaned. Although Shimona was put off by the Rebbetzin's choice of venue for their meeting, she "sensed there was something there" in what the Rebbetzin told her. Nevertheless, Shimona continued to keep her distance from Chabad due to what she perceived as the "racism" inherent in Chabad's distinctions between Jews and non-Jews and the "intensity of the drinking."

At about this same time, Shimona asked her mother why she could not date and marry a non-Jewish man. Her mother "panicked," and decided to send all three of her daughters to a B'nai Akiva midwinter camp in South Africa, part of an international Zionist

youth group. Her mother hoped the camp would give them an increased grounding in their Jewish identity and a stronger tie to the State of Israel, thereby encouraging them to marry Jewish men. At the camp, Shimona participated in a class about the *Kuzari*, a book written in 1140 by Yehuda HaLevi, a medieval Jewish philosopher. The *Kuzari* is a fictional account of a series of dialogues between the King of the Khazars, and a philosopher, a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew, in which each tries to convince the King of the superiority and truth of his beliefs. In the end, the Jew convinces the King of the truth of Judaism, and the King and his entire kingdom convert to Judaism. As she recalls in an article entitled "The Bedrock of Belief: Did G-d Give the Torah at Sinai?", "On Shabbat our counselor sat with us on the dry grass beneath a sun that glared so potently I could hardly keep my eyes open. The text in my lap was *The Kuzari*….It changed my life. I sat down that morning replete with questions and even skepticism. I stood up on a new foundation."[189]

The *Kuzari* gave what Shimona believed was a logical, rational, and irrefutable argument for the existence of God and the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai. She read the *Kuzari* and "instantly became *frum*," an observant Jew. She and her sisters decided at camp to start keeping kosher, observing the Sabbath, and observing the laws of modesty, by wearing skirts, instead of pants or shorts, and covering their arms. Upon their return to Johannesburg, they announced their new religious convictions to their parents. It is safe to say that their parents got more than they bargained for.

Although Shimona and her sisters were *frum* from the time they returned from camp, this religiosity did not settle her deeper questions; her suffering did not end there. In fact, as we will see, in some ways her newfound beliefs increased her suffering. She continued to struggle with depression and grappled with her existential questions throughout her high

[189] Tzukernik, "The Bedrock of Belief: Did G-D Give the Torah at Sinai?"

school years. Like many "seekers," during this period of intense introspection, she was also looking for answers from other sources. She became close with a Buddhist practitioner and Tibetan translator, the husband of one of her high school teachers. She spent time with him discussing Buddhism and other traditions. He was the first person to introduce her to Kabbalah. She saw the Kabbalistic Tree of Life for the first time in a book at a Tarot reading to which he brought her. Nissan Mindel's book, *The Philosophy of Chabad*, included a description of the Tree of Life and other important Kabbalistic ideas, but it was all very technical and not graphically depicted. Shimona told me her teacher's husband "opened [her] to spiritual and contemplative practice."

At the time, Shimona was also a regular practitioner of Transcendental Meditation, Tai Chi and Yoga. As she explains, this was a very dysfunctional time in South Africa. "You either had to be involved in politics or spirituality. You couldn't just go to the mall, like you could in America. You had to do something." She was still very involved in her Jewish practice and the B'Nai Akiva youth movement, which she describes as "very empowering," but they "did not have the spiritual depth" she was seeking; these new ideas and practices were not enough to heal her wounds. Although they were not the final answer, they did provide some benefit, and, importantly, helped shape her overall experiences and worldview that would later be incorporated into the Method.

Upon graduation from high school, Shimona chose not to go to university right away. She was going through a very rebellious phase of her life. She apprenticed with a professional artist, a woman whom she says had a bad influence on her. When the artist began to pursue Shimona sexually, it became "too uncomfortable," and she left. She was rebelling because she was angry with God for targeting her for suffering. "I had read the *Kuzari*. I knew the Torah was true. I knew *halakah* [Jewish law] was true, but it didn't soothe

my suffering, my extreme suffering. I was actively rebelling against God." She had transferred her father's abusive words to God. God hated her and wanted her to suffer. "I personalized my suffering as a statement of God not loving me." Her acceptance of normative Jewish practices and beliefs had actually made her suffering worse. She accepted a God that controlled the universe, but this God was making her suffer out of His antipathy towards her. This was a noncontingent worldview, one with moral absolutes and an omnipredicate deity, but one that only made her pain more profound.

One day during this period, Shimona was out for an intense bike ride through the mountains near Johannesburg. She was a competitive athlete, swimming on average two to three hours each morning, and in excellent shape. She was on the steep ascent of the Sylvia Pass, pushing herself hard, and sweating profusely, when it started to rain. She was very hot inside, but the wind and rain against her skin made her very cold. She started to cry. "Warm tears and cold rain," she remembered. As the tears streamed down her cheeks, she thought, "God I know you are true. I know you exist, and that your Torah is true. I am really sorry. I cannot sustain it; I cannot do it. The suffering in my life is so intense. I just can't go on." Her suffering and despair were so great she decided to finally take a friend's advice and give Chabad another try.

A dear friend of hers had been encouraging Shimona to return to Chabad to help her deal with her suffering. However, her friend wanted her to visit with a different rabbi, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Kesselman. She believed that he could help Shimona in a way no other rabbi or therapist had been able to before. Shimona had resisted her friend's cajoling for over six months. She thought Chabad was a "cult." "I didn't want to lose myself, lose my identity," she explained. The pain, however, was too much. After trying so many other paths, three

years after her last visit to Chabad, now eighteen years old, in the midst of deep psychological pain, Shimona decided to give Chabad another try.

Shimona attended a *Tanya* class given by R. Kesselman. Although he barely spoke English, she felt an immediate connection to him and his message. "I came to that class, and I knew something was different. I had the background of going to Israel, learning *Kuzari*, learning [Rabbi Moshe Chaim] Luzzato, but Rabbi Kesselman understood where my questions were coming from. No one else did. I saw that the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe's questions start where everyone else's questions end." The Chabad cosmology posited a very different nature of the universe from what she had experienced through other Jewish sources. This was not a distant God, but an immanent one; a "God that loves you like an only child." She studied with R. Kesselman at least twice a week from the ages of eighteen to twenty-four, when she left South Africa to move to the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. She attended his weekly classes on the weekly Torah portion and the *Tanya*. Additionally, for a number of years, she attended a weekly lecture on Hasidic philosophy. She also met with him individually at least once per week and called him on a regular basis to ask him questions and to help her deal with crises. She describes these calls and meetings as "a constant support to get me through the suffering."

The Ontology of the Self and Agency Through *Mitzvoth*

Although R. Kesselman gave Shimona a vast array of resources with which to understand and transcend her suffering, I will focus on two primary ideas that most impacted Shimona's perceived sense of psychological well-being and that have become what Shimona calls the "bookends" of the Method for Self Mastery—"Essence" and "Garments." These two elements, which refer to the ontology of the self and one's agency, respectively,

are critical components in the underlying narrative proposed by Chabad and the Method. The first, Essence, refers to a shift in one's perception and understanding of his or her soul and its relationship to the place and nature of God. In order to effect this perceptual shift, among other things R. Kesselman asked Shimona to read Chapter 2 of *Tanya* every day. This chapter introduces the idea of the Godly soul, the essence of which is eternal, infinitely valuable, unwoundable, a part of "the Creator, not the creation." This essence is what Shimona has come to call the "Sticky Self." She learned in Chabad that human beings suffer from "cosmic amnesia," whereby they do not realize they are a part of God; they forget about the "Sticky Self". Furthermore, they lose sight of the fact that God is loving and omnibenevolent, so while one's suffering is by God's design, it is also given out of this love, not antipathy. According to R. Kesselman, "the solution lies in realizing that we are one with G-d, and that He loves us like an only child and that all our challenges are custom-made for our benefit….How would you wake up differently if you knew your Creator ached for you?" he asks. The tools that R. Kesselman gave Shimona were designed to "reveal this reality" to her, "that God loves you and you are one with Him."[190]

An integral part of the idea of the Sticky Self is the fact that there are multiple aspects to the soul that can be in profound tension with one another. "R. Kesselman gave me a map of my own soul," Shimona explains. "I began to understand that there is a 'tribe' inside and started to understand the mixed messages I was telling myself." In order to reach the Sticky Self, however, one needs mental techniques, according to Shimona, "that become the hammer with which you smash and grind thought-idols," the unexamined beliefs that

[190] Tzukernik, "Surfing the Collective Unconscious: A Conversation with My Teacher."

one's parents and culture inculcate into her from birth.[191] "And that is what [R. Kesselman] gave me," she concluded.

By utilizing these tools and making this mental shift, Shimona claims she learned the difference between pain and suffering. "I always thought you solve your problems by dealing directly with the pain. I came to realize that pain is about the circumstances or events of your life, but the suffering is about your perspective. [R. Kesselman] took me to a place where I could look at the thoughts that create the suffering. When those thought idols break, then the suffering melts." As she says repeatedly during the Method, "pain is inevitable; suffering is a choice." Furthermore, as she was discovering, pain can be subtly profound. Once one breaks free of the suffering caused by one's mind, "then you are just left with the pain, and in the pain there is a wonderful quality of vitality and joy and peace," she explains. "You can be in pain and at peace, but you can't suffer and be at peace." Shimona's embrace of the Sticky Self, which completely changed her understanding of the self, and the concomitant nature and benevolence of God profoundly shifted her experience of her pain over time.

The second important element that Shimona ascribes to R. Kesselman, in particular, and Chabad *hasidiut* in general, are the Garments of the soul—thoughts, speech and actions. R. Kesselman changed the way in which Shimona understood the nature of ritual action and its efficacy and the limitations of individual agency. At that time Shimona was a ritually observant Jew, but she felt these rituals were empty and simply obligatory. She was also actively involved in Transcendental Meditation, Yoga and Tai Chi, which she believed were more spiritually satisfying for her. Shimona argued with R. Kesselman, claiming these practices were more authentic and efficacious than prayers and *mitzvoth*.

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[191] Shimona draws the language here from the story of the Biblical patriarch Abraham, who, according to a midrash, smashed his father's idols with a hammer, because he believed in God instead of the efficacy of the clay figures.

R. Kessleman challenged her, "When you experience a shift in consciousness [from TM] do you honestly believe that your consciousness has moved one hair's breadth above the face of the earth?" According to *hasidut*, God is known as the *ein sof*, "without end;" He is infinite. Therefore, R. Kesselman argued, quoting the Alter Rebbe, "If one goes one mile or a million miles towards infinity, he has gotten no closer. One cannot reach the Creator alone." He referenced chapter 4 of *Tanya*, in which the Alter Rebbe discusses the cosmic significance of the *mitzvoth*. He also quoted Chapter 5 of *Tanya*, in which the Alter Rebbe compares the Torah with a waterfall. "It is the same water at the top as it is at the bottom," R. Kesselman explained. "God contracted his mind and will into Torah and *mitzvoth*. On your terms you will never approach God. The only way you can do it is the quantum leap that is available to you through the gift He has made available, and that is through the *mitzvoth*." This model suggests a complex form of agency, whereby, one has the power to act and effect change, but only through a prescribed set of actions. It also ascribes a tremendous amount of agency to God, because God is the giver of the *mitzvoth* and is ultimately in control of everything in existence. R. Kesselman's argument had a significant impact on Shimona.

Thirty years later, Shimona remembers this moment like it was yesterday. She told me that she can remember the exact moment of the exchange, the room they were in and exactly what she was wearing. Referring to her original conversion experience, she says this was a "*Kuzari* moment." "So all of a sudden," she recalls, "TM to me was like, 'oh it's not even moving me a hair's breadth above the face of the earth,' and this *siddur* [Jewish prayer book] that I have kind of been dismissive of….All of a sudden it became a chariot that could transport me to places that I wanted to go." Furthermore, these Garments—the *mitzvoth*—have the ability to "transform the matter of the world into Divinity," to create a dwelling place for *Hashem* (*dira bitachtonim*) in the mundane world. Now the *mitzvoth* took on cosmic

significance. One's thoughts, speech and actions—the Garments of the soul—became a way in which to make the "quantum leap between us and our Source," Shimona concluded.

In a way that no other belief, practice, or therapy had been able to do before, Chabad *hasidut* assuaged the depression, shame, self-loathing, and rage Shimona had felt since she was a young girl. Although these previous experiences of psychotherapy, meditation, Tai Chi, Yoga, Qi Gong, and traditional Orthodox Jewish practice contributed to her later bricolage that became the Method, R. Kesselman was able to connect with Shimona with a new message in a new way. There was clearly more than simply a new narrative that affected her sense of well-being. The seriousness with which he engaged her and his personal relationship with her as a student were both important elements in the way she was able to accept his teachings. Shimona says that R. Kesselman "honored" her mind. "He was the first [rabbi] who didn't treat me as less intelligent because I didn't have the background," she claims. "He challenged our minds so profoundly; I never sat...with anyone that challenged my mind in that way." Shimona is a very intelligent and creative person. She does not suffer fools lightly. R. Kesselman connected with Shimona, in part, because he connected with her mind.

In addition to what he taught her and the way he challenged her mind, R. Kesselman's patience and care also had a healing effect on her. He was sensitive to her emotional needs with what Shimona recalls as a tremendous amount of patience. In her words, "he created a holding space for my heart that had no judgment.…I cannot believe he stood by me. I was a *crazy* human being." Shimona believes that R. Kesselman, and through him, the Rebbe, saved her life. "R. Kesselman changed my life," she explains. "I don't have a life without him." As with all Chabad rabbis, R. Kesselman is a *shaliach*, an emissary sent by the Rebbe, and is carrying the message of the line of Chabad rabbis stretching back to R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad, known as the "Alter Rebbe". "The Alter

Rebbe," Shimona explains, "says at the beginning of *Tanya* in his introduction, I'm writing it for everyone who is connected to me, and the Rebbe explained this is even in future generations. He looked into the future saw us and wrote [the *Tanya*] for us. He wrote it for you, too. We're connected to that text, and I believe that's what saved me. It says in the Talmud that a prisoner cannot save himself. You cannot lift yourself up. It's not possible, so to me my life is a product of the miracle of the Rebbe."

Sharing this and other stories of her experiences with the Rebbe with me and thinking of the profound impact the Rebbe has had on her life, Shimona became quiet as tears welled up in her eyes. After a pause, she continued thoughtfully, "I can only say, I feel like I don't know what the privilege was….I really don't…" She paused again as tears started falling down her face. "I don't know," she continued. "The Rebbe reached his arm across the ocean and found me at the tip of Africa. How? Why? Why did I merit that? What does one soul *do* to merit that?" She fell silent as she thought. "It changed my life." She gathered herself and explained, "I got so emotional at the end here. It's just about becoming cognizant of the great gift."

Through the Rebbe, R. Kesselman and Chabad *hasidut*, Shimona was able to reframe her life and contextualize her suffering in a new narrative framework. In this new framework, she came to understand a radically different ontology of the self and the relationship of that self with God. She also developed a new understanding of the power of the *mitzvoth* and the limits of her own agency. Now she had an Essence that was connected to God, infinitely valuable, and non-utilitarian. She had the means by which to understand the existential angst she had always experienced and to understand her pain as a sign of God's love. Furthermore, her actions took on cosmic significance, within the boundaries of the *mitzvoth*. Over the next twenty years, Shimona would further embrace the philosophy and lifestyle of the Chabad-

Lubavitch movement and build the Method of Self Mastery out of her own experience of healing her psychological wounds. Shimona developed the theories and practices of the Method over an extended period of time, not based on contemporary mainstream life coaching practices, but out of and within a similar cultural milieu. What emerges from this process is a very different version of life coaching than either that engendered within Chai Life International or mainstream life coaching.

Mashpia: Becoming a Life-Coach

In 1989, after studying with R. Kesselman for six years, completing a degree in fine art at University of Witwatersrand and teaching art history at Funda University in Soweto, Shimona moved to the epicenter of Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidism, the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. She came to New York to study in a women's seminary for a year and to find a husband. Soon after arriving in New York, Shimona became engaged. Tragically, however, her fiancé died unexpectedly two days before they were to leave for South Africa for the wedding. Shimona was devastated by this event, but has come to terms with this tragedy and also sees it in a larger cosmic framework, about which she has written and speaks.[192] Several months later, however, Shimona met the man who would become her husband and with whom she has had four children.

During her year as a student in the seminary, Shimona was asked to speak at a national Chabad women's conference. Her presentation was very well received, and she began to get asked to speak at different places. Because of her background in fine art, the Jewish Community Centre in Cleveland, Ohio asked her to do a workshop using art to

[192] Space does not allow for me to elaborate on this event here, but for Shimona's description and interpretation of the event see her article "A Match of Faith" at TheRebbe.org (Tzukernik, "A Match of Faith - Life & Times").

explore the map of the soul. A whole host of different workshops and lectures came out of that event. Shimona was quickly building a name for herself as a lecturer and workshop leader throughout the Chabad and broader Jewish networks, and was developing an array of lecture and workshop topics.

Additionally, in 1990, Shimona started to teach at the Beis Rivkah girls' high school and seminary in Crown Heights. As a teacher, Shimona developed very strong bonds with her students, many of whom asked her if she would be their *mashpia*, a spiritual mentor or coach. The idea of a spiritual mentor has a long history in Hasidism, and within Chabad in particular. The Rebbe re-emphasized the role of the *mashpia* during a talk he delivered the last week of March 1977. He made this call again in August 1986, which like all of his talks to his followers would have been delivered in Yiddish,

> Let everyone, man, woman and child therefore fulfill the words of the Mishnah: 'Provide yourself with a teacher,' even if it involves bother and tedious work to find him/her. We speak of a Rav-teacher, counselor or *mashpia*, and women and girls must also appoint for themselves *mashpios*. In this way, from time to time you will visit your rabbi/*mashpia* and be examined and evaluated. How are you progressing in Torah study, what about *tzedakah*, and your general Divine service? Are you careful that all your actions should be for the sake of Heaven? This evaluation will lead to helpful and wise advice.[193]

A *mashpia* is analogous to a coach that serves as a motivator to continue to grow. For, the Rebbe argued, simply, "knowing that you must report and be 'examined' from time to time will sharpen your desire to advance even more."[194]

Shimona vividly remembers when in March of 1988, the Rebbe again called for the establishment and proliferation of *mashpias*. It was a month after the Rebbe's wife, Chaya Mushka Schneerson, had died. The only other Chabad Rebbe whose wife had died during his reign was the third Rebbe, known as the Tzemach Tzedek (1789-1866). After his wife's

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[193] Schneerson, "Essays: Provide Yourself A Teacher."
[194] Ibid.

death, the Tzemach Tzedek retreated from public view and active engagement with his Hasidim. Considering his possible retreat from public life, the Rebbe made a call for more *mashpias* to fill the possible void, according to Shimona. As it turned out, the Rebbe only increased his public image, but, nonetheless, this call to service made a lasting impression on Shimona.

The Rebbe himself became Shimona's model for how to be an effective coach. "You have to be fully present," she explained, "and that I learned from the Rebbe." "The miracle of being at a *farbrengen*,[195] it was so breathtaking, literally the breath is taken away, because I had never ever seen someone so present, but completely absent...being present without an ego. That is the greatest gift that you can give people. There's liberation there. That is where you become free, because that person can celebrate you and invite you out. There's no threat. It's all about the other person, and their beauty and wonder."

By 2008, the number of girls, some of whom were now women, Shimona was coaching had become overwhelming. Additionally, by this time she had become a featured speaker around the United States within the Chabad network, and would coach individuals before and after her lectures and workshops. It was all taking up too much time. She had to cut back and decided to charge people for her time, which served to reduce the number of people who asked for her time. By charging, however, she felt she needed to be more professional and systematic in the delivery of her services. "Once I started charging, of course, it's very good to charge people, because I had to be present in a way that I felt I was accountable for every dollar." Her clients also started to ask her for reminders of what they had discussed during their sessions, so Shimona, as part of her increasing professionalization

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[195] A *farbrengen* is a joyous gathering of Chabad Hasidim at which Hasidic stories are told, melodies are sung, and Torah is discussed. These gatherings occur around large tables and food and alcohol are generally served. The Rebbe hosted regular *farbrengens* at 770, the Chabad headquarters.

of her practice, decided to provide clients with notes of their sessions. Over time, as she was writing up her notes, she realized that there was a method behind her practice. She realized that she had been translating what she had learned from R. Kesselman into practical strategies and tools that people could use to deal with issues they were facing in daily life. "Once I was sending the notes, I thought, Oh my gosh, there is a method here!," Shimona exclaimed with laughter while sharing this chronology with me. "I didn't know what I was doing!...I knew the method that R. Kesselman had worked with me. I got those principles and what the paradigm shift had been, but I didn't see how it was feeding into the method that I was using with my own clients."

One day, a client with whom Shimona had been working for several months asked Shimona if she could teach her to become a coach. Shimona agreed to teach her on the condition that a minimum of five people signed up for the classes. Shimona sent an email out to her list about the opportunity. By this time she was a regular speaker throughout the Chabad network and had an email list of over 5,000 people. Instead of getting five, she had seventy-nine people apply for the course. She was astonished. She knew she couldn't take on that many, so she decided to do a ten-week trial run with four groups of seven students, whereby she would try out different material to eventually build into what became the Method for Self Mastery. After a successful trial run, on January 30, 2013, Shimona launched the Method for Self Mastery Kabbalah Coaching and Certification course with fifty students. Shimona had transformed her own suffering and eventual healing into a course for others.[196]

Shimona has taken the sacred narrative and soteriological features of Chabad, including Essence, which posits a particular ontology of the self, and Garments, which puts

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[196] The figure of the wounded healer is a common archetype in many cultures. See for example, Halifax, *Shaman*; Merchant, *Shamans and Analysts*; White, "The History of Recovered People as Wounded Healers," 2000; White, "The History of Recovered People as Wounded Healers," 2000.

forth a particular theory of agency through the *mitzvoth*, and put them into language and practices of life coaching. In the remainder of this chapter, I will show how Shimona explains this sacred narrative and supports it with Jewish sources in one of the most central lessons of the Method, the Iffy-Sticky Self lesson. This description will also endeavor to provide an example of Shimona's pedagogical philosophy witch tries to teach the Method through intellectual (IQ), emotional (SQ), behavioral (BQ) and spiritual (SQ) means.

Healing from the Inside Out

In being a coach and developing the Method, Shimona believes her primary role is that of a translator. She translates the teachings of R. Kesselman into a language and series of practices that she believes a broader audience can better understand and put into use for practical ends. She does not view this ability to translate as an elevated capacity. In fact, she attributes it to her "coarser" nature. This distinction between a coarse and refined soul is prevalent in Chabad *hasidut*. Hasidim speak frequently about the problem of "coarseness" (*grubkeit*). As Shimona describes it, "[R. Kesselman] is so much subtler than I am. Everything I say, the 'ah-has,' the 'quantum leap life,' the 'Sticky Self,' that is all Rabbi Kesselman. I manage to bring it down because I'm a *grubber* soul,[197] I'm much more *grub* than him, that's the advantage in being *grub*, I can bring it down, but I needed to get it from him."

A primary way in which Shimona translates Chabad *hasidut* into practical language is by utilizing ideas and practices she gleans from sources outside of Chabad. In constructing the Method, Shimona is doing the work of cultural bricolage, providing a blended set of cultural resources for others to deploy in their own work of psychological healing.[198] While Shimona is well versed in classic and contemporary Jewish texts, she is also exceptionally

[197] *Grub* is Yiddish for coarse material as opposed to refined or spiritual.
[198] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live by*, 153.

well read in contemporary psychological and self-help literature. Additionally, as described above, Shimona has had a great deal of experience in popular forms of mindfulness practices, such as Transcendental Meditation, yoga, and Tai Chi. In our conversations and her teachings, Shimona refers often to psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Abraham Maslow, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Tal Ben-Shahar, as well as popular self-help authors and creativity experts, such as Byron Katy, Eckhart Tolle, Edward deBono and Joseph Campbell. She self-consciously seeks secular analogs of the "truths" she sees in Torah (broadly construed) to help her corroborate and more effectively teach these truths. Shimona views this interface between secular and religious as critical to her ability as a translator, for the self-help techniques lack "Godliness," while the traditional Jewish sources lack practical application. "What I see is that self help is not necessarily rooted in the [cosmic] blueprint, but conventional *hasidut* talks about the blueprint but not the practical application, so for me, most of my work is about the translation. I'm talking about the back end of my work. To do that translation requires an internal process for me. It's always an exploration. I know when I found it, and it could take days or weeks around a certain concept until I find it."

Although Shimona diverges from traditional *hasidut* in this bricolage, R. Kesselman finds her work constructive and, even necessary for some people. "What she is trying to do is to explain the Tanya," he told me. One cannot simply pick up the Tanya and expect to understand it, he explained. One has to find a way to access it in a personal way. "There is no system that will work for everyone. The principle is for everyone….Every person is obligated to find a way that works for himself and to find a way to help people around them find a way….So I think what she is trying to do is to give the idea of *yiddshkeit* and *chasidus* in a way that [the participants] have the tools and the method to internalize it."

The nature of the self and the fundamental issue facing the self are summed up in the Iffy-Sticky Self lesson of the Method. Shimona begins the Iffy-Sticky Self lesson with a recorded lecture and slide presentation that participants were expected to listen to on their own prior to the weekly coaching call. In the presentation she explained that there are three aspects of the soul—Garments, Abilities and Essence (see Figure 1). Garments consist of thoughts, speech and action. Abilities are the particular and unique attributes that each individual possesses, which relate back to the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, and consist of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, love, strength, beauty, victory, splendor and foundation. Each of these characteristics has a set of intellectual or emotional qualities, and each individual is endowed with various measures of all of these attributes. These attributes are not unlike the personality typologies described in personality psychology and measured through instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (see Figure 2).[199] Through the Garments and Abilities, one manifests him or herself in the world, which is why Shimona calls these levels of the soul, collectively, "Existence." "Existence is the Hebrew word *mitziyut*," she explains, "which is derived from the word *matzah*, found. It is how I am to be found in my life. How do I show up?" Essence, on the other hand, is what she calls "Identity." Here she uses the Hebrew word *mahut*, which she connects to the

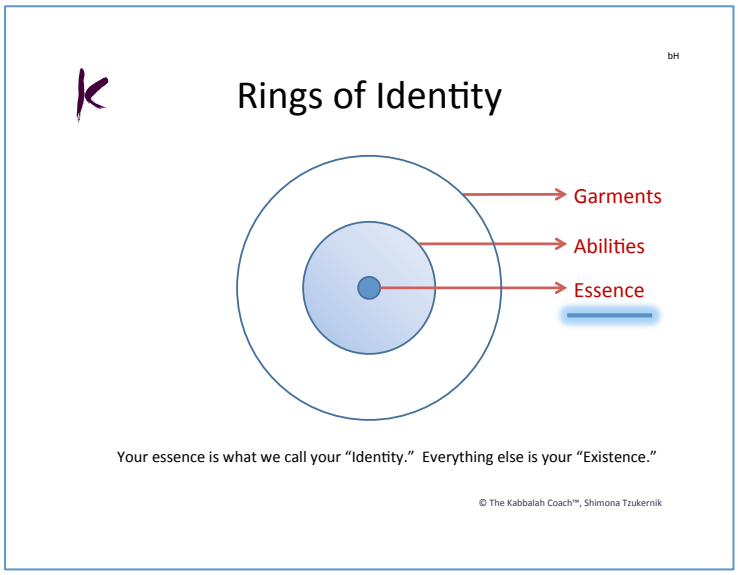

Figure 1: Map of the Soul

[199] Myers, Kirby, and Myers, *Introduction to Type*.

Hebrew words *mah hu*, "what you are, who you are?" Essence lies beneath Existence—thought speech, action and abilities. "It cannot be numbered or counted or measured," she explains. "It is pure 'being-ness.' Beyond purpose, and has nothing to do with your function or how useful you are….When we touch our Identity we live a very different kind of life."

As Shimona soon explains, this Identity is what she calls the Sticky Self.

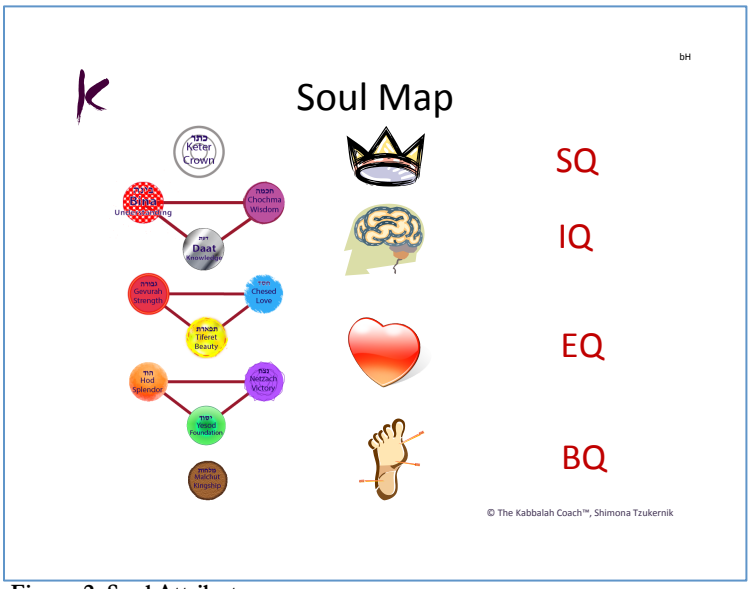

Figure 2: Soul Attributes

After explaining this Chabad schema of the self, Shimona explains the fundamental soteriology of Chabad that is woven into the fabric of the Method.

This is a very different soteriology than that found in mainstream life coaching. Shimona claims this two-fold nature of human life—Existence and Identity—engenders a deep existential angst, for we seem to have both an independent Existence—manifested through our thoughts, speech, actions, and abilities—and a dependent Essence—something more ephemeral and primary. Using two passages from the Torah, she explains the fundamental nature of the tension between Existence and Essence.

The Torah begins, she explains, with God created the heavens and the earth, as it states in the first chapter of Genesis, *Bereishit bara elohim*… "In the beginning God created…" The narrative that unfolds from here explicitly tells of a created, diverse existence. On the other hand, in the book of Numbers, in what has become part of the *shema*, a central prayer of Judaism, it states "God is God, God is One." "Not just that there is only one God," she

expands, "but God is one. There is nothing other than this Divine entity….How do we put those statements together?" she asks. "It is in the space between those two statements where we sit and wallow in our pain, because we don't have our head around that. I exist, and I don't exist." This dichotomy engenders angst because Shimona maintains that the Deepest Desire of any person is to feel like he or she truly exists, while one's Furthest Fear is that he or she does not exist. "I don't want to exist in an iffy kind of way," she argues.

> I want to exist in a sticky kind of way. And we are all driven by the angst that I exist in an iffy kind of way. We're all hanging out in our Existence, and that's where our pain is. And when we are in our Identity, we understand that those two statements go together. There is nothing other than God—*Shema Yisrael*—is true. God created the world—true. How are they both true? ...We are going to discover that all of our Existence only happens because of God. Existence is in the beginning… and Identity is God is One.

In order to take participants deeper into the intellectual modality (IQ) and to support her claims of the reality of the dual nature of the self, Shimona brings a text from Maimonides, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, contained in his *Mishneh Torah*, a codification of Jewish law. Shimona explains that to Maimonides everything exists in an "iffy sort of way. Only God exists in a 'sticky way.'" She continues in the presentation that in the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides is speaking about the foundations of knowledge, and he claims there is a rational foundation to knowledge, a rational teleological argument to prove God's existence. "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of all wisdom," he claims, "is to know that there is a First Existence who brings into being all existence." Everything else exists only because this First Existence wants it to exist. As Maimonides argues,

> And everything that exists, whether in Heaven, or earth or in between, exists only through His unceasing Being. Were it to arise in the mind that He does not exist, there is not one thing that could exist. And if it were to arise in the mind that no other being aside from Him existed, He alone would continue to exist, and the nullification of their existence would not nullify His existence. For all that exists needs Him, and He does not need any one of

> them. Therefore, His true nature is unlike that of any of theirs… (Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah, 1:1-3)[200]

"This is a line that can change a person's life," Shimona interjects. "God's true nature is unlike that of anything else in reality." God is real and everything else merely exists because of God. This First Existence is what Maimonides calls God, and he argues that knowing God in this way is a positive commandment; so essential it is included right at the beginning of the Ten Commandments.[201]

> This Being is God of the universe and Lrd of the earth, directing the sphere of the universe with a power that has no limit or interruption… Knowledge of this is a positive command, as it says, 'I am the Lord your God who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' (Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah, 1:5-6)[202]

Shimona summarizes these passages: God is the first cause, His existence is not dependent on any other existence, the nature of God's existence is essentially different from the existence of all other beings, but the existence of everything is dependent on Him, and knowledge of this is a positive command. There are, therefore, two profoundly different types of existence, she explains. The first, Maimonides calls "*Mechuyav HaMetziut*, or 'Necessary Existence.' There is no possibility for G-d not to exist. G-d is an 'absolute' being. Everything else by contrast is a possible, or accidental, or contingent existence, termed *Efshari HaMetziut*."

"So which are we in truth?" she asks rhetorically. "Most of what we identify ourselves with [the Garments of thought, speech and action, and our Abilities] only *happens* to exist. That part of us is real 'iffy.' In the Method, that's what we call our 'Iffy Self', but our Essence is part of the Creator, not part of the creation, *meaning we are part of God*, or as Rebbe

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[200] Tzukernik, "Iffy Sticky Self Lesson."
[201] There is a famous disagreement between Maimonides and Nachmanides [Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1194 – 1270)] over what constitutes the Ten Commandments. Maimonides includes the above statement as the first commandment, even though it is not phrased as a command.
[202] Tzukernik, "Iffy Sticky Self Lesson."

Schneur Zalman says in *Tanya*, we are *haylek elokai*, 'a portion of God,' *hma'al*, 'from above', *mamesh*, 'in actuality.'" So, Shimona asks the participants, "are you living an Existence driven life or an Identity driven life?" If one is driven by Existence, Shimona argues, her Identity becomes "hazy," and she "will end up being tired, resentful, sad, and life doesn't feel like it's fun; it doesn't feel like it's such a nice day." If one is living an Identity-driven life, however, she is connected to that part of herself that is part of the Creator, not the creation. "Then when that happens…boom!...the rest of [her] life falls into place….[she's] doing what [she's] doing but it's not draining her, and the outer rings [of existence] fall into place." To live an Identity-driven life is to move from a contingent life to a noncontingent life. The Method's focus on Identity over Existence in many ways marks it as starkly different than mainstream life coaching, which one could argue is primarily about what Shimona calls Existence.

After teaching participants about the Iffy and Sticky Selves in an intellectual way through Maimonides' text, appealing to the faculties of the IQ, Shimona takes the participants through an exercise created to give people an emotional experience of the idea, to engage their EQ, or emotional intelligence. While normally, this modality would be conveyed through live coaching of participants, in this case, Shimona used the weekly live coaching conference call to share a debate from the Talmud meant to engage participants on an emotional level, to engender an "ah-ha" moment, "a taste of our Identity."

In this Talmudic debate, found in Bava Kama 26b, Rabbah, a third century rabbi, asks if a man throws a vase from a tall building and, just before it hits the ground, another man hits it with a stick, causing the vase to shatter, who is liable? After some debate amongst the Method participants over whether the thrower or the smasher is liable, Shimona reveals Rabba concluded the thrower is liable for the damage and not the one who hit it with the stick. The reason is because it is considered a "doomed vase." Once it is thrown, it no longer

has any use. It will be destroyed no matter what. Shimona then brings up another case from the same passage in the Talmud. This time, instead of a vase, an infant is thrown from the building, and a man stabs the baby with his sword a split second before she hits the ground. Shimona clarifies that in this case both the thrower and the stabber are considered liable for murder, but the question is which one is subject to the death penalty, which one is more culpable. Shimona asks the group for their answers, and after a brief discussion, she shares that the stabber is more liable, even though the thrower was the one liable in the first case. "Why?", she asks. "The difference between the vase and the baby is life," she explains.

> When you look at the vase, its value is in its form or its function. It has a utilitarian value. When it comes to human life, know this about yourself, your value is non-utilitarian. It has nothing to do with how useful you are or any function you can perform….and not only that, every split second is equally as valuable as your entire life. You cannot say an instant of my life is less valuable than a lifetime of 120 years. Not possible. Now if you can begin to wrap your mind around that, you begin to come to the Sticky Self….Our work is to begin to see ourselves from God's perspective, not from our own. We are so tied up in our Existence [thoughts, feelings, actions, and abilities]; we don't even begin to come close to our Identity [Essence].

At the conclusion of these Talmudic stories, one participant chimes in saying, "I loved that. The stories bring me right there, without knowing what 'there' is," she laughs.

After this EQ exercise, Shimona leads the group in a short SQ (Spiritual Intelligence) meditation, which is supplemented at a later date with the much longer Divestment Meditation described below. Shimona instructs the group to "take a moment and focus, close your eyes, and imagine the space behind the eyes, which is the seat, the throne of the Divine self. It's within you all the time. It's the wellspring from which everything else emerges." After a few moments of meditation, Shimona summarizes the lesson by explaining the transformative power of being in touch with this Sticky Self.

> When I am in my Split Second Self, my Sticky Self, there is this point of incredible power at the center that can withstand all the turmoils of Existence. There isn't fatigue. There isn't illness. There isn't death in our

> Identity, only at the level of our Existence. And the more we are in touch with our Identity, with our Split Second, with our Sticky Self, the more we have the ability to let all the rest crumble. My false self, my Existence, the stuff I've built up to accommodate for a sense of weakness, can fall away, and then counterintuitively, because I am coming from my Identity, my Existence begins to manifest in a way of light and joy and energy and effectiveness that brings transformation for others, myself and for God.

Based on her own experience many years ago, Shimona encourages the Method participants to embrace this Sticky Self in order to heal their psychological wounds and to live more fully.

In order to translate these ideas and emotions into action, Shimona posts "Suggested Steps" each week to the member website. These suggested steps are designed to bring the ideas conveyed at the SQ, IQ, and EQ levels into behavior, the level of BQ, or Behavioral Intelligence. Participants are supposed to process these with his or her "co-coachme" partner, another Method participant with whom one has agreed to work weekly throughout the course. Additionally, these steps are discussed on the weekly live coaching calls, in which Shimona coaches volunteers through these steps. Many of the steps involve introspection and writing.

For the Iffy-Sticky Self lesson, for example, one of the Suggested Steps is "Our Isms," in which Shimona instructs the participant to "Each day for the next week, remember to use at least one of our Isms for the week." Shimona has captured 30 "Isms," which are short, pithy reminders of the Method's principles. The Isms for this lesson are "I'm big enough to fail," "I can be sad but I can never not be happy," and "I have to die in order to live." As Shimona explains, she believes that embracing these Isms is key to touching Essence. "In order to come to that core," according to Shimona, "we are going to have to live with three of the primary 'isms' of the Method." We are afraid of failing, she argues, because we are attached to our Existence, not our Essence. We need to move past that because there is "something so big, so broad, so profound and eternal in my being that it is big enough. It

can withstand the failure of everything else. I will still be there with myself and my God," even if I fail. Additionally, even if everything at the level of one's Existence is disintegrating, if one is in touch with her Essence, which is eternal, non-utilitarian, and pure, there is a part of her that can always be happy. Finally, one must realize "I have to die in order to live." "There needs to be profound decay," Shimona explains, "in order for the sprout to emerge. The garments and abilities—the Existence—must die in order for your identity to emerge….if we are willing to just die, and free fall and let every way we know ourselves go, then we can touch Identity, but we must hold that with behavior. Then the behavior becomes holy action. It's not Identity driven, it's God driven."

A week after the Iffy Sticky Self lesson, six weeks into the Method, we gathered at *Eshel Hachnosas Orchim*, or Lubavitch Hospitality Center, in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York to participate in the Mastermind, a two-day intensive seminar, which is part of the Method training. The Mastermind consisted of two days of lectures, interactive, hands-on exercises, group sharing exercises and meditations. During the Mastermind, Shimona took the participants through the SQ portion of the Iffy Sticky Self lesson, the Divestment Meditation. Shimona began by explaining, "The Zohar, the central text of Jewish mysticism, describes the body as the skin of a snake, and our souls actually wear our body. In the book of Job 10: 11," she continued, "we are taught 'You clothe me with skin and flesh and cover me with bones and sinews.' So who is the '*me'* [referred to in this verse]?,"

> I am on the inside, and I am clothed in skin and flesh and covered with bones and sinews. We are going to use this as our point of departure, she explained. "Today's meditation," she continued, "will allow us to let go of our outer aspects of our existence. As we progressively shed it and begin to access the inner core of who we are.

Shimona took participants through a brief relaxation meditation she calls "Divine Breath," because it alludes to the discussion, in the second chapter of *Tanya*, of the uniqueness of the

biblical Adam who was not just shaped by God's hand, but was also given life by divine breath—divinity itself— blown into his nostrils.

Once the participants were in a relaxed state, Shimona asked us to visualize ourselves relaxing on a chair or a couch in our living room. We were then invited to visualize all of the objects in this room, and then to get up and walk around the home and visualize all of the belongings in each of the other rooms, all of our "stuff". She then asked us to watch all of this "stuff" dissolve and fade away. "Breathe in and on the outbreath let all of that go," she instructed. "It's as if you are emerging from a sheath. Just see the possessions melt or fade as if they peel away and dissolve." In this same way, she progressively asked us to first visualize and then let go of our homes, the significant people in our lives—friends, family, enemies—until "it's just you; no stuff, no house; no people." Participants are asked to visualize the melting away of our deeds, speech, thoughts, body, emotions, and abilities—"shed them like the skin of a snake….And as you let go, behold, you emerge. Here you are. Pure-being. Your being is surrounded by the light of God. Your true source. Like an embryo in utero. Absorb the love, compassion and celebration. Draw the light of the source into you."

After a few moments, Shimona then walked us back through the process of re-entering and descending back into this world, step-by-step, in reverse. She reminded us that "who you are wears your thoughts, feelings. They are not you. Now re-enter your body. Feel how free it is to be you inside the body you wear." The whole meditation took about twenty minutes and left many people crying (or, in one case, feeling liberated) by the vision of their loved ones evaporating, as well as the powerful experience of imagining their own essence as pure, eternal, infinitely valuable light. With this mediation, Shimona concluded the Iffy-Sticky Self lesson, having taken the participants through all four learning modalities—SQ, IQ, EQ, and BQ.

By constructing the Iffy Sticky Self lesson, Shimona provides the Method participants with cultural resources to help them construct a new narrative that moves them from a contingent to noncontingent experience of the world, placing their lives within a transcendent framework that gives their lives a cosmic significance. Furthermore, it gives them a way in which to understand their suffering not as a punishment from God, but as a sign of God's infinite love for them. Shimona embraced Chabad and ultimately created the Method in order to soothe her own psychological suffering and to make sense of the world. In the chapters that follow, I will present the stories of four Method participants that exemplify how this sacred narrative, with its ontology of the self and complex theory of agency is experienced by the participants and engenders new moral subjectivities.

Chapter 4: Sacred Narratives and New Moral Subjectivities

There's a tribe inside.

Memory is the key to redemption.

Pain is inevitable; suffering is a choice.

--Three "Isms" from the Method for Self Mastery

Two traumatic events punctuate the life story of Patricia, a Method for Self Mastery participant in her mid-forties who grew up in Colombia, South America. When Patricia was ten years old, her older brother was kidnapped by Colombian guerillas. The guerillas needed money to finance their activities, and kidnapping was an all-to-common way for them to raise funds. For six grueling weeks her brother was a hostage. For six weeks her family was tormented. Her parents were distraught and preoccupied. Her father had to deal with the kidnappers and arrange ransom. Her mother was medicated throughout the whole episode, because she couldn't deal with the stress and anxiety. Patricia was left to her own devices. Her parents were completely unavailable to her emotionally and physically. As Patricia remembers, "All of a sudden I was left alone." Her parents told her, "You have to deal with your feelings and you have to deal with yourself because we can't." This is the point when Patricia recalls her developing a very strict and self-critical personality. "I was just left alone, and what happened is as a result I started to become very strict with myself because I didn't have anybody to guide me and set limits."

On the Method for Self Mastery online discussion forum, Patricia describes the devastating and lasting nature of the event. "When I was 10… my family went through a life-changing, traumatic experience. My brother was kidnapped for 6 weeks. My parents,

consumed by grief, were unavailable and I quickly learned to be the strong one, the one who wouldn't show fears or emotions. I started to learn then to live in my head, stash the feelings inside, and never, ever talk about it."

The second traumatic event that would have a lasting effect on Patricia was her mother's cancer. When Patricia was 15 years old, her mother was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia. Her father had moved the family to Miami shortly before the diagnosis to escape the violence and uncertainty in Colombia. Unfortunately, Patricia's father's business was still based in Colombia, so for a number of years he had to spend most of his time in Colombia away from his family. With her older brothers now away at college and her father in Colombia, Patricia was left to care for her mother, who was largely bed-ridden. For a period of time, Patricia even stopped attending high school, in order to care for her mother. "I was basically a little adult," Patricia remembers. Although her mother was given a terrible prognosis, not expected to live past a year, the family discovered an experimental treatment, which her mother received. This treatment cured her mother after a year-long battle. Although Patricia considers her mother's recovery a miracle, her caretaking and sense of isolation were very hard on her. "My mom was basically given a new life. It was very awesome but at that time, during the treatment nobody knew, and I was alone with her."

Patricia's father forbade anyone in the family from speaking with anyone outside of the family about these traumatic life events. In fact, her father didn't tell her older brothers about her mother's illness while they were away at college. "He didn't even tell my brothers," Patricia remembers with disgust, "like nobody can know. This is our secret. Nobody can talk about it." Patricia remembers thinking as a child, "Okay, I can't talk about it. I have to keep it inside." Looking back she believes that "all this squashing up the feelings and everything made me become very controlling."

Although the kidnapping and cancer were traumatic episodes, they simply brought into sharp relief a family environment that fostered a self-critical, stern, pessimistic worldview. Patricia remembers growing up in a very competitive house. She was the only girl with three older brothers, who all wanted to follow in their father's footsteps as a wealthy engineer and real estate developer. Her parents were also very negative. Her father focused on her flaws and shortcomings. "As a result I became very self-critical, very severe. It was always basically coming from the negative instead of the positive."

Patricia's mom was no different, she told me. Her mother married her father when she was only sixteen. He was much older, and Patricia believes that he molded her mother in his image. "She would always tell me," Patricia recalls, "the best thing that you can do in your life is always think of the worst-case scenario." Patricia laughs as she remembers what she now believes is the absurdity of this advice. "When you approach a situation," her mother would admonish, "you should always look at the worst-case scenario, that way you'll be protected from the worst." Patricia adopted this cynical view of the world. "It affected me deeply, that push, because I started approaching life from the worst-case scenario instead of the best-case scenario….I internalized that voice completely, and I became very self judgmental. I was never good enough." In the language of the Method for Self Mastery, this belief—always expect the worst—became a Thought Idol or an "Ism" that Patricia would need to smash in order to grow.

A poem written by Patricia as homework early in the Method summarizes the transformation she believes she went through during her childhood. Shimona asked the participants to write several poems as part of the Suggested Steps. One of them was supposed to be a reflection on one's place of birth and take the form of "I used to be…, but now I am…" Patricia wrote,

I used to be calm but now I am anxious.

I used to be confident but now I am hesitant.

I used to be impulsive but now I am guarded.

I used to be brave but now I am scared.

I used to think I was the best, now I know I am not.

I used to think only about me, now I forget me.

Patricia's believes her upbringing and the traumatic events she experienced have had a lasting effect on her well-being. She has experienced bouts of depression and anxiety and considers herself to be controlling, severe in nature, and often stressed, which has affected her relationships with her husband, children, extended family and employees, and her overall sense of happiness and well-being. Patricia believes the Method has had a positive impact on her well-being, helping her to be happier, less anxious and stressed, and improving her relationships with her husband, children, extended family and employees. The Method has given Patricia tools with which to edit and revise her life narrative and to reframe the difficult episodes of her past and aspects of her personality. Patricia believes the Method has been more effective for her than the traditional therapy or coaching in which she participated before. The resources she received through the Method not only enabled her to place her life narrative into a larger non-contingent master narrative, but that these resources were also more culturally appropriate than the ones she received from traditional coaching or therapy. The Method's blending of religious language and practices with therapeutic techniques enabled Patricia to more easily weave these tropes into her life narrative, which helped her cultivate a new moral subjectivity affecting her outlook on her self and her life. Specifically, as we will see, the narrative provided by the Method and Chabad was very different that what she was told in her traditional coaching. This coaching posited a more

mainstream life coaching narrative that Patricia rejected. In this chapter I will show the way in which the narrative resources that Shimona provided through the Method were adopted by Patricia and how she experienced this narrative very differently than that which her traditional life coach was providing her.

The Importance of Religion and Patricia's Path to Chabad

Patricia and her husband became *ba'alei teshuvah* (literally "master of return," a reference to Jews who embrace Orthodox Judaism) ten years before Patricia joined the Method. Patricia grew up in Bogota, Colombia where there is a very small Jewish community. Like many Jews in North America, Patricia celebrated the major Jewish holidays, such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover, but was not religiously observant in other ways.[203] Because Colombia is a Catholic country, she also felt a sense of separateness. "I always considered myself Jewish, and my identity as a Jew was very engrained especially, when growing up in South America where we physically [looked different]….So everybody knew that we were different, that we were Jewish….So my identity was always marked in the sense that I always felt Jewish." Even though she was not observant, she always felt it important to raise her future children as Jews. "Even when I dated somebody who was not Jewish and was seriously considering marrying. We always agreed that my children would be Jewish, and we would grow up and have a Jewish home." Maintaining Jewish identity was so important to her family, her father did not speak to her for the nearly two years that she seriously dated and considered marrying this non-Jewish man. It was important for her to *be* a Jew but not necessarily to know what that means or how to practice, "not the actual learning or doing all these mitzvahs that are in the Torah," she explained.

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[203] DeSilver, "Jewish Essentials."

Similar to the way she grew up, Patricia and her husband lived a very secular lifestyle. When Patricia's husband's father died, however, they felt a lack of community and a need for a rabbi. "We had no community; we had no rabbi; we had nobody to help us through that difficult time," she remembers. They discovered a Chabad synagogue not far from their home and started to attend. They were "captivated" by Chabad's welcoming, seemingly non-judgmental approach. As she describes it, "The whole Chabad welcoming, doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, what you do, what *mitzvahs* you focus on [attitude]. What matters is you're growing. You look forward." Through Chabad they met people who were in the same stage of life as they were, and they got very involved. They attended classes and religious services. They eventually became Sabbath observant and koshered their home. They remained somewhat flexible, continuing to eat vegetarian food in non-kosher restaurants, for example, and not adopting all of the modest ways of dress. Patricia was particularly drawn to the intellectual and personal growth aspects of what Chabad had to offer. "I've always been fascinated with learning. Like wow!" she exclaimed to me, "I can't believe our religion holds so much wisdom, and how come I never knew about it, and I was totally captivated." She began to study *Tanya* with a neighbor who had started to give *Tanya* classes. She experienced the *Tanya* as "very spiritual," and has studied it ever since, for over seven years.

When Patricia heard that Shimona Tzukernik was offering a course on Kabbalah coaching, she was very interested. It specifically blended her interests in Judaism and personal growth. Patricia describes her first impression of the Method as "coaching from the Kabbalah perspective." Patricia knew Shimona through Patricia's sister-in-law, who frequently had invited Shimona to give lectures in her home. Patricia enjoyed and was

inspired by Shimona's lectures, so this made her decision to sign up all the more easy. The fact that it was grounded in *Tanya* was an additional draw for her.

Patricia joined the Method to try and deepen her connection to God. As a generally rational person, she struggles with simply doing the *mitzvoth* as a form of rote exercise. If the practices do not make intellectual sense to her, she has trouble "doing things [simply] because that's what the Torah says." On one hand she feels she should be doing the *mitzvoth*, and on the other she believes, we reach "God's world" on "our own path" and "in our own place." She struggles, for example, with some of the laws of modesty, which proscribe particular ways of dressing. Connecting to God "doesn't necessarily mean that we should be wearing *sheitels* [wigs] and long skirts," she argued. She joined the Method to enhance her relationship with God, believing this enhanced connection would help her overcome her resistance to some of these new ritual obligations. "And so I figure...this would be very good for me because it would help me connect, help me clear up a lot of…layers of resistance that I have from growing up in a community where my parents, for example, think I'm completely insane."

The Method is not the first time that Patricia has been coached or sought psychological counseling. In her biographical statement written on the Method website, she states, "Personal growth has been a main ingredient in our lives. We firmly believe that the only way to raise our children is to be the living examples of who we want them to be. So both my husband and I have spent a lot of time getting coached, seeking answers, trying to imbue our lives with meaning and purpose." Her first experience with therapy was in college after her boyfriend of two years recognized that she had been repressing the traumatic experiences of her youth. More recently, however, Patricia hired a coach to deal with anxiety and depression that was triggered by a series of late-term miscarriages. "I started originally

getting coached honestly because I suffered a lot," she explains. "I have suffered tremendously, with multiple losses, like very traumatic experiences with pregnancies and just like losses, and losses, and I was getting very depressed and very obsessed with the whole concept and just really not doing well." Although Patricia went to many doctors and specialists, no one could tell her why she was losing these pregnancies. "I'm looking at that….there's nothing wrong with me, and why I'm having these losses. These were late term losses."

A close friend suggested she seek out a coach to help her navigate her grief. Although the coach was very helpful for her, the fact that she was not Jewish and had negative feelings about organized religion was an impediment for Patricia. She discovered that her coach viewed organized religion as a crutch. Her coach believed that people hold on to religious beliefs as "veils used to cover up things about yourself." Religion is something people hide behind. It became difficult, therefore, for Patricia to feel her "connection to Judaism" through her coaching.

Her coach was not devoid of religious language or beliefs, however, but she couched them in the language of "spirituality." Like mainstream life coaching, in general, Patricia's life coach exhibited a kind of perennialism that assumed a distinction between religion and spirituality. "She's a very spiritual person," Patricia explained, "She's connected to what she calls 'Source.'" Patricia equated Source with God, but that wasn't enough. Eventually, her coach's animosity towards organized Judaism was too much, and Patricia stopped seeing her. This animosity was particularly difficult for Patricia, because she and her husband were in the process of becoming more observant in their Jewish practice, about which her coach was specifically critical. "I just wanted to see what our religion had to offer, because I'm a firm believer in that, and I'm a firm believer in our power to basically uncover our true potential

in ourselves and to make things happen for ourselves, and I just wanted to get that from the Torah perspective."

Constructing Narrative Identity

According to narrative psychology, individuals utilize "episodic memory" and "autobiographical reasoning" to construct narratives about their past, present, and future in order to create meaning, coherence, and a sense of purpose in their lives.[204] This narrative capacity of personality develops between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five and operates in dialogue with culture. The autobiographical self utilizes cultural images, metaphors, myths and stories as interpretive resources to understand episodic memories and construct narratives.[205] "Life stories are psychosocial constructions, coauthored by the person himself or herself and the cultural context within which that person's life is embedded and given meaning," writes personality psychologist Dan McAdams. "As such, individual life stories reflect cultural values and norms, including assumptions about gender, race, and class. Life stories are intelligible within a particular cultural frame, and yet they also differentiate one person from the next."[206]

Although these cultural resources provide the "conditions of possibility" for self-construction, they are not determinative. Individuals maintain a level of agency in selecting which resources they will utilize and how they will utilize them. This process is "morally empowering," according to sociologists Holstein and Gubrium, as individuals select from a

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[204] McAdams, "The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author"; See also Bauer and McAdams, "Eudaimonic Growth"; Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*; Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*; Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live by*; McAdams, *The Stories We Live by*; McAdams, *The Redemptive Self*; McAdams, "The Psychology of Life Stories"; Neimeyer, "Fostering Posttraumatic Growth"; Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*.

[205] McAdams, "The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author."

[206] McAdams, "The Psychology of Life Stories," 101; See also Neimeyer, "Fostering Posttraumatic Growth," January 1, 2004; Pals and McAdams, "The Transformed Self"; Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live by*.

rnge of options the kinds of narrative resources they will adopt and adapt. "While this complicates the self-construction process, to be sure," they argue, "it also provides conditions that are ripe for interpretive slippage and artful, situationally accountable, practical reasoning which, while complicated, can be morally empowering at the same time."[207] Therefore, the kinds of cultural resources an individual may be willing to utilize and how differs from individual to individual.

Furthermore, narratives reveal one's moral stance towards the world, argues anthropologist Elinor Ochs and psychologist Lisa Capps. This moral stance points to what is good or valuable and how one ought to live in the world.[208] "Everyday narratives of personal experience," they argue, "elaborately encode and perpetuate moral worldviews."[209] Referring to Ochs and Capps and expanding on their theories, anthropologist Jarrett Zigon argues that narratives are a primary way in which individuals construct meaning and order in their lives. Therefore, as an anthropologist, they reveal "important insights into the ways in which persons conceive of themselves as moral persons. That is to say, narratives reveal the relationship between selfhood, identity, and moral dispositions."[210] Narratives also often convey, either explicitly or implicitly, moral hierarchies. "Narrators of personal experience evaluate protagonists as moral agents," Ochs and Capps argue, "whose thoughts, and feelings are interpreted in light of local notions of goodness."[211]

Complicating the construction of coherent narrative identity is what psychiatrist Laurence Kirmayer calls "ruptures in narrative." Although narrative enables us to construct a "morally valued and conceptually coherent identity and sense of self," identity can become

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[207] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live by*, 228–229.
[208] Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative*, 45.
[209] Ibid., 46.
[210] Zigon, *Morality: An Anthropological Perspective*, 147–148.
[211] Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative*, 47.

fragmented if there are ruptures in narrative due to traumatic events such as physical distress or illness, cognitive dissonance resulting from one's unwillingness to accept unpleasant facts about one's self, social constraints and conflicts with others.[212] When narrative identity fragments in such a way, optimally one must try to assimilate these ruptures into a coherent life story in order to regain a sense of meaning and purpose in life through a process called narrative revision or story editing.[213] As Pals and McAdams argue, "posttraumatic growth may be best understood as a process of constructing a narrative understanding of how the self has been positively transformed by the traumatic event and then integrating this transformed sense of self into the identity-defining life story.[214]

Just as all life narratives are culturally constrained, post-traumatic growth narratives are similarly bound by culture, as part of the "conditions of possibility" for self-construction.[215] For example, cultures help determine the kinds of trauma from which one should be expected to recover. The loss of a job or a divorce, for example, are the kinds of trauma that North American culture generally views as ones from which one should be expected to recover. The death of a child, on the other hand, is one that is expected to endure. "Some societies may consider some traumas so bad or so debilitating," argue Pals and McAdams, "that efforts to construct stories of subsequent growth may be seen as doomed from the start, senseless, meaningless, and never-to-be believed or affirmed."[216]

In summary, narrative theory claims that narrative is a way in which individuals create meaning, purpose and coherence in their lives. Ruptures in narrative occur which adversely affects this coherence and well-being. Through autobiographical reasoning

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[212] Kirmayer, "Broken Narratives: Clinical Encounters and the Poetics of Illness Experience," 154–155.
[213] Neimeyer, "Fostering Posttraumatic Growth"; Wilson, *Redirect*.
[214] Pals and McAdams, "The Transformed Self," 65.
[215] Holstein and Gubrium, *The Self We Live by*, 93.
[216] Pals and McAdams, "The Transformed Self," 67.

individuals try to assimilate these traumatic events into coherent life stories. The nature of the cultural resources from which one constructs one's narrative are important. These narratives carry moral weight and suggest particular horizons of limits and possibilities. While Patricia was uncomfortable with the way her life coach tried to have her understand the sacred in her life, Patricia embraced the underlying narrative of the Method and envisioned her life accordingly. A practice that enabled Patricia to do this narrative reconstruction is what Shimona calls Tribe Work.

There's a Tribe Inside

About half way through the course, Shimona introduced the Method participants to Tribe Work. Like many aspects of the Method, Tribe Work is an excellent example of cultural blending, whereby Shimona adapts religious ideas and texts to be used as a therapeutic intervention. The religious language used by Shimona and the textual sources in which she grounds this language gives Tribe Work a sense of non-contingent truth and places what could be a non-religious therapeutic tool into a form that is more easily digested and integrated into many participants' life stories. In fact, although Shimona was not familiar with them prior to developing Tribe Work, these therapeutic ideas are supported in non-religious therapeutic techniques such as "Parts Work" and "Self Therapy. "[217] As we will see, however, the narrative context in which Tribe Work is placed was tied to Chabad cosmology. The Tribe Work was particularly helpful for Patricia.

The Tribe Work expands on the ontology of the self described in the Iffy-Sticky Self and other Method lessons and provides a concrete practice for working with the intellectual concept of the multiple nature of the self. The Tribe Work lesson is based on the premise

[217] See for example, Earley, *Self-Therapy*; Holmes, *Parts Work*.

that individuals are composed of various different parts or aspects that are not always in concert with each other, or even conscious, having been repressed earlier in life. Without identifying and naming these various aspects and enabling them to communicate with one another, one cannot fully heal, according to Shimona. "Tribe Work encourages us to become mindful of the various voices that sing and wail, whisper and shout in the background. As you explore these personalities, remember that each Tribal member is vital to our overall well-being and purpose….Each 'member' is an integral part of our internal self." As one of the Method's "isms" states, in order to capture the conflicts that often rage within a person, "There's a Tribe inside."

Throughout her description and application of Tribe Work, Shimona grounds each psychological concept in religious language giving it a theological reality. Shimona begins the Tribe Work lesson by recounting the Biblical story of Joseph, who was sent into exile by his jealous brothers. The brothers ultimately find Joseph when they go to Egypt in search of food during a famine in Canaan. This search for and reconciliation with their exiled brother opens the way for the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt after 210 years of slavery. Shimona then claims this Biblical story of a people is also the story of every individual who must move from exile to redemption. Like much of Chabad *chasidus* (Hasidic philosophy), Shimona psychologizes the Biblical account as a metaphor for a deeper psychodynamic reality. "That [Biblical story] is the story of our own personal exiles," Shimona concludes, "and the way we break free from ourselves."

From the "mystical" perspective, Shimona explains that just as the Twelve Tribes make up the totality of the Biblical People of Israel, so too do these various tribes comprise the individual whole. Each tribe has a different set of attributes, and these various traits are how people manifest in the world. Each of the Tribes of Israel has a particular set of traits

gleaned from the blessings each son receives in the Hebrew Bible by his father Jacob and, later, their tribes by Moses, and the actions each tribe takes in the Biblical narratives. For example, Reuven is a protector, Shimona explains. Judah, the lion, symbolizes an abundance mentality and courageousness. Zevulin is a businessman and sailor and easily relates to the material world. Yisachar is an abstract thinker and intellectual. Naftali is a free spirit. It is also important for participants to understand that each of these archetypes has both positive and negative manifestations. For example, Yisachar's penchant for abstract thinking and intellectualism can be very positive and useful, but it can also create aloofness that can be problematic.

Through trauma or other psychological wounding, Shimona contends, we disconnect from aspects of ourselves, particularly those that we believe others do not like or that we need to protect. We place these aspects of ourselves into exile. When we exile an aspect of our being, the rest of us suffers and gets out of balance. Yet, in order to understand these exiled aspects of ourselves and to examine the relationship amongst them, we must both gain a safe distance from the various "tribes inside" and create an intimacy with them.

In Tribe Work this distance and intimacy is accomplished through two means. The first is to get in touch with one's Sticky Self. For Shimona, this means taking "your delusion of existing independently, that delusional ego centric part, out of your true self. Then you are left with your true self." Through this true self, one can safely observe the various aspects of him- or herself. Based on Deuteronomy 32:9-13, Shimona compares this stepping back into the Sticky Self to God as He is described as an eagle flying above the tribes protecting them as they wander in the desert.[218]

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[218] "G-d's portion is His people Jacob, the lot of His inheritance. He found them in a desert land, and in a desolate, howling wasteland. He encompassed them and bestowed understanding upon them; He protected them as the pupil of His eye. As an eagle awakens its nest, hovering over its fledglings, it spreads its wings,

Using language similar to that used in the Divestment Meditation described in Chapter Three, Shimona encourages the participants to "divest ourselves of everything and allow ourselves to rise up like the eagle from the place high above where we are connected to God above and to our own higher self that is a part of *Hashem*." From this vantage point, one can look down on and observe oneself, coming to a "compassionate space and allow those parts to speak."

The place of this Supernal Eagle is the place of the Sticky Self, which is unwoundable, according to Shimona. This resilience is important, because when one does Tribe Work, one is seeking out and examining wounded parts of oneself. Therefore, in order to feel safe, Shimona argues, one must get in touch with that part of him- or herself that is beyond wounding. "You have an absolute identity that is beyond wounding," she reminds the participants. "There are parts of you that are wounded because they are woundable. But there is a part of you that is beyond being wounded. You cannot be wounded. And that is this eagle point that is in the heavens and can look with compassion on all of the tribal members and can designate each one as the speaker of the moment."[219]

Once one has achieved this safe distance, the next aspect of Tribe Work is to establish an intimacy with the various tribes by naming them. In naming them one can become intimate with them, Shimona argues, and allow them to dialogue with each other. In this intimacy, one must recognize the duality in each tribe. Each tribal member has both a positive and negative attributes. In bringing to light both positive and negative aspects of

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taking them and carrying them on its pinions. G-d guided them alone, and there was no alien deity with Him. He made them ride upon the high places of the earth, that they would eat the produce of the field. He let them suck honey from a rock, and oil from the mighty part of the crag" (Deuteronomy 32:9-13 as cited in Tzukernik, "Suggested Steps for the Tribe Work Call").

[219] Ibid.

oneself, Shimona emphasizes that every positive tribe can have negative aspects and every negative aspect of oneself that one discovers also has a positive manifestation.

Although each tribe has a Biblical referent, when trying to discover one's own tribes, however, Shimona suggests, "don't stay stuck in trying to stick them into an archetype." It is better not to get too focused on the specific Biblical tribes and their attributes and simply examine one's own character traits and issues. Therefore, as one does Tribe Work, one should focus on the dominant voices that emerge or that are being suppressed. Invite the various tribes to speak, she instructs, giving each ample time to fully express itself and to respond in dialogue with each other. "It is the Supernal Eagle who takes care of deciding who gets to speak when," she explains. "The goal is to allow for a dialogue between the Tribes. The discussion will take its own course."

The written instructions for the Tribe Work, which are distributed as the Suggested Steps for this lesson, conclude by summarizing the benefits of Tribe Work, claiming that it helps "give a voice to the exiled 'Josephs' we have disregarded on the inside, offering a compassionate holding space for the various Tribal members." Furthermore, it helps "identify and chisel away at our Thought Idols," those recurring instinctual thoughts that we have inherited from our family of origin and culture that can unconsciously drive us. "Our shifting thoughts and loving detachment allow for new choices to be made," Shimona argues. "We are able to honor the voices inside of us without being driven by them. In this way, our compassion redeems us. We retain our moral integrity and commitment to our values and what is true and simultaneously attend to our exiled parts, thereby divesting them of their negative power and enabling them to show up in all their glory." With this, Shimona concludes the instructions for the Tribe Work.

Becoming Lily

Tribe Work was very profound for Patricia, and she believes it was a watershed moment in her personal growth. When it was time to do the Tribe Work, Patricia scheduled some private sessions with Shimona to work through it together. During these sessions, Patricia identified two primary tribes operating inside of her. The first she calls "Cruella," which she named after Cruella de Vil, the evil Disney villain from the film *101 Dalmatians*. Cruella is the severe, rigid, structured, self-critical tribe that Patricia embodies most of the time. This tribe is in conflict with a tribe she calls Lily, named after the lilies that grew outside of her childhood home. Lily is creative, free-spirited, laid back, vulnerable, and happy. Shimona shared Patricia's discovery of Lily during their coaching with the participants at the second Method Mastermind in Brooklyn, New York. As we sat in a circle of chairs, Shimona began, "Now Patricia described Lily to me on a phone conversation, and she described some lilies in her childhood home, and I was *so* there. I mean sometimes in the day I will see a picture of that lily—the fragrance, the softness of the petal, the colors, the wind—she said they are just kind of moving in the wind, and that incredible beauty and delicacy is something I see in Patricia." Patricia believes Lily is the little girl that existed before her brother's kidnapping, before she felt neglected and it became necessary to parent herself. During this period, Lily was exiled to protect her. Cruella was the part of Patricia that emerged as a result of her needing to parent herself during the kidnapping episode and later her mother through her illness. Cruella became Lily's protector. In order to do so, however, Cruella became the personification of the pessimism, severity and judgment of her parents.

Patricia believes her work in the Method in general and with the Tribes in particular has had a profound effect on her well-being. It has improved her relationships with her

family and at work and made her less stressed and anxious. For Patricia, Tribe Work was like learning a new language. "I've been using that [Cruella] language for so long that now as I try to use Lily language more in my life. It's hard. It doesn't come natural. I have to really consciously be very aware of that and really bring her in as much as I can, but it's not a natural thing, and it's like I'm learning a new language completely." Adopting this new language is part of what Patricia calls, "becoming the Method," and what I argue is part of her adopting and integrating new cultural resources to help her construct new narratives about her past and who she wants to be in the future. As Patricia explains the way she is trying to fully integrate the Method into her life, "You basically have to really become the Method, really apply it to every angle and every aspect of your life. For it to really be able to transform you, it's not just I'm going to be on a call for an hour and then that's that….These tools [Shimona's] providing us are not just exercises that you do for couple of hours a day. It really has to become the language in your life, and you transform yourself."

Key elements of the narrative Shimona puts forth are the importance of failure, embracing the negative, and ultimately God's agency. Upon discovering these two competing voices inside her, Patricia wanted to do away with Cruella. She told Shimona, "Okay I am sick of this Cruella, I need to do away with her, I need to really become Lily." Shimona countered, reminding her that there are both positive and negative aspects to each tribe, "Absolutely not…you have to integrate these two sides within you. You need to obviously become more Lily, but Cruella has served you in your life, and it serves you to this day in many ways. You just need to know when and how you actually use that tribe." For Shimona it is critical for one to grasp the dual nature of each tribe. First it is important to simply accept that every person has negative aspects of his or her personality.

As Patricia worked through this Tribe on a weekly coaching call, Shimona brought in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, a mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy, based in part on Buddhist ideas and practices that Shimona had introduced to the participants earlier in the Method. "The first part of working through this issue is acceptance," Shimona explained to Patricia. "That's why we preceded this work with ACT, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, because simply accepting the fact that I'm programmed to fail that I have these Thought Idols that are like stones. They are as strong as stones….simply accepting that as a reality disempowers the Thought Idol."

In order to illustrate the extent to which this duality is true, Shimona told the Hasidic story about Reb Nachum of Chernobyl. Reb Nachum's mother died and his father remarried. His stepmother would feed her own children first, often leaving Reb Nachum hungry. One day, Reb Nachum took a glass of milk without asking, and his stepmother severely beat him for it. Many years later, Reb Nachum was studying in the study hall of the Magid of Mezeritch, the chief disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism. Satan walked in the door in the form of an old, wise looking sage and asked him if he would study with him. Reb Nachum told the sage he would first have to get permission from his teacher, the Magid. Upon hearing this, Satan departed. When the Magid learned of what had happened, he told Reb Nachum the old man was Satan in disguise and that had he studied with him Nachum would have lost all that he had learned to that point in his life. He asked Reb Nachum how he knew to refuse the old man's offer. Reb Nachum replied, "When I was a little boy I was hit by my mother. She told me never to take anything without permission." At the conclusion of the story, Shimona explained that the story is not meant to condone child abuse in any way, but it is meant to teach us that "we are programed to fail, and the challenges that we go through, the isms that we have learned are also for our good." For

Shimona, all of life's events happen for a reason and are beneficial. "I was set up to fail a certain way," she explains, "and I messed up a certain way, and that's all post factum for my benefit."

The second element of accepting the duality of each tribe is to understand that the negative aspects of one's being are also part of one's purpose in this life. They are part of one's "soul print." "Our parents say many Isms," Shimona explains, "but you will be attuned, this is very important, you will be attuned to the Ism that is connected to your soul print." Acceptance is the first step, but more than that, it is essential to fulfilling one's purpose. "That's what I'm telling you," Shimona explains on the coaching call, "is that Acceptance Therapy is telling us that…the fact that you heard that Ism and you resonated with that Ism [is] because that was your soul print. All of that is part of your purpose." So those aspects of oneself that one does not like, one need not only accept them, but realize that they are essential to living out one's purpose.

At the second Mastermind in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, Patricia came to a new realization about the effect of Cruella on her life, although she had done the initial Tribe Work several months earlier with Shimona. At the Mastermind, while doing an exercise called Purpose Quadrants, during which one explores one's purpose in life in various ways and through different roles (see Chapter Five for an explanation of Purpose Quadrants), Patricia realized that Cruella had been holding her back from her connection with God. After the exercise, she shared with the other participants, how Cruella feels like she has to control everything, and that "*Hashem* is not in control." "All of a sudden," she continued, "my purpose became very clear, which is tied to the fact that I need to…" Shimona finished her thought, "surrender," and Patricia nodded, repeating the word, "surrender," and continued "…and really allow that space for *Hashem*.…that was my big

realization." Shimona added that this need for surrender was a common theme of what people shared with her during the break preceding this sharing session. "It came up for many people, which is, 'I have great difficulty letting go of that control,' and that is the delusion of cosmic amnesia. It's 'I'm in charge. I should be in charge. I have to make it happen,' and we would all benefit from surrendering a little." Again, although Shimona does not use this language specifically, in Chabad terminology this surrender is *bittul*.

This surrendering was the final step in enabling Patricia to see her life in a redemptive way. It enabled her to integrate into her narrative why Cruella emerged in the first place. According to this narrative, Cruella emerged at a time when Patricia had no control, and no one was there to care for her. Her brother's kidnapping and mother's illness were the most intense "ruptures" for her that left her alone. Cruella had to emerge to protect Patricia and those carefree parts of herself she calls Lily. "Cruella is all about control," Patricia shared with me. "It comes from again, being in the situations where I had no control. This controlling personality just basically had to take over."

Patricia tells me that she has always intellectually believed that God is in control, but she has never been able to surrender to this belief and apply it to her life until now. "When it comes to me," explaining her previous beliefs, "I could say of course I have always believed in God. I'm like, of course God controls everything, but in my day to day life and my day to day existence, I'm on my own. Basically I'm in control of whatever situation happens to me." Now, however, she believes that God controls everything and every experience, whether good or bad, is created for her. This connection with God has helped her let go of seemingly insignificant details of her life that she tried to control. "That connection has helped me really surrender, and it definitely has increased my faith in God."

In order to bring this awareness into her life in a way she was unable to previously, Patricia has developed a way to continually remind herself of these beliefs through meditation and prayer, which I argue is, in part, a form of story editing that enables her to see her reality in a more redemptive way. "I meditate and pray on the fact that God is in control. I'm not in control." One example of the shift from understanding her life in terms of contamination sequences to redemption sequences is how she now operates at work. "Let's say I had a client," she begins an example of how she used to be, "and for some reason the client wasn't happy with the work, and all of a sudden we lost that client. It's always about me. I'm like, okay, I screwed up. I did something wrong. What did I do? It's my fault….It's always about me." Now, instead of beating herself up for the loss, she believes this loss is part of a larger plan, despite her role in its happening. Now she says to herself, "Okay, maybe I made some mistakes, but the fact that this client left…maybe this is not really the client for us." Then she sees how even this seemingly bad situation will ultimately turn out for the good. "There's a reason why it happened, there's a lesson here, and we just need to take a step back and just not get stressed, and it's like a whole meditation that I do." Then, in her example, a new client emerges that would never have been possible if the first one had still been with her company. "All of a sudden we get another client, and if we would still be working on [the original] client, we couldn't have [gotten the new client] because of a non-compete issue….I was like, 'Oh, my gosh! That's why this happened.' There's always a reason why things happen. I started to bring that consciousness to my day-to-day, and as a result I stopped being so harsh on myself."

This surrender, or *bittul*, has increased Patricia's self-reported sense of well-being and reduced her stress and anxiety. "It was like, 'I'm not carrying the whole world on my shoulders. It's not my fault. It's not my doing. It's just like let it go….you'll see later on why

this happened, you don't need to get bent out a shape over it.' It becomes the constant meditation that I do….Because I don't feel I'm the one who's responsible but I just feel like there's something bigger than me that's responsible." Patricia ties this back to one of the central "Isms" of the Method. "I don't control anything except perhaps my attitude towards what's happening around me," she explains, "and just meditating on that when something happens helps….What does Shimona always say? 'Pain is inevitable; suffering is a choice.'"

Non-Contingent Realities and The Importance of Religious Language

According to Patricia, the Method proved to be more effective for her than traditional coaching, primarily because of the Jewish language of the Method. Not only has the Method given her a way to understand her life in a non-contingent way, it has provided her with narrative resources that were easier than secular forms of life coaching for her to assimilate and utilize. Her earlier coach had been helpful and had used similar techniques as Shimona in some situations. In particular, she used a technique that is remarkably similar to Tribe Work, trying to identify various "identities" within Patricia. "For example, she calls them identities and Shimona calls them tribes," Patricia explained to me. "I have looked at these identities, these tribes within me for many years." Tribe Work was effective, however, while Patricia's identity work with her coach was not. "It was not until Shimona made me name them," Patricia continued, "that they became real for me. And I told [Shimona]. I said, 'It's so interesting why would that change it?'" Shimona replied, "In the Torah, when the world was created, and God made Adam start naming things, the fact of naming things, the name that they have is so important." The naming, Shimona explained, creates an intimacy and control over that which is named. It also creates a specificity that was very important to

Patricia. "When I started naming [the different tribes]," she told me, "I started identifying them in my life."

Patricia found Shimona's explanation convincing, but also feels there is a less tangible reason for why the Method was effective in ways that her other coach was not. The fact that the Method is coming from a Jewish perspective has "touched" Patricia's "soul."

> I don't know if it's just basically because how we're made up, and the fact that it's touching my soul and somehow, the soul, just feels. It just opens up the channels within me. The fact that it's coming from Torah….like I said, even though a lot of the techniques that I've used before in coaching, for example, are very similar to what Shimona does, for some reason there's less resistance because it's coming from Torah, and I thought about it and I'm like, why? When I was getting coached before it wasn't like, I was so into Torah that, okay it's not going to affect me positively. I'm more closed because it's not coming from Torah, because I didn't have that thought. But I think deep inside, I guess, your soul just, I don't know, it just opens up. At least that's what it's done for me. It has opened up the channels for me, and it's like truth. The truth is the truth is the truth. That's how I feel. This is the truth. It just somehow that has unblocked me.

By couching the psychotherapeutic techniques of Tribe Work in the religious language of Judaism, Patricia understood Tribe Work as the "truth." Even more, the fact that she is a Jew enabled her to hear and implement these narrative resources in a more thorough way. Her "soul was simply wired to receive it," as she told me. Although I am not suggesting a mono-causal framework for her perceived healing, I do believe that the non-contingent language and cultural specificity of Tribe Work enabled Patricia to utilize the Tribe Work more effectively to edit her life experiences into narratives that fit within a redemptive framework and to inhabit a new moral subjectivity through a process of *bittul*. This new moral subjectivity, a revisioning of the protagonist in one's narrative, is at the heart of the Method and is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Traveling to the Mountain: Adopting a New Self

Believe that God believes in you.

Don't mistake the suffering of the body with the joy of the soul.

Plan B is the real plan A.

—Three Isms from 'The Method'

Shira spoke up towards the end of the weekly conference call of the Method for Self Mastery. She told the rest of the participants, "All of you used to say that this would be life transforming, and I would say to myself, 'yeah, yeah, yeah.' But I want to share with you and with the group how this all culminated with me yesterday. I was talking to a friend about not being able to find a *shul* [synagogue] that I am comfortable with, and what to do, and she said, just start by saying *modeh ani* in the morning,[220] so I said okay, and that just brought tears to my eyes….in the morning I just said the prayer to myself. And in relation to the part about 'thank you God for giving me back my soul,' it was the first time where I felt like I found the part of myself that I *really* like, and I found a part that is not woundable." Shira began to cry as she said these words. Struggling to speak she concluded, "It was the [the two-day retreat] Mastermind that started to get everything moving."

At this point, Shimona Tzukernik, the founder of the Method for Self Mastery, interjected, "I am sending you such a huge hug with my heart, because if there is one thing that I want people to take away from the Method is finding the part that is unwoundable;

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[220] The *modeh ani* is a Jewish prayer that is said at the moment one awakes in the morning, before even getting out of bed. The English translation of the Hebrew text is: "I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great." Chabad.org, "Modeh Ani - Thank G-d I'm Alive! - Mitzvah Minutes." This prayer is one of the first prayers that children are taught, which evokes simplicity and pure faith.

that's your 'Sticky Self.' Anything can happen to us, but when you are with that place, life is manageable."

The Sticky Self is Shimona's name for the Godly soul (*nefesh elohit*). According to Chabad *chasidut*, Jews have two souls, a Godly soul (*nefesh elohit*) and an animal or bestial soul (*nefesh behemit*). Like the paradox of all of reality, this twofold soul is really one. "The aspect of the soul that relates to the process of coming into being, separation from the divine origin, concretization, and expansion within corporeal existence is called *nefesh behemit* (the bestial soul) in Habad literature," explains Rachel Elior, "and that which relates to the tendency toward self-annihilation, the stripping away of corporeality, and inclusion within divinity is known as *nefesh elohit* (the divine soul)."[221] While described in language that suggests they are two separate entities, these two souls are, according to Chabad cosmology, simply two different forms of consciousness or ways of interpreting reality. This explanation of the twofold nature of the soul reinforces the importance of perception and perceptual transformation within Chabad. "The Habad doctrine of the soul assumes that the external world is only a reflection of the content of consciousness, and that only consciousness is what endows reality with meaning," explains Elior. "Therefore, religious effort is concentrated on altering consciousness and understanding the inner dynamic of comprehension," she continues. "The various parts of the soul are merely different levels of awareness of the divinity and reality and their religious significance derives from the fact that they are changeable. Thus, the parts of the soul are viewed as various levels of consciousness of the divine essence and as different ways of apprehending the dual meaning of existence."[222] As we will see in this chapter, a central element of the Method is to have

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[221] Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God*, 105.
[222] Ibid., 106.

participants adopt this conception of the two-fold nature of the self and to try and effect this perceptual shift from the animal soul to the divine, or Sticky Self.

Shame, Perfectionism, and the Road to Divorce

Shira told me she grew up in a "loud and volatile home." Her mother was a "big screamer" and was often yelling at her father. Shira remembers, as a child, lying in bed shuddering in fear after having been awoken by the sound of her mother screaming at her father in the morning. "They'd be up before us kids," she told me, "and she'd be yelling at him." Shira feels "scarred" from all of the yelling. Although her parents fought often, they were also often affectionate, and Shira does not believe the screaming affected their marriage. "Go figure," she told me we a sad sense of irony. In fact, if she or three sisters complained to their father about her mother's screaming, he would not tolerate it. "You could never say anything bad about her to my father," Shira remembers. "He didn't allow that, and they stayed together until they died."

Shira had a difficult relationship with her mother. Shira describes her mother as a narcissist. On this point she is emphatic. "She's a narcissist," she told me, "not just a little bit…..completely! It was all about her. If you went to her with a problem, you were a terrible person. If you needed something from her, she turned it against you." Shira felt like if she or her three sisters needed something from their mother, her mother would perceive it as an indictment on her as a mother. These conversations would invariably end with her mother crying out, "I wish I were dead!" "You couldn't have needs," Shira recalls. Shira learned from an early age not to go to her mother with any of her problems.

Shira also remembers her mother as mean. "She just had this meanness in her," Shira shared with me. As one example, Shira remembers one time, as a little girl, she accidently

broke one of her mother's china coffee cups. As a lesson, her mother took one of Shira's favorite toys and smashed it to pieces right in front of her. "She was just mean," Shira concluded after sharing this story with me. Shira sees this mean streak now as deriving from her mother's insecurity, but, as a little girl, "it was very hard to take." Shira could not understand how someone, particularly her own mother, could be so cruel. "It's so foreign to my psyche to understand how someone could do that," she told me. "That's what makes you question, to feel like you don't matter. How could anybody do something like that to you? You could only do that to someone that doesn't matter. I mean strangers matter more than that." Shira internalized this sense of worthlessness and developed what many psychologists call a proneness to shame.

When Shira was eighteen years old and still in high school, she encountered a book by psychiatrist Alice Miller entitled, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self*. She remembers reading it and being "blown away, *absolutely* blown away!" She felt it totally described her situation. As she recalls, the book was about how a child can learn very early on that they have to respond to their parents in a particular way in order to survive. They must hide who they truly are, pretend to be something they are not, and "are really serving the parents." As the author describes it, "When I used the word 'gifted' in the title, I had in mind neither children who receive high grades in school nor children talented in a special way. I simply meant all of us who have survived an abusive childhood thanks to an ability to adapt even to unspeakable cruelty by becoming numb….Without this 'gift' offered us by nature, we would not have survived."[223] These "gifted" children learn to overachieve and become perfectionists, in order to please their parents, yet all of this outward achievement belies a deep sense of inadequacy and depression. These children "do well, even excellently,"

[223] Miller and Ward, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, Back Cover.

according to Miller, "in everything they undertake; they are admired and envied; they are successful whenever they care to be—but behind all this lurks depression, a feeling of emptiness and self-alienation, and a sense that their life has no meaning."[224] At eighteen years old, Shira was shocked at how closely this book described her life.[225]

In order to hide her sense of worthlessness, Shira had become driven by external validation. "I always felt a little less than other people, but I sort of hid it, because I always functioned well. I was a good student. I was always very involved. On the outside I looked successful, but I did not feel successful." Shira describes herself as a perfectionist, which is not surprising as shame-proneness is highly correlated with what psychologists call "negative perfectionism," a drive to do well simply out of a fear of failure.[226] "I did everything I was supposed to do," Shira remembers, "I went to college and graduated on time, and I went to law school, and I graduated on time, and I passed the bar, but I was miserable."

Shira believes her mother's narcissism had a negative impact on her sisters as well. Shira believes her oldest sister is very similar to their mother. Shira describes her also as a narcissist. The youngest, she calls the black sheep of the family and has no contact with her. The last sister passed away. In our first interview when I asked her about her sisters, she told me one of them had died. When I asked the circumstances, she simply said, "It's not a nice story, so we won't go into it." It was clear that this was a difficult subject, so I did not push. I assumed it was a tragic death, since she was unwilling to share the circumstances with me. In our next interview, she became more open on the topic of her sisters, and she revealed that this sister, the only one with whom she had been close, took her own life as an adult

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[224] Ibid., 5.

[225] This is an excellent example of how Shira was embedded in a therapuertic culture that operated with certain definitions of shame, depression and psychological well-being. For a counter example of a culture where depression is shown to be a culturally inappropriate diagnosois see Obeyesekere, "Depression and Buddhism and the Work of Culture in Sri Lanka."

[226] Fedewa, Burns, and Gomez, "Positive and Negative Perfectionism and the Shame/guilt Distinction."

with three young children after she learned that her husband had been having multiple affairs. Her death was a terrible blow to Shira, and she stepped in to help raise her sister's children. Shira attributes to their childhoods the unhealthy ways in which her sisters have all ended up.

Shira was miserable all through college, law school and her first job, and it only got worse after she got married, because she married someone who she now believes is a lot like her mother. "I married a really mean person," she told me. Her husband was emotionally and physically abusive to Shira and their son. Shira was unhappy in the marriage early on, but did not have the strength to ask for a divorce. Their younger child, Ethan, was showing signs of severe distress. Shira and her husband were unable to have biological children, so they adopted Ethan and his older sister, Megan. In sixth grade Ethan started to refuse to go to school. This refusal exacerbated the tension in the marriage and ignited the physical abuse. When Ethan refused to get out of bed in the morning, Stephen would drag him out of bed and sometimes hit him. On two particularly bad occasions, Shira tried to pull Stephen off of Ethan. "He grabbed me by the throat and threw me against a wall in front of Ethan," Shira remembers. "He threw me on the ground and kicked me so hard I had a bruise the size of a grapefruit."

Ethan's school twice called the police on Stephen. One time, he was dropping Ethan off at school, and Ethan refused to get out of the car. Stephen came to Ethan's door, pulled him out of the car by his hair and threw him onto the parking lot and drove off. Ethan got up and walked off down the road away from school. Shira got a frantic phone call from Ethan that he had run away from school. She called the school, and they were also frantic, because they had heard what happened and could not find Ethan. Shira went searching for and found him. The school called the police. This incident occurred the week before Ethan's

bar mitzvah, and the police came knocking on the door. Shira was in shock. She had never had any dealings with the police. The police officers came into the house and spoke privately with Stephen, but nothing happened to him. "They didn't do anything," Shira recalls.

After the police left, Shira, Stephen and Ethan sat together, and Stephen said to Ethan, "I never hurt you." Ethan was distraught. He couldn't believe his father was denying what he had done. "I know what's that like," Shira told me. "I've had that happened where he denies reality. And it makes you… it sort of destroys you when somebody messes with your reality, where they won't accept…they won't admit to what they've done." At one point, Stephen began to tell Shira and others that the police told him "to rough him up."

These events would eventually lead Shira to the realization that she had to get a divorce. Shira had been trying to get Stephen to move out for nearly four years, although she never had the will to make him do it. "He had me convinced," she remembers, "that if we broke up it would kill my son. My son would just not be able to handle it. And I believed it and stayed in the marriage, and we stayed, and I was extremely depressed and very unhappy." Ethan's school refusal finally got so bad that they put him into an eight-week program at the local Children's Hospital for children who refused to go to school. "I was watching my kid throw his life away. It was really….it was very painful," Shira recalls.

When Shira took Ethan to the program, which was housed in the Psychiatric Ward of the hospital, she had an "epiphany." Stephen had convinced her that it would "kill" Ethan if they broke up. "One day," she recalls, "I was driving Ethan to Children's, and I just had this epiphany of it's killing him that we're *not* breaking up. That's what killing him. I was doing the exact opposite of what I should be doing. And that's when I decided." While Ethan was in the program, they participated in family therapy, and Shira used this opportunity to convince Stephen to move out. Shira explained to the professionals that

Ethan had grown up in a kind of "war zone," and that he "came by whatever anxiety he had honestly." She had the therapist help convince Stephen to move out. "It was a complete turnaround for me," she remembers. "It was just that realizing that it was the exact opposite, that I was not helping my child. Helping would be to leave not to stay." In these counseling sessions, Stephen agreed to move out, but that wasn't the end of their issues. Although she had the moral certitude to force her husband to move out and proceeded with the divorce, she continued to struggle with her sense of shame. This sense of shame made her constantly question what was right and good . After the divorce, according to Shira, it became Stephen's mission to "take her down," and make her look like the bad parent. Shira was in the midst of this battle when she joined the Method for Self Mastery.

Discovering the Sticky Self

Shira was still struggling with her shame and the process of the divorce when she joined the Method for Self Mastery. Shira was visiting an old camp friend, Estee, out of town when she first learned about Shimona Tzukernik. Estee had become a *ba'al teshuvah*, and had become friendly with Shimona over the years. During Shira's visit, just before Shabbat, Shimona called Estee to wish her a Good Shabbos. Estee told Shira all about Shimona and her work with Kabbalah Coaching. A few days later, when Shira was headed for the airport, Estee placed a couple of Shimona's CDs into Shira's suitcase and told her to listen to them. Shira did so when she returned home. She found them to be very powerful. She felt like her "soul was broken….and Shimona sort of spoke to that….and it resonated with me."

Shira looked up Shimona's website and saw that the very next day she was launching the Method for Self Mastery. She picked up the phone and called Shimona's office, even though it was after 9 PM at night in New York. Little did Shira know that Shimona's "office"

is located in Shimona's home, so Shimona picked up the phone, much to Shira's surprise. Shira shared the story of how she was with Estee when Shimona called and how she was moved by Shimona's CDs. Shimona told her that the Method was starting the next day and that she thought it would be very beneficial for her, even if she was not interested in becoming a coach. Shimona exclaimed, "Oh my God, this was meant to be!" "It was a Shimona moment," Shira later told me. Right then and there Shira decided to join the Method. As Shira said, "the rest is history."

Shira was not religiously observant when she joined the Method, although she did feel a tremendous sense of Jewish identity and belonging, and her family had belonged to a Conservative synagogue growing up. She did not live in a particularly religiously observant home, although they always had a large Shabbat dinner with guests every Friday night, and much of her family's social life revolved around their synagogue. "We were our own little *shtetl*," she remembers, referring to the small, all-Jewish villages that populated Eastern Europe and Russia before World War II. Her family did not keep kosher or observe the Sabbath in other ways beyond their Friday night dinner. Shira attended public schools, but went to after-school Hebrew School three days a week through high school. She has always felt very connected to Judaism, her "Jewishness," and Israel.

Shira attributes much of her Jewish connection to summer camp. From the age of eight she attended Camp Ramah, a Jewish residential summer camp affiliated with the Conservative movement. As Shira describes it, "home was not good, but camp was my salvation." All of her closest friends were camp friends. She preferred them to her school friends, even though she was not able to see them often during the year. Shira also felt very connected to Israel. She lived in Israel for two years after college while her father was stationed there for his job in the food service industry. Although Shira claims to have always

felt very connected to Judaism, she did not feel a connection to God. She told me that she rarely thought of God, that God had no role in her life; it was simply not something she thought about. When Shira joined the Method, she had been consistent in her level of ritual observance and belief most of her life.

Shira's divorce and her sense of shame were always at the center of her work in the Method. During the Thought Idols lesson, for example, Shira spoke up during one of the coaching calls. She was working through one of her thought idols, one of her parent's "isms" that she had absorbed and believed to be true. She shared with the rest of us that when she first decided to leave Stephen, she went to her parents to seek their support. Regardless of what she shared with them about the dire state of her marriage, her mother told her to think only about her financial security. How would she survive if she were to divorce? "Everything else was pretty much dismissed," Shira shared. As a result, Shira did not divorce until her father died and her mother was so ill she couldn't even speak. This story illustrated what Shira believed to be a thought idol with which she has been living. In telling the story to the rest of us her voice was broken and weak. She had trouble getting all of the words out. She concluded her story by revealing behind this story is the "ism" "I can't take care of myself."

The coaching session that unfolded from here is an excellent example of the way in which Shimona works with clients to try and uncover issues that underlie what is presented. Here we also see the way Shimona refracts the participants' experiences through the prism of Chabad cosmology, placing the participant's experiences into the narrative model of Chabad soteriology. After Shira shared her story, Shimona repeated back to her, "Shira, you can't take care of yourself. Can you tell me what this makes you feel, when I said that? Shira, you can't take care of yourself. Shira, you can't take care of yourself. What do you feel? Shira? And where do you feel it?" After a very long pause, Shira said softly and slowly, "I

feel it's true." Shimona replied, "You *think* it's true? What do you feel?" Shira responded dejectedly, "I feel scared that I can't take care of myself." Then, revealing more, she said, "I feel there's another side to that which is…there is a step missing…which is that no one wants to take care of me. My parents didn't want to take care of me." Here Shira revealed to the group for the first time that she did not feel her parents' love and care for her as a child.

Having gotten one layer beneath the original "ism", Shimona pushed Shira to go deeper, to continue digging until Shira arrived at what Shimona calls the "furthest fear"—the fear that I am not a real existence. "I can't take care of myself isn't the end," Shimona told her. "The corollary that you put in there is 'no one wants to take care of me.' And what does that mean? Why is that? Why does 'no one want to take care of me?,'" she asked. Shira replied that she believes it is because she is a "burden." Shimona continued to push. "Yes, but you see, to say 'I am a burden' is not the end. It's not the end. When you look at the work that we did around 'furthest fear' and 'deepest desire', there's always a way to explain why I am a burden, right? I can't take care of me. Well of course I can't because even my parents didn't want to take care of me. They didn't want to take care of me because I was a burden. And I was a burden to them because what? Because I was not enough, because there is something intrinsically lacking in me." Here Shimona translated Shira's experience into the language of the Method, distinguishing between pain and suffering. "It's that place," she continued, "that we're coming from in our suffering. It's not the pain. Because of course there's a pain that a child is not taken care of by the parents. But the suffering that you have experienced is a result of the reading of that, which is *why* I must not matter. I am only 'Iffy Self.' There is no 'Sticky Self' here at all to speak of." Shimona equates Shira's lack of self worth, her shame, into the "Iffy Self," and contrasts it with the "Sticky Self."

Shira listened and told Shimona that she believes she has always been a burden. She was currently living on alimony, and before that she lived off of her husband's income, and before that her father's. She's never been financially independent, she argued. Shimona countered Shira's comments, emphasizing that suffering is engendered by one's thoughts, and reminded Shira that many women are not financially independent and continue to feel very empowered. It is not simply the fact of financial dependence that necessarily engenders the feelings of inadequacy or suffering. It is how one interprets these facts, which is based upon what lies beneath. Summarizing their conversation thus far, Shimona said, "The 'ism' [you started with] was…about your security. Inside of it, Shira, you can't take care of yourself. Inside of that, Shira, no one wants to take care of you; Shira, you are a burden, and inside of that, I, Shira, am unworthy, and in that kernel of your belief is that Furthest Fear." The only way to overcome this fear, this feeling of inadequacy, according to Shimona, is for Shira to know that she is not unworthy—to know her "Sticky Self." Shira replied slowly and softly, "Absolutely right, and I just wrote down, 'Shira doesn't matter.'"

Later in the course, during the 'Relationship Matters' lesson, Shira again asked for some coaching during one of the Method's regular weekly coaching calls. In this interaction, Shimona helped Shira cognitively reevaluate her situation by encouraging her to see the forest for the trees, to see her challenge as a growth opportunity given out of love by God. Shira asked for help with her relationship with her daughter, as, she believed, her daughter had begun to gravitate towards her father. He had become her "go to" person, instead of Shira. After honoring Shira's pain, and encouraging her to arouse compassion for herself, Shimona reminded her that this is a growth opportunity given to her by God. She told her to ask herself, "What does God want from me? This is from God. How can I grow, and what is my part in this?" After Shira discussed the specifics of her situation on the call, and admitted

that she believed many of her issues with her daughter derive from her own insecurities, Shimona suggested a solution to Shira. She must ground herself in the two most important relationships for any individual—one's relationship with God and with oneself. "When you attach yourself above…then all relationships shift…." Shimona argued, "What I am saying is when I don't have my intrapersonal relationship right," she continued, "which can only come right when I am accurately connected to my Creator, if I don't have that taken care of, I will be placing an enormous amount of weight on others in my life….We are using people to fill our very deep needs. Remember what I said, God is the one you need. You are the one you need." In order to rectify her relationship with her daughter and with her ex-husband, according to Shimona, she must first look inside, and when she does, she will find God. "Taking responsibility for your well-being means I know that the first place to go to is inside and to God, because ultimately your deepest inner core is God, you are part of the Creator, Shimona explains. So go find that place and then you won't be burdening your loved ones with fulfilling the needs that you have." Using the language of the Method, Shimona is asking her to find her Sticky Self through a process of self-annihilation.

Shimona asked Shira if this advice was useful. Shira again responded slowly and painfully, "Uh huh…," and then fell into silence. Shimona asked, "What are you feeling, what's happening?" Shira replied, "I'm feeling that I know it's about my own internal struggle that sometimes I just don't think that I am going to succeed. That I just can't seem to get my life going as an adult. Even though I play the role in the world. When I come home I'm with myself. I don't feel attached, I don't feel, um…" Here Shimona asked Shira to question the nature of her relationship with God. "Let me ask you this Shira, does it make sense to you that you are abandoned by God? Does it make logical sense that there is a Creator that doesn't see you?," she asked. Shira responded, "No, I don't think of it in those

terms. I'm not sure what I think of God or what He thinks of me….It's been a very long time since I have felt unity [with God], let's put it that way." Shimona explained to Shira the nature of God according to Chabad cosmology.

> Sometimes the challenge in the relationship is, we tend to feel God's presence when we get what we want and feel abandoned when we don't….God's withholding is also love for us, and I really want you to meditate on the ism that 'believe that God believes in you.' You *think* that God exists but you don't allow yourself to *believe* that God exists. That superconscious belief is being blocked because of the emotional state that you find yourself in. I mentioned last week, 'don't mistake the suffering of the body with the joy of the soul.' This is directly from what the Alter Rebbe teaches in *Tanya* around happiness. Don't mistake suffering, challenges in life, with rejection by God. I think your difficulty is in believing that God loves you, because you don't believe that you are lovable. That's where the work has to happen.

I suggest that understanding God in these terms is part of a process of cognitive re-evaluation or *bittul* that ultimately helped Shira and others change their understanding of her self, particularly in relationship with God. Finally Shimona gave Shira a meditative practice to use to employ this belief and to help her work through her feelings of unworthiness. She suggested that Shira sit each day and say to God, "please help me believe in Your belief in me, and help me believe in me. Help me believe that I am lovable."

About a month later, Shira made what she considered a major breakthrough at the second Mastermind event. I noticed a shift in her demeanor on the second day leading up to and after the Purpose Quadrants workshop. This workshop is designed to help someone align one's purpose with one's actions, in order to enable the person to achieve his or her goals. While on the surface, this exercise could seem to be focused on mundane and practical aspects of one's life, like relationships, career, or health, like those domains traditionally addressed by mainstream life coaching, this exercise within the Method is framed by the imperative that even these mundane activities are a vehicle for bringing down and revealing divine vitality in the every day, and therefore, to make the world a dwelling place for God.

The Purpose Quadrants workshop took place in the late morning of the second day of the Mastermind. Shimona explained to the forty of us gathered in a circle that one's purpose is "multifaceted, organic and ever changing." Shimona asked us to select one aspect of life, one vision that one wants to make manifest, whether it's a relationship, a role, a job, an activity, or a particular issue one is facing. The Purpose Quadrants encourages participants to think about the Why, What and How of the particular aspect of life being explored, in order to "bring your vision, your purpose, down so you can take steps." As the Purpose Quadrant materials explain, "Your Purpose is WHY you are alive, do what you do, engage with others and want what you want." The "why" is broken into four quadrants (as shown in Figure 3)—Higher Incoming, Higher Outgoing, Lower Incoming, and Lower Outgoing. Based on the same Kabbalistic system that undergirds all of Shimona's exercises, the Higher purposes focus on the spiritual (SQ) and intellectual (IQ) aspects, while the Lower are focused on the emotional (EQ) and behavioral (BQ). Incoming purposes are what one receives—the benefits to oneself. Outgoing purposes are what one offers—the benefits to others.[227] Therefore, one's Higher Incoming Purpose quadrant lists the spiritual and intellectual benefits one receives from pursuing the goal, while the Higher Outgoing Purpose quadrant lists the spiritual and intellectual benefits that accrue to others

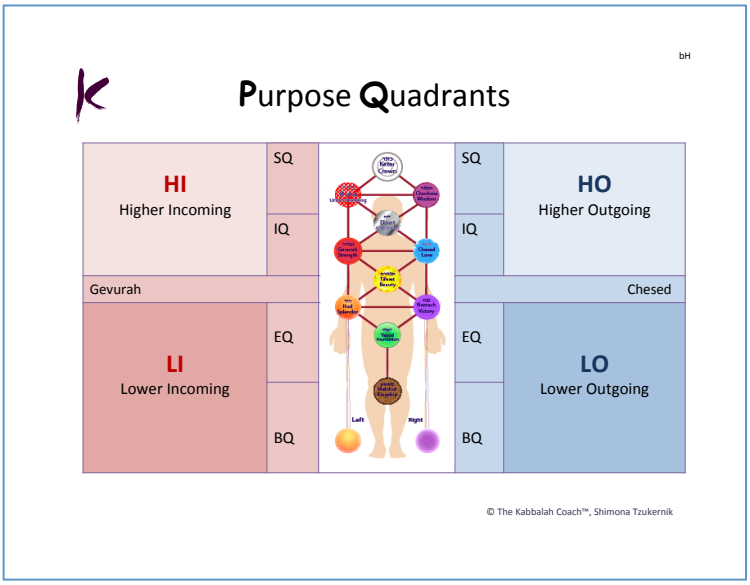

Figure 3: Purpose Quadrant handout.

[227] Tzukernik, "Suggested Steps for Creating Your Roadmap II."

by achieving the goal. One's Lower Incoming Purpose quadrant lists the emotional and behavioral benefits one receives, and the Lower Outgoing Purpose quadrant lists the emotional and behavioral benefits one gives to others.[228] Ideally one will recognize that the ultimate goal of any pursuit is to "make the world a place where G-d can 'dwell' and be manifest" (*dira bitachtonim*). This overarching assumption frames the entire exercise within a Chabad cosmology.

Once one has filled out all four quadrants and ideally gained some clarity on the "Why," one is instructed to transform these purposes into specific goals, or "What needs to happen in order to manifest your purpose." Lastly, these goals are transformed into individual tasks, or "How you go about reaching your goal." In the printed instructions these specific tasks are related back to Chabad cosmology and refer to the "garments of the soul"—thought, speech and action—that enable one to manifest one's Godly soul in the world.

After Shimona explained the Purpose Quadrants exercise to the participants, we all moved to a large table to begin. Not unlike many of the participants, Shira was at a loss for what to focus upon. She later told me she went to Shimona flustered and said, "I don't even know where to begin." Shimona replied, "you can just write one about yourself," and Shira told me, "I did, and I started writing about who I am and what kind of person I want to be." Once Shira started on this course the words flowed out of her like a river, as did the tears. "I was just writing a mile a minute," she told me. I happened to be sitting next to Shira as she wrote, struggling through my own Purpose Quadrant. While many of us had tremendous difficulty understanding the exercise and puzzling over where to begin, Shira seemed engrossed sitting next to me.

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[228] Tzukernik, "Purpose Quadrant Handout."

Figure 4 is a typed version of Shira's handwritten Purpose Quadrant worksheet she completed at the Mastermind, which she shared with me. According to Shira, preparing this worksheet became a breakthrough moment for her. In looking at the document, one can see how Shira is trying to embody a different moral subjectivity that assumes a different ontology of the self and the place of God in her life. She wrote things like, "To believe in Shira," "I will believe that I am loved," "I will believe in myself," and "I will celebrate the person that I am" (which she asterisked and underlined). For someone who described herself being unconcerned with and disconnected from God for the past thirty or more years, she also brought God into her language in a significant way. She wrote statements such as, "To know I am connected to God," "To love God," and "So that I can serve God." Most significantly, however, is the way in which she connects these two ideas—overcoming her shame and her connection with God. As her Higher Incoming Purpose she wrote, "To

Role/Project: Shira

Higher Incoming To have a clear grounded Shira To know I am connected to G-d To know that I matter to G-d To know that I am unwoundable To live beyond fear To live in gratitude and joy To know what G-d wants of me To believe in Shira To live in community To love G-d To love Shira as a child of G-d	**SQ** HIGHER **IQ** PURPOSE	Higher Outgoing Putting light into the world so I can live life of purpose So I can be the best mother So that I can be self-reliant So that I can connect to people. To the world. So I can remarry So that I can serve G-d
(Restraint) INCOMING PURPOSE		OUTGOING PURPOSE (Expansion)
Lower Incoming To have a purpose via career To experience success To model success To share my talent w/ world To make my own money To deflect war	**EQ** LOWER **BQ** PURPOSE	Lower Outgoing I will tell myself daily that I am part of my Creator That everyone around me is part – I am connected. I will believe that I am loved. I will believe in myself *I will celebrate the person I am I will celebrate my children I will survive the lawsuit, the will, etc. I will do a great job on the camp I will help Chani and Yossi

Figure 4: Shira's Purpose Quadrant Worksheet from the Mastermind

know that I matter to God," "To love Shira as a child of God," "To live beyond fear," To live in gratitude and joy," and "To know that I am unwoundable." In her Lower Outgoing Purpose she wrote, "I will tell myself daily that I am part of my Creator." These statements all reflect her sense of *bittul*, or self-nullification before God.

The transformation that Shira reports having experienced at the Mastermind is summed up by what she shared with the rest of us after the closing exercise of the Mastermind. Using a technique Shimona adapted from creativity scholar Edward deBono,[229] Shimona generated three random words and gave us three questions to answer, with each answer needing to include one of the random words. The random words were "switch," "address," and "warship." The questions were "What did I learn at the Mastermind?"; "How can I bring this down and apply it to my life?"; and "Anything else?" Although she did not often share herself in these public forums, Shira shared her answers to these three questions. "My vision of myself," she began, "has *switched* to God's vision of me. I will *address* life through God's vision. What I have learned will not stay at the Pointe Plaza Hotel [the venue for the Mastermind]. It will go to 160 Elm Street [her home]. The *warship* of my life is God. I am moving inland." The others laughed and applauded at the way Shira pulled all of these ideas together using the random words. These statements illustrate the way Shira is trying to shift her understanding of her self and her moral subjectivity to a state of *bittul*, or self-nullification. At the Mastermind Shira made a dramatic shift in her relationship with God. This shift set Shira on a course that led her to resolve the final issues hanging over her divorce, and to reclaim a sense of purpose and self.

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[229] De Bono, *How to Have Stunning Ideas*. This is another example of the way Shimona adapts practices from other cultures for use within the Method.

Traveling to the Mountain as a Grounded Visionary

About a month after the Mastermind, Shira again spoke up on the weekly coaching call. This time, her voice was much stronger. She was louder and easier to hear. She seemed to speak with more confidence. She said, "I am going to war tomorrow." She explained that she was going into mediation with her ex-husband the next day. He had sued her after her mother died because he believed she had received a large inheritance, and he wanted to stop paying her alimony. She was fighting him, since the inheritance was small and in no way could replace what he owed her in the settlement. She told us she did another Purpose Quadrant for this specific confrontation. This Purpose Quadrant helped her reach two conclusions. The first is that her ex husband is an "Aggressor," and second that she would try and deal with him as the "Courageous Warrior."

Here Shira is utilizing language that Shimona originally taught at the Mastermind, but had been fleshing out and emphasizing in the lessons ever since. These are Exit Strategies, archetypal roles individuals adopt when confronted with a challenge.[230] They relate back to the Purpose Quadrants exercise, because they are "avoidance responses" that arise when one is confronted by the discomfort engendered by the purpose, goals, and tasks one develops as part of the Purpose Quadrant exercise. Like most everything in the Method, Shimona grounds these strategies in a Jewish text. In the Biblical account of the Exodus, seven days after the Israelites fled Egypt, they were pinned in at the Sea of Reeds, she teaches. The Sea was ahead of them, Pharaoh's approaching army behind them, and empty wilderness to their left and right. The Israelites, according to Shimona, divided into four camps. One group wanted to return to Egypt and a life of slavery. One group believed they should go to war against the approaching army. Another group was hopeless and suggested they all simply

[230] Tzukernik, "Exit Strategies Handout."

commit suicide, and the fourth group advocated prayer. These four responses, Shimona argues are four archetypal responses to challenge or crisis—the Coward, the Aggressor, the Shameful One, and the Victim. "Ultimately G-d rejected all four," Shimona argues, "and said that the way out of their quandary lay in understanding the *Purpose* of the Exodus – namely to receive the message of G-d on Mount Sinai." The lesson here, she argues is that we must "remain attached to our purpose."

Each unhealthy response described above, however, has a healthy counterpart—the Peacekeeper, the Courageous Warrior, the Humble One, and the Devotee, respectively. For example, as Shimona's written descriptions explain, the Aggressor "goes to war without forethought. She is compelled by fear, anger or hatred. Because the Aggressor lacks humility and surrender to a Higher Being, the power she wields causes damage to self and others. The Aggressor *believes* she is motivated by truth but in *actuality* she is motivated by self-preservation." The Courageous Warrior, on the other hand, "knows the *art* of war; is aware of what others are feeling and incorporates softness into her interaction. The healthy warrior strategizes and often colludes. Because she is motivated by a selfless intention she experiences healing outcomes. The Warrior stands up to the status quo. She is willing to say 'Yes' *or* 'No' whenever necessary. Peace is the unanticipated outcome of the Warriors efforts." In order to explore which role you are falling into, each archetype has a set of values and questions that one can consider. The positive counterpart of each archetype can be seen as the one coming more from the Godly soul, or a place of *bittul*.

Beyond all of these positive manifestations, however, there is a higher, loftier one that integrates them all, which emerges when one is connected to one's identity and purpose, when one "travels to the mountain," like the Israelites in the desert traveling to Mt. Sinai to

receive the Torah. This archetypal figure is called the "Grounded Visionary."[231] "When you are in touch with who you truly are," Shimona explains, "(an absolute, unwoundable, essentially valuable being) and with your purpose (to contribute to perfecting the world in accordance with your own unique gifts) then no obstacle is insurmountable." Despite challenges or setbacks, one must stay focused on one's purpose. "Just as Nachshon, the prince of the tribe of Judah brought about the splitting of the sea when he walked into it," she explains, "and kept on walking until the waters reached his nostrils, so too is each of us capable of moving forward no matter the challenge we encounter. Things don't always go the way we want but even then, the Grounded Visionary is able to navigate a new path, imagine a new response that moves one towards his or her ultimate Purpose." This is a place where one's moral subjectivity has been completely transformed into that of the Godly soul through a process of *bittul*.

Although, through the Purpose Quadrants exercise, Shira had decided to embody the Courageous Warrior during her mediation, Shimona directed her back to the bigger picture and suggested she, instead, "travel to the mountain." "I want to suggest to you," Shimona advised, "the only way to move forward is to look at the mountain and travel, to be the Grounded Visionary. I have a sense that you get locked into counter attack. This causes damage to us. When we feel threatened, if we counter attack, we often think we are coming from Courageous Warrior, but we are not. We are turning into the Aggressor out of intense fear." Instead she wanted Shira to think about her shame and how to overcome it. "I would recommend to you to think of the worthlessness that comes with shame and to find your antidote for this in a much higher purpose."

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[231] Tribe Work has resonances with both Bibliodrama and Parts Work, but Shimona was not aware of either of these programs before developing Tribe Work. See Pitzele, *Scripture Windows*; Holmes, *Parts Work*.

Shimona reminded Shira that she has been dragged through the court process for five years already, and that there must be a reason why this keeps coming back. God must be trying to teach her something through all of this. "[Your husband] has already dragged you through this in a painful kind of way," she reminds Shira. "That indicates a real 'go' point. God is giving you a growth opportunity, and ask yourself, what is the growth opportunity?" She directed her to the questions listed for the Grounded Visionary on the Exit Strategies handout. "Look at those questions. 'What is my purpose in this?' 'Am I connected to my purpose in this?' 'How can I reconnect with and recommit to my purpose,' and, of course, 'do I have faith that God cares and can help?'" She asks Shira to "meditate" on these questions in preparation for mediation.

Shimona concluded her coaching by again arguing that God had given Shira this conflict as a growth opportunity and an opportunity to overcome shame. "The conflict is being presented to you from God, from the Creator of the Universe as a growth opportunity," she implored, "and just go with that. So if you can connect with what your purpose is, and maybe that purpose is 'I don't want to feel like a victim,' or 'I want to feel like I am worthy.' 'I don't want to experience the shame.' Whatever it is, you find that purpose and then you keep that in front of you like a constant focus." Shira agreed to follow this plan.

The next night, on the Method online forum, Shira made her first post. It was entitled "Travel To The Mountain."

> My Dear Friends Of The Method,
>
> I am pleased to report that 5 years of painstaking divorce litigation has come to an end! Contrary to my belief that NO settlement was possible, WE DID INDEED SETTLE. Despite all my fear and trepidation about the aggressor I had to face, it was my purpose quadrant that saved the day. Recommitting to my goals, and holding steadfast to the vision of the person I wanted to be, opened doors that I never knew existed. I did not engage in war, instead I

> travelled to the mountain! I gave up some, but gained so much more in return. Thanks to you all and Shimona for guiding me toward this profound personal victory.
>
> Love,
> Shira

Other participants were ecstatic at this news and were very supportive of her in several posts. For example, Patricia wrote,

> Mazal tov Shira! This is great news! I am so happy for you and proud that you held on to your highest self and were able to get the results you wanted. Life is one big (and sometimes difficult) journey and the tools we are learning with Shimona definitely prepare us to journey with purpose and a clear sense of what we need to do, how we need to do it, and why. It is quite an amazing blessing!

On the coaching call the following week, Shira's "hand" shot up right away. Shimona invited her to share her news with the group. "As I said last week," she began in a strong and confident voice, "I was going into what I considered to be a tremendous battle, with absolutely no vision of settlement in mind. I reviewed my Purpose Quadrant, and we settled, which I didn't expect at all. It was amazing. I gave up some, but I really got so much more than I gave up. It is life changing really." Shimona was very supportive, telling Shira that she had been praying for her and was a "major cheerleader on the sideline" throughout the day of mediation. She then told Shira that she could tell she had become the Grounded Visionary, because she was able to say "I gave up some, but I gained so much more." She told Shira that by doing this she "opened up a whole new path forward for yourself." Shimona ended by asking everyone to "press 2" to indicate hugs for Shira.

In a conversation a few months later, Shira told me that the Purpose Quadrants had enabled her to change the way she framed everything during mediation. At first, she had no hope. She was even thinking of asking her attorney not to attend, since her attorney was so pessimistic about the potential outcome, and Shira felt the whole process was going to be a

waste of time. Yet, after meditating on what it means to be a Grounded Visionary, to see herself as a Godly soul, she saw that there could be a way through this encounter. In the end, she received what she sees as total liberation. "He can never take me back to court again. He can't hold this over my head anymore. And this is the end of five years. It's a big deal."

When I asked her if her feelings of freedom were a result of her work in The Method or the positive outcome of the legal proceedings, she told me they go hand in hand. She believes that she would never have been able to settle if she hadn't done the work in the Method. "I did not expect to settle," she told me. "I saw no grounds to settle. I almost asked my lawyer not to show up. I couldn't believe that we settled. And [my ex-husband] signed a contract that takes it outside the purview of the courts, so he can't take me back to court over this issue. It's wonderful!" She told me what enabled her to settle was the Purpose Quadrant, which enabled her to move from the Warrior to the Grounded Visionary engendering a new moral disposition.

Shira explained to me, in the months following the settlement she has experienced tremendous progress in all of her relationships. She feels she has "taken away the power" from her ex-husband, and that he no longer has a "heavy thing hanging over [her] head." Based on their settlement, he can never take her back to court. "He can never hurt me," she said in relief. "Now he *just* can't hurt me anymore." She now feels free of Stephen. He no longer dominates her thinking. "In the last month or so, since it's settled," she told me. "This enormous weight has lifted off of my shoulders. I do not think about [him] or it anymore. It does not dominate my thoughts. Nothing."

Fixing Shira's Broken Soul

Like Patricia and many other participants in the Method, this was not Shira's first experience with a therapeutic intervention. Yet, the Method, according to Shira, was more effective than her earlier experiences with psychological therapy had been. Shira felt the core of her problems was that her "soul was broken." "I didn't feel like I had a mental illness," she told me. "I felt like that I was sort of so downtrodden and sort of beat up to a point that my soul was defective, as if my soul is broken."

For four years Shira saw the therapist who ultimately helped her end her marriage. This was the same therapist at Children's Hospital who had helped Ethan when he refused to go to school. Shira told me she told the therapist two things when she first walked into therapy. She said, "I don't think I can survive the break up of my marriage, and I have a broken soul." Although this therapist was helpful on a practical level in helping her convince Stephen to move out, according to Shira, "she never really got anywhere near my soul." Shira visited several therapists after this one, and according to her, "nobody got anywhere near my soul." That all changed when she encountered Shimona. From the time she first listened to Shimona's CDs Estee had slipped into her luggage, Shira felt like Shimona was "speaking to her soul." Her private coaching sessions and participation in the Method, in Shira's words, have "rekindled my soul." "As Shimona would say," she told me, "the layers have been peeled away, and [my soul] has been reclaimed. It was always there, and it was reclaimed."

Shira compares The Method to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), only more effective. For many years, Shira went to a CBT therapist. Shira shared this experience with me. "I remember her teaching me all about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. It made sense but there was something lacking...the soul part was missing from it, there was nothing to tie it...I

don't know...to tie it into a person." She understood the logic behind CBT and why it could work, yet she felt something crucial was lacking.

> [CBT] totally makes sense, I understood it. I always understood it, and it's exactly what they say in *Tanya*, but it wasn't connected to God or something. And I remember thinking, what you say is true. I know it, but something in me fights it. It's not enough. What you're telling me is not enough. So okay, change your thoughts, it will change your feelings. Okay I know that. I get it.

Although Shira understood it on an intellectual level, she still did not practice the exercises her therapist gave her. There is a reason I'm not doing it," she rationalized. "I don't know what it is, and so that simplicity comes now. That's the God thing." God connects CBT with the soul. "I mean, I think [the Method is] completely CBT, and it blows me away that it is sort of an ancient principle. The idea that your emotions are very real, but that you and your intellect must be the one that controls the emotions, that keeps it in check, that contains the emotion…. I've seen a CBT therapist before but not until it was connected Jewishly could I buy it." For Shira this is the key to its effectiveness. "Without addressing the soul and the essence of who you are. All the other stuff you can adopt it sort of intellectually for a while but you can lose it too. It doesn't have a foundation that it attaches to." In this way, the *Tanya*, for Shira is the "original CBT." For Shira, the Method succeeded where other therapies failed, because it gave Shira a way to heal her broken soul and work through her shame. Shira fundamentally changed the way she understood the nature of her self. This new self was, at its core, unwoundable, infinitely valuable and already perfect, because it was part of God. As a part of God, this self is also subordinate to God and the laws of the Torah, which communicates God's will. While the Torah provides mechanisms for transcendence, according to Chabad cosmology, it also constructs boundaries and constrains the self, as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Sexuality and the Limits of Jewish Life Coaching

Creation begins in chaos.

I didn't make the mess.

Truth is not monochrome

—Three Isms from the Method

Yocheved is a 48 year-old married mother of two who has spent most of her life angry with God. She attributes this anger to the modeling of her father and the traumatic experiences of the first half of her life. Her father was a survivor of the Holocaust, having been imprisoned in the infamous Auschwitz Concentration Camp during World War II. As a result, he was angry with God and life and expressed this anger with his children. He was often drunk, very erratic in his behavior, and verbally and physically abusive to Yocheved and her older brother. Yocheved's mother was narcissistic and neglectful. Her neglect led to, among other things, some of the horrible sexual abuse Yocheved experienced throughout her childhood at the hands of multiple perpetrators. Yocheved always felt an important connection with her Judaism, but her relationship with God was one of anger. Yocheved's history of physical and sexual abuse and severe neglect left her struggling her entire life with shame, anger, drug addiction, and confusion over her sexual identity. She has been trying to figure out her relationship with God and why she had to suffer so much for so long.

Although this project has spoken a good deal about the aquatic attributes of religions, in this chapter I will discuss the way in which the Method constructs boundaries. As religious studies scholar Thomas Tweed argues, religions construct boundaries by establishing fixed notions of "bodies," "homes," "homelands," and cosmos," and by

defining rules by which one crosses boundaries.[232]t The boundaries constructed by Chabad and further by the Method have been important to Yocheved, as they have helped her gain a sense of stability out of a very chaotic life. These boundaries have also left her very confused and struggling with her sexual identity, as the sexual boundaries set by Orthodox Judaism prohibit her from acting on her desires. These boundaries or fixed moral constraints are a primary ways in which the Method is starkly different than mainstream life coaching, which claims to be value-neutral. As opposed to mainstream life coaching's avowed value neutrality, whereby the client drives the agenda and sets his or her own core values, the Method holds to a very strict set of values that it seeks to impose on participants, establishing boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable actions. In this chapter I will present Yocheved's struggle with her sexual identity and the way in which Shimona tries to coach Yocheved through this struggle. While Shimona asserts a very clear boundary for Yocheved, however, the ethnographic data shows Shimona's approach to be much more subtle. Yocheved's case is especially helpful, because, like Patricia and Shira, Yocheved had seen a traditional therapist before Shimona who provided her with very different advice.

In this chapter I also will explore what is at stake for Yocheved in her struggle to repress her attraction for women and to remain an observant Orthodox Jew. When we understand what is at stake for her, we understand why she struggles each and every day to not act on her attraction to women. In this way, we can understand what anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly means when she says, in the moral laboratory we often see people who are "not working with the odds but also, in important ways, *against* them." In the moral laboratory "the possible is pitted against the predictable," she argues.[233] In this chapter, I will provide extensive excerpts from a coaching session Yocheved had with Shimona that I was

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[232] Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*.
[233] Mattingly, "Moral Selves and Moral Scenes," 9.

privileged to sit in on. This session demonstrates the moral narrative that Shimona and Yocheved co-construct, the ways in which the boundaries are negotiated and imagined, and the ways in which Yocheved tries to live into that narrative in the wake of the Method.

Yocheved's life is like Cheryl Mattingly's moral laboratory, where the "turbulence, uncertainty, and drama are such pervasive qualities that ordinary routines are not the daily expression of a habitual way of life culturally inherited so much as a fragile achievement, a hard won moment of mundaneness. Under such circumstances the ordinary is freighted with a special moral weight and it can acquire an unexpected symbolic density."[234] As such, it is important to understand what is at stake for her in her struggle in order to appreciate the moral choices she makes.

A Childhood of Abuse and Neglect

When I first asked Yocheved if her father was ever physically abusive to her, she asked me sardonically in reply, "Do you consider being kicked until your butt is the color of eggplant abusive? Do you consider someone who takes a painting off the wall and starts beating you with it abusive?" I asked her what she meant by this last question. She described it as the worst beating she ever endured. When she was in high school she walked into their house with her best friend. They were eating snow cones. Her father immediately sent her friend to Yocheved's room and within an instant had removed a painting from the wall and began to repeatedly beat her over the head and body with it. She had no idea what had sparked his rage. Years later when she asked him why he had beaten her so severely that day, he said he simply knew she had been up to no good. "You know what," she told me, "maybe I was up to no good. Maybe I did deserve that beating. I just didn't want to be

[234] Ibid., 23.

home. I never wanted to be home when my father was home. You never knew what was going to happen when my father was home. Who was going to get hit. Who was going to get yelled at. You know, it was so unpredictable."

While Yocheved's father was erratic and abusive, her mother was vain and neglectful. Yocheved's mother was a gorgeous woman, Yocheved remembers. Every night she would get dressed up late in the evening and head to the casinos with her friends in Puerto Rico where they lived. She wouldn't get home until three or four AM and would sleep in late each morning. Yocheved and her brother wouldn't see their mother in the morning and were ordered to keep quiet by their father so as not to disturb her. The situation was very difficult on Yocheved's father and led him to become a heavy drinker, according to Yocheved. "My father," she explained to me, "adored my mother. My father loved my mother, but he couldn't control her and so he would stay home, and he would drink. And he couldn't control her spending, couldn't control her going out, he knew that when she was going out she was flirting and who knows what… He knew what she was doing, and so she was pretty much absent." Her father moved out several times until her parents finally divorced when Yocheved was eleven.

Another example of Yocheved's mother's gross negligence occurred during one of the times her father and mother were separated. When Yocheved was only ten years old, her mother left her alone in their apartment for three days while she took a trip to New York City with her friends. Her parents had already sent her older brother to live in a boarding school in Israel the year before, so Yocheved was left home alone. As Yocheved remembers it, her mother instructed her, "Don't tell anyone. Just wake up. Go to school. Come back, and do what you need to do, and I'll be back soon." Yocheved did as she was told.

Yocheved also experienced many instances of sexual abuse from the time she was a little girl through her early twenties. When Yocheved was seven years old living in Puerto Rico she was sexually assaulted by a stranger. It was late at night and her parents were at home having a cocktail. They asked Yocheved to walk their two small dogs. She walked the first dog without incident, but when she exited the apartment building and turned the corner with the second dog, a man who seemed to know she was coming immediately abducted her. She later blamed herself for the abduction, since she was playfully speaking with the first dog when she walked him and mentioned that she was about to bring the other dog down too. The abductor placed his hand over her mouth and started to carry her off around the building towards the darkened beach. He was trying to remove her pants as he walked. She struggled wildly to break free, screaming franticly through the man's hand while also trying to bite his hand. She vividly remembers her small white poodle choking as it dangled from the leash that was still clenched in Yocheved's hand. "The further we got away from sight," Yocheved remembers, "the more fear I felt and pictures of my life flashing by quickly in fragments. So much seemed to be going on in such a short time." The commotion and screaming must have sacred the man, for all of a sudden, he threw her down on the sand and ran off. Yocheved picked herself up off the beach and tried to clean the sand off of her clothes. She realized that she was now holding a dollar bill. At some point in the struggle, the man must have placed it in her hand. "I remember a bad feeling associated with that," she told me.

Yocheved climbed the stairs to her apartment building trembling. She opened the door to the apartment and simply stood in the entrance in shock, unable to utter a word. "I tried. I really tried [to speak]," she remembers, "but as I attempted to get the words out nothing would come out. Nothing. My voice had gone. My throat felt raw. Not a sound. I

am not sure why, but I just could not speak." Her parents looked at her in bewilderment, not knowing what had happened and why she wouldn't speak. She was obviously troubled and scared. They gave her a drink of whiskey to try and calm her down and clear her throat. She still could not speak. In the end, her parents became so frustrated with her unwillingness to speak they slapped her across the face. At that point, Yocheved remembers, "I silenced myself."

Later that year, during one of the periods when Yocheved's father was not living with them, Yocheved's mother hired Juan, a handy man in his mid-sixties, to come to the house on Saturday mornings to do chores and household repairs. Yocheved's mother regularly left Yocheved home alone with Juan on these mornings or simply stayed in bed asleep with her door closed. One day, Juan locked Yocheved in a room and molested her. She didn't tell her parents. He molested her every Saturday morning until one day he stopped showing up. When Yocheved asked her mother why he was not there, she told her that he was in jail. When he was released a few months later, Yocheved's mother rehired him, and he returned to the house on Saturdays and the molestation continued. In total, Juan came to their home for almost three years. Yocheved never mentioned a word of any of this to her parents. Somehow she felt what she was doing with Juan was wrong and she felt shame.

For Yocheved, perhaps the worst abuse came at the hands of her cousin who was eight years older than Yocheved. In the summers Yocheved traveled to Mexico and Venezuela to be with her grandparents and cousins. During these visits, between the ages of eight and eleven, this cousin would physically force her to perform oral sex on him. Sometimes he would abuse her multiple times on the same day. Again, she never mentioned this abuse to anyone. One day, Yocheved's older brother got suspicious when the cousin

took Yocheved into a bedroom and locked the door. He climbed out of a window, ten stories above the ground, and shimmied along the ledge to the window outside the room in which his sister was being held. When he saw his cousin holding Yocheved down on the bed, he confided what he saw to another cousin. The two of them went to yet another, much older cousin, and told him what he had seen. This cousin confronted the abusive cousin and threatened him with bodily harm if he continued. After that, the abuse stopped.

Yocheved also had a relationship with another cousin. He did not force himself on her at first, but took advantage of her weakness and lack of boundaries. She began having intercourse with him when she was eleven years old. She did not resist him at first, but when she became older, she started to refuse. He tried to force himself on her, but she stood her ground. She finally set some boundaries.

By the time Yocheved was fourteen the sexual abuse had stopped. When she experienced her first menstruation, she felt "reborn," and consciously decided she would never be "touched or taken" by anyone against her will again. In middle school and high school her friends considered her a "prude…a virgin." None of her friends knew about her past and she pretended to be naïve about sex. After her parents divorced, however, Yocheved was shipped around from relative to relative. She lived with her grandmother for a couple of years, an aunt for a couple, and another aunt for a couple. The abuse had stopped, but her life continued to be unsettled.

When Yocheved went to college she discovered drugs and an attraction to women. She started smoking a lot of marijuana and eventually began snorting cocaine. She had been doing exceptionally well in all of her classes and was getting along very well with her teachers, but when she started snorting cocaine, her grades began to plummet. She

eventually flunked a couple of classes and felt like she did not know how to get back on track. She felt very lost and confused.

Yocheved also felt very confused about her sexual identity. She had never considered herself a lesbian before. Although Yocheved felt a physical attraction to her childhood best friend, she had never thought of it in a sexual way and never acted upon those feelings. When she was at college, however, Yocheved became very attracted to one of her female professors. It was very confusing for her, but she decided to explore that part of her sexuality and began dating women. She enjoyed being intimate with women, but it was not "a sexual thing." Yocheved describes it as "very comforting. It was soft….I was able to be a little bit more on the aggressive side, and I liked that. And it was just very comforting, very soft….I look back, it wasn't so sexual." Despite these positive experiences, she remained very torn about her sexual identity. Her sexual confusion coupled with the drugs and failing grades were too much for her to bear.

When Yocheved was twenty, she dropped out of college and went to Israel. She was running away from her confusion and sense of failure and wanted to be as far away from her mother as possible. Unfortunately in Israel she would not escape the sexual abuse that had tormented her early life. While she was in Israel, she spent time with the family of her mother's first husband. Her mother had been forced to marry an Israeli man by her parents when she was only seventeen years old and had a son with this man. This man and his new wife lived in Israel and had become a family away from home for Yocheved's brother when he had been sent to boarding school in Israel. This family also invited Yocheved to spend holidays and weekends with them. They became a family away from home for her. About one year after knowing them, one night while staying in their home, she awoke to find her mother's ex-husband laying in bed next to her with his hands down her pants. His wife was

sleeping in the next room. He told her to keep quiet, and she reluctantly complied. She is not sure why she did not speak out.

Yocheved again said nothing about being sexually abused. His attacks became a repeated occurrence. "It became unbearable," Yocheved told me. "He would corner me and force himself…groping mostly." It shattered her. "The feelings of shame were overwhelming," she remembered. "It was sick!!! I could not fight him off, I didn't. I allowed it. As disgusting as it was, I allowed it. I was not a little girl, I was in my twenties." Later, Yocheved shared with me that she did at one point fight him off. He had decided to try and have intercourse with her. He brought her to an apartment in Tel Aviv, and she refused him. She would not let him go that far. What made his attacks particularly horrific for her, she told me later, is that he justified his attacks by saying he was simply trying to prove to her that she was not gay. "He couldn't stand that I had a girlfriend at that time," she remembers. "He couldn't stand it. That's one of things he would say to me. 'You're just confused.'"

The only way Yocheved felt she could get away from his persistent attacks was to move as far away as she could in Israel. She chose a village at the southern tip of the Jordan Valley in the Occupied Territories. By being so far away, she felt she could plausibly refuse the mother's invitations for weekend and holiday visits. She was still nonetheless wracked by guilt over continually turning down the family's invitations.

Even here, Yocheved could not escape sexual predators. While living in the village, she became romantically involved with a woman who lived in the village. They moved in together. After living in the village peacefully for eight months, one night while her girlfriend was at work and Yocheved was sleeping in her bed, a male neighbor broke into their home and raped her. He was a very large man, and she could not fight him off. She screamed, but he beat her to keep her quiet. "I could not move He had absolutely total control," she

described the incident in an e-mail to me. "There was nothing that I could do!!!! when he was done he apologized!!!! I ran into the shower and never came out..... My friend found me in the shower....I was in there for hours..." The man had fled by the morning. Her girlfriend demanded she report this attack to the authorities. This was the first time that Yocheved had the courage to speak out against one of her attackers. To her knowledge, however, they never caught the man who raped her.

After this horrific attack, Yocheved again felt the need to run away. After two and a half years in Israel, she left for India. She had saved up money from working in Israel, and was able to survive in India living on a "shoestring," which Yocheved described as "$5 per day or less." Her first stop was Goa. According to Yocheved, Goa was "basically a party town…known for having these trance parties." She stayed in Goa for a month and a half, and began taking LSD regularly. By the end of the month and a half, Yocheved felt like she needed to "clean herself out," so she joined an ashram. She did not like the rituals of the ashram and didn't feel she fit in, but she ran into a man there whom she had met in Goa. He introduced her to "Brown Sugar," which is a form of heroin used for smoking. "I basically got lost with this guy for…I got into this trance that I was in for almost two months, and I finally got out of it." When he began to make sexual advances towards Yocheved, she left him and continued traveling around India for another two and a half months until she ended up in New Delhi. She was sleeping in a hostel in New Delhi and met an Israeli woman there who had been traveling around the world for eight months. Someone had recently stolen all of this woman's possessions. Yocheved saw it as a sign and decided to give this woman everything she owned and most of her money. She only kept what she needed to get back home to the United States. She had been completely out of communication with her parents for six months and decided, "this is enough punishment." Yocheved's return from India

marked the end of a difficult childhood and young adult period of her life that left her with feelings of depression, anger and shame, drug addiction and confusion over her sexual identity. Although her struggles with sexual and physical abuse were over, she continued to struggle with how to deal with the scars that these earlier traumas produced and how to live a moral life.

Returning to Judaism

Yocheved returned to Judaism in various ways throughout her life to try and reconstruct what she considered to be a moral life. When Yocheved moved back to the United States, she got a job working at a Jewish camp. There she met Beth, a non-Jewish woman, and they became romantically involved. They moved to Florida and moved in together. The fact that Beth was not Jewish always bothered Yocheved, but that did not prevent her from continuing the relationship. After almost five years with Beth, Yocheved traveled to Israel to visit her half brother who had just had a baby girl. While holding her infant niece, Yocheved had what she describes as a "really weird experience." She felt suddenly as if she had a "very deep connection that came from a very deep source," she told me. "I can't explain it. It was a moment. It was a second. It was a revelation, if that makes any sense to you. And I…it was almost like I had this feeling that she was into and out of me. It was a very strong feeling….It filled me from inside…going through my veins." In that moment Yocheved decided she would leave Beth, get married to a man and have children. Before then, she explained to me, "I didn't want children. I never thought that I would get married and have children. It was in that moment. The minute I held her it was like something just snapped. When I held my niece I just knew that I had to make some changes

in my life. She was the catalyst." She cannot explain why, but it was a moment of moral crisis that she felt had only one resolution.

Yocheved returned home and told Beth she wanted her to move out. Within two weeks Beth moved out, and Yocheved started dating men. Shortly thereafter, Yocheved met Eric, the man she would later marry. Unfortunately, this new life did not rectify her moral confusion; it only exacerbated it. Yocheved's relationship with Eric intensified her drug addiction and magnified her struggle with her sexual identity. Eric suffered from undiagnosed bipolar disorder, and would often go into manic states that made their lives very chaotic. Describing these episodes, she told me "his eyes change. His eyes are wide open. He's louder. He's always talking non-stop. It's exhausting and overpowering. He's abusive. The reason I threw him out the last time is because I thought I was going to beat the shit out of him. He sucks out every bit of energy from my existence. I cannot breath….Our finances, everything is a mess, everything. Since Eric, my life has been a mess."

At one point, when Eric was in a particularly manic state, Yocheved made another sudden and dramatic life change in order to gain control over her chaotic life. At the time, Yocheved was reading *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle and listening to a series of audio interviews with him conducted by Oprah Winfrey. One day, while out on her regular Saturday morning jog, Yocheved was listening to one of these interviews. The question was asked, "Do you believe in God?" Yocheved stopped dead in her tracks. "I stopped running, and I stood there," she told me, "and I thought to myself, I said, 'I *do* believe in God.' And then I looked around myself. I looked around my surroundings, and I thought to myself, 'There is a God, and I believe in God, and I believe that Moses liberated the Jews out of Egypt, and I believe that there are Ten Commandments and you shall keep the Sabbath.'"

Yocheved immediately went home, walked in the door and announced to Eric and her children, "Guess what everybody, I'm *Shomer Shabbat* [Sabbath observant]!" They looked at her in disbelief, saying, in Yocheved's words, "What the heck is going on here?" Yocheved laughs as she remembers the story. "What do you mean?, her family asked. "I'm not driving anymore. That's it, no more," she told them. "And I am going to go jogging on Sunday, okay? I'll stay home on Saturday. I'll clean the house." Yocheved also decided if she was going to keep the Sabbath, then she was going to keep all Ten Commandments. She embarrassingly admitted to me that at the time she did not realize that there are 613 commandments, not only ten.

This change was a big shock to her family. At this point, Yocheved and her family were not living a religiously observant lifestyle. They were not affiliated with any synagogue and did not practice any Jewish rituals on a regular basis. Eric attended classes occasionally at the local Chabad House, but Yocheved did not join him. Further, the idea of wearing a skirt instead of pants was ridiculous to Yocheved. "I wasn't wearing a skirt, God forbid I would wear a skirt. Me in a skirt? Forget it!" She now wears a skirt and covers her hair with a wig or hat every day, even when she goes to work as a personal trainer at the gym.

Yocheved describes her transformation as part of her addictive personality. She says when she started to learn Torah, she saw the "truth in it." She did not question anything. "I believe that the Torah was given to us in the Sinai and I believe it so this is the way it should be, and I didn't see any medium….I'm an addict. I'm a 100%. I am an addict in every sense of the word." She regrets the way she thrust all of this on her family. "I basically threw my family; I put them all in sack, and I dragged them with me. And what I did is, I covered my hair and I got rid of all my pants, and I started wearing a skirt. Pretty much over night."

As with her dramatic moral transformation that led her to give up her girlfriend and get married, this moral transformation brought with it multiple new moral questions. As Mattingly states, the new beginnings that are engendered by moral experiments do not happen in a vacuum; they are part of longer narrative trajectories. "They may be beginnings," she writes, "but they are beginnings in what are, paradoxically, also, always middles."[235] Yocheved's new beginning did not solve her moral confusion in one fell swoop, as she may have hoped. Particularly with her confusion over her sexual identity, it has made the struggle even more intense.

Sexual Confusion

Despite Yocheved's decision to marry a man and give up a homosexual lifestyle, Yocheved has struggled with her sexual identity from the very beginning of her relationship with Eric. Even walking down the aisle, at her wedding, her ex-partner Beth standing beside her as a bridesmaid, Yocheved was asking herself, "What am I doing? Am I going to be able to handle this?" Yocheved has continued to feel an attraction to women, but has tried to fight it, in order to remain married and faithful to her husband. Once she became a *ba'alat teshuva*, she also felt that God wanted her to be heterosexual.

Using the language of Chabad *chasidut* and the Method, Yocheved relates her moral struggle with her sexuality to the battle between the Godly Soul (*nefesh elohit*) and the Animal Soul (*nefesh beheimit*). As Shimona teaches in her Dual Identity lesson, the self is comprised of two souls. There is a Divine Soul and an Animal Soul. The Animal Soul "suffers from the delusion of cosmic amnesia." It has forgotten that it is part of God, thus it is "delusional and egocentric." The Animal Soul is prone to impulsive behavior, because it is driven by

[235] Ibid., 19.

emotions rather than thoughts. When driven by the Animal, thoughts become nothing more than a reflection of one's emotional desires. Actions then, driven by these desires, are "impulsive and generate regret." When one is driven by the Divine Soul, on the other hand, one's thoughts control one's feelings, and then these feelings control one actions. "The mind controls the heart," Shimona explains. "By shifting our thinking, we give birth to different kinds of feelings. Feelings are the offspring of our mind and actions are the offspring of our feelings, the grandchildren of our mind." The Godly soul, according to Shimona, "

> is characterized by what we call *bittul*, nullification, it's not even humility, because with humility you are an existence and you are a humble existence, but *bittul* means the awareness that I don't have any existence, meaning any independent existence. Remember, we said the soul is there but it doesn't exist independently, it is just a part of God, a part of the Creator. The Godly soul understands that it is rooted in the Source….characterized by nullification. It is also mindful, so it thinks and then it feels. The animal soul is characterized by ego, or the delusion of separate existence. It is ruled by the heart.

Shimona points out that this battle between the Animal and the Godly is a core teaching at the heart of *Tanya*, written by the Alter Rebbe. In chapter nine of *Tanya* it states, "The body is called a 'small city' (Ecclesiastes 9:14). Just as two Kings wage war over a city…so the two souls…wage war against each other over the body and all its limbs." So, when it comes to her desire for women (and drugs), Yocheved sees herself pitted in this epic battle between her Godly Soul and her Animal Soul. When she feels more connected to God, she feels less desire to follow the feelings of the Animal Soul. Shimona is also quick to point out that the Animal Soul is necessary and good. "There is much produce in the strength of an ox," she frequently quotes.

Yocheved became a personal trainer in the wake of her drug conviction, and when she became Orthodox she stopped going to the gym. She felt like her presence there fueled her Animal Soul. She wanted to workout intensely and look masculine. The exposure to

physically fit women dressed in tight fitting workout clothing also stoked her desire for women. "I'm driven by the Animal," she told me, "because I'm a body builder, and I want to become a man, and I have these… and I have these, these desires, so I stopped working out. I stopped part of who I was. I totally stopped. I was cold turkey, okay?" In a one hundred and eighty degree turnaround, in order to embrace the laws of modesty as interpreted by Chabad, Yocheved began to wear a wig and a skirt. "For me that was the hardest thing I could have ever done," she told me. "It was very, very difficult, and three years into or more or less I started feeling lost, that I have lost myself like, who am I in all of this?"

Yocheved began to go to traditional psychotherapy through a Jewish social services agency to try and cope with her sense of loss and confusion. It took her a year to finally open up to her therapist about her sexual identity. The therapist was Jewish but not a religious woman. Yocheved felt like the therapist confused her even more. The therapist advised her, "You have to live your truth, and you have to be who you are. You know you're a lesbian. Maybe you need to leave your husband." This made Yocheved very unsettled. She could not reconcile these two parts of her life. "When I listen to Torah," she told me, "and I feel… I feel that that's the right path that that's the right thing, and it makes so much sense to me, and it's so true, and I love it. Although I feel so awkward because I have these unkosher thoughts and these unkosher feelings and I don't know where that all plays into it. And I'm struggling with that." Yocheved began to question God again. "God, why did you make me this way?" she cried. "Maybe I'm not good enough. I shouldn't be Orthodox because I'm not, I'm not…I don't fit the mold, and I'm not good enough. Why did you make me this way?" she beseeched.

Around this time, Shimona came to Yocheved's city to give a class, and Yocheved signed up to have a private coaching session with Shimona. Yocheved did not know

Shimona, but many of the women in the Chabad House she frequented did and highly recommended her. It was about a month before the start of the Method for Self Mastery. Yocheved wanted to discuss her sexual identity with Shimona. "I don't know if I'm worthy of being Orthodox because I have this attraction to women," she admitted to Shimona. "I feel like I'm all confused." Shimona replied lightly, "There's nothing wrong with that. So you have an attraction to women." Yocheved told her that she did not feel that God loved her. "God loves you." Shimona replied. "What do you mean God doesn't love you? God loves you. Of course He loves you!" Shimona told Yocheved about the Method and that she thought it would benefit her, and Yocheved signed up. Yocheved is committed to remaining in her relationship with Eric, but she is struggling. She hoped the Method would help her work out her thoughts and end her confusion.

The Co-creation of a Moral Narrative

As described in Chapter Four, one of the exercises of the Method is Tribe Work, through which one identifies and negotiates amongst various tribes or voices that act within oneself. By explicitly naming multiple, often conflicting, drives and motivations, Tribe Work recognizes the inherently pluralistic nature of morality and the self. Tribe Work was very profound for Yocheved. When she did this work, she worked out four dominant tribes, which she named Joan, Jocelyn, Joe, and Yocheved. As Yocheved described them to me, Joan is the little girl that existed before all of the sexual and physical abuse and neglect. Joan is the name Yocheved's parents gave her when she was born. Jocelyn is the victim, who is angry at the world and wants to escape it. She is the one that abuses drugs and binges—the addict. Jocelyn dominates when Yocheved is feeling chaotic, anxious, shame-prone or angry. Jocelyn emerged when Yocheved was fifteen years old. At that time she actually began to ask

her friends to call her Jocelyn instead of Joan. Joe is the tribe that emerged to take control of Yocheved's life, to protect her from abuse, so she would not be a victim anymore. Joe is masculine, tough and attracted to women. Finally, Yocheved, which was the Hebrew name her parents gave her when she was born, is the tribe that emerged to try and connect with God and to elevate all of the others. Yocheved adopted this name as her everyday name when she became a *ba'alat teshuvah*.

Yocheved had scheduled a private coaching session with Shimona to take place at the conclusion of the Second Mastermind in Brooklyn to discuss and process her Tribe Work. Both Yocheved and Shimona consented to my observing and recording the session. The session took place in a bare, small, windowless conference room with a small square table in the center of the room. I sat in a chair along the perimeter of the room. Yocheved sat with her back to me, so my presence wouldn't distract her. The Method had just concluded and Shimona was clearly exhausted from having led the retreat for the past 48 hours, yet as soon as the session began, Shimona seemed to become completely engaged and present for Yocheved. In what follows is extended excerpts from this session interspersed with my analysis. Although this session could easily be understood through the analytic lens of the Artisan's Workshop, as an apprentice being schooled in the practices of the craft guild by a master, I think it is more productive to understand this session and the ways in which Yocheved subsequently tries to practice what is unearthed in this session through the lens of Mattingly's moral laboratory. Through a process of co-creation, Yocheved and Shimona construct a vision of a new moral reality with new moral possibilities that Yocheved experiments with and tries to inhabit. Rather than simply adopting the practices of the Artisan's Workshop, Yocheved experimented with new ways of understanding her moral tragedy.

I have included long excerpts from this session, because I want to illustrate the way in which during the session Shimona and Yocheved engaged in a process of co-authoring of a new moral narrative in which Yocheved tries to inhabit. Anthropologist Elinor Ochs and psychologist Lisa Capps argue there is a substantial difference between "telling a story *to* another and telling a story *with* another." When one tells a story *with* another, the interlocutors co-author the narrative through a process of inherent collaboration. The "narrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life," they argue. The interlocutor shapes the narrative by providing, eliciting, criticizing, refuting and drawing inferences from facets of the unfolding account.[236] Ochs and Capps liken the process of co-authoring narrative to prayer because they argue both "involve a quest for moral clarity and legitimacy. Conversational narratives are never simply informative; they are always imbued with moral meanings," they argue. "Through conversational interaction, co-narrators build moral perspective on life events."[237] The session I witnessed was exactly this process of co-authoring of a new moral narrative, whereby Shimona helped Yocheved re-imagine Yocheved's narration of her difficult situation. Shimona seems to be trying to move Yocheved from a place of having to decide whether to repress or express her sexual identity to a place of trying to transform and/or transcend it, based on a mystical kind of inversion (*ithapcha*). The narrative Shimona helps Yocheved shape also asserts strict limits on Yocheved's sexuality, and does not suggest the same kind of value-neutrality that is present in mainstream life coaching. Here, I will show, that life coaching is defined within a predetermined set of values. We will also see that Yocheved continues to struggle with trying to embody this new narrative.

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[236] Ochs and Capps, *Living Narrative*, 2–3.
[237] Ibid., 242.

Yocheved began the session by explaining to Shimona that it is about this time each year when she battles hardest with her attraction to women. It was right after the High Holiday season. For the past two years, Yocheved had returned to the gym working as a personal trainer. Yocheved takes an extended period of time away from the gym during the Holidays to prepare for the Holidays, and then goes back to work at their conclusion. She was preparing to go back to work when she had this session. She explained her fear of returning to work, for it heightens her attraction to women and separates her from Eric.

> Yocheved: You know Shimona I also came to a realization that, that I cycle. I cycle just like my husband cycles and goes into a manic state. I cycle, and I cycle with Joe....and I fear…I have a fear: What do I do with Joe? Because now, now that we finished the Holidays, and I knew that this was coming, I have to start working. I've got to get back to the gym, and it's not the first time. It happens *every* time, the same time of year. Come the month of Elul,[238] I start to back off [from the gym]. I've got to get ready for the Holidays, and I become like this [Yocheved], and then I start shifting, and then when I make that shift I become more separate to, you know, my husband, and I start going into this head case…
>
> Shimona: And this shift you're talking about is the shift where you're focusing about…?
>
> Yocheved: It's that masculine side, and then once I start that, it's it's, it's, I start becoming very confused…very confused, and that confusion feeds on me, and that keeps me away from Eric, in coming close to him, and you know…
>
> Shimona: What did you tell him?
>
> Yocheved: I told him that I have these, this, this feeling where I become more attached to the idea of…being more physical, and I start becoming very confused in the gym. I start looking more at women, and that there's this duality, this side of me that, um, that I'm working on.
>
> Shimona: Why, when you told me that you become confused at this time of year, is there so much pain? What is the pain around being confused?
>
> Yocheved: Because I don't want to feel that way. I want to be a devoted wife. I want to be a devoted mother. I don't want to be pre-occupied with what's going on in my head. I want to…I have this sense of wanting to appear a

[238] A month associated with repentance that directly precedes the month of Tishrei, in which the High Holidays occur.

> different way, physical, and that bothers me. It bothers me that that's important to me because that shouldn't be important to me.

Yocheved told Shimona that her muscular appearance does not serve her in her business, because most of her clients, who are female, do not want to look muscular. Shimona, however, redirected Yocheved away from this more utilitarian excuse for why Yocheved dislikes her desire to be more well-built, and asked Yocheved to get in touch with the fear inside the confusion. Why, Shimona persisted, is Yocheved so afraid of her confusion?

> Shimona: But why is it scary to you that you like it?
>
> [Long pause.]
>
> Yocheved: Mostly, at this point in my life, because it's not serving God.
>
> Shimona: Was there ever a point in your life when this was uncomfortable?
>
> Yocheved: No.
>
> Shimona: So, there was never discomfort around Joe until God came into your life?
>
> Yocheved: Only that it would, only that Eric would reject me. Because there were points, times in my life that I was taking even steroids, not steroid injections, but taking things to supplement, to make me more, more enhanced. I'm a drug addict. So, you know, I would find my ways.
>
> Shimona: You see what I'm telling you is that now, when you're confused there's fear in the confusion, and that at one point it was about your human relationship with your husband, that you would compromise your marriage or lose your marriage if you honored Joe. And now that's shifted or moved on to include a bigger fear, which is the fear of compromising your relationship with God…
>
> Yocheved: Okay.
>
> Shimona: One fear inside of that confusion is about the marriage and now to add to that, there is the fear about God.
>
> Yocheved: Yes.

> Shimona: So, what I want to know is this. You're very uncomfortable with the confusion because it seems to me you're afraid that Joe's going to come along and sabotage this life and the next life for you. Joe's going to sabotage my life.

Shimona emphasized to Yocheved what she saw as Yocheved's moral development, from a fear of only losing Eric to one of also losing her connection with God. This also illustrates the complex nature of what is at stake for Yocheved. Living an Orthodox life gives her life meaning and order, yet precludes her, in her mind, from acting on her desires for women. She has a positive motivation for being Orthodox (order and stability) and a negative motivation for not acting on her desires (losing Eric and God). Yocheved agreed with Shimona's assessment and told Shimona that her fear has increased since she started the Method, because the Method has helped her with her relationship with Eric. She is feeling closer to him and doesn't want to lose him or push him away even more than before the Method.

> Shimona: So, what you're saying to me is "I'm at a place where because of my relationship with God, my human relationship got better, my marriage got better, and now I stand to lose because that is worth more to me. Losing them matters more to me." And I want to ask you a question. I think you're in a place of saying I have to cut Joe out of me, because Joe is going to make me lose the rest of my life….and you're saying I don't like being confused because inside the confusion is the fear that I'm going to lose everything, this world and the next. I want to suggest two things to you. So just see what happens when I suggest them to you, like, in your body hear what I'm telling you okay?

Shimona then said something that caught me completely off guard. I had naively assumed that Shimona would tell Yocheved to squash the masculine part of her, thinking she would label Yocheved's sexual attraction to women as sinful. Instead, Shimona encouraged Yocheved to embrace Joe.

> Shimona: I think that it's possible for Joe to hang around, and that you'll be fine. I don't think your goal has to be to cut that part out.

> Yocheved: [With a sigh of relief] She's been with me for a *long* time…
>
> Shimona: I know. Do you remember when we spoke about her, and you had this fear of being without her because so much of who you think you are is…
>
> Yocheved: …is part of her. I'm part… We, me there's a connection…We have evolved…
>
> Shimona: You're not sure whether to frame it, "I'm part of her or she's part of me." That's how closely you identify with her.

Shimona next drew on *Tanya* to give her position more authority and greater moral clarity. In so doing she made a crucial distinction between inner thoughts and feelings and external speech and actions.

> Shimona: So I want to suggest two things to you. One, that it's okay if Joe sticks around. You see, when the Alter Rebbe says in *Tanya*, "be righteous, don't be wicked, and even if the whole world tells you you're righteous, be like a wicked person in your own estimation," what's he telling you? Joe can stick around. What he's saying is this, in my Cosmic Closet,[239] in the outside thought, speech, and action, I live one way. The fact that there is an impulse of personality on the inside who is functioning differently is just part of the way God made me, so you don't have to get rid of her.
>
> Yocheved: How do I tame her?
>
> Shimona: Okay. No. The first thing is you have to accept that she's there. I'm telling you two very important things.
>
> Yocheved: Okay.
>
> Shimona: One is you don't have to excommunicate her. You don't have to cut her out. But here's the deeper part of it, she has been a *very* good friend to you. She has helped you *enormously*.

Not only does Shimona tell Yocheved to acknowledge Joe, she tells Yocheved she must be grateful for her. She rejected Yocheved's immediate desire to tame Joe and instead directed her to this gratitude. Shimona went on to explain that every person has at least one problematic tribe, and inside of that tribe is something wonderful. She used Patricia as an

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[239] The Cosmic Closet is from another lesson and refers to the "garments of the soul," one's thoughts, speech, and actions, over which one has the power to decide what and when to put on and take off.

example. "Patricia found Lily inside of Cruella," she told Yocheved. "We all have that part that is most problematic. And I'm telling you that inside of her there is a very wonderful part that Joe is just the external persona of another persona." At this point, Yocheved began to laugh softly and cry and said something inaudible. "So what are the tears about?" Shimona asked. Yocheved remained silent and cried for a few minutes. She took several deep breaths, and then she said it was alright to continue.

Shimona: So, I'm not going to push you.

Yocheved: No. You're not pushing me.

Helping Yocheved construct a new moral narrative, Shimona tried to get Yocheved to see how Joe has been beneficial to her. She is not a part of Yocheved to be merely tolerated; she is to be celebrated.

Shimona later explained to me the Chabad principles behind her work with Yocheved. In *Tanya*, she explained, the Alter Rebbe describes three different types of people—the *tzaddik*, or righteous person; the *rasha*, the wicked person, and the *benoni*, the in-between or average person. A *tzaddik*'s goodness is mirrored on his inside and outside. A *rasha*'s wickedness is mirrored on his inside and outside, but a *benoni* should strive to have his outside be like a *tazddik*, even if his insides are like a *rasha*. The job of a *benoni* is *itkafya*, subduing the animal soul (*nefesh behemit*) in favor of the Godly Soul (*nefesh elohit*). A person first must be involved with self mastery (*itkafya*), Shimona told me. "You have to subdue your animal. In chapter 43 of *Tanya*," she continued, "the Alter Rebbe brings, 'an ox is not useful unless it's been yoked. The beginning is you train that ox, then we see 'there's much produce in the strength of an ox.'" The next step is called *ithapcha* or inversion. "By controlling, subduing, starving [the Animal Soul], you position yourself to do *ithapcha*." With *ithapcha*, one not only tries to subdue the Animal Soul, but to transform it into something

used for God's benefit. "You are positioned to take the exact fire that is burning you to death and placing it on the altar of God," Shimona explained. "So that is the idea of when I'm doing Tribe Work I'm looking for Shimon and Levi [the Biblical Jacob's two sons]. They killed the people of Shchem, and I want to wait there because I know inside numbness is anger, inside anger is pain, inside pain is hope, and inside that longing is the desire for connection, and that's here. That's where I am trying to take the person. It takes a long time to get there and one of the dangers is that you can encourage a person to stay in the place of the shadow." Shimona, continued with Yocheved,

> Shimona: I want you to think of this okay? Put it like this. How has Joe looked after you? How has she protected you all these years? She's been with you for a long time.

> Yocheved: [quietly] Strength…strength, physical and internal strength….hmm…but she's also the one that has that, you know, a lot of self-expression, not caring what anybody else thinks. That's the one that goes out there and, you know, 'I don't care what anybody else thinks. This is who I am.'

Shimona prodded Yocheved into reexamining her narrative, to reclaim Joe as a positive element of who she is. "How did she protect you?" Shimona asked.

> Yocheved: I'm not quite sure honestly…

> Shimona: See, I think that you look at Joe as the bad guy on the block, but I think Joe kept you alive. I think Yocheved would be dead without Joe.

> [Long pause]

> Shimona: Tell me where I am wrong.

> Yocheved: No, possibly. You know, she was. Yeah. Joe was the one that went forward, and, you know, made her life, and, you know, went to school, and it was her who, you know, actually guided my life, became independent when I needed to….

> Shimona: You needed her so badly because Yocheved would never have been able to take care of the little girl, so can we give that little girl a name?

> Yocheved: You know that little girl was Joan.
>
> Shimona: So, if you can let Joan and Joe and Yocheved talk, I bet you there's a place for Joe at home. What I mean is, you know when we spoke about the [Supernal] Eagle, that's it's that place of…
>
> Yocheved: [still in her own thoughts] My kids love Joe. My kids *love* Joe. When Joe is not around, my kids' are like "where is Joe?" [both laugh] You know my son. You know what I'm saying?
>
> Shimona: Joan loves Joe.
>
> Yocheved: But then I'm afraid my husband doesn't…[sighs in exasperation]
>
> Shimona: Because you think that Joe is going to take you away from your husband. You're not…you see you told me when we started, "My husband is in denial…"
>
> Yocheved: Yeah, because how can he not see it. Come on, give me a break!
>
> Shimona: No, I don't think so. I don't think so [Yocheved laughs], because I think that Joe is great for your life, but she loses her sense of boundary, like it's enough. Okay so now stay here, so what I'm inviting you to look at is two things: A, how good she is for you. How she saved your life. Joan needed her and Yocheved needs her, but that Joe, in defending and caretaking Joan, just lost sense of all boundaries. So she becomes un-boundaried, and that's when she can be damaging, but I don't think that your husband is afraid of Joe, I think you're afraid of Joe.

In this response, Shimona gave Yocheved her understanding for why Yocheved began to become attracted to women and to be in sexual relationships with them. She expands upon this later, but in short, in reaction to Yocheved's mother's unbridled sexuality and the sexual abuse, Joe had to emerge to protect Yocheved. This persona was necessarily masculine, strong, and against traditional female sexuality. This persona, however, spilled over her boundaries, according to Shimona, and began to be sexually attracted to women. This conception enables Shimona to appreciate Joe for the benefits she provided to Yocheved, and to understand Yocheved's homosexuality.

> Yocheved: I'm afraid of Joe. I'm afraid that Joe diminishes Yocheved, and Yocheved wants to be connected [to God], Yocheved wants to be, you know,

wants…wants to be connected, wants to you know, umm [exhales in exasperation], and Joe pulls me away from that…

Shimona: Okay, so, can you have a conversation between them?

Yocheved: …and, you know, it's like when I came to you before I started the Method. I said to you "I don't think I'm worthy of being an observant Jew." You know, I don't…

Shimona: You know how many women I've worked with who've had affairs? Who don't think they deserve life? That's because if you were God you might get it all wrong and not forgive when you should…

Yocheved: [whispering] God you made me this way.

Shimona: Right. I did not create myself. I didn't make the mess. So can you tell Joe, I want you, Yocheved, to tell Joe about your fears and your hopes.

Yocheved: You want Yocheved to tell Joe?

Shimona: Uh-huh.

Yocheved: [Deep audible exhale] Joe, I would like us to have a balance, to co-exist together. Okay? I know you're very strong, and I know you like all that outer stuff and that you've got, you know, to sit next to a guy and bench press and shoulder press just as much as him to show him off, [sternly] but you need to calm that down. There's no need for that, you know. You need to hold your femininity and yet be strong, so it doesn't overtake, take us, so that we can live together in strength and in harmony and connection, without one overpowering the other and taking over. Umm…I need you to embrace your feminine side; it's not so bad… [she whispers this last line and takes a deep audible breath].

Shimona: Yocheved, why does Joe think that femininity is bad? Why do you have to say it's not so bad to her?

[Long pause.]

Yocheved: [whispers barely audibly] I have such a hard time with that. You have no idea…

Shimona: Just breathe here, and I promise you that the answers are safe.

Yocheved: I know.

After another pause, Yocheved shifted her tone and responded to Shimona by saying it is simply too complex to be feminine. It is easier to be masculine. Stressing superficial

appearances, she argued, worrying about her outward appearance is much more difficult for a woman. Doing her hair and nails, clothes is all such a pain, she claimed. After a short discussion commiserating about the difficulties of having to tend to all of these things, Shimona challenged Yocheved to go deeper than these superficial excuses.

> Shimona: I get that, but I don't think that that's why Joe is afraid of being feminine. See, for Yocheved to say to Joe "embrace your feminine side," that's not what Joe does. I don't think that's fair. I don't think it's fair to ask Joe to be Yocheved. Joe is Joe. Yocheved is Yocheved. So, like where do you get off telling her to be feminine and get her nails done…? [playfully]
>
> Yocheved: [Laughing] It ain't gonna happen.
>
> Shimona: She's not going to do that. She doesn't like that. She doesn't like that, but she's afraid of femininity. It's not just that it's a headache and a hassle. She is *afraid*. So I want you to put yourself in the place of Joe and tell me why are you afraid of femininity?
>
> Yocheved: Because it's not comfortable. Maybe it has do…[long pause] I don't know… [long pause] The sexuality…maybe. I'm not giving you straight answers, I know.
>
> Shimona: No. You are.
>
> Yocheved: It represents this sexuality. [long pause] Maybe it has something to do with my mom, which represented with all the femininity and all the beauty and everything that I rejected.
>
> Shimona: I want to tell you something. [Emphatically] I think Joe had to come on the scene for Joan for two reasons. Because your mom's sexuality was totally out of control…unhealthy…damaged herself, her marriage and her children…destroyed her relationship with God, and you didn't want that. You wanted something truer. So, Joe came along and yanked you out of that, because Joe believed that that kind of feminine frivolity was…
>
> Yocheved: …not going to serve me.
>
> Shimona: …was bad….Joe believed that women's sexuality is dangerous, damaging, selfish, bad. Women's sexuality, not men, because Joe's dad was not like that, but Joan's mother was. That's one part of it, and the other piece is, is that when people hurt Joan, over and over [knocking on the table for emphasis] and over again, Joe had to cut out *all* femininity, but I think that she cut it out for two reasons, because of Joan's mommy and because all of those men around Joan. [long pause] Do you hear?
>
> Yocheved: Yeah.

Shimona: So what do you think and feel when I say that to you?

Yocheved: I know so.

Shimona: So I want you to go into the place of Joe and tell Yocheved why you do…

Yocheved then cut Shimona off and protested that now that she was safe from harm, she should no longer need Joe. She should no longer have sexual desires for women or feel a need to be masculine. As quickly as she accepted Shimona's narrative, she rejected it, but Shimona would not let her so easily.

Yocheved: But I'm safe now. It's like Eric says to me. He says, he says to me "but you're safe now." You know. It's not…

Shimona: Oh, I don't know about what Eric says. I just know….I want to know what Joe thinks. Okay? So just be with Joe. Tell me what Joe thinks and feels when I'm telling you that. Does Joe, is Joe mad with her mom, does Joe think "yeah there's no place to be feminine and sexual in a feminine way because that is bad and evil," or "if you're feminine then you get hurt"?

Yocheved began to try and accept the positive elements of Joe, and not to simply reject her. It was difficult for Yocheved to do until Shimona asked her to embody Joe and speak from her place, which is a key part of the practice of Tribe Work.

Yocheved: There is a place where…but, yeah, Joe feels much more comfortable in her own skin…in her own skin…on her own terms.

Shimona: So I want you to be Joe and tell Yocheved how you feel.

Yocheved: But, Yocheved I want to be strong, I want to be physically strong. I want that endurance, I want that energy, and I want people to see it, and that's who I am…[emphatically]

Shimona: Uh-huh.

Yocheved …you know, and God wants me to be this way because He made me this way, and He set the path for me to be this way, and that's *who we are*! [loudly, triumphantly]

Shimona: Can you tell Yocheved how you looked after Joan?

Yocheved: Hey listen [in a defiant tone. Shimona laughs], when you were too weak to, you know, move around. Who was protecting you? Who put up the

> shield? Okay? And who took you forward to be able to, to get through all the stuff that you had to endure? Huh? It was me! Yeah. Every time I benched and every time I did everything and I said, I'm getting this physical body just in case anybody ever beats you up that I can kill them…even if I land in jail…
>
> Shimona: You see Joe's the…
>
> Yocheved: …and you don't need the hair, okay? [Laughter] You don't need the hair. You have a wig. Just wear it more. That's it! [Shimona laughs]
>
> Shimona: You see Yocheved when you tell Joe to be feminine and have an expectation that is setting yourself up for pain, suffering. Joe is not going to become feminine. She's not doing that. She doesn't want to do that. She doesn't want the hair, or the nails or the time. She wants a tough, fit body. So can you give that to her? What I'm suggesting is you find a place for Joe because Joe kept Joan alive.
>
> Yocheved: And not one is better than the other.
>
> Shimona: Right.
>
> Yocheved: So I don't have to struggle with this.

Shimona tried to give Yocheved a way to transcend the simple binary of either repressing or expressing Joe in total. In so doing, Shimona also set what she considers to be the moral limits of Joe in her life, how she believes Yocheved can integrate Joe in a morally acceptable way. Here she is imposing a specific value system on Yocheved and her understanding of her sexuality.

> Shimona: What I'm telling you is that in action Joe can't sleep with other women [they laugh loudly], but she can bench press, and if she notices them [women] in the gym, Yocheved can just say, "Joe get back in place okay just calm down." But Yocheved [both laughing] doesn't have the right to tell Joe to be a girly-girl. That's inappropriate of Yocheved. Where does she get off thinking that she's going to tell Joe who kept Joan alive all these years…Why? You see I think that Joe does have a very tender part in her, because if she didn't care about Joan so much and about Yocheved's kids, she wouldn't show up. She wouldn't work so hard to look after everyone and protect everyone. You hear what I'm saying?
>
> Yocheved: Yeah, she does care.
>
> Shimona: Right. You want Joe to be like the other girls? The girly-girls? She's never going to be like that, but that doesn't mean that Joe's a man. Inside Joe

is this very tender, loving part. She loves Joan. She's going to look after her. Can you sense the tender heart inside of Joe, her caring?

Yocheved: Yeah.

Shimona: So, what happens when you become cognizant of that tenderness in her?

[Long pause.]

Yocheved: I think that, umm, that Joe also feels a lot of that pain, you know, and it's Yocheved who evolved to try and protect them both and to take it to a different level…

Shimona: Isn't that fascinating?

Yocheved reflected to Shimona for a while about how she realized that different tribes emerged and evolved at different times in her life, and each has been more or less prominent at different times, depending on her circumstances. Shimona then tried to help Yocheved see how these seemingly disparate tribes can now co-exist, to give her narrative a way forward.

Shimona: So now, now they're coming to a place where they actually could co-exist in peace, because I think that when you pay attention to the fact that Joe has a tender heart and really cares, then you're not so scared. There's a little compassion for Joe too, and if you could just have a little compassion…if Yocheved, you see Yocheved has Joe's toughness, so she, she wants to beat Joe out, but if she could appreciate what Joe did for Joan and for her, and notice the *tender* heart in Joe, she would be more willing to co-exist, to live together. She doesn't have to give Joe reins of the outside, but she does have to say…firstly, thank Joe from time to time and to allow her to be. Can you do that now? Can you thank Joe for what she's done for you and Joan?

Yocheved: Me, using Yocheved?

Shimona: Yocheved. I know that's surprising for you but…

[Long pause]

Yocheved: I think that you've done a wonderful job. I think you really have excelled. You have a lot of motivation and drive. When you set out to do something, you do it. I want to thank you for that…and I want to thank Joan for being such a good girl. [starts to cry.]

Although Shimona asked Yocheved to thank Joe, seemingly out of nowhere, Yocheved suddenly also thanked Joan, the little girl that existed before the abuse, with whom Yocheved has been out of touch for many decades. It was very unexpected for me as I witnessed the session. This revelation had a dramatic impact on Yocheved, as it also seemed to emerge without her conscious effort. She began to cry and became very quiet.

Shimona: Uh-huh.

Yocheved: [whispers] Yeah.

Shimona: Don't go away from that. That's true. How does that make you sad?

Yocheved: It's just a hole in my stomach, you know, and because I was…

Shimona: [whispers] Are…

Yocheved: …yeah…despite of everything, you know…

Shimona: Uh-huh.

Yocheved: …I was…I was so gentle, and I was so quiet, and…

Shimona: Tell me, "gentle and quiet..."

Yocheved: …and I was good and loving. I wanted to love. That's all I wanted, and I would do everything possible to get it….just waiting for it. Anyway…[dismissively]

Shimona: Not "anyway." I know that's a hard space. Do you see how Joan came right up? When you could *even* consider that Joe has some tenderness, when Yocheved, stops battling with Joe like this [pounding her fists together], Joan could come in. You see the whole reason that Joe started acting like that is because Joan's mother was checked out, and because Joan was such a good girl, and she's still here.

Then in an instant, Yocheved's tenderness for Joan was gone, and she became intensely critical of her. The sadness dissapeared and only anger was left in its place, but again, Shimona tried to co-create a new narrative with Yocheved around gentle Joan and Joe's heroic nature.

Yocheved: Joan was weak!

Shimona: She was weak?

Yocheved: …and she was hurt, and she was a girl, so it was better to be a butch. I was a butch for many years.

Shimona: Uh-huh.

Yocheved: You know, dressed like a guy. It was just easier.

Shimona: Look what happened, Yocheved. Joan was first a good girl, tender, loving, kind, wanting love, and then Joan became weak, cowardly. That's not how she was born, and that's not really what happened. Joan was abused, so Joan came in like open, loving, present, ready to connect, and she was soft and gentle, quite feminine…

Yocheved: Yeah.

Shimona: …and because her mother damaged, caused so much damage with distorted female sexuality out there, and because so many men abused soft, gentle Joan, she went into exile.

Yocheved: Yes.

Shimona: So that's what you call weak and cowardly, but that's just a tender, wonderful child who wanted love, and she would have died if Joe didn't come along. Yocheved wasn't around yet. She just wasn't. You were a little girl, so Joe came to protect you, and I'm telling you that thinking that you have to get rid of her, in order... You told me "I cycle like my husband cycles, and I'm confused, and I'm uncomfortable in the place of the confusion." Inside the confusion is a fear that Joe's going to destroy your life with your husband, your earthly life and your heavenly, spiritual life…

Yocheved: Right.

Shimona: …and she's not. She's not.

Yocheved: But maybe God doesn't want me to be that… I'm starting to shift that but that was my initial you know, that was my initial thing that you know, God is looking down and He's angry. You know, that…

Despite her earlier claims that God made her this way and must therefore want her this way, Yocheved again revealed her fear that God does not want her to feel what she feels, to have Joe in her life. Here, Shimona displayed what I thought was an incredible amount of empathy and compassion for Yocheved.

Shimona: I don't think so. I'm not God, but I want to tell you, when I look at you, I am *humbled* in awe of you. I could *never* do what you did.

Yocheved: Even though I don't speak up and I don't say anything? I am a coward.

Shimona: No, you're not. You're putting yourself between [Yocheved sighs audibly] when Joan went into exile and Joe, and you don't have to do that. I'm telling you that I'm in awe of you, and I don't know anything, God knows, I promise you, God *loves* you and is *kvelling* [bursting with pride] from the fact that you've lived the life that you did, and you couldn't have this life without Joe. So I want you to think about this…

Yocheved: Okay.

Shimona: …the more you try and push Joe out, the less Joan can appear, and the worse your relationship with Joe is. She's not leaving, and she is *not* becoming girly. She does have a *very* tender heart. It's because she's so loving that she had to get dressed in such a tough veneer. So why do you have to get rid of her? Can you begin to entertain the thought now…

Yocheved: Yeah.

Shimona: …I'm not saying that you have to live from her place. You have to celebrate everything she's done for you and continues to do for you, and that will create a peace, and Yocheved can emerge, and Joan can emerge, and so the more they can come out then it's all very balanced.

Although seemingly ready to embrace Joe in a new way, Yocheved continued to have difficulty understanding why she had any need for Joan. Despite the powerful and tender revelation of Joan and all the positive qualities she ascribed to her during this session, Yocheved could not grasp why she would ever want this aspect of herself in her life.

Yocheved: And do I want Joan to come out?

Shimona: [Emphatically] Oh yeah.

Yocheved: Why? If I have Joe and Yocheved what do I need Joan for?

Shimona: You tell me.

Yocheved: Why do I need Joan? Why, why do I need Joan?

Shimona: Why do you *not* want Joan?

Yocheved: Joan, Joan…I don't want Joan.

Shimona: Why?

Yocheved: Because Joan's hurting…Joan's…*no*… Can't I just stay with Yocheved and Joe?

Shimona: [Laughing] Sorry.

Yocheved: Joan is a little hurt girl.

Shimona: Before she was hurt?

Yocheved: …I don't know Joan…

Shimona: Before Joan was hurt?

Yocheved: I don't know who that is….

Shimona: Yes, you do...

Yocheved: How do I know who she is?

Shimona: You just told me.

Yocheved: I told you Joan's a hurt little girl. I don't know who Joan is.

Shimona: No, you told me that second. First, you said Joan was such a good little girl. She was good and kind and loving and just wanted to be loved.

Yocheved: Well yeah. Which isn't…

Shimona: Wait.

Yocheved: …well, Joan represents a lot of hurt and a lot of pain.

Shimona: Joan was wounded and went into exile, but I am telling you that the unwounded Joan has always been with you, and she's with you now…

Yocheved then seemed to have a breakthrough with respect to Joan. She began to understand why Shimona felt she was such an important aspect to who she is.

Yocheved: It's true. It's true. It's true. She had, yeah…because if she wasn't there believe me I wouldn't be the kind of daughter that I am to my mom and my dad.

Shimona: Right, but not only that you wouldn't have a sparkle in your eye? [Yocheved laughs] You ran away from pre-exiled Joan. You tell me she was *such* a good girl, and there was so much pain in there. The pain is just mourning like this beautiful child that was exiled *so* young. You do want Joan. So if you can stop battling Joe and appreciate Joe's tenderness and how Joe

has looked after Joan and Yocheved in adulthood… What happened in that moment was the most important thing in our time together, which is that Joan came up. You think that you want to continue your life without her. So much pain in…

Yocheved: I have fought to shun her…

Shimona: Keep her at bay, right?

Yocheved: Oh yeah…she, she's the one that I always felt kept me as a victim for so long.

Shimona: Yeah, but before she was a victim she was a shining good girl.

Yocheved: [Whispering] Yeah she was, and even was, even though she was a victim.

Shimona: Yeah. Right, that's what you're saying "Even into all the abuse, Joan was still there until it just became too much," and then Joe said, "I've got to do something here, I'm going to save the scene," but you see how you smile and what happens when you remember Joan before she went into exile?

Yocheved: You see it?

Shimona: Yeah, you did. You don't feel it?

Yocheved: I do.

Shimona: Great. So I want you to stay with that. Put the brakes on Yocheved's…Yocheved's become a little militant.

Yocheved: [Laughter]

Shimona: She's becoming a little butch. [Laughter] I mean she's taking on control. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Yocheved: Yeah, because I feel that that's what God wants. It's all in the service of God.

Shimona: She's wonderful. She knows what's right. But she's too scared of Joe. Joe's not going to take over. Because Joan not in so much danger anymore, and neither is Yocheved so all I'm telling you is Yocheved can be soft, feminine, and co-exist with Joe and that will allow little Joan to come out, and she'll bring so much into the picture. She's there all the time. I think that all your friends see Joan. I think that a lot of your dynamics with your friends have to do with Joan.

Yocheved: Actually, you're probably right. [Laughter]

> Shimona: When I'm interacting with you, I'm very often talking to Joan.
>
> Yocheved: Wow!
>
> Shimona: But I know that I can't say that until you bring her into the picture because if I do you only think of the victim. And how Joe had to save you from that. But everyone else has seen the other little Joan. It's like she's shining in your eyes and in your smile and the spunk and the…like I'm available for real life. *Hineini* [here I am], I'm here. Yeah. So everyone enjoys her so much. And you're terrified of her. You're terrified of Joan and you're scared that Joe's going to just -- like Joan was the victim but Joe in trying to save her Joe will caused so many problems so then Yocheved's left alone and nothing that she can really benefit from broadening the circle.

With that, Shimona concluded the session. In the session Shimona and Yocheved co-created a new narrative, a new moral trajectory with which Yocheved could experiment. In this narrative Joe is integrated more openly and with gratitude, Joan is rediscovered and embraced. It is also a narrative with moral constraints. It does not find a place for Joe to be sexual with other women, but with limits imposed by a strict understanding of Jewish law. As much as Shimona tries to help Yocheved see the upside of Joe, she is not willing to give her consent to her acting on Joe's desires.

Living Out the Moral Narrative

In speaking with Yocheved over the six months following the Mastermind, it is clear that her experience in trying to integrate the new narrative into her life has been mixed, but she continues to experiment. Yocheved feels that she has experienced many benefits from her work in the Method and the Tribe Work, in particular. She believes she has integrated Joe into her life more and feels more comfortable with that part of her. "I accept her more openly," she told me. She has even opened up to some people in her community about her struggle, women who have been with her in the Method. "The Joe part of me, it's part of who I am. I am more open to letting her out more." She has also allowed herself to workout

more and develop a stronger body. Remembering back to when she first gave up training, she told me, "I stopped training for two years, because I wanted to soften up a little bit, and I didn't think I should look so muscular, fit, and how are people going to judge me. I don't care about that anymore. I have become a little more open, even with people from the community. They don't seem to have a problem with it, and they are not surprised." She also doesn't feel anymore that God does not love her or that she is not deserving of living an observant lifestyle.

At the same time, while Yocheved is more accepting of Joe and has been able to integrate that aspect of her life in a more open way, she continues to struggle every single day with her attraction to women and the boundaries set by Orthodox Judaism. "The thoughts are still in my head," she told me. "That's an issue all the time, every time, every day, but I'm living with it, I've accepted it, but that doesn't go away. I struggle with it all the time, but maybe that's part of the shame, thinking about it, still having my head in it, I have work to do, Michael, I have work to do." In talking about our work together, she expressed her hope that her story would be read by others in her situation and would possibly bring them some solace knowing they are not alone. "I'm not the only one that feels this way; it can't be," she told me. "This thing of being Orthodox and being trapped and not being able to express who you are. Is it a struggle? YES! It's a struggle!" she exclaimed loudly in a tone of exasperation and resignation.

To make matters more complicated, despite her active participation in the Method and her community, she is feeling less connected with God, because she is trying to find a balance that won't alienate her husband. "I can't be that strict or I will have a problem with my husband," she explains. "I feel that when I'm more connected to God I have less of these dualities and head games in my head. Right now I feel a little disconnected because I

am trying to find a balance. I'm smoking [marijuana] more." Yocheved feels she needs to go to the extreme to live by the constraints of Orthodox Judaism. For her it seems very black and white. "You follow the Torah," she explains. "I mean the laws are there, so you need to live by the laws. You can't just choose and pick, and right now I'm choosing and I'm picking so I'm not…" Her voice tapered off as she exhaled loudly in frustration and exasperation. "Anyway," she continued, "I don't know how to explain it. It makes me feel...I don't want to say this word shame again, but shame. Not living up to a standard I want to live up to at the moment. I'm not being that hard on myself. I am letting it play out a little bit…either you believe or you continue to do whatever you want." She desperately wants to accept the home, homeland, and cosmos of Chabad and the Method, to fully embrace what Mattingly would call the yoke of the artisan's guild. "I know where I aspire to be," she said, "and hopefully one day I will get there."

What's at Stake and Moral Ambiguity

Yocheved is committed to remaining an Orthodox Jew and to staying married, which means to her she must repress her attraction to women. She believes she chose to get married and have children and wants to keep her family together out of a sense of responsibility to them. Additionally she believes that Orthodox Judaism has brought a sense of community, order and normality to her life, which she feels is critical to her well-being and that of her husband and children. Before becoming a *ba'alat teshuvah* she felt her life was "total chaos." With Eric's bipolar disorder, their lack of financial stability, and their persistent drug abuse, which resulted at one point to she and Eric being arrested and placed under house arrest for two years for shipping cocaine to themselves across international borders, their life was very chaotic. She believes Orthodox Judaism has helped bring order

from that chaos. "Everything was always a mess," she told me, "but I found that the religion, the base, bringing the fundamentals of religion into our home and the structure of that into our home brought some sort of balance and stability. That's the one thing that was stable for us as a family, as a unit."

In contrast to this sense of helplessness and instability, Yocheved feels like religion gives her and her family's lives order, discipline and a sense of community. As religious studies scholar Thomas Tweed suggests in his theory of religion, religions orient one spatially and temporally. They construct homes and homelands, delineating domestic and public spaces and constructing collective identity. "Religions distinguish between us and them—and prescribe where and how both should live."[240] This orienting function of religion gives Yocheved and her family a sense of stability amongst the chaos. Shabbat, for example, has brought a rhythm to her family that she feels is very stabilizing for her children. "Walking to synagogue each week as a family," she shared, "I see my kids and how the religion has kept us bound, because the boundaries are not boundaries. The time with family and kids and order…that has really helped them."

After living a chaotic life of abuse, neglect, and addiction, Yocheved clings to Judaism as a way to bring order and meaning to her life, but it is not simply religion she is seeking. She also wants to stay married. I asked Yocheved if she had ever investigated organizations or websites that cater to the needs of gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews. She told me she had, and said many of the sites and organizations are "great," but she also told me that she did not want to pursue that kind of lifestyle. "That's not where I want to go; I want to stay married"

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[240] Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*, 75.

Yocheved also feels a sense of responsibility to her father for living an Orthodox lifestyle. Her father survived the Holocaust, and she sees her joyous acceptance of Judaism as a way to honor his survival. "It's to give my father meaning to his existence, to his survival," she shared with me. The fact that he survived the Holocaust has given her a "purpose" and a "mission" in her life. "I feel I have this unique obligation to my father and to his existence and to the whole process, purpose and process of our people," even if she has to fight her attraction to women. "I'm part… I'm part of that, and maybe I have to fight this thing that is in me [her attraction to women], and I have to control it, and I have to work through it. Maybe that's my challenge, I don't know." By remaining Orthodox, she is able to bring order to her life and bring meaning to her father's survival, but in order to do so, she feels she must not act out on her desires for women. Then, once she has made this decision, she clings to Judaism, because she believes that the more connected she is with God the less of the cravings she has.

Yocheved is an example of the moral ambiguity that we find when we see individual lives through the lens of the moral laboratory. We also see the ways in which the Method is very different than mainstream life coaching in the way in which it posits a very strict ethical code of behavior that takes precedence over any individual's wants or desires. This is because, despite the belief in the Sticky Self, the individual is subordinate to God and the Torah, which significantly limits one's individual sense of agency. In the final chapter I will present this complicated form of agency that posits individual will, which is ultimately sublimated to God and the manifestation of God's will, the Torah.

Chapter 7: Finding Agency Through God, Torah and the Rebbe

Creation begins in chaos.

Memory is the key to redemption.

Thinking is a chiropractic adjustment for the soul.

--Three "Isms" from the Method for Self Mastery

Hadassah spent nearly five decades of her life conceiving of herself as a victim. When she joined the Method for Self Mastery she was ready for that self-perception to end. "I want to change because I want to be seen as a person of worth," she told me as we sat together talking at the second Mastermind. "I am a person of worth. I'm tired of being the victim….I'm not happy to be a door mat, and because I no longer want to be a victim. I don't *deserve* to be a victim." Hadassah was sexually abused as a little girl, sexually assaulted as an adult and is currently in an abusive relationship with her husband, who is verbally and emotionally abusive to her, and at times physically abusive. After a lifetime of being a "victim," Hadassah said she was ready to change. She feels that there is a healthy part of her at her core that needs to emerge. As she told me in that same conversation, "I'm tired of being in the shadow….I don't want to be in the shadow. I want to come out of my own shadow." Part of this shadow, she was discovering, is her fear of what others think of her. "On the [coaching] calls," she went on, "so often I want to talk, but I'm afraid to be criticized. I'm afraid of people laughing at me.…I was criticized constantly [as a child]. I'm criticized by my husband. I'm put down by my husband in front of people." In her late fifties, after over thirty years of marriage, with four grown daughters, she is ready for the transformation that has eluded her through many years of psychological counseling.In this

chapter, I will focus on the agency within Chabad cosmology, the way this system is conveyed through the Method, and the way it is adopted and then experienced by Hadassah. Agency within Chabad cosmology resides in a complex system comprised of God, the Torah, the Rebbe, and the individual. On some level, all four of these sites of agency are subsumed into God, but in the world of manifestation (*yesh*), these four entities each have elements of agency that influence how one ought to live.

Through the practices that Hadassah has learned through the Method, she has developed agency in an oppressive relationship creating what Judith Okely has called "cracks in contentment."[241] These cracks are sometimes only hairline fractures in the power relationships at work in a system that go undetected without the close examination and cultural sensitivity that comes with an ethnographic method. Building on this idea Joyce Flueckiger writes it is, "only by looking at culture at the level of individual lives that 'cracks of resistance' to dominant ideologies are revealed."[242] As we will see, Hadassah has developed practices and narratives through the Method that have given her a significant sense of agency while still living within her social and financial constraints.

Furthermore, through her moral experiments with new ways of being, particularly through contemplative practices, Hadassah has developed what anthropologist Wynn Maggi has called "negative agency." Maggi in her study of Kalasha women in the Hindukush, writes that for these women, "freedom does not mean limitless choice but crafting a meaningful life out of present possibilities."[243] She goes on to clarify that this crafting often occurs through what appears outwardly as inaction, but "deciding not to act is active too and not merely

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[241] Okely, "Defiant Moments," 7.
[242] Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*, 24.
[243] Maggi, *Our Women Are Free*, 203.

passive acceptance of authority."[244] Similarly Saba Mahnood argues, "What may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency—but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment. In this sense, agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms."[245] Through the Method for Self Mastery, Hadassah's self-understanding has changed, and as such the way she inhabits the norms of an Orthodox Jewish woman, mother, and wife have changed.

Difficult Beginnings

Hadassah's parents gave her the English name Hilary, but they always called her Hilly. Hadassah was her Hebrew name, but not one she went by until she became a *ba'alat teshuva.* Hadassah does not remember either of her parents ever verbally expressing their love for her when she was a child. In fact, the only time she remembers either of her parents ever telling her they love her was when Hadassah was an adult and her father was about to undergo heart surgery. Hadassah did not know whether he would survive the surgery and so before he went into the operating room she said, "Dad, I love you." It was difficult for her to say, but in response he said, "I love you, too." She told me, "that was the first time any of my parents told me that they loved me."

Hadassah emerged from her childhood with an appreciation for Jewish history and tradition, but no love for the theological or spiritual aspects of Judaism. She grew up attending a Reform synagogue but explained to me that Reform in her country is closer to what might be considered Conservative Judaism in the United States. "There was no love for

[244] Ibid., 209.
[245] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 15.

the religion," she explained. She attended a Jewish Day School, but became even more disenchanted with Judaism through this experience. In school, she was taught simply to memorize and regurgitate her religious learning. "When I asked my rabbi about a passage in *Pirkei Avot* [Ethics of the Fathers], what it meant, he said to me, 'Jews, we don't ask questions. We just learn things, and you just have to learn it,' and I always asked questions, and I failed Judaics." After her maternal grandmother passed away, Hadassah began having dreams about her. She didn't understand why she was having these dreams, so she asked her mother and their rabbi what these dreams were about. They replied, "Leave her alone. Let her be. Let her rest. She's gone." Hadassah thought she was a terrible person for disturbing her grandmother and thought there was something terribly wrong with her. As a result of all of these experiences, she told me, "I just decided I don't want to be Jewish. I was taught to fear God, and I said I don't want to fear God, I want to love God. I don't want to be afraid of God."

Hadassah's father did not help her gain an appreciation for Jewish theology either. He was very anti-religion, even though his parents remained religiously observant until the day they died. Her father taught Hadassah, "You are born, you live your life, and you die." As a child, he and his nuclear family narrowly escaped the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of all of his extended family. This experience convinced him that there is no God. "My father doesn't believe in God," she told me, "absolutely not, from [his experience in] the Ghettos, he said that couldn't have happened to the Jews if there was a God." Her father refused to believe in God or any religion. Because of her father's influence and her own experiences with Judaism through synagogue and school, Hadassah says, she "felt nothing for the religion."

Although Hadassah didn't want to practice Judaism, these experiences did not diminish her belief in God or her desire to seek some form of religious path. From a very early age Hadassah felt she could not accept her father's atheistic beliefs. She remembers always believing in something bigger than herself and an afterlife of some kind. For example, when Hadassah's paternal grandmother passed away she was in the hospital room alone with her. Her father had stepped out of the room momentarily, and when he returned his mother had died. Hadassah was eleven or twelve years old, and she asked her father if he believed that he would ever see her again. He said, "No. Absolutely not. She's gone." Hadassah replied, "Look how peaceful she looks. Her skin, there's no wrinkles. Dad, she looks so peaceful, and she was talking to her mom before she died." Her father was crying, and Hadassah continued, "Dad, don't be sad. She's always going to be with you. She's in a good place." He said, "You don't know what you're talking about. I don't believe that nonsense." Hadassah doesn't know why, but, she told me, "Inside me, I knew that she was in a good place. I don't know, I just always felt very peaceful."

Because she felt she could not find the answers she was looking for in Judaism, Hadassah began to explore other religious traditions. In this way Hadassah, like many of the women in the Method, fits the description of "seeker" discussed by Wade Clark Roof and Robert Wuthnow.[246] Although she always identified as a Jew and felt a connection to Jewish history and tradition, she did not see any value in Jewish theology or practice. "I started to look at Hare Krishna, Christianity, everything," she explained. After she left university, she discovered a book by a popular New Age guru, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990). "I found this book from Rajneesh, and it sort of was very simple, and it answered all my questions. Live in the moment. Be joyous." Hadassah felt like his philosophy explained

[246] Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*; Wuthnow, *After Heaven.*

everything she wanted to know, "everything was in his teaching." She felt for the first time she understood the meaning of life, the purpose of life. As she described it, "At the time for me it was living in the present, living in the moment. Living one's true potential. There was not yesterday, and there is no tomorrow. Live each moment and feel each breath." There were no specific practices she engaged in as a devotee, but she read his books and listened to his tapes.

Rajneesh was a provocative and controversial guru who espoused a perennialist philosophy at the height of the human potential movement. Born in India, Rajneesh was popular with a Western audience, who flocked to his ashram in Pune, India. After encountering issues in India, because of his outspoken criticisms of the government and his radical interpretations of Hinduism, he emigrated to the United States in 1981, bringing with him many of the non-Indian followers who had joined him in Pune. Some of his followers established Rajneeshpuram, a commune on a 64,000-acre ranch in rural Wasco County, Oregon, which peaked at over 4,000 residents.[247]

While Hadassah was still a follower of Rajneesh, she met her husband. He was not a follower of the guru; rather he was a relatively observant Jew, but he did not object to her desire to follow in this path. After they married, they moved to a city in the northeastern United States where her husband completed his graduate training. While living in this city, Hadassah was able to visit a Rajneesh Center for the first time, and she began to wear articles of orange clothing that symbolized her adherence to his teachings, although it does not seem that she was interested in or attracted to his more radical teachings. In the early 1990s, they moved to a mid-sized city in the midwestern United States, where her husband was able to find a job. The move was very difficult for Hadassah. The city did not have a

[247] Ramey, "Hinduism in North America"; See also Lambert, "Rajneesh, Bhagwan Shree (1931–1990)."

large Jewish community and an even smaller international community. She felt isolated. Although she was a follower of Rajneesh, she still identified as a Jew and wanted to be part of an organized Jewish community.

Looking For Challah; Finding the Torah and a Rebbe

When they first arrived in their new city, Hadassah and her husband tried to connect with its small organized Jewish community. There was one Reform synagogue and one Conservative synagogue. They tried the Conservative synagogue, but did not like it. As Hadassah told me, "It reminded me of a theater. It had stained glass windows, and the rabbi told jokes, and I didn't feel comfortable, so I didn't go to *shul*." Then one day she went to the Jewish Community Center to inquire where she could purchase challah for Shabbat. They told her about the Chabad House in town and suggested she try them for challah. At the time, she did not want anything to do with Chabad, since she had had a very bad experience with them in the last city in which they lived.

In that city, Hadassah had taught English part time in a Chabad school. She experienced a major culture clash with the administration. They told her that she unkoshered their desks because she sat on them while teaching. Another particularly difficult (yet humorous in retrospect) incident happened due to the cultural differences. She told her young students they had to bring "a pencil, paper and rubber to school every day." She was called into the principal's office shortly thereafter. He said, "Do you know what a rubber is?" "Yes," she replied. "It's used to rub out things when you make a mistake." She was almost fired over the incident. These are only two of the examples of the culture shock she experienced in the school and the discomfort she felt with Chabad at the time. Nevertheless, Hadassah contacted the Chabad House in her city for challah, and they invited her and her

family over for a Friday night Shabbat dinner. The Chabad presence was very small at the time, having only arrived in town one year before Hadassah, and they conducted Friday night Shabbat services in their garage.

At the time of her first visit to Chabad, Hadassah was still following the teachings of Rajneesh and had pictures of the guru and statues of Buddha all over her home, because she felt they gave her comfort. The Chabad rabbi, in keeping with his mission, decided to try and expose Hadassah and her husband to Hasidic ideas. In Hadassah's words, "the rabbi took it upon himself to try and convert me, and he started to study Kabbalah and *Tanya* with me and my husband." Hadassah immediately was drawn in by what she learned. "Honestly, it was like food for me," she told me. "It was like total nourishment for me, because I realized that everything that was in this eastern religion is actually based on *Tanya*, and I came a full circle round." It is a common belief within Chabad, as well as other Orthodox communities, that the mystical teachings found in "eastern religions" are Jewish in origin. They believe these teachings made their way to India by way of Abraham's children. According to Genesis 25:1-6, after Abraham's wife Sarah died, he married Keturah and had six sons to whom he "gave gifts" and then sent "eastward to the land of the East."[248] These gifts are thought to be the mystical teachings of the Torah. Hadassah now saw that everything that had attracted her to Rajneesh was in these Hasidic teachings.

Philosophically, Hadassah was instantly convinced of the "truths" the Rabbi taught, but she was not ready to change her practices, to perform the *mitzvoth*. The *mitzvoth* came later for Hadassah, when she understood the purpose of them within Chabad cosmology. The rabbi kept encouraging her to perform the *mitzvoth* even without understanding their purpose. She told me he would say to her, "Light the Shabbos candles. You can do the right

[248] Treister and MiDevash, "Abraham's Presents to the East - The Zohar"; Kaplan, "Kabbalah and the East - What Is Kabbalah?"

thing for the wrong reasons, and then it'll come to you." When she told him she was uncomfortable with that approach, he replied, "Just do it, and you'll understand." This is a common strategy within Jewish outreach groups in general. It took Hadassah almost three years to begin practicing the *mitzvoth*, and, when she did she says, she began to understand what the rabbi was saying. She later came to learn more and more about the meaning of the *mitzvoth* from her children. "I sent my children to the [Jewish] Day School, and I learned to *daven* [pray] through them learning how to *daven* and through doing the homework, I learned."[249]

It is important to understand that within Chabad cosmology the Torah and *mitzvoth* have tremendous agency, particularly as a way of transforming the world into a dwelling place for God (*dira batachtonim*).[250] Shimona stresses the importance of performing the *mitzvoth* throughout the Method, but particularly so during the Action Arena Lesson. In this lesson she teaches that the Torah itself is the mind of God. In keeping with Orthodox tradition, she broadly defines "Torah" as all Biblical, Talmudic, mystical and legal texts. "Any [Torah] text you open," she asserts, "you are becoming intimate with the mind of God." She argues that God is both beyond infinite and beyond finite, and as such would be unreachable through human means if it were not for the Torah and the *mitzvoth*. Only through God's humility, by God's choosing to "contract His Essence into matter, into the text," can humanity access God. "By engaging with the Torah," she teaches, "with my mind and with my mouth, I bind myself with the essence of my Creator." Even more importantly, the *mitzvoth* "are the pleasure, the will, the desire of the Creator." Known as the "garments of the soul"—thought, speech, and action—the performance of the *mitzvoth* is the only way one

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[249] This is quite common amongst parents of Day School children in North America (Pomson and Schnoor, *Back to School)*.
[250] Wolfson, *Open Secret*, 47–48.

can bridge the gap between the human and the divine, to make, what Shimona calls, the "Quantum Leap." The garments, she argues, "facilitate the ultimate 'religious' experience."

Here Shimona makes an important distinction between contemporary forms of individual spirituality, which aim for "enlightenment," and a Torah observant lifestyle. Just as Rabbi Kesselman convinced her over twenty years prior that the *mitzvoth*, not yoga, Transcendental Meditation or Qi Gong, could enable her to access God, here Shimona is rehearsing the same argument. The Quantum Leap life, she argues, "has nothing to do with my ego, my perception, what *I* think is appropriate. It has to do with what is required of me in this moment [as stipulated by Jewish law]. As we've said, let's not ask questions of life, but what is life asking of me. What is God asking of me?" In this way, even the most mundane acts can have cosmic significance. Referring to a famous Hasidic story, she contends that chopping wood is no more satisfying than meditating or praying, because what is driving me is the yearning to be "bound up in the bundle of life with You." One, therefore, should seek to be "Godly," rather than "spiritual." Being Godly means living life on God's terms, as communicated through the Torah and *mitzvoth*. "Exchange the pursuit of self-actualization and enlightenment for a Quantum Leap life," she suggests. "A Quantum Leap life is a God-driven life. That's the kind of life that becomes full of energy and joy and freedom." Anything that is driven by my ego's machinations is not going to get me there no matter how subtle my pursuit is.

The garments are even superior to the soul, Shimona argues, because despite one's internal struggles, one can always do the right thing. As one of her Isms states, "One does not have to be perfect to perfect the world." One can always act Godly, and, therefore, bind oneself to God. It also elevates and enables one to celebrate mundane acts. The garments, for Shimona, are the heart of one's free will.

Because of her commitment to the *mitzvoth* and raising her daughters according to a Chabad lifestyle, when her oldest daughter was thirteen years old and ready for high school, she and her husband felt they either needed to move or send their daughter away to school, since there was no Chabad high school in their city. Sending children away for high school is a very common practice within Chabad, because so many Chabad families live in cities and towns without a Chabad infrastructure, due to the fact that they are on missions to do outreach work far away from the major Chabad centers like New York. Hadassah decided to write a letter to the Rebbe, who was still alive, for his advice, which is a common practice amongst Chabad adherents. She believed that he would be able to guide her in this difficult decision. She wrote to the Rebbe saying, "I have to send my daughter away, and I don't know where to send her. I don't have family in America. My husband doesn't want to move, because he hates change, and he doesn't want to send her away, but should we move or should we send her away?" Hadassah was sure the Rebbe would say they should move to a bigger Jewish community, because there was no school where they lived. Instead, the Rebbe's response said, "You need to send your children away, and you and your husband need to stay where you are and be a light in the darkness." This response is not surprising given the Rebbe's overall mission to spread "*yiddishkeit*" (literally "Jewishness") throughout every corner of the world. The news, however, was devastating for Hadassah, but they sent their daughter away nonetheless. Hadassah changed careers from teaching to working in her husband's practice so she could be flexible and travel to be with her daughter whenever she needed her. Hadassah and her husband have stayed in their community for almost thirty years now, which has been very difficult for her. Noting how most people who become *ba'alei teshuvah* end up leaving to find larger Jewish communities, she explained to me, "people become religious and they move on, and I've stayed.…For me it's a dry desert here."

Yet because of her commitment to the *mitzvoth* and her faith in the agency of the Rebbe, she sent her daughters away and stayed where she was.

My Sister's Mother; My Father's Wife

Despite her belief in the power of the *mitzvoth* and the Rebbe, Hadassah continued to struggle to be happy and live a life of purpose and meaning. The source of much of her ongoing pain became conscious to her two years ago. Her unhappiness would ultimately lead her to the Method and a new belief in her moral subjectivity and God's agency. Two years ago, a traumatic event occurred that left Hadassah feeling scared, alone, and that nobody believed her. She sought a psychologist to help her work through her mental anguish. What came up during her sessions was a flood of memories she had repressed about her childhood. "I felt abandoned and afraid, nobody believed me," she explained of her situation, "Then I went to a therapist, and it was just one day, just all the memories came back; the feelings of being totally alone, of being abandoned and the fear of nobody believing me." She remembered that her father sexually abused her for many years. She recalled how on the night of her fourth birthday, her father came into her room and sexually molested her for the first time. This abuse continued regularly for another eight years or so, until Hadassah decided it was wrong and somehow found the courage to say something to her father. Her father stopped, seeming more disappointed than angry. As she told this story to me, she said, "I have this feeling inside me right now of him being very disappointed, not angry, just very disappointed, and me feeling that I disappointed him. I'd done something wrong. It's my fault. I'd disappointed him, and I remember feeling very, very guilty….There was no anger, it was just like it's my fault, and I'd done something wrong by stopping it."

Hadassah sums up her childhood this way, "I became my sister's mother, and I became my father's wife." Hadassah became very overprotective of her sister who is three years younger than her. When her sister was a toddler, Hadassah would hold her, because her mother would not. In general Hadassah's mother was uninvolved in the family. Hadassah says her mother was always either depressed or sick. "I was the one who held [my sister]. I was her caretaker," she remembers. As they got older, Hadassah also tried to distract their father away from her sister to protect her from his sexual advances. "When I saw him going into my sister's room," she told me, "I tried to distract him, pulling him into my room." Hadassah now realizes with great sadness that she was unable to shield her sister fully. "Apparently I didn't protect my sister as well as I thought I did," she told me, "but I do remember trying to distract my father. I thought I had protected my sister, but apparently I was a child, and I didn't do what I thought I had done." Although Hadassah's sister has never confirmed Hadassah's suspicions, the fact that she has had anorexia since she was fourteen years old feels like an obvious indication to Hadassah. "My sister has not gotten out of bed in the past fifteen to twenty years and weighs seventy pounds," she told me.

In addition to acting as her sister's mother, Hadassah feels she also became her father's wife in more ways. Although the sexual abuse had ended, as Hadassah got older, she accompanied her father to parties and other functions, serving essentially as his date, since her mother never felt well enough to go. "My father always put me on a pedestal, and I was always his favorite daughter and couldn't do anything wrong." Although she never confronted her mother about the abuse, Hadassah feels as if her mother must have known what was going on. On many occasions her mother would say to her, "I've failed you and your sister as a mother."

Although the memories only came back in full recently, Hadassah always felt something was wrong. "I knew that I wasn't living a normal life," she told me. "I never had a childhood, and I knew that I was different. I grew up very quickly, and I grew up taking care of my sister." She also confirmed some of her suspicions with an old boyfriend who was older than her, whom she met when she was fifteen. According to Hadassah he became like a parent to her. They eventually went their separate ways, but remained friends. One day when she was around thirty years old, she called him and asked, "Did I ever say anything to you about my father? I'm having some memories, but I don't know if I'm imagining it." He told her that she did speak about him at times and that, although she was never specific, she implied that something inappropriate was going on. She then asked, "Do you think something happened with my father?" He said, "Yes," and went on to tell her that he always suspected something.

When the full memories finally came back, it was very traumatic for Hadassah. "It was really bad," she explained, "and I went to see somebody, and he gave me some medicine, which made me sleep because he said, 'you just need to sleep,' because I went crazy. I slept for two days, and then I decided I have to start dealing with this. I knew it, but I couldn't deal with it." As she understood it, her father's violations and her mother's neglect left her without boundaries. "When you are molested as a child," she explained, "you don't have boundaries, because you don't know to say, 'no.' You don't say, 'no,' because you don't think your daddy could be wrong, and you don't know when to say, 'no'." The combination of her craving of her mother's attention and her father's violation of her boundaries, she believes, left her with no sense of her own boundaries, although, it would take many years for her to come to this conclusion.

When Hadassah was twenty, she experienced another terrible sexual trauma Her car broke down around 10 o'clock in the morning on her way to the university. Stranded, she decided to hitch a ride to get to school, which was only about ten minutes away. When a young couple stopped and offered her a ride, she felt like they looked safe. The fact that there was a woman present made her feel even more comfortable. Unfortunately, the couple abducted her and raped her. Afterwards, Hadassah walked home and never spoke about it to anyone until many years later.

Hadassah believes her lack of boundaries has impacted her relationship with her husband. He is verbally, emotionally and, on occasion, physically abusive. What makes matters more difficult is that she and her husband work together. He is a professional, and she manages his office, including all of the staff. He often shouts at her in front of the office staff and undermines her decisions. "My work situation is becoming intolerable," she told me. "I'm overstepped. Decisions are made about the office that he's making now and overriding me completely." she explained. "He has a temper, and I get shouted at in front of my staff. They've lost respect for me because the boss, my husband, doesn't respect me." On three occasions he was physically abusive to her, until one of her daughter's heard and left the house for seven months. Hadassah threatened to call the police and get a restraining order, if he did not stop. He stopped.

When Hadassah heard about the Method for Self Mastery, she was ready to make changes in her life. She had been through years of traditional psychological therapy, but was not making any progress. She was ready for a Jewish approach to her healing. In the remaining portions of this chapter, I will describe the ways Hadassah has used the Method to try and re-establish boundaries for herself, experiment with a new form of moral subjectivity and establish a sense of agency within Chabad cosmology. Furthermore, by

understanding what is at stake for Hadassah in remaining married, it will be clear why her situation is not so simple and why she lives within the constraints she chooses to live within.

Dira Batachtonim: To Create a Dwelling Place for *Hashem*

In 2008, while visiting her daughter, Hadassah attended a lecture by Shimona Tzukernik. She was very impressed with Shimona. Five years later when she heard about the Method for Self Mastery, she decided to sign up. The cost of the course was difficult for Hadassah, because her husband would not pay for it, but, as Hadassah put it, "I decided I was going to sign up for it, and I was just going to jump in and do it. Somehow, I just got the money together and some cash, and I just jumped into it, and I just knew it was the right time, and the right thing for me to do." As discussed at the start of the chapter, she was ready for change. "I knew the time was right," she told me.

Hadassah started the Method hoping it would change the dynamics in her relationship with her husband. She was tired of not having boundaries, she told me, of not being able to define herself in relation to her husband. She reasoned that she needed to change herself in order to change her relationship with her husband. "I'm in a negative environment," she told me, "and I'm living with negative people and the only way I can change anybody…the only person I can change is myself and hopefully the people around me will change." She was also trying to find ways to live in line with what she believed is her purpose, which she defined broadly as creating "a dwelling place for *Hashem*." She was trying to figure out what was stopping her from fully understanding and actualizing this purpose, what was holding her back, despite living a religiously observant lifestyle.

The Creation lesson had a particularly large impact on Hadassah. This lesson emphasizes God's agency and the need of the individual to sublimate him- or herself to that

agency. Shimona began the Creation lesson by explaining that individuals have an important role in the Divine plan. "Our work," she explained, "is to make the world a place where God can dwell and be manifest." God created the world incomplete by design. "The Divine intention," she continued, "is that we humans will step up to the plate and become co-creators with God in completing and perfecting the world." This introduction to the lesson seems to grant a tremendous amount of individual agency. Yet, while this is true at some level, this agency is constrained by the ideal sense of self this theory promotes and by the agency of God and the Torah that supersedes individual agency. While the individual has agency, as discussed above, there is a right way to act and to conceive of the self in relation to God. Unlike mainstream life coaching, this agency is not value-neutral.

In the Creation lesson, Shimona suggests an alternate reading to the first lines of the creation story in the book of Genesis. This reading emphasizes the importance of God's agency and the necessity of transforming one's sense of self in order to sublimate one's purpose to that of God. Instead of "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and empty, with darkness on the face of the depths," followed later by, "and God said let there be light," Shimona offers a different reading "suggested by the Sages," namely,[251] "In the beginning *of G-d's creation of* heaven and earth, when the earth was without form and empty, with darkness on the face of the depths...(*It was then that*) G-d said, 'Let there be light.'"[252] Shimona contends that this reading offers a model that is a "template for how to live our lives." She uses a standard Hasidic technique that maps a Biblical idea onto an individual life. Shimona says, "This is the way

[251] For example, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040 –1105), also known as "Rashi," the definitive commentator on the Torah, interprets the opening verses in this way based on the first word of the verse in Hebrew ("Genesis - Chapter 1 (Parshah Bereishit) - Tanakh Online - Torah - Bible.").
[252] Tzukernik, "Creation."

God created the world, and just as 'the world is a large body, the body is a small world.' How does the account of day one of creation map onto our personal lives?"

Shimona goes on to break down the Biblical lines in a step-by-step exegesis that, she contends, reveals a three-step process for achieving personal transformation and sublimating one's vision to God. She starts with the phrase "In the beginning of God's creation…" Anything one sets out to accomplish begins, she suggests, with an intention. This intention, however, comes from the place of the "unrectified 'I'", or "*ani*" in Hebrew (see Figure 5). One has an intention, but this intention is still clouded by an individual agenda. This is the ego-centered "I" with the "delusion of cosmic amnesia," which forgets it is part of God.

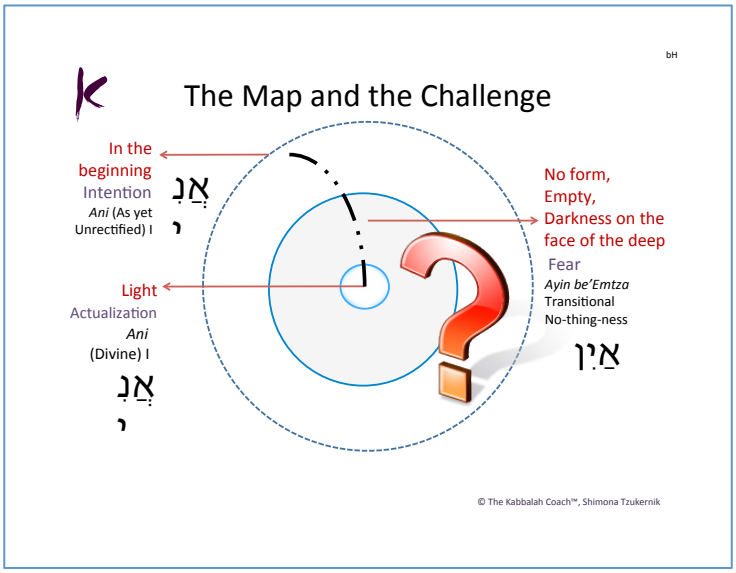

Figure 5: The Map and the Challenge

Next, one encounters the "darkness on the face of the deep"—the inevitable problems, obstacles and fears that emerge when one is seeking to manifest a vision. "God has setup reality in such a way" Shimona explains, "that our intention is immediately met with darkness." The darkness is given by God. Both the intention and the individual have the potential to be changed through the encounter with "the darkness on the face of the deep…" but only if one is willing to struggle through the darkness. If so, in this space of the darkness, the "*ani*", the unrectified I, will change to "*ayin*," nothingness, spelled, as Shimona points out, with the same three Hebrew letters as *ani (alef-nun-yud)*, suggesting a transformation of the self.

This *ayin*, Shimona explains, is the *ayin be'emtza*, the "nothingness in between." Just as God contracted Himself in order to bring forth creation, so too must human beings contract themselves, their egos, in order to manifest God's purpose. This contraction of the self is a form of *bittul*, the annihilation of the self before God that is necessary, according to Chabad cosmology, to elevate oneself to a higher state of consciousness. This process of self-abnegation is the same principle behind the Ism "You have to die in order to live," discussed in Chapter Three. During this phase—the darkness, the *ayin be'emtza*—Shimona explains, "I am disappearing. I cease to be in the way that I was. This is an extremely fearful place for us as individuals, but is pregnant with possibilities." What emerges, if one emerges, on the other side of the darkness is the rectified I, a new *ani*, a new moral subjectivity that recognizes its contingency before God. This is the point when one's original intention can be fully manifested as God's light, as God says, "Let there be light." To further explain her point, Shimona uses the metaphor of a seed. The seed is the unrectified I, she explains. It has to disintegrate (become nothingness, *ayin*), lose its identity, its way of being in order to actualize its purpose and become the rectified I, the plant.[253] As a result of this process one's sense of individual agency then is subsumed within Divine agency.

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[253] As scholar Susan Handelman explains this concept, "In order for a person to reach any new stage, to ascend to a higher level of insight and understanding, Chassidism explains, there has first to be a kind of self-nullification (*bitul*), an emptying out of oneself to make room for the new. In other words, between the prior level and the succeeding level, there has to be what Chassidism terms a nothingness in the middle (*ayin be'emtzah*). This psychological principle reflects a spiritual principle, and that -- in turn -- reflects a cosmological principle.

Jewish mysticism explains that the Creation of the world first occurred not through an act of G-d's expansion and self-assertion, but the reverse -- through a *tzimtzum* or contraction. G-d, so to speak, first had to withdraw or contract His infinite light and presence, and create an empty space in order to make room for a world of finite beings.

That pattern is then followed in every aspect of existence: there has to be an emptiness in the middle in order to move from one state of being to the next. A seed has to first dissolve in the soil before it can grow towards the light and bloom. In a human being, emptiness becomes spiritual openness when one lets go, when one nullifies one's ego, when one's own ego does not try to fill and control all the space around one, but makes space for the other. The emptiness is the necessary prelude to an entirely new and higher mode of existence" (Handelman, "Fortysomething").

Most people, however, never make it past the outer rim of the darkness (see Figure 6), Shimona asserts, and never manifest their true purpose. They continue to bounce off of what Shimona calls, the "Fear Fascia," the unproductive "thought/speech/behavior patterns which *appear* to simulate forward motion but *actually* function to protect us from feeling our fears (and thus moving forward towards the light.)."[254] In order to make it through this process, Shimona contends one must know her "Deepest Desires" and Furthest Fears."

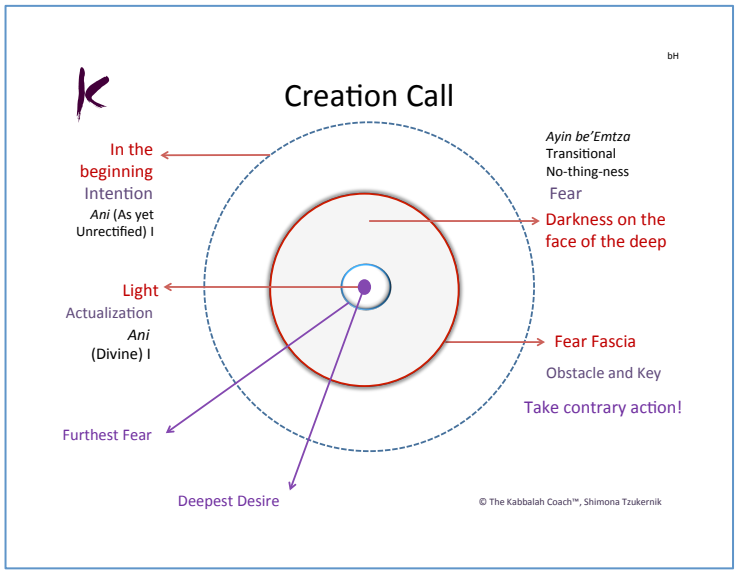

Figure 6: Creation Call Slide

As discussed in Chapter Three, ultimately one's Furthest Fear is that "I am a nothing. I don't exist in a true way." On the other hand, the "Deepest Desire of every human being is to be a true existence, to be connected with God.[255] She explains that one has reached one's Furthest Fear or Deepest Desire when the answer to "why" is "because." For example, one could state, "I go to work." The answer to "why" may be "to make money." The answer to the next "why" may be, "I want to make money to support my family." The answer to the next "why" may be, "I want to support my family because I love them." The answer to the next "why" may finally be simply, "I love them *because* I love them, just because." At one level, this would be one's Deepest Desire. Even this, however, is still on a superficial level, according to Shimona, because ultimately one must come to the realization that there is a

[254] Tzukernik, "Suggested Steps for the Creation Call."
[255] Shimona roots the concepts of Furthest Fears and Deepest Desires in the mystical concept of Inner Will (*Pnimiyut HaRatzon*).

deeper desire still, and that is that one's love for one's family somehow connects him or her to God. On the deepest level one's Deepest Desire is always to feel connected to God and to elevate the mundane. When one knows one's Deepest Desire and how it relates to one's original intention, one can more easily muster the courage necessary to overcome the darkness on the face of the deep and actualize his or her vision.

In summary, there are several important points in the Creation lesson that emphasize God's agency. First, one must believe that "the spirit of G-d is hovering on the *face* of the waters *at the very moment* [one] find[s] [one]self in darkness." It's not just that the light follows the darkness, as Shimona explains, but even in the very moment of the darkness, God is there. God has ultimate power and is the cause of what one perceives as difficult, even traumatic, life events. Ultimately, however, it is all for the good. As Shimona states often, "God loves you like an only child." In order to stay strong through the darkness, therefore, one must cultivate a vision of the light, one's divine purpose, and to be able to palpably envision it. In other words, if one knows his or her Deepest Desires, he or she will be able to overcome her Furthest Fears, and undergo moral transformation, becoming a rectified I to act in the service of *Hashem*. This lesson began with the assertion that individuals are necessary to complete God's work, suggesting a tremendous amount of individual agency, but within this cosmology, we see that God has the ultimate agency and the individual must subsume oneself within and surrender to God's plan, as conveyed through the Torah, if one wants to live out one's true purpose.

After participating in the Creation Lesson, Hadassah embraced these central ideas. Referring to these ideas and this lesson, in particular, she told me, "I keep on thinking this whole thing of creation. *Hashem* created the world. There was darkness, and then His purpose was to create a dwelling place for Himself, to create life." She has also tried to

personalize this story, as Shimona suggested. "I think of what is my intent and what's stopping me, and [Shimona] talks about there's always a fear, and she says, what is your fear? This is where her, a big part of her teaching is coming into me, is coming in and helping me. What is my fear?"

Hadassah came to believe that she is afraid of what others think of her. In Hadassah's narrative this fear is related to her lack of boundaries. Because she feels no sense of self, of her own boundaries, she worries about what others think. She feels a terrible sense of conflict within herself between an authentic self, the Godly Soul, and an inauthentic, scared self. We can see in her language how she embraces the dual nature of her self posited by the Method.

> My fear is that people will see who I am, or *I* will see who I am, and who am I…really? It's like I believe that I'm a *neshama* [soul], that…I'm a soul journeying in a body, so really I am a part of *Hashem*, and that is who I am, but I've built this life for myself that I'm really two people. One is that I'm the leader of a community, and I'm seen as this very strong person and that's how I'm seen in our community. The other thing is that I'm a victim. I have a victim mentality, and I've been abused, and I'm in an abusive situation, so really who am I? I have to be the strong person and the leader if I am, but I have a victim mentality, because things keep happening to me, and I allow them to….When I get into a situation where I'm scared, I become a victim, but yet when I'm in the situation where I need to be a leader, I'm a leader. Nobody sees the victim part of me and the fear in me; they only see the leader. So, who am I? Is this whole thing a fantasy? That's what I'm working on and the fear is people are going to see who I am.

Shimona helped Hadassah give names to these two aspects of herself. The first aspect she named Hilly, which is the name her parents called her, short for Hilary. She identifies Hilly as the victim. The second aspect of herself is Hadassah, her Hebrew name, which she believes is her potential. As she explained it to me,

> An exercise that Shimona gave me is knowing that there's the Hilly part of me, which is the hurt, broken part of me. The child that was hurt and never nurtured, and then this Hadassah, which is the part of me that's the candle say, that is able to light other candles and doesn't lose its strength. It's a Shabbos candle that lights all the other candles, but that doesn't lose its

> essence. I go back to Hadassah, and that's the part of me that's the strong part of me. That's the survivor, and that's the part of me that is here.

Her fear is being the weak, scared, vulnerable Hilly, and that people will see her this way. This fear, she believes, holds her back from manifesting her purpose, which she describes in Chabad terminology as "creating a dwelling place for *Hashem*." Armed with this new awareness of her fear, she felt she needed a way to move through this fear. She believes she found this mechanism within the contemplative practices she learned through the Method.

Finding Agency in Surrender

An important part of the Method, discussed in earlier chapters, and that Hadassah believes in strongly is that thoughts have the capacity to change one's behavior. The superiority of the mental faculties over the emotions has its roots in the founding of Chabad (which is an acronym of the Hebrew words for wisdom, understanding and knowledge). "Your thoughts have as much power as you give them," she explained to me, "if I don't give my thoughts any power, my behavior will change, and when I realized that, I stopped thinking about the past, and I realized that my reality changed and then when I started to study with Shimona, my whole reality changed, I had a paradigm shift." Importantly, she also believes that changing her thoughts can bring her back to her Godly Soul, to Hadassah. "That for me is the whole essence of change," she explains. "I notice that with everybody around me that if you can change your thoughts, and if you can change the way you word things like the garments that you wear, your real self will come, your True Self. You can come back to your True Self."

Hadassah believes she becomes Hilly when she is scared, humiliated or feeling victimized. She becomes reactive and disconnected from God. She associates this reactivity and anger with the Animal Soul (*nefesh behemit*). "The anger, the reaction, the animal side is

the fear side," she explains, "which is anti-the Godly side." She believes she has to bring God into the Animal and subdue the Animal for God, a process known as *ifkakya*, in order to serve God's purpose and "to create a dwelling place for *Hashem*." By bringing God into her fear, she believes she can transform her animal-driven reactivity into a Godly serenity. This transformation of the animal into the Godly is the process of revealing the divinity in the world. "The purpose of creation is to bring *Hashem* into this world," she explains, "and that's our purpose, to bring *Hashem* into this fear and into the reactive side." In other words, by recognizing that "God is hovering on the face of the deep," at the moment of one's greatest fear, one can bring God into the fear and transform it, which is the essence of one's purpose. While sublimating herself to God, however, Hadassah gained a new sense of agency. This renewed sense of agency lies within her perceived ability to change her thoughts and come back to the Sticky Self, and therefore change her emotional state and behaviors.

Hadassah attributes most of this new agency to the meditation practices Shimona has taught her through the Method. In particular she feels she has benefited from the Divine Breath meditation. Divine Breath is the fourth in a series of meditations that focus on the breath. This meditation is the first of the four that is more of an analytical meditation, where the meditator is not simply focusing on an aspect of breathing, but is working through an idea. As Shimona describes it, "the Divine Breath meditation takes us into an exploration of our Identity [Sticky Self]. We will be shifting our focus away from the diaphragm, bellybutton, lungs and throat and anchor the breath practice on a thought. We will drive our practice with a thought about the nature of breath and the origin of life."

The thoughts to be focused upon are encapsulated in several Biblical and mystical passages brought by Rabbi Schneur Zalman (the founder of Chabad and author of *Tanya*) in

the *Tanya*, which Shimona introduces at the start of the meditation. "Rabbi Schneur Zalman describes our Identity, the Divine Soul, as being a part of God above," she explains. Quoting Chapter Two of Tanya she states, "As it is written [in the Torah], 'And He breathed into his [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life,' and 'You breathed it (the soul) into me.'" These verses focus on Adam, she explains, but then she says, R. Zalman goes on to discuss "the one who is breathing, not only about Adam who had this breath breathed into his nostrils, but the Breather [i.e., God]." Chapter Two of *Tanya* goes on to state, she continues, "As the Zohar says, 'He who exhales, exhales from within him,' that is to say, from his inwardness and his innermost being, for it is something of his internal and innermost vitality that man emits through exhaling with force.' And of course this is used as an analogy for the life giving force that comes with the breath of the Divine," she concludes.[256] Shimona uses these verses as the basis for the meditation. "As you practice the meditation, allow these verses to carry your thought much like the current at the center of a river," she explains. "So your moving with the ideas, the verses, your thought is being carried by these verses and your breath is riding on top of that."

While these passages are the thoughts to be used during the meditation, she also brings a proof text that she uses to explain the breathing technique that will be used during the meditation. "Mystically, whereas the mouth is a gateway to the heart," "she teaches, "the nostrils are a gateway to the brain. We will focus on the flow of the breath into the nostrils and up to the brain and then out. By focusing on the physical air and then the Divine life-force in our nostrils, we come in touch with the way in which G-d sustains us moment by moment." The breathing technique in this meditation, unlike the previous three, focuses on

[256] In chapter one I explained how R. Zalman uses this text from the Bible as a proof that part of God's own soul was breathed into Adam at creation.

breathing in and out of the nostrils. With these introductory remarks concluded, she begins the meditation.

After suggesting specific posture options, Shimona instructs the meditator to focus on the nostrils and the air just as it enters and leaves the nostrils. "Feel the cool air as you inhale and the warm air as you exhale. Feel the movement," she instructs. Once the meditator has focused on her nostrils and the breath circulating around the brain, Shimona asks the meditator to use her "mind's eye" to "develop a picture of the first human being formed of the earth" and God breathing in the life force. She then individualizes the experience by instructing, "With each breath, God breathes *your* soul into *you*. Take in the gift of life. Make a commitment to use the life force you receive for holiness." She eventually makes the process of breathing in this way a very intimate experience with the Divine. "With each in breath imbibe the gift of life, and with each out breath give back to God the commitment to live the life you were given. It's like an intimate kissing through the nostrils. In and out…in and out…in and out…"

> As you breath in that essence know that the essence of the essence of life is in the left nostril. Allow the Divine Breath to enter your sinuses, your skull, as Adam in the Garden of Eden, you receive the love of your Creator. Each in breath is an affirmation of the wonder of you and each out breath is a cleansing, a letting go, and a thank you for the Divine Breath you receive.

Hadassah explained to me this meditation has helped her gain some perspective on her reactive thoughts and emotions to transform the thoughts being driven by the animal into those of the Godly. It enables her to view difficult situations from a distance that allows her not to become so caught up in them. As Hadassah explains her experience, "Breathing into the left nostril and breathing out of the right, it immediately takes me into a place where I am outside, like if someone is shouting at me or something like that, it will take me...I'm not engaged. I don't feel like I have to react. It will just take me into a very calm place where

I don't have to engage. I can just look at the situation. I am finding I am able to do that easier than I was before."

It took Hadassah many months of practice before the meditation had this positive effect on her. For months, she was doing several of the mediations including, Divestment (described in Chapter Three) and Divine Breath. Then, after this extended period of practicing the mediations three times per week, something shifted. As she told me during one of our conversations,

> I had a revelation this week. I've been doing the meditations, the breathing meditations, Divestment, Divine Breath, but I haven't felt them. It's like listening to someone but not internalizing them. It was here [pointing to her head] and the feelings were here [pointing to her heart] but I couldn't put it together. Just for the first time I've been doing them while I've been in this quiet space, so they are becoming part of me, and now the breath is taking me to that quiet space, whereas before I was just doing them but not feeling any difference. I was doing them three times a week, but I wasn't feeling any different, it was just up in my head, now it's becoming part of me. Now when I get upset, I can do the meditation in my mind and that will take me into this quiet place, I am putting the two together.

Although the effects of these practices sound similar to the positive outcomes of other forms of meditation, Hadassah uses very specific language to describe her experiences.[257] Hadassah believes this mediation helps her connect with her Essence, her Sticky Self, helping her manifest her Deepest Desire. "Shimona's taking me back to my Essence," she explained, "and so when I start to feel crazy, I go back to who I am, and really I am part of *Hashem*, so when I start to feel crazy, my whole world is coming apart, the breath for me is my symbol, and I take a deep breath, and I go back. I just take a deep breath and I go back to me, not my body but I go back, and I wait; I just wait for a fresh thought,

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[257] See for example Baer, "Mindfulness Training as a Clinical Intervention"; Davidson et al., "Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation"; Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are*; Pace et al., "Effect of Compassion Meditation on Neuroendocrine, Innate Immune and Behavioral Responses to Psychosocial Stress"; Pace et al., "Innate Immune, Neuroendocrine and Behavioral Responses to Psychosocial Stress Do Not Predict Subsequent Compassion Meditation Practice Time."

and I know that it is the thought that's determining my behavior." Being in touch with her Sticky Self enables her to react differently, she asserts, more from her Godly Soul than her Animal Soul. This enables her to occupy a new subject position, to be Hadassah and not Hilly.

Hadassah gave me an example of how she has used the meditation. At the office, her husband often gets angry with her and will shout at her in front of the office staff. When this happens, she told me, "I feel myself…I'm going to cry, or I feel what did I do wrong this time?" With Divine Breath, however, she explains, "I separate myself. I take a deep breath…that takes me back to I'm not the Hilly, the abused child, but I'm actually part of *Hashem*." By connecting with her Sticky Self, Hadassah disengages from the volatility of the immediate situation. "I detach, but I don't detach like I used to detach and make a fantasy like world. This time I detach, and I observe. I'm very present, whereas, last time I wasn't present.…this time I'm very present, and I become Hadassah, and I observe the situation, and I don't have to go into [my office] and cry anymore, and I don't have to think I'm a terrible person, [thinking] what did I do wrong?"

When I asked Hadassah to explain what the experience of the meditation was like, to be in this quiet space during the Divine Breath meditation, she said, "You know how I was never held as a baby? It feels like I am being held. It feels like I am home. I am being held by *Hashem*. It feels like…I used to love going to the *mikveh* [ritual bath],[258] I still go to the *mikveh* even though I don't need to, because I crawl up into the fetal position and the water is warm, and I feel like I am being cared for. That's the feeling. It's just warm, and I am in the fetal position, and someone is holding me. That's the place." These meditations and the

[258] A *mikveh* is a ritual bath in which women and men immerse themselves at ritually prescribed times. It is meant as a form of spiritual cleansing and a way to remove impurities.

transformation from what she describes as the animal to the Godly affect her moral subjectivity and her sense of agency.

With each of these events, Hadassah is experimenting in the moral laboratory of everyday life. The workplace becomes her laboratory. She is testing new possibilities of how she will be in relation to her husband, with possibilities for new outcomes. As anthropologist Veena Das writes, "My view of moral life is deeply influenced by a notion of the everyday in which how I respond to the claims of the other, as well as how I allow myself to be claimed by the other, defines the work of self-formation."[259] Hadassah has changed the way she interacts with her husband and others and has changed the way she is claimed by these others. Through her meditation she is cultivating a new moral subjectivity. Using the language of the Creation Lesson, she is going into a place of *ayin be'emtza*, confronting her fears and finding a place of the rectified I. From this new subject position, although her situation has not changed, the way she inhabits it does, which makes all the difference in how she engages with her husband. Yet, although she is able to get to that place, it is an imperfect process, with which she struggles every day.

It is still often difficult for Hadassah to get into that calm place in the midst of the verbal abuse her husband often dishes out at work. During one of our Skype interviews, she confided in me, "Today my husband shouted at me in front of our staff. He didn't shout, but he was very angry. The staff just ran away, and I tried to get into that place, and I couldn't. I went into my office, but I had to leave the office, and I went home, and I got home, and I got into that place. I have to get into that place faster. But when I was able to get home, I was able to get there and feel calm." She recognizes that it is an imperfect process that is and will continue to be a struggle to enact. This is the very essence of

[259] Das, "Engaging the Life of the Other: Love and Everyday Life," 377.

"creating a dwelling place for *Hashem*" according to Hadassah. It won't be easy or quick, she explains, "that's our purpose, to bring *Hashem* into this fear and into the reactive side, so it's not going to just come like that….It's a life-long process."

Hadassah describes getting to a place of Sticky Self as a place of boundaries. She describes her work with Shimona, "Getting to that place of Sticky Self, that place within myself, in a time of crisis, because there is constant crisis. I found that place and the Method has helped with that and now I am connecting that with the breathing, and now I need to be able to do that in a time of crisis." She believes that the contemplative practices, in particular, help her reach this place of Sticky Self by changing her thoughts. "I think if I can summarize it," she explained, "Shimona takes me back to who I really am and she helps me filter the junk and she helps me filter the distractions and the distractions are my thoughts. That's basically the process." This passive sense of self that embraces surrender is a very different conception of the self and agency as that of mainstream life coaching and brings forth a very different sense of agency.

For the Love of Her Daughters: Developing Agency Within the Constraints

These lessons and contemplative practices have given Hadassah practices and embedded narratives that have enabled her to cultivate a new moral subjectivity, which has brought with it a sense of agency. To more fully understand Hadassah's sense of agency, however, one must understand her constraints and what is at stake for her in remaining in a difficult and abusive relationship. Hadassah is terrified that if she leaves her husband she will have a very difficult time finding a husband for her two youngest, unmarried daughters. As she told me, "in a religious world, if you have an unmarried daughter, you're not going to get divorced." She is very worried not only about the divorce but of the story of her past abuses

becoming public, and how this will affect her daughters' ability to marry. This is why she is also intensely concerned about her story becoming public before her daughters are married. She was very reluctant to speak with me when Shimona first asked her to speak with me. It took many months before she replied to my emails requesting our first interview. Much later, after we had worked together for almost a year, in an email to me she wrote, "I have not gone public because I am protecting [my] children and I will not do anything to change my decision now-they have gone though too much themselves."

In addition to protecting her daughters, Hadassah is very concerned that she will not be treated fairly from a financial perspective in a divorce. She has several medical conditions that keep a steady stream of medical bills flowing in and limits the kind of work she can do. When she was a child she had virus, which left lasting physical symptoms. Additionally, she was in a major car accident when she first arrived in the United States, and, more recently, she suffered an illness, which nearly killed her, and have left her in chronic pain. Her work, although humiliating at times, continues to give her an income of her own and a place to go every day. "I'm not financially independent. I don't have family in this country and I have medical issues, and I need medical insurance, so it's a choice I made. It's a choice I'm making."

In addition to the financial constraints, there are also perceived emotional constraints that she is working through. "I need the money," she reminds me, but she continues, "I need a place to go to every day, otherwise, I don't think I would get out of bed." Although she has developed strategies for coping with the abuses she has endured, she is afraid of what will come if she has nowhere to go each day. What is at stake for Hadassah is protecting her daughters, being able to survive financially given her specific medical constraints, and avoiding her sister's fate. In these decisions, she feels a sense of power and

agency. "Right now," she explains, "I've made a decision to do this for myself, but it's degrading. It's humiliating, but I feel like I'm in control." It is in this control that Hadassah feels a sense of agency in her decision to stay with her husband, despite the worsening situation.

Shimona has helped Hadassah create this plausible narrative of agency. "I remember Shimona said, Hadassah recalled, 'If you do something with consciousness, it's okay. But if you do something without consciousness, not that it's okay.' But she said, 'If you are aware of what you're doing, you're a step up. If you're not aware of what you're doing, you're a victim.' I'm very aware of why I'm doing what I'm doing." Her contemplative practice also gives her agency or at least what Wynn Maggi has called "negative agency" creating what Judith Okely has called "cracks of resistance."[260] "When there is an abusive situation," Hadassah explains, "I remove myself emotionally. I watch it from the outside. I mean I do go into the office and have a cry afterwards, but I don't let my staff see it. I remove myself emotionally, and I listen, and I say, 'I'm sorry you feel that,' or 'I'm sorry you feel angry.' I don't say, 'I made you angry,' and my staff watch me."

For a while after joining the Method, Hadassah's relationship with her husband became worse. He became more verbally abusive and on two occasions became physically abusive again, which he had not done in many years. When we spoke at the October Mastermind, she explained to me her assessment of her husband's increased aggression. She believes that often when one person gets better the other gets worse. "The more I come into myself, the more threatened he is. I always thought that the better you become, the better your spouse will become, but it's not…it's the opposite." Instead her husband berated her even more, saying to her, "You're going crazy. You're a victim and have a victim mentality.

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[260] Maggi, *Our Women Are Free*; Okely, "Defiant Moments."

You've come from a dysfunctional family, and you're getting worse, and worse and worse. You're becoming more controlling, and you're even answering me back now, you're just getting worse and worse."

When her husband saw that he was having no effect on her, he became very frustrated. "He looked like he was going to have a heart attack," she told me. This is when he hit her again. As her husband became worse, she said she had a decision to make at that point. "You can either suppress yourself or you can become stronger and stronger and stronger," she explained, "and I find that at the beginning I suppressed myself, but now I'm actually getting stronger, and so it's in a way it makes you stronger because as you get quieter, they get louder, and I'm hoping if it doesn't change, it doesn't matter because I'm seeing a shift in myself." She describes this shift as, "I'm not reactive. I'm getting quieter. I'm going deeper within myself, and I'm able to watch it. I'm able to become an observer, not reactor. Which is interesting and I'm able to separate myself and not react and become part of the situation but look at the situation from the outside and know that I'm not responsible….it's empowered me." These are the "cracks of resistance" Flueckiger and Okely describe that may not appear to an observer as if they are resistance, but nonetheless are. Furthermore, they are a form of the negative agency that Maggi discussed, where it may not look like freedom, but it is the crafting of a meaningful life within what are perceived to be the limits of possibilities.

At the heart of this agency is a renewed sense of her self worth and boundaries. She believes she has achieved this by developing practices to come into her Sticky Self. "Before I realized that I needed approval because I never got it from my parents," she explained, "and it's hard for me to put up boundaries. Any stronger person than myself, I would be drawn to, because I almost needed their approval, but I'm getting more and more used to finding that

place within myself. It's becoming more comfortable. This is something that this course has really helped me with." Now, despite the fact that it is a struggle, she feels she does not rely so much on others for her sense of well-being. "I'm not dependent on someone else for my happiness, to make me happy or to make me unhappy," she boasts. "My happiness comes from within myself. Now I'm talking generally, most of the time, but I can separate myself now. I'm not enmeshed, whereas before I was enmeshed, and he would make me happy and he would make me unhappy, and his behavior would make me happy and his behavior would make me unhappy. So, I'm not enmeshed anymore."

More recently, Hadassah has reported that her relationship with her husband has improved. After his intense frustration at his inability to affect her, he has become calmer. "I think when one person starts to change and starts to get quieter, the other person gets louder, and it does it escalates and then it just kind of peaks out." During these intense moments, "it was a very conscious effort on my part not to react, it was very conscious. I would actually physically leave, but now I don't physically leave. Then I had to emotionally cut myself off, like just think about something else. Now I can do it without doing that. Now I'm just kind of, I can just go to another place, it just doesn't bother me." Through what appeared as more passivity, Hadassah was able to inhabit a new moral space in relation to her husband. This space is moral because when she inhabits it, she no longer sees herself as the victim, as the one who has done something wrong, but instead sees the abuse for what it is. Not only did this enable her to achieve a sense of power, hopefully, it is going to end the abuse and, perhaps, improve her relationship with her husband.

Becoming A Sun to Many Moons: Redemption

During one of our weekly Method classes, Shimona gave a metaphor that resonated deeply with Hadassah. Shimona told of a discourse of the Rebbe delivered just weeks before his stroke, during which he said, when the moon is shining and full it is farthest from the sun. It diminishes in light as it approaches the sun and is completely black when it is the closest to the sun. We all want to be in the place of the full moon, he said, fully manifest, but when we are in the darkness, that place of fear and the unknown, we are actually closest to God. It is by surrendering to that darkness, knowing that we are closest to God at that very moment, we emerge from it and come into the fullness of our own being.[261] Like the seed, this is another metaphor for the idea of *ayin be'emtza*, that one must go into the darkness and become seemingly nothing to emerge anew. Taking this a step further, Shimona went on to explain that one's purpose is to go from being simply an emanation of God's light (an *ohr*) to being a source of illumination to others (or a *ma'ohr*). As the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe reportedly answered when he was asked to define what is a *Chasid*, he replied, "a *Chasid* is a lamplighter, helping others find their Divine light."

In hearing Shimona's charge, Hadassah felt she finally understood the full meaning of the letter she received from the Rebbe about sending her daughters away to school. She believes the final lines of his letter were giving her a more enduring and deeper message than simply what she should do with her daughters. The letter concluded with the instructions to stay in her town and "to be a light in the darkness." As Hadassah now understood the metaphor, "The darker the hour is, the more a person needs you, and if I can be a sun to that moon and bring light to that moon, and teach that moon how to be a sun, so that moon can be a sun to the next moon, and so on and so on…so, there can be more suns…."

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[261] A transcription of this discourse can be found in *Sefer HaSichos* 5752

Referring to the Rebbe's letter, she explained, "I never understood that [part of the letter], but it's more than just staying in [my city]. When Shimona spoke about that moon and being a light, of teaching that moon how to be a light, I got goose bumps." In this realization, we see the way agency works within Chabad as conveyed through the Method and experienced by Hadassah. Hadassah sublimates her will to that of God, Torah and the Rebbe. Yet, in all of this surrender, Hadassah seems to have found a new sense of agency within her constraints.

Hadassah sees her light as speaking out against domestic violence and sexual abuse in the Orthodox world. "In the religious world," she told me, "there is such shame and there is such secrecy. People cannot be reached. They don't know where to turn to, and they cannot be reached, and they don't know how to talk; they don't communicate because there's such in-marriage—sisters marry cousins, and they're all so close." Hadassah first realized that there was so much "suffering in silence" when daughters went to seminary. Her daughters know, in general, what Hadassah went through, and when they were in seminary, they had friends confide in them about abuses they endured. Realizing that these girls had never spoken to a parent or other adult about the abuse, Hadassah's daughters suggested they speak with her. Because Hadassah did not know these girls, and they could remain anonymous to her, many of them agreed to speak with her. Hadassah spoke to many of them and shared with her that they were afraid to speak out because "they were afraid they would never be able to marry." She is very happy that many of these girls later did marry and told Hadassah's daughters that they do not know if they ever would have married if it hadn't been for her.

Hadassah wants to write a book about her experience to help other religious women who are subject to abuse. "I want to reach out to women," she told me early during our very

first interview. “There are so many women who are silent, and I want to be a channel. I want to open a woman up to be able to talk, because there are many women who have been violently abused, and they don't know that they can open up.” Hadassah told me that there have been very few books written on the subject for this audience. Women buy them secretly and “they're hidden under mattresses,” according to Hadassah. Worse yet, she explains, “there's no one to listen to them because there's no one who will talk about these things.” Furthermore, because of the stigma caused by revealing that one has been abused in this way, girls do not want to seek help. “There are so many girls out there that don’t want to go to religious therapist,” she explained, “and there aren’t many women who deal with anything sexual or anything intimate and not many counselors. There are not many counselors who would not tell their parents and these girls want to talk about it because it’s not an open subject.”

To fill this lacuna, Hadassah wants to do more than simply write a book; she wants to go to religious communities and speak openly about these issues. “No woman has come out and spoken,” she claims. “They’ve written books, but no woman has really come out and spoken. I think they’re scared, but I’m not scared, because I want to reach these women.” She wants to confront communities and husbands about the reality of sexual abuse. “I want to talk to husbands, and I want to say that your wife is not a freak [for having been sexually abused or raped]. She’s a normal woman, and you can talk about it, and you can help her. I want to help people. I want people to be able to talk about this because I know these women are hurt, and I know they don’t have normal lives with their husbands, and I want people to be able to talk about this openly.” As for women who are currently in abusive relationships, she wants to create safe places for them to go. “There's a terrible stigma for the woman,” she explains, “and for the men, they just get angrier, and then the woman retreats. But I

want to be able to start a place for these women to go to, to start their lives again. Even if I can just start and give these women something to think about."

Relating this mission to the Rebbe's metaphor she told me, "there are so many moons that are being blocked. There are no programs now for these women. There is no place for these women, if they do come out, to go, and the thing is that once you start opening up a can of worms, it's very scary for these women, to build up support networks for these women to go to. Because there's fear; things get much worse when you start opening up." Now that she feels she has found her Sticky Self, she wants to transform her suffering into light. She has been through the darkness and has emerged illuminated by the sun. Now she wants to move from an emanation (*ohr*) to an illuminator (*ma'ohr*), as Shimona charged her students to do. "If my job can be, not to be a sun to that moon, but to teach that moon how to be a sun," then she feels she would have fulfilled the mission she now believes the Rebbe had given her so many years earlier.

Conclusion: Exchange and Religious Innovation

I began this research project with many questions. To recap them, they were: 1) Why would Chabad institutions turn to life coaching as a way to satisfy its religious mission? 2) Why were there so many tensions when Chai Life tried to implement mainstream life coaching within a Chabad environment? 3) Why weren't there the same kinds of tensions within the Method for Self Mastery? And finally, from the individual perspective, 4) Why did the participants turn to Chabad for coaching and healing and how did these programs deploy Chabad religious resources to try and effect psychological healing and cultivate new moral dispositions and subjectivities for participants?

Although at first I found it odd that life coaching should emerge within Chabad, I discovered many reasons why Chabad seemed well situated for these types of programs. Many of Chabad's central teachings, such as *dira bitachtonim* (lower indwelling) and *hamshakha el ha-Yesh* (drawing down the Divine influx), serve to elevate one's mundane existence and infuse it with divine purpose. By helping one tend to one's seemingly secular or mundane concerns, such as personal finances, relationships, and health, a coach would be helping that individual enhance his or her relationship with God and ultimately reveal divinity in the world. Connected to this, the Rebbe emphasized the practical application of *hasidiut* and Jewish law. How, he wanted to know, could every aspect of Jewish thought be applied in a practical way in daily life? Both the founders of Chai Life International and the Method for Self Mastery emphasized the importance of mundane existence in fulfilling God's divine plan.

Furthermore, the role of the *mashpia* or spiritual mentor within Chabad is another reason why life coaching seemed like a natural evolution of Chabad practice to the founders of Chai Life and the Method. The Rebbe's call in the 1970s and the 1980s for more *mashpias*

is an important reason why they embarked on their coaching initiatives. They believed that creating Chabad life coaches would be a fulfillment of the Rebbe's instructions. The role of the *mashpia*, furthermore, is connected to Chabad's self-perception as a kind of Hasidic psychology and the *Tanya* as the manual for exploring one's psyche.

Both Chai Life and the Method are also bound up in Chabad's outreach mission. For Chai Life International the goal of fulfilling the Rebbe's mission to reach out to unaffiliated and non-observant Jews was its primary *raison d'etre*. It believed that life coaching, by addressing more secular concerns, would be a good way to initiate a relationship with these unaffiliated Jews, as a first step towards engaging them in more specifically Jewish concerns. For the Method for Self Mastery, Chabad's outreach mission is why Shimona came into contact with and eventually became a Chabad Hasid. Furthermore, as Shimona states, the Method is largely an effort to translate Chabad ideas into language and practices that individuals who are not steeped in Chabad *hasidut* and ritual observance can digest. This translation is necessary because she primarily works with *ba'alei teshuvahs*, non-observant Jews, and converts, all of whom have come by Chabad through Chabad's outreach efforts.

Additionally, the Rebbe encouraged his Hasidim to utilize technology in fulfillment of this outreach mission. In many ways, both Chai Life International and the Method for Self Mastery view psychological and coaching practices as technologies to be appropriated in this way. Boradly, this means looking outside of strictly Jewish resources to see what can be appropriated and placed in service to the mission. Chai Life was very explicit in how it viewed life coaching as a value-neutral technology, no different than the internet, radio or television, that it could utilize for its mission. While Shimona sees the ideas and practices of modern psychotherapeutic interventions as potentially beneficial, she does not see them as value-neutral, in the same way. She claims to seek out what is wrong with them, however,

what is not in concert with Jewish law or Hasidic philosophy, and either discards the idea in total or modifies it to suit her needs.

Finally, the economic model under which Chabad emissaries or *shluchim* operate is a reason why Chabad is a fertile environment for life coaching. Each *shluchim* and *shluchot* couple is responsible for the economic solvency of their Chabad House. At minimum this means raising enough money to support their family and programming in their community. This requires them to be constantly looking for ways to raise money and generate revenue. Chai Life saw life coaching as an excellent way to enable rabbis and rebbetizins to earn additional income while executing against their mission of outreach. Life coaching, they reasoned, was also a way to employ young rabbis and rebbetzins who did not yet have a physical territory to which they could move and begin outreach efforts. Although Shimona is not technically a *shlucha*, the economic opportunity provided by life coaching is essential to her and the Method. Shimona is the primary income earner in her family, and life coaching and the Method are her way of earning a living for her family. In a way similar to mainstream life coaching, one cannot separate the economic model and incentives from the mission of Chabad.

While there are these many reasons why Chabad was a fertile ground for the emergence of Jewish life coaching, when Chai Life tried to bridge these worlds, however, it experienced conflict. This is because, I argue, mainstream life coaching embeds its own sacred narratives, ontologies of the self, theories of agency, and a value system that are all akin to religious ideas and systems. These underlying assumptions are based on life coaching's roots in the human potential movement and the rhetorical separation of religion and spirituality that took hold in American culture at that time. These assumptions go unmarked because they are part of the dominant modern, western, cosmopolitan, religiously

liberal values that conceptualizes "spirituality" as transcending institutional, "religious" boundaries, while remaining at the core of each of them. This "spirituality" privileges individualism, interiority, privacy, and non-dogmatic progressivism.[262] While this spirituality is thought to reside within the individual and to stand opposed to institutions, it is actually carried by institutions in America, such as mainstream life coaching. When Chai Life tried to utilize a mainstream coaching model and trainer to launch its coaching program, it experienced conflict precisely because the religious elements of life coaching clashed with those of Chabad.

The Method for Self Mastery did not experience these same kinds of conflicts, because Shimona spent years blending many of the same underlying theoretical ideas of the human potential movement, such as the need to go inside to find one's true self, with Chabad cosmology and practice. Furthermore, she did so originally as a way to effect her own psychological healing and construct a coherent view of the world for herself, not to develop a coaching program. The operationalization of these ideas for others only came much later, after they had been transformed in her own mind into harmony with Chabad. Therefore, while the Method in many ways is a hybrid of elements of Chabad and mainstream American culture, its presentation and self-understanding is much more seamless and emphasizes the Jewish roots of these healing modalities.

Finally, I asked why individuals are turning to Chabad for something like life coaching and how were these programs effective in their eyes. Uniformly, the women who participated in the Method were seeking some form of psychological healing. They spoke of anxiety, depression, shame, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and addiction. Although there were significant variations in the severity of these issues, the participants all turned to

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[262] Herman, "The Spiritual Illusion: Constructive Steps Toward Rectification and Redescription."

the Method for healing. That said, they wanted to receive this healing through a Jewish source, a Jewish method. Many of the women were already observant Jews, and it seemed natural to them that Judaism would be the source of their healing. As converts or *ba'alei teshuvah* they were also seemingly comfortable with the ideas Shimona brought in from outside of Chabad or Judaism. In fact, these ideas helped them to better understand the often complicated and obscure Hasidic mystical concepts. Many participants had sought psychotherapy or life coaching from non-sectarian sources and had not found the level of help they were seeking. These women spoke of "broken souls" in need of healing and seemed to thrive in a psychotherapeutic setting that was thoroughly "Jewish."

The Method worked for the women I spoke with most extensively because it gave them resources to cultivate a new moral subjectivity, sense of self, and agency that embedded them in a new sacred narrative with cosmic significance. Again, when I speak of efficacy here, I am not speaking about whether these programs "work" in a medical or scientific sense. Instead, I am speaking about the kinds of "work" these programs did for the individuals in terms of shifting their moral subjectivity and, therefore, their experience of themselves and the phenomenal world. By utilizing concepts like *dira bitachtonim* (lower indwelling), *nefesh elohit* (Godly soul) and *bittul* (self annihilation), the Method changed how they saw themselves, the negative events in their lives, and their purpose.

The kinds of transformations they experienced were messy, complicated, and tentative. They were continually testing new forms of moral becoming in the laboratory of everyday life. Although I do not subscribe to the underlying assumptions of the Method or Chabad, I tried to suspend judgment in order to appreciate what they experienced and what is at stake in seeking this moral subjectivity. By suspending judgment and finding humility, I believe I was able to see what is at stake for them in their moral struggle. Ultimately, even

though I disagree quite fundamentally with some of the practices and beliefs, particularly around the issue of sexuality, I came to have a tremendous amount of awe and respect for the struggles these women grapple with daily.

I am also grateful that these women opened up with me to the extent they did, which enabled me to achieve this level of respect and understanding. I was sensitive to the fact that I am a man doing research with women, especially in such intimate detail. Many of the women that I interviewed and with which I participated in the Method have been emotionally, physically and/or sexually abused and/or sexually assaulted; yet many were very open with me about these events and how they believe they have impacted them.

The greatest honor came for me at the end of the first Mastermind. As the group of twenty-five women sat in a circle and shared some final thoughts about their experience in the Mastermind, one woman remarked that she felt as if we were all now "soul sisters," to which everyone heartily agreed. A few people later, I took a turn to speak. I thanked them all for welcoming in as part of the Mastermind and told them how I was cognizant of being a man in a room filled with women, and hoped that my presence did not detract from the two days. I also jokingly said, that I was grateful for being included as a "soul sister." They all laughed. The woman who had made the comment in the first place, responded, saying she did not feel as if my presence detracted at all, and that I was of course one of the "soul sisters!"

Religious Economics

As we saw in these chapters, the sacred narrative, understanding of the self, theory of agency, and moral limits within the Method and mainstream life coaching are very different. The Method reflects a Chabad cosmology that claims the Jewish self is part of God. This

Godly soul, or Sticky Self, is unwoundable, perfect, and eternal. The Method encourages one to find this Sticky Self and to live from that place. At the same time, while this Sticky Self is part of God, that does not make one God. Within this structure, individuals have agency, but God has the ultimate agency. One must live according to God's will, communicated through the laws of the Torah and the Rebbe, in order to live a meaningful life in concert with God's divine plan. This means there are moral limits to what one can and cannot do.

Life coaching, conversely, holds that individual's do not live up to their maximum potential. Each individual is already "creative, whole and resourceful." In order to overcome one's problems and live to one's maximum potential, one must only look inward to discover one's own, unique, authentic values and live in accordance with those values. The self has ultimate agency through the Law of Attraction to manifest one's dreams and aspirations. Chai Life's failed attempt to integrate mainstream life coaching with Chabad is at least in part a testament to the clashing of these religious systems.

Although very different than mainstream life coaching, the Method did not emerge without contact with and influence by many of the same cultural streams that influenced mainstream life coaching. Religious Studies scholar Catherine Alabanese argues religions and cultures in America have always been in contact, exchanging ideas and combining in new ways. She upsets traditional views of self-contained religions and expresses the messiness of lived religion. Through this contact and exchange, she argues, American religions are always "*changed* religions," and they become "*new* religions," as a result, "even if they evoke the stuff of tradition and the trappings of former cultures and times."[263]

In this study we have seen the ways that both Chai Life and the Method have come in contact with and appropriated ideas, symbols, and practices from mainstream

[263] Albanese, "Exchanging Selves, Exchanging Souls: Contact, Combination, and American Religious History," 203.

psychotherapeutic, personal development, and coaching industries. This contact and exchange is a two-way process. Chabad has not only changed these cultural resources, but through the contact and exchange Chabad has also changed. Although these institutions of Chabad life coaching are largely in opposition to the liberal, western, modern agenda of mainstream life coaching that privileges individualism, privacy and nonjudgmental progressivism, many of those they are trying to reach understand their religious and personal life in those terms. As an example, I will end this dissertation with a final story from my research that illustrates the way in which this exchange is a never-ending process that shifts in small but myriad ways every time an individual comes in contact with the Method interpreting and applying it to their own life. In this way, religion, even fundamentalist religion, is evolving every day through contact and exchange.

Tamar had been a participant in the Method for Self Mastery for almost a year when she found out she didn't have a Godly soul according to Shimona. Although she felt like she had benefited tremendously by discovering her Sticky Self, knowing that there was a place in her that was unwoundable, eternal, and infinitely valuable, in a flash it was gone. In fact, it had never been there to begin with, according to Chabad cosmology. Tamar's mother converted to Judaism before Tamar was born. Shimona knew this from the beginning, but one day, during a coaching session with Shimona, some of the things Tamar was telling her about her mother led Shimona to question the nature of Tamar's mother's conversion. She asked Tamar if her mother went to the *mikveh* (the ritual bath associated with family purity laws), kept kosher, and kept the Sabbath when Tamar was growing up. These three—family purity, *kashrut*, and Shabbat—are considered the "big three" sets of *mitzvoth* that one must keep to be considered an Orthodox Jew, and they are essential for the convert. Tamar answered "no' to all three and knew something must be wrong when Shimona asked these

question. Shimona had realized what Tamar didn't yet know—Tamar's mother had not had an Orthodox conversion. When Tamar checked this out with her mother, she learned that this was true. She had been converted by a Conservative rabbi. While this may seem like an irrelevant detail it makes all the difference in the world within Orthodox Judaism. According to Orthodox Jewish law, whether one is a Jew or not is based on matrilineal descent. If one's mother is a Jew, then one is a Jew. The father's status means nothing in this regard. The fact that Tamar's mother was not Jewish by Orthodox standards when Tamar was born means Tamar is not Jewish according to Jewish law. And, according to Chabad cosmology only Jews have a Godly soul.

At this point, Shimona told her, "You have to make a decision. You don't have to convert but if you want to be Jewish you do." Tamar was devastated by the news. "It hit me like a ton of bricks," she told me. She thought to herself, "'I'm not Jewish,' and the flood gates opened." She was "distraught" and did not know what to do. The irony was that this was supposed to be the part of her that was beyond damage. "My unwoundable part is my Jewishness," she told me, "and that got ripped away from me, and I was just absolutely floored…The only thing that was a constant in my life was not real." At first she was angry. Then she considered the prospects of going through an Orthodox conversion. She tried to take on the role of a non-Jew in her mind, but felt that was not who she was. "I never knew anything else. I have tried to try on not being Jewish, and I can't," so she decided she would need to convert.

Over time, however, Tamar came to the conclusion that no one could take away her Jewish soul. Although she may be interested in becoming more religiously observant at some point in the future, and may, therefore, consider an Orthodox conversion, for now she has come to terms with her status as a Jew. "You know what, I was wounded at first, but then I

thought, no, you still can't wound me there….So [my Sticky Self] has really been tested. They really can't destroy it, even by telling me that it isn't there."

Tamar refuses to be bound by the limitations of Jewish law, but still feels the benefit of having "found" her Sticky Self and her purpose through the Method. Although Shimona claims from the in the very first lesson that the Method is "fundamentalist" and "not New Age", Tamar shows that even though life coaching has been adapted to this environment, the participants bring their own worldviews to the practice and continue the process of religious innovation through the encounter. As a microcosm of a larger process of religious creativity, Tamar has embraced the Method without necessarily embracing the Chabad cosmology that underlies it. In this way, she is practicing a new form of American Jewish religion.

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