THE YID AND THE ID
JEWISH PERSPECTIVES ON PSYCHOLOGY & PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

All paradigms of psychology ultimately deal with a picture of man. Judaism provides a complete and comprehensive vision of man. Psychology and Judaism address common concerns such as well-being, ethical behavior, and the fulfillment of a meaningful life. Additionally, the practice of psychology is based on certain underlying assumptions about what it means to be human. It addresses such questions as: What is human nature? Do we have free will? How do we create a psychologically healthy lifestyle? Which thoughts and feelings should be expressed and which suppressed? Judaism also has much to say on these issues.

This class will not focus on psychological problems per se – issues better left to mental health professionals to discuss. Rather, the focus will be on positive psychology – how people thrive and experience normal life in a more fulfilling way.

In order to understand how Judaism promotes these goals, we will first have to explore the basic Jewish understanding of human psychological makeup. We will explore the understanding of human nature and how it is built to facilitate free will. This in turn will lead to an investigation of various facets of the intellect and imagination, and about the development of personality and character traits. We will then be poised to appreciate how the Jewish system of Torah study and mitzvot observance can help us achieve the goals of positive psychology and personal development.

As such, this class seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is the Jewish attitude toward psychological therapy? How is it in line with the goals of such therapy, and how does it differ?
- How does Judaism view human nature?
- Do we have free will, and if so what are its parameters?
- What are the basic powers of the human mind, and how are they best employed?
- What are the most fundamental human character traits, and can they be changed?
- How does practicing Judaism promote positive psychological development?

CLASS OUTLINE:

Introduction: **The Jewish Attitude toward the Goals of Therapy – Ends vs. Means**
Part A. Self-Knowledge and Actualization
Part B. Self-Transcendence – Seeing Beyond Oneself

Section I: **Human Nature**
Part A. Good and Evil
Part B. The Definition of Moral Free Will
Part C. Expanding the Frontier of Free Will
Part D. Completing Creation

Section II: **Theory of Mind**
Part A. Subconscious Motivations
Part B. Intellect and Imagination
Part C. *Chochma, Binah,* and *Da'at* (Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge)
Part D. Doubt, Faith, and Belief

Section III: **Personality and Character**
Part A. Suppression and Expression
Part B. *Tikkun HaMiddot* – Refining Character Traits

Section IV. **The Torah Antidote**
Part A. The Mitzvot – Curbing Your Inclination
Part B. Working from the Outside In
Part C. Cognitive Change through Torah Learning

INTRODUCTION:
THE JEWISH ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GOALS OF THERAPY – ENDS VS. MEANS

In many ways, Judaism's approach to personal development is in line with the goals of most mental health professionals. Judaism sees great merit in addressing one's personal challenges by maximizing self-knowledge and self-actualization. Only by being aware of one's own potential can a person actualize it. However, Judaism also teaches that self-actualization cannot be achieved by focusing purely upon oneself. In fact, doing so is counter-productive to the higher goal of achieving self-transcendence.

PART A. SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND ACTUALIZATION

Each individual is unique and has his own personal mission to achieve in this world. Fulfilling this unique purpose requires that we first become well acquainted with ourselves.

1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Sanhedrin 37a – Judaism affirms the importance and uniqueness of each individual.

Therefore, man was created alone, in order to teach that destroying one life is tantamount to destroying an entire world; and sustaining one life is tantamount to sustaining an entire world. Therefore, every individual is obligated to say, "The world was created for my sake."

לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי, ללמדך שכל המאבד נפש אחת ... מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו איבד עולם מלא וכל המקיים נפש אחת ... מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיים עולם מלא. ... לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם.

2. Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, Netivot Shalom, Parashat Lech Lecha, pp. 62-63 – Every person's mission is unique.

No two people are alike, from the time the world was created until now. No person can fulfill that which his friend must fulfill. That is, each person has a destiny and purpose that it is his job to fulfill in his life. This includes the specific matter that he came into this world to accomplish. God sets up each individual's life with the specific challenges and conditions necessary to fulfill his purpose, to achieve his unique destiny and purpose.

All the conditions of a person's life – whether in physicality or spirituality, the

אינו דומה אדם לאדם מיום בריאת אדם והלאה ואין אדם אחד יכול לתקן מה שעל חברו לתקן. והיינו שלכל אדם יש את ייעודו ותפקידו אותו עליו לתקן בחייו, ובכלל זה גם העניין המיוחד עבורו ירד לעולם לתקנו כידוע. והקב"ה מעמיד לכל אחד את כל הנסיבות והתנאים שיוכל לתקן את אשר מתפקידו לתקן, ולמלאות ייעודו ותפקידו בעולמו.

כל תנאי החיים של האדם - בגשמיות וברוחניות, הטובים והרעים, כולם נתנו לו כפי השייך לתיקון

עולמו, שרק ע"י תנאים אלו יוכל להגיע לייעודו, ובלעדיהם לא יוכל להגיע לייעודו, ובלעדיהם לא יוכל לתקן את אשר תפקידו לתקן. וכיון שלכל אחד יש תפקיד וייעוד מיוחד, לכך שונים תנאי החיים של כל אחד, וזה חייו קלים ולשני החיים קשים יותר...

good as well as the bad – are granted to him in order to fulfill his unique purpose in the world. And under these specific circumstances, a person will be able to reach his destiny, and without them he would not be able to. And since every person has his own specific purpose and destiny, each one has his unique life conditions, some easier and some more challenging.

So central is the obligation to fulfill one's unique potential that it was the first message that God conveyed to the first Jew, Avraham.

3. Ibid. – "*Lech lecha*," the command to overcome our challenges and fulfill our potential, is said to each of us.

וזה הוא דבר ה' אל אברהם, שנכלל בזה גם הוראה לכלל ישראל זרעו של אברהם, לך לך פי', להגיע אל תקון הנשמה השייך אליך ולתכלית המיועדת אליך.

עליך לצאת מארצך ומולדתך ובית אביך, היינו מכל התנאים והתכונות והטבעיות שלך. דהנה השרשים של כל התכונות והטבעיות נובעים מג' ענינים אלו. יש תכונות ששרשם מארצך, לכל ארץ יש את התכונות הרעות השייכים אליה כגון רציחה וגזל וכדו' ששרשיהם מתפשטים אל כל בני הארץ. ויש השייכים ממולדתך, הם התכונות הרעות שיש בכל משפחה והמדות שמצד התורשה, ויש הנובע מבית אביך, שלפי ההתנהגות בקדושה של ההורים נמשך כמ"כ על בניהם.

ועל זה נאמר לך לך, להגיע לתקון ולתכלית שלך, עליך לצאת מכל התכונות הרעות של ארצך ומולדתך ובית אביך, אשר כל אלו שייכים לאדם לפי שורש נשמתו ותפקידו, ואז תגיע אל הארץ אשר אראך, לתקון הגמור של נשמתך שהוא

God's directive to Abraham repeats itself to every Jew. We are all instructed to distance ourselves from our land, our birthplace, our father's house, in the sense that we must overcome the conditions that we are challenged with individually.

You must leave "your country," "your birthplace," and "your home" – that is, all your life's circumstances, your disposition, and your nature. You see, the root of every kind of disposition or nature stems from these three arenas. Some stem from "your country," for every culture has its own negative characteristics, such as murder or theft, etc. These dispositions are shared by the entire country. Some characteristics are passed along to us by "your birthplace," meaning the negative traits we inherit from our family. And there are others that come to us from "your home," for the way parents conduct themselves profoundly influence their children.

To all this was said *Lech lecha*: Journey toward the fulfillment of your unique purpose. In order to do so, you must abandon all the negative traits of your land, birthplace, and home, all of which are

unique to the root of each person's soul and purpose in life. Then you will come to "the land that I will show you," to the perfection of your soul which is your task in your world.

יעודך בעולמך.

Self-actualization demands self-knowledge, for if you don't know your potential, then you are not likely to fulfill it.

4. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur I, p. 141 – The beginning of personal growth is in profound self-knowledge.**

Self-knowledge is the prerequisite for any self-improvement. One who does not know himself – for him the gates of self-improvement are shut tight. He will live his spiritual life in peace, he will fail as many fail, and will perform good deeds like every man of Israel – and God does not deny the reward of each individual. But a person of self-growth and truth he will not be.

Someone who reaches self-knowledge is forced by it to embark on a trail of fruitful labor and profound change, in behavior and in disposition.

בתחילת כל עבודה עצמית עומדת ההכרה העצמית. מי שלא זכה לה מעודו - שער העבודה הפרטית סגור בפניו. הוא יחיה בשלוה את חייו הרוחניים, ייכשל כאשר רבים נכשלים, יעשה מעשים טובים ככל אדם מישראל - ואין הקב"ה מקפח שכר כל בריה. בן-עליה ואיש אמת לא יהיה.

מי שזכה להכרת-עצמו, מוכרח על-ידה לבא לידי עבודה פוריה ולידי שינויים מעמיקים, בהנהגה ובמדות.

PART B. SELF-TRANSCENDENCE - SEEING BEYOND ONESELF

While Judaism agrees with the idea that self-knowledge and self-actualization are vital for everyone, it does not stop there. Fulfillment of potential is not an end in itself. In fact, the very focus on self-actualization may itself turn narcissistic if not seen in the bigger picture.

1. **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:14 – If one focuses on oneself alone he will achieve nothing.**

He (Hillel) would also say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I?

הוא היה אומר אם אין אני לי מי לי? וכשאני לעצמי מה אני?

2. **Ibid. 2:1 – True self-actualization is seen in the context of others as well as the individual.**

Rebbe would say: Which is the right path for man to choose for himself? That which is estimable to the one who does it, *and* brings him the esteem of other people.

רבי אומר איזוהי דרך ישרה שיבור לו האדם כל שהיא תפארת לעושה ותפארת לו מן האדם.

3. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Mesillat Yesharim (The Path of the Just), Ch. 1 – The purpose of fulfilling one's potential is that doing so is the ultimate service to God.**

The very foundation of piety and the root of **Divine service** is the clarification of one's obligation in his world.

יסוד החסידות ושורש **העבודה** היא שיתברר אצל האדם מה חובתו בעולמו...

4. **Rabbi Kalonymos Kalman Shapira, To Heal the Soul, p. 28 – Self-awareness is a prerequisite for reaching God.**

Each and every one of us has not only the right but the obligation to express his unique and individual self. And to the degree that you are able to live in this world from the very center of your unique self, to that degree will you be able to exercise your individual free will.

Raise yourself above the crowd; bring out what makes you unique. Become the person who can choose for himself – *the prerequisite for reaching God.*

5. **Dr. Naftali Fish, Nachas Ruach, p. 256 – Self-awareness is not an end in itself; rather, it serves higher spiritual goals.**

Looking at the Torah perspective on self-awareness, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, in *Sefer Noam Elimelech*, teaches that self-knowledge is very important - and yet is not "an end in itself" but a necessary *step* in order for man to be able to ultimately achieve more awareness of God.

In *Chovot HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart), written by Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda, it explains: "Philosophy is man's *knowledge of himself*, so that through the evidence of the Divine wisdom that is manifest within himself he will come to recognize the Creator."

In his book *The Nineteen Letters*, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch stresses that a person should be aware of his uniqueness and have a goal to actualize his potential as a way to serve God. Hirsch writes in his fourth letter, called "Man": "Is it conceivable that everything is to be of service in the world, of service to God, and only man is to be self-serving throughout? ...No, surely not. Your own inner awareness tells you, and

the Torah states, that man's purpose is to be **tzelem Elokim** - a likeness of God." He continues: "Everything bestowed upon you – mind, body, fellow man, material goods, other creatures, every talent and every power – *all are merely means* to action, to further and to safeguard everything."

Similarly, the Admor of Piaseczna, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, wrote in his personal journal, which was later published in an essay "Becoming Who You Really Are," that only a person with self-awareness of his uniqueness can later exercise free will. Here again, self-awareness is a means to a higher goal.

We see from the above that the goal of self-actualization is ultimately self-transcendence through caring for others, improving our *middot* (character) and connecting to God. How do we get there, and how does Judaism help us along the journey? Judaism is comprised of a comprehensive system of mitzvot, which build the three spheres of human endeavor: The first concerns the relationship between man and God (*bein adam l'Makom*), the second concerns the inner relationship between a person and himself as he strives to develop and refine his character (*bein adam l'atzmo*), and the third concerns interactions with others (*bein adam l'chavero*). (See further the Morasha shiur on The Jewish Vision of Spirituality II: The Spiritual Expression of Mankind, Section II.)

But in order to appreciate how Judaism promotes self-awareness, growth, and transcendence, we first need to understand the fundamentals of human psychology from the Jewish perspective.

KEY THEMES OF INTRODUCTION

- **Judaism places a high premium on self-awareness and self-actualization. In this it shares a common goal with the field of mental health.**
- **But Judaism does not see awareness and actualization of the self as an end in itself. Rather, they are tools to achieve higher spiritual attainments, such as the proper use of free will, knowledge of God, and the service of God.**

SECTION I. HUMAN NATURE

What is basic human nature? Are we defined by our base desires or by our higher aspirations? Do we have free will to choose to be good or evil?

Judaism maintains that we are both good and evil; at least, we have the potential to be either. The choice is up to us. God designed us to feel the sway of both sides and thereby gave us free will to choose which to follow. The positive exercise of free will is the very purpose of our being, our part in the completion of God's work.

PART A. GOOD AND EVIL

Judaism teaches that human nature is comprised of two basic components called the *yetzer tov* (good inclination) and the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). The good inclination is the source of spiritual purity within a person. Its seat is in the intellect, and it is that part of us that perceives truth and seeks moral goodness. It is that part of us that wants to be giving, to have self-control, and to swallow our pride.

The yetzer hara is just the opposite. It is the source of spiritual contamination and is sometimes associated with the body, since it is our physicality that is most serviced by it. The evil inclination is that part of us drawn after illusion and which seeks to fulfill our baser desires, such as laziness, pleasure fulfillment, and the admiration of others.

Here we will explore Judaism's understanding of human nature through the prism of the good and evil inclinations.

> *Even if you know what is good, right and desirable, it isn't so simple just to act that way. No sooner does an inclination to do something good come into your mind or heart than up pops an objection. It might be a contrary thought, or a feeling, or a desire pulling you in the opposite direction.*
>
> *The Jewish sages give a name to this negative impulse. They call it the yetzer hara, the inclination to evil. We all have that inclination and it challenges us, which is the purpose for which it exists. We are born with free will and can choose to do good or bad, but whenever we try to do something that stretches us in the direction of good we need to expect to encounter this inner resistance arising from the shadows. We have an inner inclination to elevate and purify ourselves – that's the yetzer hatov, the impulse to do good – and what stands in our way is the in-built adversary, the yetzer hara. (Everyday Holiness: The Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar, p. 22 by Dr. Alan Morinis [Trumpeter, 2007].)*
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> The good and evil inclinations are forces within the personality of every person.

1. Talmud Bavli, Berachot 61a – God created us with inclinations toward both good and evil.

Rabbi Nachman bar Rabbi Chisda expounded: What is meant by the text, (Bereishit/Genesis 2) "Then the Lord God

דרש רב נחמן בר רב חסדא: מאי דכתיב [בראשית ב'] וייצר ה' אלהים את האדם בשני יודי"ן - שני יצרים ברא הקדוש ברוך הוא, אחד

formed [*va-yetzer*] man"? [The word *va-yetzer*] is written with two *yuds* to show that God created two inclinations, one good and the other evil.

יצר טוב ואחד יצר רע.

2. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of God), 1:3:2, translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers, p. 45 and p. 47. – Dual nature of man.**

... The Highest Wisdom decreed that man should consist of two opposites. These are his pure spiritual soul and his unenlightened physical body. Each one is drawn toward its nature, so that the body inclines toward the material, while the soul leans toward the spiritual. The two are then in a constant state of battle.

...גזרה החכמה העליונה שיהיה האדם מורכב משני הפכים, דהיינו מנשמה שכלית וזכה, וגוף ארציי ועכור, שכל אחד מהם יטה בטבע לצדו, דהיינו הגוף לחומריות והנשמה לשכליות. ותמצא ביניהם מלחמה:

Although the yetzer hara is part of our human nature rooted there by God, it is still called "evil" for a reason. The driving force behind the evil inclination is to remove us from the reality of our own existence, to distance us from God, others, and our true selves.

Jewish sources often talk about the yetzer hara as if it were *external* to us. Sometimes it is associated with Satan, the spiritual force of impurity, or even the guardian angel of Eisav (Esau), the brother of Yaakov (Jacob). But it is also described as something *within* us; this concept is the linchpin of understanding human psychology from a Jewish perspective.

Put in the broadest terms possible, the evil inclination is a force of estrangement within us. Not only does this yetzer hara try to cause us to transgress and act self-destructively, it also seeks to spiritually undermine us by distancing us from God, others, and even from our essential selves.

3. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, "Psychiatry and Religion" in *Be-Shvilei Ha-Refuah*, Vol. V, 5742 (1988), p. 65 – The yetzer hara is the force of estrangement that seeks to gradually distance us from the reality of the world we live in.**

There is a force within people that does not want closeness (to God, others, or self). The estrangement develops step by step until all connection with others is lost, until it becomes the worst of traits: cruelty (*ach-zariut*, lit. pure estrangement), that is, complete estrangement. The cruel (read: completely estranged) gloats at the misery

ויש כח באדם שאינו רוצה בקירבה זאת – התנכרות המתפתחת שלב אחרי שלב, עד אבדן כל זיקה אל הזולת, ועד האיומה שבכל המידות: אך־זריות, כלומר זרות מוחלטת. האכ־זר שמח לאיד חברו, נהנה מצערו. השלב האחרון של התנכרות זו הוא, שהאדם נהי' זר לעצמו ואף אכ־זרי לעצמו

of another, deriving pleasure from his pain. The ultimate stage of this alienation is that man becomes estranged unto himself, cruel even to himself.

Rabbi Wolbe cites the following Talmudic passage as an illustration of Judaism's understanding of the evil inclination.

4. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 105b – Do not worship the strange god within you.

Whoever rends his garments in his anger, breaks his vessels in his anger, or scatters his money in his anger, regard him as an idolater, because such are the wiles of the yetzer hara: Today he says to him, "Do this"; tomorrow he tells him, "Do that," until he bids him, "Go and serve idols," and he goes and serves [them]. Rabbi Abin observed: What verse [intimates this]? "There shall be no strange god within you; neither shalt thou worship any strange god" (Tehillim/ Psalms 81:10). Who is the strange god that resides within man himself? [We must] say that this is the evil inclination.

המקרע בגדיו בחמתו, והמשבר כליו בחמתו, והמפזר מעותיו בחמתו - יהא בעיניך כעובד עבודה זרה; שכך אומנתו של יצר הרע, היום אומר לו עשה כך ולמחר אומר לו עשה כך. עד שאומר לו עבוד עבודה זרה והולך ועובד. אמר רבי אבין: מאי קראה -[תהילים פא:י] לא יהיה בך אל זר ולא תשתחוה לאל נכר, איזהו אל זר שיש בגופו של אדם - הוי אומר זה יצר הרע.

The yetzer hara is a force of alienation, a result of the unbalanced or excessive expression of a negative drive. The Talmud portrays the process of alienation: It begins with a person's alienation from himself through anger, and from there he reaches alienation from God – idolatry. It is not for naught that pagan gods are called by the term "avodah zarah" (foreign worship), to point to the power of *zarut* (alienation or foreignness).

While the example above noted this phenomenon in regards to anger and idolatry, the same is true of other drives, such as sex, violence, self-glorification, stinginess, etc.

PART B. THE DEFINITION OF MORAL FREE WILL

The struggle between the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara is the basis of free will. In Jewish thought this experience is described as an internal battle between one's good inclination versus one's evil inclination. This battle only starts at Bar/Bat Mitzvah age with the acquisition at that time of the good inclination to balance off the evil inclination, which is embedded in a person at birth. A person only begins to experience free will at the point when both elements of desire are firmly planted within his psyche – his personal yearnings countered by the awareness of God's will as something external to his own.

1. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. I., p. 113 – The battle of free will can be compared to two armies fighting on a battlefield.

When two nations are engaged in warfare, the war is fought over that battlefield. All the territory behind one army is in its possession, and the enemy has no foothold there whatsoever. Likewise, the territory behind the other army is totally under its control. If one of the armies conquers further ground and advances and takes over some of the enemy's territory, then subsequent battles will resume with new battle lines. But territory which has already been conquered will not be fought over again, for it has already been occupied. There is only one battleground, and this can shift between the territories of the two warring nations.

כששני עמים נלחמים, הנה המלחמה היא במקום מערכתה, כל מה שאחורי צבא העם האחד הוא כולו תחת רשותו ואין לו שם שום ניגוד כלל, וכן מה שהוא מאחורי השני כולו ברשות השני. אם האחד ינצח פעם בקרב, וידחה את השני מרחק מה, אזי בהתחדש הקרב יהיה במקום שיעמדו שניהם אז, אבל במקום שרכש לו הראשון שם אין עוד מלחמה כי הוא ברשותו. הרי שבפעל יש רק חזית אחת, ובכח, כל שטח שתי המדינות הוא מקום הקרב.

The same is true of the nature of free choice. Each person has a zone of free choice where his conception of truth encounters his imagined truth – which is really falsehood. However, the majority of one's actions occur where there is absolutely no conflict between truth and falsehood. Since a person has been educated to act in many areas in accordance with the truth, when he does so, he is not exercising his free will, since he has no option to do otherwise. Similarly, he might make incorrect decisions based on falsehood and not realize that these are improper actions. Since he is so accustomed to doing them, they are now beyond the range of his free will.

כן הוא גם בענין הבחירה. כל אדם יש לו בחירה, היינו בנקודת פגישת האמת שלו עם האמת המדומה, תולדות השקר. אבל רוב מעשיו הם במקום שאין האמת והשקר נפגשים שם כלל. כי יש הרבה מן האמת שהאדם מחונך לעשותו, ולא יעלה על דעתו כלל לעשות ההיפך, וכן הרבה אשר יעשה מן הרע והשקר, שלא יבחין כלל שאין ראוי לעשותו.

Decisions of free choice are limited to the meeting ground between the positive and negative forces within an individual. For example, many people might be negligent in speaking derogatorily about others, only because they are accustomed to it and are oblivious to its severity. The very same people however would never consider stealing or murder, because their education

אין הבחירה שייכת אלא בנקודה שבין צבאו של היצה"ט לצבאו של היצה"ר. הרבה נכשלים תמיד בלשון הרע, מפני שהורגלו בו, ולא יעלה על דעתם כלל כי רע הוא. ואותם אנשים עצמם לא יבוא לפניהם יצר הרע לגנוב או לרצוח והיינו משום שנתחנכו והורגלו כל כך עד שאין כניסה שם ליצר הרע.

has ingrained in them not to do so, to the extent that they have no inclination to do such things.

While each individual's struggle may be over a different decision, it is important to note that each person's struggle is qualitatively *the same*.

2. Ibid. – Regardless of a person's level, his struggle to choose right over wrong, in his own unique circumstances, is the same.

Sometimes a person becomes accustomed to doing so much good that he is protected from the evil inclination in that area, and his zone of free choice is in more sublime areas. For instance, for a person who was educated in the ways of Torah, among righteous people, his zone of free choice will not be with regard to committing an actual sin or refraining from an actual mitzvah, but rather with regard to a very subtle point in his inner service of God and pure intent.

There are some people who were brought up in the company of evildoers, rabble and thieves. [Such a person] will not have a choice at all regarding whether to steal or desist. It could be that his zone of free choice will exist only when he is caught in the act of stealing, and he has the possibility of murdering someone. That is where the battle between his inclinations will take place, for that is the truth that his good inclination can discern at his level, and he could ignore his evil inclination.

We see, then, that a person's upbringing does not change the actual struggle of free choice at all, but only the point at which it takes place. Everyone is created with the ability to discern the truth that he can access at his level, and to cling to it and not ignore it, even in the face of the temptations of spurious justifications. Regardless of whether his upbringing raised or lowered

יש אשר יתחנך האדם להרבה מן הטוב עד שהוא בטוח בו מן היצר הרע ונמצא שנקודת בחירתו היא בענינים יותר גבוהים. למשל, מי שנתחנך בחינוך התורה בין צדיקים ואנשי מעשה, יועיל לו החינוך אשר נקודת בחירתו לא תהיה בעשיית עבירה במעשה או במניעת מצוה מעשית, אלא בדקות עבודת הלב והכוונה.

ויש אשר יתחנך בין רשעים, פחותים, וגנבים. אצלו לא תהיה הבחירה כלל אם לגנוב או לחדול. ויתכן אשר נקודת בחירתו תהיה רק כשיזדמן לו לרצח נפש בעת שייתפס בגניבתו, ושם היא מלחמת יצריו, כי זוהי האמת אשר יבחין בה על פי יצר הטוב שלו במדרגתו, ובעצת יצרו הרע יתעלם ממנה.

נמצא שאין החינוך משנה כלל בעצם ענין הבחירה, אלא רק את מקום נקודתה, וכל אדם משעת יצירתו ניתן בו הכח אשר יוכל להכיר האמת שידע, לפי ערכו, ולדבק בה ולא להתעלם ממנה אפילו בפני הדמיונות של חשבונות שקר. ואין הפרש בזה בין אם חינוכו הגביה את מקום נקודת בחירתו או השפילו, כי כח הכרת האמת אשר ידע, שוה הוא בכל המצבים.

his point of free choice, his ability to recognize the knowable truth is identical in every situation.

PART C. EXPANDING THE FRONTIER OF FREE WILL

Each person has certain choices between conflicting impulses, and it is in those areas that the battle of free choice – the battle between good and evil – is truly waged. The area that is subject to these choices is dynamic and constantly shifting in response to one's previous choices.

1. Ibid. – Positive and negative decisions create a momentum.

The zone of free choice is dynamic. As a result of a good decision, a person raises his moral level, so that those areas which were previously the battleground between his positive and negative inclinations are now incorporated into the zone of his good side and will no longer present a conflict. This is the principle that "One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah" (Pirkei Avot 4:2).

The converse is also true. Bad decisions push away the tendency to behave properly in that battle zone and subsequently lead one to act improperly without deliberation, since his good side is no longer in control there. This is the principle that "One bad deed leads to another."

אמנם נקודה זו של הבחירה אינה עומדת תמיד על מצב אחד, כי בבחירות הטובות האדם עולה למעלה, היינו שהמקומות שהיו מערכת המלחמה מקודם, נכנסים לרשות היצה"ט, ואז המעשים הטובים שיוסיף לעשות בהם יהיה בלי שום מלחמה ובחירה כלל, וזהו "מצוה גוררת מצוה."

וכן להיפך, הבחירות הרעות מגרשות היצה"ט ממקומו, וכשיוסיף לעשות מן הרע ההוא יעשנו בלי בחירה, כי אין עוד אחיזה ליצה"ט במקום ההוא. וזהו אז"ל (אבות ד':ב') "עבירה גוררת עבירה"...

Our task in this world is to expand this point of truth, to conquer more and more ground from the yetzer hara and convert it to territory of the yetzer tov. In this territorial battle, the evil inclination has a head start, having complete control of a person from birth until maturity at the onset of adulthood. Then, with the development of moral awareness, the battle starts to be a fair one, and a person is held responsible for his actions.

2. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 49 – With maturity comes free will and therefore responsibility for one's actions.

At birth, the "evil inclination" enters a person, i.e., he or she loses that incredible clarity that he possessed before entering this world. The soul's desires are overshadowed by the physicality of the body, and its yearning for spiritual fulfillment is muted by ego, selfishness, and materialism. Childhood is a time when the physical world and all of its overwhelming desires rule over the human being, and the soul and its aspirations are largely dormant. It is for this reason that the child is not held legally responsible for his/her actions.

Toward the end of childhood – during a girl's twelfth year or a boy's thirteenth year – the soul begins to awaken and assert itself more overtly. When the child reaches adulthood, the soul has reached its full level of activity, and therefore this person has complete free will. He or she is able to choose between good and evil, the spiritual and the material, between humility and egotism, to engage in a full range of moral decisions. Since they now have both a "good inclination" and an "evil inclination" and the ability to choose between the two, they are fully accountable for their actions.

A positive free will decision requires the employment of the good inclination, i.e., one's perception of Truth, to overcome the evil inclination, i.e., one's natural tendency, habit, or ego. The Torah is the Jews' therapeutic tool for expanding the domain of the good inclination.

PART D. COMPLETING CREATION

Why are we so focused on expanding the free will frontier? What is the greater good accomplished by our moral growth? The answer is that it is nothing less than completing God's world.

1. Talmud Bavli, Chagigah 12a – God did not "let" the world develop to completion.

And Rabbi Yehudah said: At the time that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, it went on expanding like two spools of thread until the Holy One, blessed be He, rebuked it and brought it to a standstill, for it is said (Tehillim 25:6): "The pillars of heaven were trembling, but they became astonished at His rebuke." And that, too, is what Reish Lakish said: What is the meaning of the verse (Bereishit 35:11), "I am God Almighty [*Sha-dai*]"? It means, "I am He that said to the world: Dai – Enough!"

ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את העולם היה מרחיב והולך כשתי פקעיות של שתי, עד שגער בו הקדוש ברוך הוא והעמידו, שנאמר (תהילים כה, ו) עמודי שמים ירופפו ויתמהו מגערתו. והיינו דאמר ריש לקיש: מאי דכתיב (בראשית לה, יא) אני אל שדי אני הוא שאמרתי לעולם די.

God did not finish the creation of the world; He left it in our hands to do that. The Talmud illustrates this idea with the following story:

2. Midrash Tanchuma, Tazria, 5 – Man's deeds are "greater" than God's, since by perfecting the self, man attains completion.

It happened that the wicked Turnus Rufus [a Roman general] asked Rabbi Akiva, "Whose deeds are more beautiful, God's or man's?"

He answered, "The deeds of man" ...

מעשה ששאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ר' עקיבא איזו מעשים נאים של הקב"ה או של ב"ו?

א"ל של ב"ו נאים...

[Turnus Rufus] said to him, "Why do you perform circumcision?"

Rabbi Akiva answered, "I knew that this is what you meant, which is why I responded that the deeds of man are more beautiful than those of God."

Rabbi Akiva brought him stalks of wheat and baked rolls, and said, "These [the stalks] are the work of God, and these [the baked rolls] are the work of people.

"Aren't the rolls nicer than the stalks?"

Turnus Rufus said to him, "If He desires circumcision, why doesn't the infant emerge from his mother's womb already circumcised?"

Rabbi Akiva told him, "God gave the commandments to Israel for the sole purpose of purifying them."

א"ל למה אתם מולין?

א"ל אני הייתי יודע שעל דבר זה אתה שואלני ולכך הקדמתי ואמרתי לך שמעשה בני אדם נאים משל הקב"ה.

הביא לו ר"ע שבלים וגלוסקאות א"ל אלו מעשה הקב"ה ואלו מעשה ידי אדם.

א"ל אין אלו נאים יותר מן השבלים?

א"ל טורנוסרופוס, אם הוא חפץ במילה, למה אינו יוצא הולד מהול ממעי אמו?

א"ל ר"ע... לפי שלא נתן הקב"ה את המצוות לישראל אלא לצרף אותם בהם.

We not only "add value" to the physical world that God created; we also enhance the world's progress towards spiritual perfection. In fact, while Brit Milah is an act performed on the human body, the purpose of the mitzvah is to teach us that we need to perfect ourselves in a spiritual way as well.

3. Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Da'at Tevunot (The Understanding Heart) #14 – The "first principle" is man's ability to complete himself.

The first principle, on which the entire construction [of God's direction of the world] stands, is that the Divine Will wanted man to complete himself and all that was created for him. This itself will be his merit and his reward: his merit, for it emerges that he toils and is constantly occupied with reaching this completion; and when he achieves it, he will reap the benefits of his own toil, and no other. And his reward, for ultimately, he will be perfected, and will take pleasure in goodness for eternity.

היסוד הראשון שעליו עומד כל הבנין הוא, שרצה הרצון העליון שיהיה האדם משלים את עצמו ואת כל הנברא בשבילו, וזה עצמו יהיה זכותו ושכרו. זכותו - לפי שנמצא שהוא מתעסק ויגע להשיג השלמות הזה, וכשישיגהו - יהיה נהנה רק מיגיע כפיו וחלקו מכל עמלו. שכרו - שהרי סוף הוא יהיה המושלם, ויהיה מתענג בטובה לנצח נצחים.

How do we complete the perfection of our souls? We complete ourselves, and thereby complete creation too, by using our free will for the good.

4. **Ramchal, Derech Hashem, 1:2:1-3 – Those who use their free will correctly to perfect their character and actions will become more like God, Who is the ultimate perfection.**

The purpose of all that was created was therefore to bring into existence a creature who could derive pleasure from God's own good, in a way that would be possible for it.

God's wisdom however, decreed that for such good to be perfect, the one enjoying it must be its master. He must be the one who has earned it for himself, and not one given it accidentally [or by chance].

One sees that this arrangement is partially reminiscent of the perfection of God Himself, at least to the degree that this is possible, for God's [intrinsic] perfection is not a matter of chance or accident either ...

By means of acquiring perfection [i.e. by choosing the true good that God has placed in the Creation], this unique creature [man] becomes fit to "cleave" to its Creator, simply because through acquiring perfection, it has, in a certain respect, begun to "resemble" its Creator. Moreover, by incorporating elements of perfection into itself, it "cleaves" to the Creator's Perfection, and is drawn to Him continually – until, ultimately, its earning of perfection and its bonding in closeness to Him are one matter.

א:ב:א. ונמצא היות כונתו ית"ש בבריאה שברא, לברוא מי שיהיה נהנה בטובו ית' באותו הדרך שאפשר שיהנה בו:

א:ב:ב. ואולם גזרה חכמתו, שלהיות הטוב שלם, ראוי שיהיה הנהנה בו בעל הטוב ההוא. פירוש - מי שיקנה הטוב בעצמו, ולא מי שיתלוה לו הטוב בדרך מקרה.

ותראה שזה נקרא קצת התדמות, בשיעור שאפשר, אל שלימותו ית'. כי הנה הוא ית"ש שלם בעצמו, ולא במקרה ...

א:ב:ג. ואמנם מלבד היות הבריה הזאת שקנתה השלימות ראויה לידבק בבוראה ית' מצד התדמותה לו, הנה על ידי קנותה השלימות לה, נמצאת מתדבקת והולכת בו, עד שסוף קנותה השלימות והמצאה מתדבקת בו, יהיה הכל ענין אחד.

Each person plays a dual role in perfecting creation: to strive to perfect oneself known as "*tikun haprati*" and to contribute to improving the world known as "*tikun haklal*."

5. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Check Your Privilege, Ner Le'Elef Journal, nleresources.com – Tikun haprati and tikun haklal.**

God created an incomplete world and gave it over to man. Man has to become God's partner in completing the world. This is the real meaning of tikun olam – of correcting the world. Each person is given a small, unique part of this tikun/correction. Each person should leave this world knowing that, because of him or her, the world is a little better than when he or she was born. In order for the world to reach completion, everyone has to make his or her contribution. We all need each other in a very

fundamental way, and that is a real, inherent equality, the only one we all really have.

The tikun olam is made up of two things. Everyone has a unique tikun haprati (literally, a private tikun) as well as a part of the tikun haklali (lit., the general tikun). The tikun haprati is made of the perfection of self, the development of character, sensitivity, kindness, wisdom, and other noble traits. It has to do with deepening our spirituality and getting close to God. The tikun haklali is made up of the perfection of the environment – broadly defined – that each person comes into contact with. The tikun haprati is all about the perfection of our internal environments.

What matters to God is that each one of us fulfills our potential by contributing to our part of the tikun. In that sense, we are unique individuals and yet part of the communal vision all in one. God gives each person the perfect set of tools – personal and environmental – for his or her tikun tasks, and these tasks include helping anyone else we can in any way. As we grow, He keeps on changing those challenges, so that at any stage we have exactly what we need to fulfill our potential needs, no more and no less. What matters to God is the amount of tikun we contribute, and that is a function of the difference between our starting and end points, not any objective level, not any comparative level and not any privilege or lack thereof.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- **Judaism teaches that every person has both a good and an evil inclination. The balance of both is what allows for free will.**
- **The evil inclination is a force of estrangement that seeks to distance us from others, from God, and from our true selves.**
- **Free will is likened to a battle field where the war takes place only on the front line between two territories. Based on upbringing, education and past choices, a certain amount of moral territory is already within the domain of the good inclination. Other moral issues that are beyond our level of sensitivity are in the domain of the evil inclination.**
- **Free will is active at the point of conflict between these two domains, i.e. when a person feels an internal conflict between the desire to do something and the awareness that it is wrong to do so.**
- **The free will frontier is never static; it moves with every choice we make. The point of human development is to expand the territory of the good inclination by overcoming the evil inclination time and time again.**
- **The proper exercise of our free will fulfills the purpose of our existence and makes us partners with God in the completion of creation.**
- **Each person plays a dual role in perfecting creation: to strive to perfect oneself (tikun haprati) and to contribute to fixing the world (tikun haklal).**

SECTION II. THEORY OF MIND

Certainly, mankind has a spiritual dimension, but we will not be focusing on that here. In our quest to describe the Jewish view of the human being from the perspective of human psychology, we will focus on the mental faculties such as intellect, understanding, intuition, and imagination and also the nature of doubt, knowledge, and belief – and how we go from one to the other. We will investigate the relationship between thought, emotion, and action and how an idea can develop from one stage to the next. But first we must understand the connection between our basic inclinations and our thoughts.

PART A. SUBCONSCIOUS MOTIVATIONS

Before we examine the connection between our thoughts and our actions, we must first understand where our basic thoughts come from in the first place. Why does a certain object seem desirable to acquire? Why does a particular course of action seem correct to pursue?

Judaism teaches that underlying most of what we want and consider good is a hidden inclination toward it that escapes our conscious awareness.

1. Talmud Bavli, Sukkah 52a – "Hidden" is one of the names of the evil inclination.

Rabbi Avira or, as some say, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, made the following exposition: The evil inclination has seven names...Yo'el (Joel) called it "the Hidden One," as it is said, "But I will distance the hidden one from you" (Yo'el 2:20). Our Rabbis taught: "But I will distance the hidden one from you," refers to the yetzer hara, which is constantly hidden in a person's heart.

דרש רבי עוירא, ואיתימא רבי יהושע בן לוי: שבעה שמות יש לו ליצר הרע... יואל קראו צפוני, שנאמר (יואל ב:כ) ואת הצפוני ארחיק מעליכם. תנו רבנן: ואת הצפוני ארחיק מעליכם - זה יצר הרע, שצפון ועומד בלבו של אדם;

2. Maharal, Netivot Olam, Netiv Koach HaYetzer, Ch. 1 – The evil inclination can be hidden from our conscious awareness.

Yo'el called it the Hidden One for it is hidden in a person's heart, and he is not aware of it.

אמנם יואל קראו צפוני שהוא צפון בלבו של אדם ואינו יודע ממנו.

3. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, "Psychiatry and Religion" in Be-Shvilei Ha-Refuah, Vol. V, 5742 (1988), p. 68 – Deep subconscious desires are the source of ideas.

In the Bible we find that "God examines kidneys and heart." And the Talmud states: "the kidneys council, the heart

בתנ"ך אנו מוצאים כי "ה' בוחן כליות ולב" והתלמוד קובע: "כליות יועצות, לב מבין". הלב הוא מקום ההכרה, הכליות – מליצה לתת־

understands." The heart is the seat of consciousness; the subconscious is referred to figuratively as the kidneys. However, the subconscious known by the sages of the Torah was not that of Freud, which is formed by the suppressing of passions or unpleasant experiences. It is also not the unconsciousness of Jung who believed in archetypes lodged in the collective unconscious.

Here we must rely on the explanation of the Gra, the Vilna Gaon: "All of human behavior follows from the primary desire; anything that arises in his mind from a primary desire will seem correct in his eyes" (Commentary to Mishlei/Proverbs 16:1-2). That is, the will is formed in a deep place that the conscious mind is unaware of. The "I" that we are aware of is only a small fraction of the true self. Hidden desires set our course – these are referred to in the Bible as "the counseling kidneys," whose influence we do not detect directly.

הכרה. אולם, התת־הכרה הידועה לחכמי התורה אינה זו של פרויד שנוצרה ע"י הדחקת יצרים או חוויות בלתי־נעימות, וגם לא האי־מודע של יונג המאמין בארכיטיפים המקננים באי־מודע קולקטיבי.

אנו מזדקקים כאן לביאור הגר"א, "הגאון מווילנה": "כל דרכי האדם נמשכים אחר הרצון הראשון וכמו שעולה על רוחו ברצון הראשון הם זכים וישרים בעיניו" (פירוש הגר"א על משלי טז, א־ב). כלומר: הרצון מתרקם במעמקים כאלה שאין הכרתנו שולטת בהם. ה"אני" הידוע לנו הוא רק חלק קטן מאד ממהות האדם. רצון נעלם מכוון דרכינו – הן ה"כליות יועצות" במליצת התנ"ך וחז"ל, אשר בפעולתן איננו מרגישים באופן ישיר...

4. Rabbi Eliyahu E. Dessler, Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Vol. I, pp. 52-53 – Conscious thought is prompted by a primary desire.

When we begin investigating the mind's capacity for accuracy of judgment we come up against one basic fact: There is no thinking without prior interest. The mind of a person who is not interested in philately, for example, will simply not register the fine details of postage stamps which are so obvious to the ardent philatelist. Or consider a person idly turning the pages of a newspaper. Which details will enter his mind and remain fixed in his memory? Those which for some reason or other catch his interest. Those matters which altogether fail to arouse his interest do not attract his attention at all and never become the subject of thought.

נמצא עובדה יסודית – שאין מחשבה בלי התעניינות קודמת. מי שאינו מתענין, למשל, באסיפת בולי־דאר, לא יעלה על דעתו לחשוב בפרטיהם, אשר אחרים כתבו ספרים שלמים אודותיהם. המביט אנה ואנה בטורי עתון, אלו פרטים יכנסו למחשבותיו וישתמרו בזכרונו ? – אותם שמתענין בהם. על הדברים שאינו מתענין בהם יעבור האדם תמיד בלי תשומת־לב ומבלי לחשוב בהם כל עיקר.

What is the source of interest? Clearly it is the will. It is my will which promotes my interest, either positively or negatively. That is to say, I am interested primarily in what I want, or conversely in what I wish to avoid. Interest is always connected to will.

It follows that any matter on which we exercise our judgment is a question our will has presented to our intellect to decide.

ומהו מקור ההתענינות ? אין ספק שהיא תולדת הרצון. כמובן, יש שני צדדים לרצון – חיובי ושלילי – ולפעמים יתענין אדם בדבר מחמת שרצונו מתנגד לו והוא מבקש לדחותו מעליו, וכדומה. עכ"פ, אין התעניינות אלא בקשר עם רצון.

נמצא, שכל ענין שאנו דנים בו, הרי הוא שאלה שהגיש הרצון אל השכל להחליט עליה.

A vivid example of the workings of the unconscious mind is given to us in the Biblical story of Eliezer, Avraham's servant, who is sent on a mission to find a wife for Yitzchak (Isaac, Avraham's son). When Avraham gives him his instructions, Eliezer demurs and asks, "But what if the girl does not want to come back with me to this land?" (Bereishit 24:5) – a seemingly innocent question. But after Eliezer finds Rivka (Rebecca) for Yitzchak, he repeats his conversation with Avraham to her family, and in his retelling, there is a change in the Torah's spelling of the word for "what if," as Rashi points out.

5. Bereishit 24:39 with the commentary of Rashi – Eliezer reveals his hidden agenda – he wants his own daughter to marry Yitzchak.

"I said to my master, 'But what if the girl will not come back with me?'

Rashi: It [the word אֻלַי (what if)] is written [without a "vav" and may be read] אֵלַי (to me). Eliezer had a daughter, and he was looking for a pretext so that Avraham would turn to him and tell him to marry off his daughter to [Yitzchak].

ואמר אל אדני אלי לא תלך האשה אחרי:

אלי כתיב, בת היתה לו לאליעזר והיה מחזר למצוא עילה שיאמר לו אברהם לפנות אליו להשיאו בתו…

The interesting point is not just that Eliezer had an ulterior motive in asking his question. What is most intriguing is that the Torah only indicates this upon the retelling of the story. Why didn't the Torah point out this hidden agenda the first time that Eliezer asked the question?

6. Rabbi Menacham Mendel of Kotzk, Ohel Torah as cited in Talelei Orot Parashah Anthology by Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin – Even Eliezer did not realize his own bias at first.

The Rebbe of Kotzk offers a different solution to this question. Originally, when Eliezer wondered what to do if "the woman did not want to follow him," it did not occur to him that he was motivated by self-

האדמו"ר מקוצק היה אומר, כי נרמז רמז זה דוקא בפעם השניה, שכן בפעם הראשונה, שעה ששאל אליעזר את שאלתו לאברהם, לא הרגיש בדבר נגיעתו, והיה בטוח כי רק בכנות שואל את השאלה. רק לאחר מכן, כשכבר הוחלט כי

interest. Blinded by his own bias, he was convinced that his question was perfectly legitimate. Later, however, once it was settled that Rebecca would marry Isaac and Eliezer's bias was removed, his vision suddenly cleared. Only now did he realize that his original question had been asked with an ulterior motive, because he wanted his own daughter to marry Isaac.

רבקה תהיה אשת יצחק, וסרה כל נגיעה מלבו, רק אז הבין, כי בעצם כל שאלתו לא היתה אלא תוצאה של נגיעותיו האישיות החבויות במעמקי הלב, וכל "חששו" לא היה אלא "תקוה", שאכן כך יהיה. הרי שרק כאן הבין כי מה שהיתה לו בת וביקש להשיאה וכו' גרם לשאלת "אולי לא תלך" וגו'. ולכן הוזכר כאן רמז זה.

PART B. INTELLECT AND IMAGINATION

Now that we have demonstrated how the subconscious affects our thoughts, what happens to a thought once it has entered our conscious awareness? Jewish sources discuss how the conscious mind has mainly two capacities: intellect and imagination. Intellect has the power of reason and sees the world in the big picture. Imagination sees alternatives to the reality of the intellect. It sees what the world could be.

We discussed above how a person is comprised of a good inclination and an evil inclination. While a thought can pop out of the unconscious from either inclination, in the conscious mind the intellect is the essential tool of the good inclination while the evil inclination employs the power of imagination. That is not to say that imagination is evil. It just needs to be subservient to the intellect which can put it to good use, as we shall see.

1. Rabbi Tzaddok HaCohen Rabinowitz of Lublin, Machshevet Charutz, Ch. 3 – Imagination can be employed for spiritual aims when the intellect is in control.

As is known, there are two realms within the brain. One is the power of wisdom (i.e. the intellect) and the other is the power of imagination. When one rises the other falls. When the power of wisdom is in control, it pulls the imagination along with it to the point that all of a person's imagination – that is, the thoughts that emerge within the brain on their own without thinking deeply about them – will also be purely directed toward God.

כידוע דיש שני חדרים במוח באחד הוא כח החכמה ובשני כח המדמה וכשזה קם זה נופל. וכשמוח החכמה גובר אז הוא מושך כח המדמה עמו להיות גם כל דמיונותיו רצה לומר ההרהורים שעולים מעצמם במוח בלא העמקת המחשבה בחכמה גם הם יהיו רק לה' לבדו.

Imagination in the hands of the intellect directs us toward spiritual strivings, enabling us to envision how we can be more like God.

2. **Rabbi Yishaya HaLevi Horowitz (Shelah HaKadosh), Toldot Adam, Introduction, paragraph 23 – The essential trait of human beings is their ability to liken themselves to God, attaching themselves to God by behaving like Him.**

"And God called their name *Adam* (Man)." This name "Adam" is the definition of mankind. If a person is attached to the Above, he likens himself to God and follows in His ways, then he is called the essential *Adam*, as in "I will resemble (adamé) the Supernal" [Yeshaya/Isaiah 14:14] and "on the likeness of the throne was a likeness (*demut*) of a man's appearance" [Yechezkel/Ezekiel 1:26). Buy if a person distances himself from attachment to God, then he is called simply *Adam* like the soil of the ground (*adama*) from which he was created – dust he is and to the dust shall he return (to paraphrase Bereishit 3:19). Nevertheless, mankind is called *Adam* for the potential likeness to the One above, for that is mankind's main purpose; evil was only created for the sake of the good.

'ויקרא את שמם אדם', זהו פירוש על 'תולדת אדם' וסופו. אם דבוק הוא למעלה ומתדמה לו יתברך לילך בדרכיו, נקרא שמו בעצם 'אדם', מלשון 'אדמה לעליון' (ישעיה יד, יד), 'ועל [דמות ה]כסא דמות [כמראה] אדם' (יחזקאל א, כו), ואם הוא מפריד את עצמו מהדבקות, אז נקרא 'אדם' על שם האדמה אשר לוקח ממנה, ועפר הוא ולעפר ישוב (עפ"י בראשית ג, יט). אמנם שם 'אדם' המורה על 'אדמה לעליון' זהו עיקר התכלית, כי הרע לא נברא רק בעבור הטוב

3. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, "Faith Is Not a Religious Idea," from NLEresources.com blog entry for November 10, 2013 – Imagination helps us to rationalize the existence of God and to envision a better self and a better world.**

According to Judaism, the mental part of man is divided into the *sechel* – intellectual – and *dimyonot* – his imaginative side. (Dimyonot is sometimes translated as someone's illusions or even delusions.) The word "dimyonot (דמיונות)" comes from the same word as man, "Adam (אדם)," from the word "Adameh (אדמה)" – I will be like – i.e. I will be God-like, imitating His actions. And how? I will take a leap of imagination (from which the word dimyon [דמיון] comes).

This is very ambitious.

Imagination is vital to the capacity to believe in God. The only way that we can imagine a being that cannot be seen, heard or felt is by a leap of imagination. The ability to take that leap is basic to the human condition. As scientists or as Monotheists, it takes us to areas that we might never have visited before.

4. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Tefillah, pp. 53-54 – Imagination gives us the ability to perceive the "big picture."**

> The essence of being able to invoke a vision or an image is to allow us to perceive reality in a much deeper way. Using our power of imagination enables us to transcend the surface-level reality we encounter. What we encounter in life or read about in the Torah is but the tip of the iceberg; there is a much deeper message which emerges, but it can only be touched by using our power of imagination. Reality is made up of various fragments, each of which may carry its own message. But there is a much bigger message that can only be comprehended when the parts are joined together.
>
> One can think of this as one would look at a pointillist painting. If one looks at the painting from up close, it appears as nothing more than a random mess of dots. Yet, when one takes a few steps back, one can see the entire picture in all its brilliance, how every dot is in its right place and together forms a unified whole. The message of the whole is much greater than the messages of its composite parts. It is with the power of imagination that we can see beyond the parts and unlock the hidden, overarching message of the whole.

What happens when the intellect is not in control? What happens when the imagination is left to run amok? When this happens, the yetzer hara gains a powerful ally.

5. **Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, Iggeret Ha-Mussar – There are two classical ways of understanding the good and evil inclinations.**

> [There are two schools of thought concerning the definition of the evil inclination and the good inclination.] The first, more common view asserts that the yetzer hara is the force of spiritual contamination in man that induces him to transgress; whereas the yetzer tov is the force of holiness in man that inspires him to perform good deeds. The second school of thought asserts that the yetzer hara is the force of desire that looks to [get pleasure from] every momentary enticement. The power of that passion "brings him within her house, and he clings to her in love." Whereas, the yetzer tov is the straight intellect that looks and gazes towards the [inevitable] consequence of our deeds.

> השיטה האחת, היא השיטה הנודעת, כי יצר-הרע הוא כוח הטומאה באדם המובילו לפשעים, ויצר-הטוב הוא כוח הקדושה באדם המובילו לטוב, היא שיטת רוב המחברים הגדולים. והשיטה השניה היא, שיצר-הרע הוא כוח תאוות האדם, המשקפת אל כל הֶעָרֵב לשעתו, אותו תאספהו אל ביתה ובו תדבק לאהבה. ויצר-הטוב הוא השכל הישר הצופה ומביט להנולד.

Understanding the power of imagination can help deepen our understanding of free will. We discussed above the concepts of the good and the evil inclinations and how they create a battle

line upon which free will plays itself out. Now let us pose a question: If we do have a good inclination, and deep down we know the truth and our desire for evil is not based on reality, then why is it even a struggle? Surely our awareness of what is right should always trump the temptations to do what is wrong?

The answer is that the evil inclination has a secret weapon that essentially levels the playing field. That weapon is called "imagination."

6. **Abraham Amsel, Rational Irrational Man, pp. 58-59 – The good inclination uses the logical force of reason, while the evil inclination uses the deceptive force of imagination and fantasy.**

> The "good inclination," being a reflection of the greatness of the human soul, is the drive to grandness in mortal behavior. Its physical tools are the mental faculties, the abilities of understanding and perception.
>
> The "evil inclination," on the other hand, which is a mirror of the coarser parts of the soul, namely the faculty to arouse and the faculty for feeling and sensing, utilizes these two faculties to stimulate the ability to fantasize. Acting through the power of imagination, which is its physical counterpart in the brain, the ability to fantasize distorts and perverts the realities of life.
>
> The evil inclination's greatest strength is its ability to deceive, to color things in its own hues, to make the subjective seem objective, to make falsehood seem truth, and truth falsehood. It preys upon man's selfish instincts, spurring him on to gratify all of his desires, and, at the same time, filling him with a sense of his own altruism. It is these self-deceptions which are alluded to in the Talmudic statements: "A man is not able to see his own boils" – i.e. bad qualities (Talmud - Negoim 2:5). "A man is not able to see fault within himself" (Talmud - Shabbos 119a).
>
> The evil inclination incites a man to excessiveness in the area of his basic drives. It intensifies lust, pride and envy, and these blown-up drives sweep along others in their wake in the vicious behavioral chain reaction. Selfishness breeds haughtiness; haughtiness, arrogance; arrogance, discontent; discontent, insecurity; insecurity, distrust; and distrust, fear, the catalyst of mental illness.

PART C. CHOCHMA, BINAH, AND DA'AT

We have discussed the basic powers of the mind, intellect and imagination. Now we will delve further into how intellect works and its relationship to emotion and behavior.

Judaism teaches that at the conscious level there are three stages to ideation, the generation and internalization of an idea. These stages are called *Chochma*/Wisdom, *Binah*/Understanding, and *Da'at*/Knowledge. These three stages form a continuum of thought, feeling, and action.

1. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Ner Le'Elef Booklet Insights into the Weekday Siddur, p. 137 – The interrelationship of Chochma, Binah and Da'at.**

These three [terms – Chochma, Binah, and Da'at –] although each separate, build on each other. They represent three levels of wisdom.

Chochma represents abstract intellectual understanding.

Binah is the emotional integration of the wisdom, where a person feels comfortable with that knowledge, can relate to it personally and therefore also understand where it is and where it is not relevant to his/her life.

Da'at is the translation of that wisdom into action. It represents a complete unity between the person and the knowledge; a total connecting with that knowledge, and it is no longer just relevant information which one applies. It is now the person – he/she is totally united with that knowledge (Rashi, Shemot/Exodus 31:3).

We learn about the continuum of desire, thought, feeling, and action from the mitzvah of tzitzit, the fringes worn on the corners of a four-cornered garment. These fringes are supposed to remind us of the mitzvot so that our thoughts do not stray, arouse our desires, and lead us to transgress the mitzvot.

2. **Bamidbar (Numbers) 15:39 with Commentary of Rashi – There is a progression of thought to feeling to action.**

This shall be tzitzit for you, and when you see it, you will remember all the Lord's commandments, and you will perform them, and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you have gone astray.

והיה לכם לציצת וראיתם אתו וזכרתם את כל מצות יקוק ועשיתם אתם ולא תתרו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זנים אחריהם:

Rashi: Heb. וְלֹא תָתוּרוּ, like "from scouting (מְתוּר) the Land" (13:25). The heart and eyes are the spies for the body. They are its agents for transgressing: the eye sees, the heart covets and the body commits the transgression (Midrash Tanchuma 15).

כמו (לעיל יג כה) מתור הארץ. הלב והעינים הם מרגלים לגוף ומסרסרים לו את העבירות, העין רואה והלב חומד והגוף עושה את העבירות:

3. **Rabbi Tzaddok HaCohen Rabinowitz of Lublin, Machshavot Charutz, Ch. 1 – Thoughts create feelings, and feelings inspire action.**

Wisdom (*chochmah*) in the brain is connected to understanding (*binah*) in the heart, which then turns into feelings. When a person feels the thought in his heart, he is

חכמה שבמוח כנודע היא מחוברת עם הבינה שבלב שהם כח הרגשת אדם, ומיד הוא מרגישה בלב וגורמין הולדה לכוחות המעשה כענין עין רואה ולב חומד וכלי המעשה גומרים (עיין רש"י

immediately led to actualizing it in deed. This is the meaning of the statement, "the eye sees, the heart desires and the physical body completes the task."

במדבר ט"ו, ל"ט).

In the case of transgression, the idea starts in the imagination of the "mind's eye." This thought then evokes the emotions and awakens a desire, which seeks to translate itself into action. In the following section we will see how this process of ideation is meant to be used in the performance of mitzvot.

PART D. DOUBT, FAITH, AND BELIEF

The most important concept to traverse the three stages of ideation is that of belief in God – not just that He exists but that He knows everything, controls everything, and is guiding our lives and the whole world toward that which is best for it. The development of mature belief in God follows through the same three stages described above: It begins from the intellect as *chochmah*, turns into an emotional connection as *binah*, and ultimately ends up as part of us when it is transformed into *da'at*.

This process starts in the intellect with a doubt or a question. For example, why do bad things happen to good people (especially when that good person is me)? Resolving this question requires faith in the benevolence and omnipotence of God. To live with that faith – to be able to accept suffering happily knowing that it is for the best – takes true belief. In religious life the Jew is expected to continually turn his doubts into beliefs and his beliefs into knowledge of the truth.

1. Rabbi Tzaddok HaCohen Rabinowitz of Lublin, Machshavot Charutz, Ch. 1 – The power to question is the unique facet of human intelligence.

Thought is the essence of a person, as is well known... There are many different levels of thought within a person...The real thought is always called "wisdom" (*chochmah*) and is the essence of the person – the "power of what" (*koach mah* – the power to question). The numerical value of "what" (*mah*) is the same as that of "man" (*Adam*). This is the thought which makes an imprint on the brain, and from there immediately spreads to the heart, and then to the rest of the body.

המחשבה היא עיקר האדם כידוע... במחשבת האדם יש כמה מדריגות... עיקר המחשבה שהוא החכמה בכל מקום שזהו עיקר האדם "כח מה", בגימטריא "אדם" כנודע והיא המחשבה העושית רושם במוח להתפשט מיד ללב וממנה לכל הגוף...

2. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, "Faith Is Not a Religious Idea," from NLEresources.com blog entry for November 10, 2013 – Growth is the process of using our imagination to formulate doubts and our intellect to resolve them in an ever-escalating cycle of formulation and resolution.**

> At some point, the capacity of our imagination takes us into the world of doubts – the realm of *safek*. We move beyond the realm of faith and axioms into an uncertain world.
>
> Doubts reflect the horizon of a person's imagination – things which he has not yet resolved. In Judaism we embrace these doubts, because that's the way in which we will stretch the horizons of where we are to new territories. Every yeshiva student does his best to find a difficulty – a *kushyah* – in the text he is solving. And if there is no immediate answer to this difficulty, he is infused with joy.
>
> The reason for this is that, without these doubts and intellectual conflicts, we would never explore. We would never go further than where we are. Doubts stretch the possible range of our experience. Resolution of those doubts brings us into faith. And faith, as we have explained, is the tool we use for most of what we do. Yes, we use it for religion. But we are all believers, for we all have to make leaps of faith just to get through our day.
>
> What we want is for our beliefs to be rational extensions of what we know. We want to be scientific in our beliefs. We want to be honest and rigorous in asking ourselves questions – in creating the kinds of doubts that will force us to keep on growing. Every time we resolve a doubt in the realm of faith, we need to stretch our horizons by developing new doubts and questions. And then we shall be very happy, because then we know that we're going to grow.

The process of ideation comes naturally to us. We regularly act upon basic assumptions about how the world works and how other people behave.

3. **Ibid. – People have a natural capacity for making assumptions about the nature of the world in which they live.**

> Every person on earth has what amounts to thousands of beliefs, unproven assumptions and axioms which allow him or her to navigate in the world. We make judgments about other people we may have never seen before, all the time. This allows us to anticipate their actions and reactions and to act appropriately. These judgments are really assumptions and are based on our experience, on the context in which we meet them and on our basic beliefs about whether people are essentially good or evil.
>
> Picture walking down the street and hearing footsteps behind you. Most times you won't do anything about it. You will presume it is a friendly or neutral person. But there is actually no proof that this person is not about to hold you up or attack you. Perhaps in Rio de Janeiro or in Johannesburg, you would break out into a cold sweat.

The truth is that you don't know anything more about the person in Jerusalem or New York than the person in Rio or Johannesburg. You have built up a certain set of beliefs and projected it onto the stranger behind yourself. If someone knocks on the door in Jerusalem many people say, "Enter" without even finding out who is there. If someone knocks on the door in Brooklyn, most people say, "Who is there" and then look through the key-hole (or the modern equivalent: the security camera), to confirm that the person is not hostile. If someone knocks on my door on the southern side of Chicago, I may take a machine gun, fire a few rounds into the door and then see who was there. What causes the different reactions are my beliefs about human beings in those areas.

Every human being has thousands of such beliefs which guide him or her through the day and which allow him or her to anticipate other people's reactions. Beliefs are a basic fundamental tool used by man to orientate himself within his environment. This has nothing to do with religion. Believing in God is simply taking that natural human capacity and applying it to an Ultimate Being. The capacity itself, however, is basic to our ability to function as human beings.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- **Desire at the level of subconscious thought is the source of the ideas that seem correct in our minds.**
- **There are two main powers in the human mind: intellect and imagination. Intellect is the power of reason to discern reality, while imagination is the power to see the way things could be.**
- **In general, the good inclination employs the power of the intellect, while the imagination is the tool of the evil inclination to make us seek the fulfillment of our desires.**
- **Ideas form and transform into action through a three-stage process of ideation. It starts with an abstract idea which is in the realm of *chochmah*, or wisdom. When that idea starts to have emotional reality it is then called *binah*, or understanding. And when it is so integrated that we take it for granted as truth, then it is called *da'at*, knowledge.**
- **Ideally our belief in God should also traverse this three-stage process so that ultimately we end up living with the reality of His being.**

SECTION III. PERSONALITY AND CHARACTER TRAITS

We have seen how free will arises from the struggle between the good and the evil inclinations and how these drives prompt thought, evoke emotion, and motivate action. We are called upon to employ our faculties of intellect and imagination so that we may use that free will correctly. But this process is about much more than controlling thoughts and making the right decisions. We also need to work on ourselves and try to change fundamental aspects of our basic psychological makeup.

In this regard, Jewish sources distinguish between two essential human elements: character traits and personality traits. Rabbi Avigdor Miller says that a person must learn to identify which of his traits are *techunot* (personality traits) and which are *middot* (character traits).

Techunot are hereditary and must be put to use for good purposes, since they generally will not change. For example, a person who has a techunah to be active should work on applying that trait in good ways, and he should not try to break his active nature.

On the other hand, a bad midah is not hereditary; rather, it is something that a person picked up at some point in his life. If one realizes that this tendency is leading him in the wrong direction, then he should not try to work on channeling this midah, but rather he should try to break his habit and change. When a person directs his techunot in healthy ways and eradicates his negative middot, he is on his way to perfecting his character.

PART A. SUPPRESSION AND EXPRESSION

A negative personality trait either needs to be controlled through self-restraint (which can be accomplished by recognizing an absolute moral standard) or by putting the trait to some positive use.

1. Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda, Chovot HaLevavot (Duties of the Heart), Shaar Prishut 2 – The point of the Torah is not to deny the body but to place it under the control of the mind.

The idea of the Torah is to extend the influence of the intellect to all the desires of the (animal) soul and to make it reign over them.

כוונת התורה להמשיך השכל בכל תאוות הנפש ולהגבירו עליהן.

2. Rashi, Commentary to Vayikra (Leviticus) 20:26 (citing Torat Kohanim 20:128) – A person should not be in denial of his desires, but rather acknowledge and control them.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah says: How do we know that a person should not say, "I find pork disgusting," or "It is impossible for me

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר מנין שלא יאמר אדם נפשי קצה בבשר חזיר, אי אפשי ללבוש כלאים, אבל יאמר אפשי, ומה אעשה ואבי שבשמים

to wear a mixture [of wool and linen]," but rather, one should say, "I indeed wish to, but what can I do – my Father in Heaven has imposed these decrees upon me?" Because Scripture says here, "And I have distinguished you from the peoples, to be Mine." Your very distinction from the other peoples must be for My sake, separating yourself from transgression and accepting upon yourself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.

גזר עלי, תלמוד לומר ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי, שתהא הבדלתכם מהם לשמי, פורש מן העבירה ומקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים:

Control of desires often requires suppression of them. But desire that stems from inborn personality traits can, and should, be channeled to positive expression.

3. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur Vol. II p. 38 – We have the free will to choose how to develop our personality attributes.

Basic free will is regarding how a person uses his inborn traits. The Gemara (Shabbat 156A) describes the impact of astrological phenomena at the moment of birth on a person's nature, such as "A person who is born under *Maadim* will be one who spills blood. Rav Ashi says: He may be a doctor, a robber, a ritual slaughterer, or a *mohel* (one who performs circumcision)." It is impossible to uproot one's character traits. A person with a cold temperament cannot change and become one with a hot temperament. Similarly, it is impossible to uproot the tendency for "bloodshed," but it depends how one uses it.

Rav Ashi enumerates four possibilities how one can express a tendency for "bloodshed": as a doctor, as a robber who may murder, as a ritual slaughterer or as a mohel. All of them "shed blood," but the mohel does so for a great mitzvah; the ritual slaughterer does not perform an obligatory mitzvah, since there is no obligation to eat meat, but when one wishes to eat meat it is a mitzvah to slaughter; the doctor saves lives by "spilling blood"; and only the robber uses this

הבחירה הבסיסית היא: כיצד משתמש אדם בתכונותיו. הגמרא בשבת קנו ע"א מבארת השפעת הכוכבים והמזלות בשעת הלידה על תכונות האדם, כגון "האי מאן דבמאדים יהא גבר אשיד דמא (שופך דמים). אמר רב אשי אי אומנא אי גנבא אי טבחא אי מוהלא." תכונות אי אפשר לעקור. קר המזג אינו יכול להשתנות להיות חם המזג. על דרך זו תכונה של שפיכת דמים אי אפשר לעקור אך תלוי הוא כיצד משתמשים בה.

ומונה רב אשי ארבע אפשרויות: רופא, גנב העלול לרצוח שוחט או מוהל, כולם "שופכים דם" אבל המוהל למצוה גדולה, השוחט אינו מקיים מצוה חיובית שהרי אין חיוב לאכול בשר אבל כשרוצים לאכול בשר מצוה היא לשחוט, הרופא מציל נפשות במה שהוא שופך דם, ורק הגנב משתמש בכח זה לרעה.

tendency for evil.

These are the fateful choices with which a person establishes his path in life by using his traits for good or for evil. It is limited, since we do not have the ability to change or uproot any traits that are connected to our temperaments, but free will is still vast, because there are many ways for a person to use his inborn traits for good.

זוהי הבחירה הגורלית, אשר בה קובע האדם את דרכו בחיים על ידי שהוא מכריע את תכונותיו לצד זכות או לצד חובה. מוגבלת היא, כי אין בידינו לשנות או לעקור תכונות הקשורות במזג, אבל עשירה היא הבחירה כי הרבה דרכים לפני האדם בניצול תכונותיו לטובה.

PART B. *TIKKUN HAMIDDOT* – REFINING CHARACTER TRAITS

Of course, not every bad part of us can be channeled or expressed in a positive way. When it comes to character traits (middot), the goal is to actually change ourselves by refining our character to the point of fixing these traits. Sometimes, a negative ingrained trait, such as impulsive anger, has to be uprooted.

1. Orchot Tzaddikim (The Ways of the Tzaddikim), Introduction – The importance of refining character traits.

If you do not possess refined character traits, then neither do you possess Torah and mitzvot, for the entire Torah depends on the refinement of character traits.

כשאין בידך מידות טובות - אין בידך תורה ומצוות, כי כל התורה תלויה בתיקון המידות.

As we already discussed in relation to free will, refining character by consistently making the right choices is the very purpose of our existence.

2. Vilna Gaon, Even Shleimah 2 – What is life for if not for character refinement?

The prime purpose of man's life is to constantly strive to break his bad traits. Otherwise, what is life for?

עיקר חיות האדם הוא להתחזק תמיד בשבירת המדות, ואם לאו - למה לו חיים?

The following anecdote reflects just how literally our Torah giants took these words of the Vilna Gaon.

> *A man once approached Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, the famous Rosh Yeshivah and Torah sage, with a heartrending question. He had been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and the doctors had told him that he had only six months to live. How should he spend the remaining six months of his life?*

The man expected the great rabbi to suggest an intensive regimen of Torah study, to devote the remaining months of his life in this world to purely spiritual pursuits. To his surprise, Rabbi Shach responded, "Work on your character, and overcome some negative tendencies." The rabbi explained, "The Vilna Gaon tells us that this is the entire purpose of our existence in this world. If you have only a few months left to live, it makes sense to devote those months to achieving your purpose in life."

While breaking unhealthy habits and cracking bad character traits is essential to the goal of life, most Jewish authorities these days recommend a more roundabout approach to character refinement. Rather than focusing on our faults, which can be spiritually debilitating, we are taught to focus on developing our positive traits.

3. **Rabbi Yosef Lynn (Based on an essay by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe), "Personal Growth: The Challenge of Our Generation" from greatnesswithinseminars.com – Nowadays, spiritual growth should be approached by focusing on our strengths rather than our weaknesses.**

People of our generation cannot endure exacting reproof, like the reproof of the great Ba'alei Mussar, the Jewish masters of character development, who used to analyze their students' deeds and character traits down to their very core level, exposing their hidden flaws and shortcomings. While people in previous generations gained wisdom, insight, and motivation to grow from such deep internal scrutiny, most people today would become crushed from it or suffer from despair.

Today, a new approach to personal change must be taken. The spirit must first be uplifted, the person must become deeply aware of the idea of man's greatness. Afterwards, he is able to endure the scrutiny of his deficiencies. The first step of character development is to learn the greatness of what man can achieve...

Discovering one's strengths, however, is more difficult than knowing one's deficiencies. Man today is drowning in feelings of lowliness and depression. His base inclination constantly pushes him towards inaction and mediocrity, and his conscience assaults him. If a man concentrates on himself honestly for a little time, he will see his flaws and what he is doing wrong, and as a result he will begin to despair and to lose sight of any way to change. In that state it is difficult for him to think about greatness, especially about the greatness within himself. Nevertheless, focusing on the greatness of man is the only effective way to lift oneself out of a sense of lowliness and insignificance.

Most people think that "knowing ourselves" means knowing what's wrong with us, our flaws, and our negative attributes. While it certainly is important to be aware of our weaknesses, before we explore our deficiencies we are obligated to recognize the greatness of man, the greatness within ourselves, with candid clarity.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- **People have personality traits and character traits. Personality is immutable and therefore must be nurtured toward positive expression. Character on the other hand can, and should, be changed if it is leading a person in the wrong direction.**
- **The Torah helps us to either control our negative impulses or to find ways to give them positive expression.**
- **We use our free will in the positive development of personality traits and the changing of negative character traits.**

SECTION IV. THE TORAH ANTIDOTE

As we have seen, the evil inclination is designed to challenge us. It challenges us to use our intellects to control our imagination, and it challenges us to develop our personality traits and to keep our basic character traits going in the right direction. The single most important tool for overcoming the mental and behavioral challenges of the evil inclination is the Torah.

1. Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin 30b – God created the yetzer hara, and He also created the Torah to help us prevail over it.

Our Rabbis taught: *Ve-samtem* ("And you shall place them" [Devarim/Deuteronomy 11]) [reads] *sam tam* (a perfect remedy). This may be compared to a man who struck his son a strong blow, and then put a bandage on his wound, saying to him, "My son! As long as this bandage is on your wound you can eat and drink at will, and bathe in hot or cold water, without fear. But if you remove it, it will break out into sores." So the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to Israel: "My children! I created the evil inclination, but I [also] created the Torah as its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand."

ת"ר: [דברים יא] ושמתם - סם תם, נמשלה תורה כסם חיים; משל, לאדם שהכה את בנו מכה גדולה והניח לו רטיה על מכתו, ואמר לו: בני, כל זמן שהרטיה זו על מכתך, אכול מה שהנאתך ושתה מה שהנאתך, ורחוץ בין בחמין בין בצונן ואין אתה מתיירא, ואם אתה מעבירה הרי היא מעלה נומי; כך הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל: בני, בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה - אין אתם נמסרים בידו.

The common goal of therapy and Judaism is to help people grow into better people, to actualize their potential by overcoming whatever it is that holds them back. One need not be mentally ill to realize that positive change is needed. Everyone can, and indeed should, endeavor to better themselves.

There are many theories in the field of psychology as to how such change is achieved. In this section we will explore two of the ways in which we grow according to the Jewish view of human nature.

PART A. THE MITZVOT – CURBING YOUR INCLINATION

The most basic way that the Torah helps us grow is that it affords us many opportunities to confront and conquer our yetzer hara. In fact, such confrontation is at the very heart of the Torah's system of mitzvah observance.

1. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Temurah (The Laws of Temurah) 4:13 – The mitzvot are God's instructions and advice for living and improving our character.

And all these matters [the mitzvot] are to [help us to] overcome our negative inclinations and to correct our traits; and most laws of the Torah are instruction from afar from the Great Adviser [to help us] to correct our character traits and straighten our ways.

וכל אלו הדברים כדי לכוף את יצרו ולתקן דעותיו ורוב דיני התורה אינן אלא עצות מרחוק מגדול העצה לתקן הדעות וליישר כל המעשים.

Certain mitzvot have an obvious moral sway: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, give charity, etc. But many mitzvot seem to have nothing to do with making us better people. How can Rambam tell us that all the mitzvot are to help us improve our character?

2. Rabbi Aryeh Carmell, Master Plan, pp. x-xi – The concept of commandment introduces a new motive into our lives.

"Mitzvah" means "commandment." In the Western world we are not familiar with the concept of doing something because it is a commandment. We behave in moral ways, if we do, because of the value system to which our upbringings and society happen to have conditioned us. When challenged we often find it very difficult to defend the system. This mode of behavior is unreliable because it is based on vague general concepts without formal rational basis. There could be no better illustration of the instability of this type of system than the Nazi experience. In a few years we saw a nation which prided itself on its high level of culture have its morality turned on its head, with disastrous results.

Throughout history great thinkers – Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Marx – have produced splendid ethical systems suggesting that we could curb our egotism in various ways for the good of the community. Insofar as they were tried, they all failed abysmally. First, they lacked credible authority. Second, they failed to deal with the brute facts of the human being as he really is. They failed to provide a detailed program which would nurture the growth of the individual from a self-contained being to a person

prepared and motivated to give up his self-interest for an ideal beyond himself. Everyone agreed that the system was wonderful – for everyone else.

Both these shortcomings are overcome by the mitzvah system in Judaism.

The concept of mitzvah introduces a new motive into our lives: we act in a certain way not because we happen to feel it is right, but because we realize that this is how God wants us to act. This introduces a higher dimension into our lives. In fact it involves a revolutionary change in our attitude toward ourselves, the world and our fellow beings.

When we do something good because we relate to it on an intellectual or emotional level without also relating to it as a command from God, then we are essentially commanding ourselves. Volunteering to do a good deed is nice, but only a mitzvah performed as a commandment will develop a person on a moral level.

It is for this reason that Judaism puts a premium on fulfilling obligations:

3. Talmud, Avodah Zara 3a – It is better to perform an act out of obligation than voluntarily.

Rav Chanina said: Greater is one who is commanded and performs than one who is not commanded and performs.

אר"ח גדול המצווה ועושה ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה.

At first glance, this principle seems highly counterintuitive. We tend to regard the person who volunteers as an aid worker, for example, to be on a morally higher plane than the doctor whose job is to help others. After all, the latter may only be motivated by his salary, while the former demonstrates a true inner drive to be a good person. Acting voluntarily, says conventional wisdom, is of greater value than acting out of compunction. And yet here we are being told just the opposite!

The explanation is rooted in a universal psychological phenomenon: the desire to shirk responsibility. Whenever we feel ourselves pressured into performing a task, part of us would like nothing more than to throw off the yoke of obligation. Our natural human tendency to assert our individuality feels threatened with suffocation at the thought of being forced by someone else to do something. And especially if that someone else is God!

4. Tosafot, Kiddushin 31a – The greatness of performing an act out of obligation stems from the fact that it requires greater strength of character.

Greater is one who is commanded and performs... The explanation is that someone who is commanded must constantly struggle to overcome his own inclination and fulfill the commandments of his Creator.

גדול המצווה ועושה - פי' מפני שהוא דואג תמיד לבטל יצרו ולקיים מצות בוראו.

PART B. WORKING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

What about the mitzvot that are not hard for us to do, the ones that we carry out without struggling with our yetzer hara? What element of the human psyche do they work on in order to improve us?

If you have ever seen a Hassidic man dressed to the hilt with a long, black silky coat and fur shtreimel (hat) on his head, you might have wondered to yourself, "Why does he dress like that?" Well, Hassidim dress in the clothing of Polish nobility. The theory behind it is that if you dress like a noble then you will behave nobly.

The idea that behavior affects thought patterns is well-known in the world of psychology. In practice, it is also central to Judaism's program for personal growth.

1. Rabbi Aharon of Barcelona, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16 – Outward actions have the power to shape one's inner character.

A person is influenced by his actions, and his heart and thoughts follow the acts he does whether they are good or bad. If a completely wicked person who constantly thinks of doing bad deeds is inspired for the better and puts time into fulfilling Torah and mitzvot, even if it is not for the sake of Heaven, even he will turn to the good, and he will overcome his evil inclination through the power of these actions, since the heart follows the actions a person does. Similarly, even if one is a completely righteous person who desires Torah and mitzvot but always involves himself in bad deeds...after a certain amount of time he will become a wicked person, for we know, and it is true, that every man is affected by his actions.

כי האדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו, ולבו וכל מחשבותיו תמיד אחר מעשיו שהוא עוסק בהם, אם טוב ואם רע, ואפילו רשע גמור בלבבו וכל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום, אם יערה רוחו וישים השתדלותו ועסקו בהתמדה בתורה ובמצוות, ואפילו שלא לשם שמים, מיד ינטה אל הטוב.. ובכח מעשיו ימית היצר הרע, כי אחרי הפעולות נמשכים הלבבות. ואפילו אם יהיה אדם צדיק גמור ולבבו ישר ותמים, חפץ בתורה ובמצות, אם אולי יעסק תמיד בדברים של דופי... ישוב לזמן מן הזמנים מצדקת לבו להיות רשע גמור, כי ידוע הדבר ואמת שכל אדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו

2. Based on Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Growth Through Torah, Bnay Yakov Publishers, p. 168, and Rabbi Reuven Leuchter – The concept of self-creation can be applied to any form of personal growth.

This concept of the Sefer HaChinuch (discussed above) is a basic one for becoming a better person. Even if you are not able to have elevated thoughts at first, force yourself to behave in the way in which you hope to eventually become. If you want to become a giving person, even though you are inwardly very selfish, you will eventually succeed if you continue to behave in a giving manner. This is the self-creation principle. You

create yourself by your behavior. Awareness of this will enable you to improve yourself in any area in which you are deficient. Make a plan to perform as many actions as possible that would touch the positive traits you want to develop. After acting positively for a long enough time, your thoughts will become consistent with those actions, and you will become a positive person.

3. **Rabbi Dr. Asher Meir, "The Jewish Ethicist: Songs and Sanctity," from www.aish.com – When the message is repeated enough times, it eventually sinks in.**

Jewish tradition, with its strong emphasis on concrete practice rather than abstract faith, is particularly insistent on the need to choose habits and an environment that are conducive to human growth. One of the most famous statements of this is the explanation in the classic *Sefer Hachinukh* (Book of Mitzvah Education) that practical commandments are necessary because "the heart is drawn after the actions." Rather than commanding a particular sentiment or character trait, the Torah influences us by accustoming us to acts and experiences which will in turn cultivate an enlightened outlook.

There is no question that our outlook and habits are heavily influenced by the messages we are exposed to in the communications media and in the arts. That's why advertising companies spend hundreds of billions of dollars trying to influence our buying decisions. The same is true of music.

Rabbi Yehudah Amital once illustrated this with a story. The *kaddish* recitation is the most frequent motif in our daily prayers; it is said about ten times each day. The prayer leader or mourner declares, "May His great name be magnified and sanctified" in the world, and the congregation responds, "May His great name be blessed forever!" The Talmud greatly emphasizes the importance of this response, stating that anyone who makes this declaration with all his might and concentration will be saved from evil decrees. Yet we must admit that many of us don't attain this height of enthusiasm, and occasionally (or more than occasionally) we respond in an automatic way.

> *Rabbi Amital tells that a student once approached his rabbi and explained that he felt hypocritical stating over and over "May his great name be magnified" in a completely mechanical way; perhaps it would really be better to just omit it. The rabbi replied, "What would happen if ten times a day we all shouted 'Drink Coca-Cola!' Don't you think it would have an impact on us, even if said it in a mechanical, habitual way? So responding to kaddish also influences us, even if we can't really feel the impact."*

PART C. COGNITIVE CHANGE THROUGH TORAH LEARNING

Besides the cognitive impact of observing mitzvot, Judaism seeks to influence personal development in more overtly intellectual ways as well. From Pirkei Avot in the Mishnah to the Talmud's Aggadata to Medieval Jewish philosophy to Chassidic teaching to the Mussar movement, Judaism is filled with overt ethical teachings and practices that focus us on deliberate personal change.

1. Ramchal, Derech Hashem. 1:4:9 – Torah study leads to personal perfection.

Out of all the means that God has given us to come close to Him, there is one that stands higher than all the rest. This is the study of Torah. This consists of two parts: One is the reading and understanding of the Torah, and the other is the deeper comprehension of Torah. With His kindness, God authored a text in accordance with His wisdom, which He then presented to us. This is the Torah (i.e. the Five Books of Moses) as well as the books of the prophets that followed. These texts have a special property, namely, that when one reads them with sanctity and purity, and with the proper intent – to fulfill God's Will – he will be imbued with a great loftiness and a very great level of perfection. Similarly, when one works at understanding the content of these books, as well as the accompanying explanations that God presented to us, he will attain one level of perfection after another.

ואמנם אמצעי אחד נתן לנו האל יתברך שמו שמדריגתו למעלה מכל שאר האמצעים המקרבים האדם אליו, והוא תלמוד תורה. והוא בשתי בחינות. האחת, בבחינת ההגיון והלמוד. והשניה בבחינת ההשכלה. כי הנה רצה בחסדו וחיבר לנו חבור דברים כמו שגזרה חכמתו ית' ומסרם לנו והיינו כלל ספר התורה ואחריו ספרי הנביאים, שבסגולת הדברים האלה יהיה שמי שיהגה בהם בקדושה ובטהרה על הכונה הנכונה שהיא עשית חפצו ית' שמו, יתעצם בו על ידם מעלה עליונה ושלימות גדול עד מאד. וכן מי שישתדל בהבנתו ובידיעת מה שמסר לנו מפירושיהם, יקנה כפי השתדלותו, שלימות על שלימות...

Just as not all mitzvot have obvious moral implications, not all Torah study seems to promote personal development. Sometimes the topics studied under the aegis of Torah may appear obtuse and of seeming little relevance to our lives. However, when our minds are engaged in understanding God's word – no matter what it is – the very endeavor has subtle yet profound effects.

2. Rabbi Aryeh Carmell, Masterplan, pp. 270-271 – Torah study and mitzvot observance help us imbibe morality by osmosis.

Rather than dwelling constantly on morality, Torah Jews discuss the mitzvot in all their variety and subtlety. By doing so they immerse themselves in the words of God, and this itself has a purifying effect. In addition, moral and spiritual ends are implicit in all the mitzvot, though these are often not obvious on the surface. As a result one

can delve into the logical subtleties of the halachah without being consciously aware of the moral demands that the mitzvot imply. But the spirit of the mitzvah is absorbed subconsciously, by osmosis, so to speak.

Of course, there is also a time to study those works that deal explicitly with character improvement. As we mentioned above, Judaism offers a full library of such works. Taking time to focus on character improvement by studying the explicit ethical teachings of Judaism helps us refine our character traits.

3. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 88 – One must have a daily session in the study of texts dealing with ethical and personal development.**

The foundation of ethical education is not listening to lectures or reading articles. Rather, it is a fixed daily session devoted to "studying one's personality on a daily basis," by learning works of mussar regularly, in depth, and with constant review, in the same manner as Torah study. Whatever people say, write, or advocate in the name of "mussar" is merely a detail associated with this central point: the requirement to dedicate a daily period for the study of mussar and a personal accounting ...

Experience has shown that a person who sets aside time to study mussar every day will change for the better without realizing it – in his behavior, carefulness, and ambition to reach higher levels in Torah.

יסוד החינוך המוסרי אינו בשמיעת שיחות וקריאת מאמרים, אלא בקביעות יום-יומית, המיועדת "לבחון תכונות נפשו יום-יום", על ידי לימוד ספרי מוסר ברציפות, בעיון, ובחזרה תמידית, כמשפט לימוד-תורה. כל מה שמדברים, כותבים, מטיפים והוגים בשם "מוסר" אינו אלא פרפראות לנקודה המרכזית הזאת: החיוב להקדיש יום-יום זמן ללימוד המוסר וחשבון הנפש...

מהנסיון ידוע שהקובע זמן ללימוד מוסר יום יום, משתנה הוא לטובה מבלי שירגיש בכך– בהתנהגותו, בזהירותו, ובשאיפתו לדרגות התורה.

Merely studying the texts, however, is not enough. One must ponder the ideas they contain and analyze how to apply them to life. An investment of time and energy in regular, serious introspection can be the catalyst for incredible personal growth.

4. **Ibid. – Through introspection, a person can recreate himself.**

A creative force that is shared by everyone, however, is introspection. There is no one who cannot, when he is in a state of calm, reach a state of focus on his spiritual condition, the course of his actions, and the goal of his life. Such introspection is a genuine act of creation. The person himself becomes renewed by it.

כח יוצר שהוא נחלת כל אחד ואחד–הוא ההתבוננות. אין לך אדם שלא יוכל להגיע להתרכזות, מתוך מנוחת נפש, במצבו הנפשי, במהלך מעשיו ובמגמת חייו. התבוננות כזאת יש בה משום יצירה ממש. האדם עצמו מתחדש על ידה.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV

- **God gave us the Torah as an "antidote" for the evil inclination. That means that if we follow its path of learning and keeping mitzvot, we will be able to exercise our free will and achieve self-actualization.**
- **In commanding us to keep mitzvot, the Torah challenges us to overcome the evil inclination's desire to shirk our obligations to God.**
- **Judaism seeks to affect cognitive change in both subtle and overt ways. The practice of mitzvot and the study of Torah have subtle influences on our general outlook and behavior, even if we do not always realize it.**
- **More deliberate attempts at personal change are also encouraged through the study of ethical teachings and the practice of introspection.**

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHAT IS THE JEWISH ATTITUDE TOWARD PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY? HOW IS IT IN LINE WITH THE GOALS OF SUCH THERAPY, AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER?

- One of Judaism's approaches to psychological development could be called a "positive psychology" – one that guides people to develop and flourish.
- Like the field of mental health in general, Judaism promotes self-knowledge and self-actualization. But unlike secular theories of psychology, Judaism does not see these things as ends in themselves. The point of self-actualization is that it leads to the overarching goals of self-transcendence and attachment to God.

HOW DOES JUDAISM VIEW HUMAN NATURE?

- People are both good and evil. That is, we are made up of a part that desires good and can recognize truth, but also of a self-serving part that seeks to distance us from others, from God, and from our true selves.
- We call the part of us that recognizes moral truth the yetzer tov, while the part of us that seeks to quell the conscience is the yetzer hara.

DO WE HAVE FREE WILL, AND IF SO WHAT ARE ITS PARAMETERS?

- It is in the balance between the good and evil inclinations that true free will plays itself out. When we are confronted by a personal desire to do something, but our conscience tells us it is wrong – then we have a free will choice to make.

- The purpose of life, and what Judaism tries to help us achieve, is the expansion of our free will, to grow in moral sensitivity by continually making the correct free will decisions.

- When we employ our free will correctly, we are truly completing ourselves and becoming partners with God in the act of creation.

WHAT ARE THE BASIC POWERS OF THE HUMAN MIND, AND HOW ARE THEY BEST EMPLOYED?

- Subconscious thought is influenced by primal desires that stem from the good and evil inclinations.

- At the conscious level, the two basic powers of the human mind are intellect, i.e. rational thought, and imagination, i.e. the ability to entertain alternatives to the reality at hand. In general the intellect is the tool of the yetzer tov to help us act morally, while the yetzer hara employs the imagination to incite desires and seek wish fulfillment.

- When the intellect is in control, it can make use of the imagination as a way to help us affirm our faith in God and envision a better version of ourselves.

WHAT ARE THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN CHARACTER TRAITS, AND CAN THEY BE CHANGED?

- Judaism distinguishes between personality traits and character traits. Personality traits are innate; they cannot be changed. Rather, a person should seek to find positive outlets for these traits.
- Character traits, on the other hand, are learned and can change. The main ones we seek to inculcate within ourselves are kindness, self-restraint, and truth-seeking. The opposite of these are jealousy, lust, and the desire for honor.

HOW DOES PRACTICING JUDAISM PROMOTE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT?

- Judaism promotes positive psychological development in a number of ways. First of all, it seeks to channel negative impulses to positive expression. In this way it avoids the excesses of repression on the one hand and licentiousness on the other.
- Judaism promotes development through cognitive and behavioral change. It does this subtly through the practice of mitzvot and the abstract study of Torah and directly through the study of ethical teachings and the practice of introspection.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD, Getting Up When You're Down, ArtScroll Publishers

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD, Self Improvement, I'm Jewish, ArtScroll Publishers

Dr. Yisrael Levitz and Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD, A Practical Guide to Rabbinic Counseling

This class is based on a shiur by Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Director of Ner Le'Elef.