

## **Introduction**

My introduction to all of you tonight could begin anywhere since one of my major themes is about Endlessness, Infinity, the timeless dimension of consciousness that hold no beginning or end.

But since I have to particularise myself in finite space and time, I find myself focusing in on the Toronto Film Festival. The reason for this is that on Friday September 14, 2001, three days after the shocking events of September 11, Damian, Susan and I were viewing a film at The Festival called The Struma.

This documentary made by a Toronto filmmaker, Simcha Jacobovici, tells the story of a ship named 'The Struma'. During the Second World War in 1941, The Struma attempted a perilous voyage from Roumania to Palestine. The small boat was carrying seven hundred and seventy-nine Jewish refugees in desperate flight from certain torture and death at the hands of the Nazis.

The overcrowded, unseaworthy ship suffered engine failure and barely made it to Istanbul. Turkey refused the passengers sanctuary so for seventy-one dreadful days the refugees were imprisoned under the most deplorable conditions.

Amongst those Jews were my grandfather, grandmother, uncle and my mother's lover. On February 24, 1942, The Struma was towed back

out to sea and a Russian submarine torpedoed the boat.

Every person perished save for one survivor, a nineteen-year-old man named David Stoliar, and he was the same age as Martin, my mother's brother. On that fateful day, my twenty-year-old mother who was waiting in Palestine lost her entire family.

My sister and I befriended this Jewish filmmaker, Simcha who invited us to visit his shul. It is a warm, homey community that he and a fellow Jew created as a place to worship. The very first time I went to Simcha's shul was the day David Stoliar showed up, the sole survivor of The Struma. When I saw David rise up and go to read in Hebrew the Torah Scrolls I was astounded by the confluence of events that had given rise to this moment.

Not only had New York City been devastated a few days before. But here was I able to make direct contact with the one living witness to a devastation that occurred sixty years ago. The reverberations from the destruction of the twin towers will ripple on for years to come. The reverberations of my mother's loss live on in my sister and me to this day.

When I sat next to Simcha at lunch after our prayers I told him how I heard my grandmother speak to me. It was during a scene in the film where the camera goes underwater to film the placing of a plaque of remembrance in the spot where it was believed The Struma lay. With a searing stab of pain in my belly she came to me

and said, "now you have found us, now you know what happened."

Simcha said, "you are part of the Jewish soul. Your grandmother wanted to reach you." Her name like mine was Leah. She was the age I am now; forty-five, when she died.

I had never before considered my Jewish soul, and yet I am Jewish. The Great Plains Indians who inhabited this land before we were here believed their ancestors remained with them providing guidance and inspiration. My own visceral response to an encounter with the spirit of Leah tells me this is true. Suddenly I remembered how drawn I had been to Kabbalah, the mystical branch of Judaism. I went home and began to re-read Daniel Matt's book 'The Essential Kabbalah'. The more I read, the more inspired I became. So for the past five months I have found myself drawn into a creative experience. It involves an attempt to synthesis ancient Jewish wisdom, psychoanalysis, and religious tradition with all that I carry in this one Jewish soul.

## THE KABBALAH AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

By Leah Lucas

The Hebrew translation of Kabbalah means "receiving" or "that which has been received." The word "Kabbalah" was first used in the twelfth century by the Jewish mystic Isaac The Blind to designate a variety of mystical teachings and practices. His powerful insights into the nature of the universe were born out of his personal experiences of meditation and "contemplative observation." He developed access to a level of awareness through which he could sense the imperceivable.

In the Jewish calendar it is now the year 5762. It was over five thousand years ago that the Jews of the Middle East made a dramatic shift to monotheism, the one God. It was a major paradigm shift of human consciousness from the belief of many Gods who ruled the world to the conception of One God, One Divine Source underlying all of creation.

An awareness was born in the Jewish people so many thousands of years ago that they could strive to consciously merge with this One God, the Divine Source. The beginning and continuation of this merging make up what we call the process of enlightenment, to become filled with light, to experientially know the hidden force behind the phenomenon of existence.

The Kabbalists call this paradigm shift "messianic consciousness". The heralding of The Messiah where Christ shall return as our saviour, from the Christian perspective alludes to an event in the

distant future. But this is an externalization of a consciousness that is in actuality our intrinsic nature available to us all right here and now.

Realization of the true dimension of consciousness is to experience reality in an entirely different way. The ideal situation is where one's heart and mind are connected to one's actions in the world. In the teachings of the Kabbalah the word for this is "kavannah" which translates as "intention", "to direct, aim, or attune." Kavannah is the practice of continuous awareness, striving to be constantly attuned to one's thoughts and actions in each moment and how they reverberate in our world. Kabbalists realize that everything is interconnected, there is no separation between one's inner life and the world of existence. There are worlds within worlds that continuously interact and affect each other.

This concept speaks to the intersubjective space between therapist and client. Each is affected by the unconscious world of the other. To sit with the client day after day, hour after hour, is to engage in the discipline of continuous awareness on the soul of another. In my youth I despaired of ever gaining enlightenment because I believed one had to travel to some remote monastery in The Himalayas, find a guru, and meditate for years at a time striving to empty the mind. But here I was engaged in a life in the city with all its excitements and distractions. I didn't really like the idea of sitting so still for so long. I knew for sure that my feet would fall asleep. I hate the tingling sensation when you try to walk again.

But to my delighted surprise I found an opening to the doors of enlightenment right here in my own back yard. Perhaps Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz was herself a secret mystic when she declared to Toto "there's no place like home" and really meant it after travelling so very far away. My back yard was actually my basement office where I have spent the last eighteen years of my life endeavoring to attune, to listen ever deeply both to my innermost intuitions and the inner life of my clients. The Jews believe that the process of expanding awareness in ourselves and the world is the fundamental reason for our existence. To make no effort to raise our own consciousness is to abdicate our humanness.

The Jewish sages taught that negativity separates us from humanity and God by psychologically covering the heart with a thick membrane. The search for union with God has always been uppermost for the Jewish contemplative mind. But we have to strive to make a place in ourselves for higher consciousness. The Holy One, which is the Jewish reference to God, says "offer me an opening no bigger than the eye of a needle and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages can pass."

When I first began practicing as I psychotherapist I found all the psychoanalytic theory I had learned to be of inestimable value in analysing and interpreting the client before me. They liked it to because it was away of bringing sense and order into the frightening chaos of an unintegrated psyche. Yet I also feel that the language and

words I use serve as the backdrop to convey vibration and feeling, to search out and touched a heart that is veiled for protection. More and more do I become aware of consciously creating a space for The Holy One to enter. When a heart breaks open in an agony of tears I feel a transcendent power of healing belonging to neither one of us. The human suffering before me is too weighted for me to bare alone. I think I would be crushed if I did not receive help from an unknown and invisible source. The minute I ask in a silent prayer, assistance is always forthcoming.

These spontaneous, dramatic moments in the therapeutic process take me to some words in the Zohar. The Zohar is the canonical text of the Kabbalah formulated from the Bible and rabbinic literature with a mystical reference. There is written a traditional phrase "the world that is coming," but again does not refer to a far off messianic era. The Kabbalah reveals it to mean "the world that is constantly coming", constantly flowing, a timeless dimension of reality available right here and now if we are receptive. God is not static being but dynamic becoming. Without human participation, God remains incomplete, unrealized. It is up to us to actualize the divine potential in the world. God needs us.

For thousands of years Jewish rabbis and sages have been immersed in an in-depth lifelong study of The Torah. The Torah is the foundation of the Faith. The word Torah means scrolls. It refers to the communication from God to Moses at Sinai, which became the first five books of the Bible;

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Numbers. These first five books were written in Hebrew and known as the Old Testament and the Oral Law. A collection of commentaries in the Torah was written down by Biblical scholars in the sixth century and became known as The Talmud or written law. Kabbalists view the Torah as the mind of God.

The Kabbalah emerged as a distinct movement within Judaism in Medieval Europe. It is a compilation of writings and dialogues interpreting the Torah and Talmud from a mystical perspective. The rabbis and sages whose quest for meaning was rooted in their understanding of God emerged out of the traditional discipline of Torah. They were deeply religious, learned, and leaders in their community. They were struggling to balance practice and theory as a path to connect with the Divine Source. They wanted to gain direct experience of God without renouncing the world. They too were searching right in their own back yard - so to speak. They saw God in the details. To these creative individuals the world was viewed as a reflection of and in symbiotic relationship with other realms of reality. Each experienced event holds a deeper message if one has the eyes to see and the ears to hear. They strove to blend tradition with creativity, loyalty to the past and bold innovation. Because they were so deeply committed to traditional observance they could not be attacked as radicals. Yet they touched a profound yearning deep within the human soul and thus were truly radical.



At first they communicated their secret teachings orally from master to disciple in small groups. By the thirteenth century their writings became a new genre of Jewish literature in itself. But only a handful of Kabbalists wrote of their experience. Most chose to remain hidden in anonymity. Many of the Jewish mystics indicate that much of their Kabbalah came through contemplative meditation. In the fifteenth century there was a spiritual community of Kabbalists that lived in Safed near Palestine. Moses Cordovera was a famous teacher who led this group of seekers. Eleazar Azikiri was a member of this circle and he stated that "isolation is more helpful to the soul than study. One should try to unite names of God with joy and trembling. One should flee from society as much as possible and be completely silent in a brilliant flame, alone, fearful and trembling. The light which is above your head make always into your teacher."

Another famous mystic connected to this Safed community was Isaac Luria, known as Ari The Lion. He spent ten years in meditation on an island in the river Nile. Every Shabat he would return to community and share his illuminations. He developed a profound cosmology about the shattering of the vessels and the healing of the world.

Vessels are boundaries or containers. One could understand this on the level of the human body. No matter where we go, we cannot escape ourselves. Our particularity resides in this one

body we inhabit. Isaac Luria was driven to sink deeper and deeper into the experience of a self in a body. He desperately wanted to understand the meaning of existence, the dynamics of creation, who are we? Why are we here? What does it mean that we exist at all? What is this mysterious force that sustains our being? A great deal of Kabbalah refers to the 'raising of holy sparks'. This comes from Luria who said "There is no sphere of existence, including organic and inorganic nature, that is not full of holy sparks which are mixed with the kelippot (or husks) and need to be separated from them and lifted up." Kelippot - the husks are a metaphor for a denser level of consciousness, sparks represent the light of holiness. When sparks are freed from the density of materiality and are gathered together in one place - not physical place, but symbolically the center of the universe - all sparks combined would radiate ultimate awareness.

Luria developed this cosmology from the opening lines of Genesis that say: "And the earth was without form (the Hebrew word is tohu) and empty (bohu): and darkness was on the face of the deep (tohum)." The word "tohu" means chaos, astonishment, or confoundedness. This primordial chaos was viewed by Luria as a situation in which vessels that were supposed to contain the light of creation shattered, and the light was thereby concealed in "the deep". The deep is an allusion to death, also to the unconscious. Along with chaos there was "bohu", emptiness, other vessels to

receive the lost light. Bohu represents the potential of creation so is called the universe of Tikkun - Rectification. The universe of Tikkun is a container for the collection of all the missing sparks. According to Luria, our task is to release each spark from the shell and raise it up, ultimately to return to its original state. This is accomplished through acts of loving-kindness, of being in harmony with the universe and through cultivating higher awareness.

I believe we are all shattered. The moment of coming into bodily being is a shattering as spirit meets flesh. I cannot know where I was before I found my embodied self. But I vividly recall the illuminating instant at about age six or seven when I suddenly realized "I was here". It hit me with a force of amazement that "I was I". In that moment I was split in two. "I was myself" but there was a world outside of me. I was distinct and separate from the world. Up until that sudden shift there had been no "I". There was no prior experience of myself or world, world and me were one and the same.

This experience of separateness was a dangerous place. Where could I reside? What could I rest in and feel safe? Suddenly I had no home because outside was frightening. The peopled world surrounding me conveyed vibrations of anxiety, depression, anger and burden. The terror and panic invaded my tummy, it felt tight inside. But here is the paradox - I remember with joy the gurgling river and the sweet green fields of summer, my father's affectionate teasing, the

magic ice crystals of Jack Frost on the window. There, was the heaven and hell of existence interwoven in my childhood being.

Michael Eigen in his book *The Psychoanalytic Mystic* speaks to this theme of shattering “The sense of totally cataclysmic events happening to personality as it was starting to form never fully leaves. Neither self nor helpers can save one from early breakdowns one goes through, although quality of support in the aftermath makes a difference.

Disintegration is real. There are times environmental impingement breaks us down. We disintegrate under traumatic impacts and need time to recover. Sometimes we recover in deformed ways. We harden and refuse to disintegrate, or partially harden around pockets of disintegration. We step between disintegration threats like children stepping between cracks in the sidewalk, hoping to avoid fault lines of personality.”

Kabbalists say the task of a person’s soul at each stage of his reincarnation is called ‘tikkun’, meaning to mend or fix. In mystical terms this refers to the spiritual work we have the opportunity to do. We are here to repair our souls, the souls of others and the world as a whole. I think integration or unification goes along with repairing. I realize now there is no escaping the body and the emotions it carries. But could repairing the soul mean union with the ground of our Being? And is that a sacred ground, a true home to reside in?

The Jewish mystics saw awareness as our most precious gift. The mind is not the enemy. It is only through awareness that we can know what holds value and meaning. It is misleading to think if we stop the mind we attain enlightenment. We must take the reigns of the mind in hand. Our awareness is not a fixed commodity. It is possible to seek a new degree of awareness through daily actions that heighten it. In Kabbalah expanded consciousness is called "mochin de gadlut" which translates as "mind of bigness". Kabbalah does not teach the illusory nature of the world. It goes in the opposite direction. It emphasizes the holistic nature of all levels of awareness and how each is a reflection of all others. Thus through our reality we have access to all others. We maximize the precious time we have in the body for that is the gateway to higher states. We can be a unity and pluralistic simultaneously. We can focus on the separateness or the unity. There exists within us a powerful need to communicate with the hidden parts of the soul. Human consciousness draws us into realms of intuition and symbolic thinking, along with encountering instinctual energies of the body. The urge for union, bringing upper and lower forces together is the driving force of the process of creation, the process of our lives.

The mystical underpinnings of creation contain three essential forces. In Hinduism they are symbolized in the deities Shakti, Shiva and Kali, the creator, preserver and destroyer. Mathematically the number three is a necessity for physical manifestation in a three dimensional

world. For it is composed of three lines of direction: North-South, East-West, and up down. The Kabbalists viewed all the major Biblical characters as symbolizing divine forces. Adam and Eve represent the principle of duality, each a polar opposite of the other, masculine and feminine, expansion and contraction. Both energies are required for balance and harmony. But in addition to the duality of Adam and Eve a third element is required for creation. This is the serpent, which represents the force of fragmentation. He archetype of the serpent merges with the life - force, the form and substance represented by Adam and Eve. Once the serpent is able to merge with this life force, the mystical formula is complete for the metaphysics of creation. Satan is the crucial element because without it everything would dissolve into The One. There would be no differentiation, nothing would be particularised. Yet the splintering force of the serpent or Satan is not separate from the unity of God, paradoxically it is contained in the Oneness of the Divine.

The constant tension between opposing forces is a universal law. Kabbalah calls it gevurot - restrictive powers and chasidim - expansive powers. The dynamic tension between gevurot and chasidim appears continually throughout the Bible. Along with Adam and Eve there is Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac to represent the relationship between expansive and restrictive energies. This cosmic tension is the nature of creation and the underlying principle of good and evil. Without a

force that pulls us away from the Divine we would be overwhelmed by God, lose our free will and creation could not exist as it does today. God is in every direction represented by Light and Satan is everywhere represented by veils. Evil can be defined as a force that dims the light.

The truth is, we can never really be at peace. If we are alive we are creative. And if we are creative we are engaged with these opposing forces as the only way to birth the creation. This manifests in every dimension, whether we struggle to give birth to a child, a self, a dance or a painting, a conversation or an idea. So, if inner peace is impossible, then what good is therapy?

I entered therapy twenty-seven years ago because I was conflicted and disturbed. I expected therapy to help me unravel my conflicts so in understanding myself I could be happy. Happiness was the elusive goal.

Well, I did sort out the conflict with my boyfriend. I grew strong enough to leave him and smart enough to pick a more suitable partner to marry. But then being in a marriage led to more conflicts. It has been a classic case of conflicting archetypes. I am capable of expanding to off the planet ungroundedness. He can contract so tightly there is no room to breathe. Therapy certainly helped me to land in my body long enough to appreciate day to day reality. But opening wider to the

present moment draws me further into deeper upheaval. How much reality can a person take?

Maybe it is the maturity of middle age along with my quest for "mind of bigness" that has enabled me to give up more and more of my vices. The sex and drugs and rock and roll along with relentless busyness and overactivity I now view as ways to obscure consciousness. In therapeutic terms we name these avoidances of self 'acting out'. But I appreciate how very necessary they are. The world and everything in it is achingly intense. To remain totally open would be to realize in fullness that death is around the corner for me and everyone I know. How can I face this to the depths of my being? I never knew where I came from and even less do I know where I shall go. Is there any possibility of fathoming such an incredible mystery?

This question draws me to what the Jewish mystics term "Ein Sof" which means Endlessness. The idea of Ein Sof addresses how we cannot define God. God does not exist as existence is defined, for It takes up no space, is not bound by time. Ein Sof precedes thought and even precedes Nothingness, which is called "Ayin". Only out of Ayin is thought born. Nothingness or Ayin is viewed as a level of awareness that is the result of the "annihilation of thought". This sounds akin to the Zen koan "What was your face before you were born?" Zen masters



put such enigmatic questions to the pupil in an attempt to pierce through a mind of finite, rational concepts. The rational mind confines us to the boundaries of our own reality. Ein Sof is that which can go beyond the Nothingness that surrounds Infinity. It is inaccessible through any intellectual endeavour. Jewish mysticism like Zen Buddhism, Sufism, and esoteric Christianity teach that we can know Ein Sof in ways that transcend thought. The call to develop a relationship with Endlessness, The Source of Creation, is the key to all Kabbalah and the lifeblood of all Jewish practice. God is not discussed as a thing in Itself, but a representation of a far deeper mystery.

The urge to call out to God is always answered simultaneously as it is spoken, for ultimately there is no difference between the caller and that to which it calls. God resides whenever we let God in. We do not have to search for God, because the presence of The Divine permeates all things. If there is a search at all, it is God searching for Itself.

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