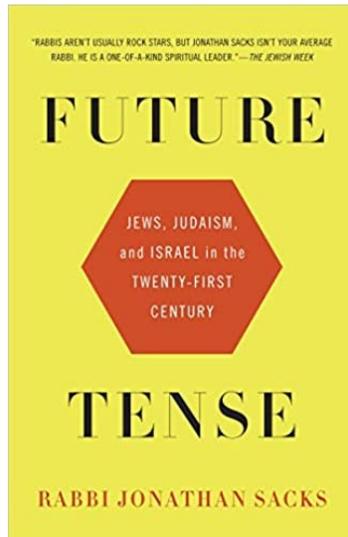


# "INTELLECT AND EMOTION: EXPLORING PSYCHOLOGICAL THEMES WITHIN THE WRITINGS OF RABBI SACKS"

לעילוי נשמת הרב יעקב צבי בן דוד אריה

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Throughout the whole of the first Gulf War, in 1991, my wife and I were in Israel. Thirty-nine times Saddam Hussein launched Scud missiles. Each time, we would retreat to our sealed room and put on gas masks, not knowing whether the next missile would contain chemical or biological weapons. Miraculously, there were almost no fatalities. But there was an unexpected casualty: family life. Israeli families were not used to spending prolonged periods together in a single room in situations of danger. The then mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, set up a working group to deal with family stress. I received a phone call from his office asking if I would be the rabbinic member of the group. I laughed and said, 'I'm only a tourist here. Are there no other rabbis in Jerusalem?' The reply came back: 'We have many rabbis, but none expert in family psychology.' A rabbinate untrained in the wisdom of the world will find itself irrelevant to those immersed in the world.

*To Change the World You Have to Understand the World*

Torah & Chochmah

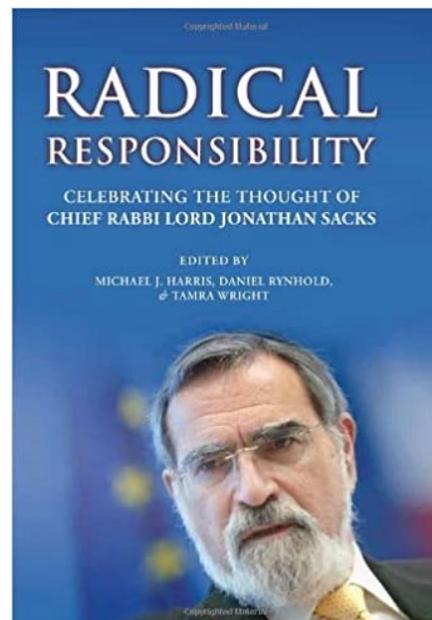
I have argued, not only in this chapter but throughout the book, that a basic duality runs through Judaism, shaping its view of the world. It honours both the universality of the human condition and the particularity of Jewish faith. So the Torah contains two stories, one from Adam to Noah, the other from Abraham to Moses. It contains two covenants, one with all humanity, the other with the people of Israel. There are two different names of God. There are two manifestations of God, one in creation, the other in revelation. And there are two forms of knowledge, *chokhmah* and Torah. Neither displaces or supersedes the other. To be a Jew is to be both. We are part of humanity and its story, and we are children of Abraham and Sarah and their story.

We can now state the difference between the two modes of knowledge. *Chokhmah* is the truth we discover; Torah is the truth we inherit. *Chokhmah* is the universal heritage of humankind; Torah is the specific heritage of Israel. *Chokhmah* is what we attain by being in the image of God; Torah is what guides Jews as the people of God. *Chokhmah* is acquired by seeing and reasoning; Torah is received by listening and responding. *Chokhmah* tells us what is; Torah tells us what ought to be. *Chokhmah* is about facts; Torah is about commands. *Chokhmah* yields descriptive, scientific laws; Torah yields prescriptive, behavioural laws. *Chokhmah* is about creation; Torah is about revelation.

Greek culture vs. Greek Wisdom

There is such a thing as Judaic wisdom, Torah allied with *chokhmah*, however difficult this is to define or specify in advance. To give one example: by choosing to base his psychoanalytic theory on the Greek myth of Oedipus, Freud gave us an essentially tragic view of the human condition. Three figures since—Viktor Frankl, who gave people hope in Auschwitz; Aaron T. Beck, who developed cognitive therapy; and Martin Seligman, who pioneered in the field of positive psychology—produced a set of understandings of the human mind and its emotions far more in keeping with the spirit of Judaism. Nor is this a marginal phenomenon from a religious point of view. Maimonides called his ideal type, the sage, a *rofe nefashot*, a healer of souls: in a word, a psychotherapist.

I think in this context of Michael Walzer, Michael Sandel and the late Daniel Elazar, who advanced Jewish understandings of political theory; of the work of Leon Kass in bioethics, and Robert Winston's in the treatment of infertility. I think of Howard Gardner's insights into multiple intelligence, and Abraham Maslow's into the structures of human motivation. Isaiah Berlin



Afterward by Tamra Wright – "A New Musar?"



### 1. The First Psychotherapist (Vayigash 5778)

- The interesting question is: is there a third kind of Jewish thinker, one who contributes to the universe of knowledge, but does so in a recognisably Jewish way? The answer to this is never straightforward, yet we instinctively feel that there is such a thing...

I believe that something similar applies to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. So many of the early practitioners of psychoanalysis, with the marked exception of Jung, were Jewish that it became known in Nazi Germany as the “Jewish science.” I have argued – though my views on this have been challenged – to the contrary, that by taking the Greek myth of Oedipus as one of his key models, **Freud** developed a tragic view of the human condition that is more Hellenistic than Jewish.[3]

By contrast, three of the most significant post-war psychotherapists were not merely Jewish by birth but profoundly Jewish in their approach to the human soul. **Viktor Frankl**, a survivor of Auschwitz, developed on the basis of his experiences there an approach he called **Logotherapy**, based on “man’s search for meaning.”[4] Though the Nazis took away almost every vestige of humanity from those they consigned to the death factories, Frankl argued that there was one thing they could never take away from their prisoners: **the freedom to decide how to respond.**

**Aaron T. Beck** was one of the founders of what is widely regarded as the most effective forms of psychotherapy: **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy**. [5] Among patients suffering from depression, he found that their feelings were often linked to highly negative thoughts about themselves, the world and the future. **By getting them to think more realistically, he found that their mood tended to improve.**

**Martin Seligman** is the founder of **Positive Psychology**, which aims not just to treat depression but actively to promote what he calls “authentic happiness” and “learned optimism.”[6] Depression, Seligman argued, is often linked to pessimism, which comes from interpreting events in a particular kind of way that he calls “**learned helplessness**”. Pessimists tend to see misfortune as permanent (“It’s always like this”), personal (“It’s my fault”) and pervasive (“I always get things wrong”). This leaves them feeling that the bad they suffer is inevitable and beyond their control. Optimists look at things differently. For them, negative events are temporary, the result of outside factors, and exceptions rather than the rule. So, within limits,[7] you can unlearn pessimism, and the result is greater happiness, health and success.

What links all three thinkers is their belief that (1) there is always more than one possible interpretation of what happens to us, (2) we can choose between different interpretations and (3) the way we think shapes the way we feel. This gives all three a marked resemblance to a particular kind of Jewish thought, namely Chabad Chassidut, as developed by the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745-1812). The word Chabad stands for the initial letters of the three intellectual virtues, chokhmah, binah and da'at, "wisdom, understanding and knowledge," which influence the more emotional attributes of chessed, gevurah and tiferet, "kindness, self-restraint and beauty or emotional balance." Unlike the other Chassidic movements, which emphasised the emotional life, Chabad Chassidism focused on the power of the intellect to shape emotion. It was, in its way, an anticipation of cognitive behavioural therapy.

Its origins, however, lie far earlier. Last week I argued that **Joseph** was the first economist. This week I want to suggest that he was the **first cognitive therapist. He was the first to understand the concept of reframing, that is, seeing the negative events of his life in a new way, thereby liberating himself from depression and learned helplessness....**

- <https://rabbisacks.org/first-psychotherapist-vayigash-5778/>

## 2. *The Light in the Ark (Noach 5780)*

- Recently, the science writer **David Epstein** published a fascinating book called *Range*, subtitled, *How Generalists Triumph in a Specialised World*. [4] He makes the point that over-concentration on a single specialised topic is good for efficiency but bad for creativity. The real creatives, (people like the Nobel Prize winners), are often those who had outside interests, who knew other disciplines, or had passions and hobbies outside their subject...

Autobiographical?

Lehavdil, it was precisely Maimonides' breadth of knowledge of science, medicine, psychology, astronomy, philosophy, logic, and many other fields that allowed him to be so creative in everything he wrote, from his letters, to his Commentary to the Mishnah, to the Mishnah Torah itself, structured differently from any other code of Jewish law, all the way to *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Maimonides said things that many may have sensed before, but no one had expressed so cogently and powerfully. He showed that it is possible to be utterly devoted to Jewish faith and law and yet be creative, showing people spiritual and intellectual depths they had not seen before. That was his way making a tzohar, a window for the tevah, the Divine word.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/noach-5780/>

Psychological Insights for the parsha: happiness, gratitude, mindset, altruism, evil, conformity, shame, grief, etc. (see list below)

## 3. *Descartes' Error (Chukat 5777)*

- One result of the new neuroscience is that we are becoming aware of the hugely significant part played by emotion in decision-making. The French Enlightenment emphasised the role of reason, and regarded emotion as a distraction and distortion. We now know scientifically how wrong this is.

Intellect vs. Emotion

**Antonio Damasio**, in his *Descartes' Error*, tells the story of a man who, as the result of a tumour, suffered damage to the frontal lobes of his brain.... It is less reason than emotion that lies behind our choices, and it takes emotional intelligence to make good choices. The problem is that much of our emotional life lies beneath the surface of the conscious mind.

That, as we can now see, is the logic of the chukkim, the "statutes" of Judaism, the laws that seem to make no sense in terms of rationality...

There have been many interpretations of the chukkim throughout the ages. But in the light of recent neuroscience we can suggest that they are laws designed to bypass the prefrontal cortex, the rational brain, and create instinctive patterns of behaviour to counteract some of the darker emotional drives at work in the human mind.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/descartes-error-chukat-5777/>

#### 4. **Thinking Fast and Slow (Acharei Mot 5779)**

- Recent years have seen a revolution in our understanding of the human brain, and with it, the human mind. One key text was **Antonio Damasio's** book *Descartes' Error*....

We have, in fact, a dual-system or twin-track brain. This is what **Daniel Kahneman** is referring to in the title of his famous book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.**[3]** One track is rapid, instinctive, emotional, and subconscious. The other is slower, conscious, deliberative, and calculating. The former allows us to react quickly to situations of immediate potential danger. Without it, we and our ancestors would not have survived. Many of our instinctive reactions are benign. It is natural to have empathy, and with it the tendency to feel other people's pain and come to their aid. We develop a strong sense of attachment that leads us to defend members of our family or community. But not all instincts are benign. Anger, envy, jealousy, fear, hate, and the desire for revenge may once have been functional, but they are often deeply destructive in social situations. That is why the ability to "think slow," to pause and reflect, matters so much. All animals have desires. Only human beings are capable of passing judgement on desires – of asking, should I or should I not satisfy this desire?...

Which brings us to **Genesis 27** and the moment when Jacob dressed up in Esau's clothes and said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn." The two goats of the High Priest's service and the two goats prepared by Rebecca symbolise our duality: "The hands are the hands of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob." *We each have an Esau and Jacob within us*, the impulsive, emotional brain and the reflective, deliberative one. We can think fast or slow. Our fate, our *goral*, our life-script, will be determined by which we choose. Will our life be lived "to the Lord" or "to Azazel," to the random vicissitudes of chance?...

- <https://rabbisacks.org/thinking-fast-and-slow-acharei-mot-5779/>

#### 5. **Torah as Song (Vayelech 5775)**

- And why call the Torah a song? Because if we are to hand on our faith and way of life to the next generation, it must sing. Torah must be affective, not just cognitive. It must speak to our emotions. As **Antonio Damasio** showed empirically in *Descartes' Error***[2]**, though the reasoning part of the brain is central to what makes us human, it is the limbic system, the seat of the emotions, that leads us to choose this way, not that. If our Torah lacks passion, we will not succeed in passing it on to the future. Music is the affective dimension of communication, the medium through which we express, evoke and share emotion. Precisely because we are creatures of emotion, music is an essential part of the vocabulary of mankind....

Rabbi Yehiel Michael Epstein in the introduction to the *Arukh ha-Shulchan, Choshen Mishpat*, writes that the Torah is compared to a song because, to those who appreciate music, the most beautiful choral sound is a complex harmony with many different voices singing different notes. So, he says, it is with the Torah and its myriad commentaries, its "seventy faces." Judaism is a choral symphony scored for many voices, the written text its melody, the oral tradition its polyphony.

Parallel  
to his  
life?

So it is with a poetic sense of closure that Moses' life ends with the command to begin again in every generation, writing our own scroll, adding our own commentaries, the people of the book endlessly reinterpreting the book of the people, and singing its song. The Torah is God's libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir. Collectively we have sung God's song. We are the performers of His choral symphony. And though, when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, because words are the language of the mind but music is the language of the soul.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/torah-as-song-vayelech-5775/>

## 6. *Emotional Intelligence (Ha'azinu 5779)*

- In March 2015 I had a public conversation at Yale with the University's President Peter Salovey.... the President pointed out that not only was Yale that afternoon hosting a rabbi, but he too – Salovey – was Jewish and the descendant of a great rabbinic dynasty. Salovey is an Anglicisation of the name Soloveitchik.

Thinking back to that occasion, I wondered whether there was a more than merely family connection between the university president and his great distant relative, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, the man known to generations of his students at Yeshiva University as simply, "The Rav." Was there an intellectual and spiritual link also, however oblique?

**There is, and it is significant. Peter Salovey's great contribution to the thought of our time is the concept he formulated together with John Mayer in a landmark 1989 article,<sup>[2]</sup> namely *emotional intelligence* – popularised in 1995 by Daniel Goleman's best-selling book of the same title...**

For many decades, IQ, or intelligence quotient, focused attention on a set of cognitive and reasoning tests as the primary measure of intelligence, itself considered as the best indicator of ability ... What Salovey and Mayer did was to show that our ability to understand and respond to not only our own emotions but also those of others is an essential element of success in many fields, indeed of human interaction in general....

It was precisely this point – the need for emotional intelligence – about which Rabbi Soloveitchik spoke in one of his most moving addresses, 'A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne.'<sup>[4]</sup> ...

From a father, he said, we learn how to read a text, comprehend, analyse, conceptualise, classify, infer and apply. We also learn how to act: what to do and what not to do. The father-tradition is "an intellectual-moral one." Turning to "the teaching of your mother," Soloveitchik became personal, speaking of what he learned from his own mother. From her, he said:

I learned that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavour, a scent and warmth to *mitzvot*. I learned from her the most important thing in life – to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders. Without her teachings, which quite often were transmitted to me in silence, I would have grown up a soulless being, dry and insensitive.<sup>[5]</sup>

To put it in other words: *Torat imekha* is about *emotional intelligence*. I have long felt that alongside Rabbi Soloveitchik's great essay, *Halakhic Man*, there was another one he might have written called *Aggadic Woman*. Halakhah is an intellectual-moral enterprise. But aggadah, the non-halakhic dimension of rabbinic Judaism, is directed to the broader aspects of what it is to be a Jew. It is written in narrative rather than law. It invites us to enter the minds and hearts of our spiritual forebears, their experiences and dilemmas, their achievements and their pain. It is the emotional dimension of the life of faith.

Speaking personally, I am disinclined to think of this in terms of a male-female dichotomy.[6] We are all called on to develop both sensibilities. But they are radically different. Halakhah is part of *Torat Cohanim*, *Judaism's priestly voice*. In the Torah, its key verbs are *le-havdil*, to distinguish/analyse/categorise, and *le-horot*, to instruct/guide/issue a ruling. But in Judaism there is also a **prophetic voice**. The key words for the prophet are *tzedek u-mishpat*, righteousness and justice, and *hessed ve-rahamim*, kindness and compassion. These are about I-Thou relationships, between humans, and between us and God...

Which brings us to our parsha. In Ha'azinu, Moses does the unexpected but necessary thing. *He teaches the Israelites a song*. He moves from prose to poetry, from speech to music, from law to literature, from plain speech to vivid metaphor...

**Why? Because at the very end of his life, the greatest of all the prophets turned to emotional intelligence, knowing that unless he did so, his teachings might enter the minds of the Israelites but not their hearts, their passions, their emotive DNA. It is feelings that move us to act, give us the energy to aspire, and fuel our ability to hand on our commitments to those who come after us....**

This is a life-changing idea: *If you want to change lives, speak to people's feelings, not just to their minds*. Enter their fears and calm them. Understand their anxieties and allay them. Kindle their hopes and instruct them. Raise their sights and enlarge them. Humans are more than algorithms. We are emotion-driven beings.

Speak from the heart to the heart, and mind and deed will follow.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/emotional-intelligence-haazinu-5779/>
- <https://behind-the-bima.simplecast.com/episodes/special-episode-rabbi-lord-jonathan-sacks-ztl>

“Rabbi Sacks himself epitomized this integration. His towering intellect was infused with input from his moral emotions. His religious and philosophic rationality was suffused with spiritual sentiments. Using his own terminology, we can say about him that he was both “*Halakhic Man*” and “*Aggadic Woman*.” He was both the “priestly voice” of analyzing, and the “prophetic voice” of justice and compassion. He was someone who preached so eloquently, but more importantly, demonstrated what he preached through his personality. To continue this aspect of his multifaceted legacy, we are charged to develop both our intellect and our emotions and integrate them in the service of God and humanity.”

<https://www.psychedfortorah.com/post/intellect-emotion-in-memory-of-rabbi-sacks-z-1>

## **7. Communities and Crowds (Vayakhel-Pekudei 5780)**

- What Moshe saw exemplified **Carl Jung's** description: "The psychology of a large crowd inevitably sinks to the level of mob psychology." Moshe saw a crowd.
  - <https://rabbisacks.org/vayakhel-pekudei-5780/>

## **8. Faith in the Future (Shemot 5780)**

- I think this is one of the most important ideas of Judaism. I wrote a book about it, called Future Tense.[3] I remember one evening when Elaine and I had the privilege of discussing this with the founder of positive psychology, **Martin Seligman**, in his home in Philadelphia. He was toying with a similar idea. After years of practising psychology he had come to the conclusion that the people with a positive psychology tended to be future-oriented, whereas those with a negative mindset – he called this, in a brilliant phrase, "learned helplessness" – were often fixated on the past.
  - <https://rabbisacks.org/shemot-5780/>

## **9. To Have a Why (Chayei Sarah 5780)**

- The book was called The Choice and its author was **Edith Eger**... On their way to Auschwitz, Edith's mother said to her, "We don't know where we are going, we don't know what is going to happen, but nobody can take away from you what you put in your own mind." That sentence became her survival mechanism. Initially, after the war, to help support the family, she worked in a factory, but eventually she went to university to study psychology and became a psychotherapist. She has used her own experiences of survival to help others survive life crises.
  - <https://rabbisacks.org/to-have-a-why-chayei-sarah-5780/>

## **10. A Nation of Storytellers (Ki Tavo 5779)**

- **Howard Gardner**, professor of education and psychology at Harvard University, is one of the great minds of our time. He is best known for his theory of "multiple intelligences," the idea that there is not one thing that can be measured and defined as intelligence but many different things – one dimension of the dignity of difference. He has also written many books on leadership and creativity, including one in particular, Leading Minds, that is important in understanding this week's parsha.[1]  
Gardner's argument is that what makes a leader is the ability to tell a particular kind of story – one that explains ourselves to ourselves and gives power and resonance to a collective vision. So Churchill told the story of Britain's indomitable courage in the fight for freedom. Gandhi spoke about the dignity of India and non-violent protest. Margaret Thatcher talked about the importance of the individual against an ever-encroaching State. Martin Luther King told of how a great nation is colour-blind. Stories give the group a shared identity and sense of purpose.
  - <https://rabbisacks.org/ki-tavo-5779-nation-storytellers/>

## **11. Leading a Nation of Individuals (Bamidbar 5779)**

- Counting devalues the individual, and tends to make him or her replaceable. If one soldier dies in battle, another will take his place. If one person leaves the organisation, someone else can be hired to do his or her job.  
Notoriously, too, crowds have the effect of tending to make the individual lose his or her independent judgment and follow what others are doing. We call this "herd behaviour," and it

sometimes leads to collective madness. In 1841 Charles Mackay published his classic study, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions And The Madness Of Crowds*, which tells of the South Sea Bubble that cost thousands their money in the 1720s, and the tulip mania in Holland when fortunes were spent on single tulip bulbs. The Great Crashes of 1929 and 2008 had the same crowd psychology.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/leading-a-nation-of-individuals-bamidbar-5779/>

### **12. The Pursuit of Meaning (Vayikra 5779)**

- No one did more to put the question of meaning into modern discourse than the late **Viktor Frankl**. In the three years he spent in Auschwitz, Frankl survived and helped others to survive by inspiring them to discover a purpose in life even in the midst of hell on earth. It was there that he formulated the ideas he later turned into a new type of psychotherapy based on what he called “man’s search for meaning”. His book of that title, written in the course of nine days in 1946, has sold more than ten million copies throughout the world, and ranks as one of the most influential works of the twentieth century.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/vayikra5779/>

### **13. Does My Father Love Me? (Vayigash 5779)**

- “Though my father and mother may forsake me, the Lord will receive me,” says Psalm 27. That is a line that resonates throughout Genesis. No one did more than **Sigmund Freud** to place this at the heart of human psychology. For Freud, the Oedipus complex – the tension between fathers and sons – is the single most powerful determinant of the psychology of the individual, and of religion as a whole. Freud, however, took as his key text a Greek myth, not the narratives of Genesis. Had he turned to Torah instead, he would have seen that this fraught relationship can have a non-tragic resolution. Abraham did love Isaac. Isaac did bless Jacob a second time, this time knowing he was Jacob. Jacob did love Joseph. And transcending all these human loves is divine love, rescuing us from feelings of rejection, and redeeming the human condition from tragedy.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/father-love-vayigash-5779/>

### **14. A Drama in Four Acts (Noach 5779)**

- This is developmental psychology as we have come to know it through the work of **Jean Piaget, Eric Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg and Abraham Maslow**. The subtlety and depth of the Torah is remarkable. It was the first, and is still the greatest, text on the human condition and our psychological growth from instinct to conscience, from “dust of the earth” to the morally responsible agent the Torah calls “the image of God.”

- <https://rabbisacks.org/drama-four-acts-noach-5779/>

### **15. Giving Thanks (Tzav 5778)**

- Not until the early 1990s did a major piece of medical research reveal the dramatic physical effects of thanksgiving. It became known as the **Nun Study**. Some 700 American nuns, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, agreed to allow their records to be accessed by a research team investigating the process of ageing and Alzheimer’s Disease. At the start of the study the participants were aged between 75 and 102.[4]

- <https://rabbisacks.org/giving-thanks-tzav-5778/>

### **16. The Limits of Grief (Re'eh 5777)**

- The more we learn about the psychology of bereavement and the stages through which we must pass before loss is healed, so the wisdom of Judaism's ancient laws and customs has become ever more clear. As it is with individuals, so it is with the people as a whole. Jews have suffered more than most from persecution and tragedy. We have never forgotten these moments. We remember them on our fast days – especially on Tisha B'Av with its literature of lament, the kinot. Yet, with a power of recovery that at times has been almost miraculous, it has never allowed itself to be defeated by grief. One rabbinic passage[2] epitomises the dominant voice within Judaism:
  - <https://rabbisacks.org/limits-grief-reeh-5777/>

### **17. The Sin Offering (Vayikra 5777)**

- This view – characteristic of the Chabad approach, with its emphasis on the psychology of the religious life – shares more than a passing similarity with **Sigmund Freud's** analysis of the unconscious, which gave rise to the phrase, 'a Freudian slip'. Remarks or acts that seem unintentional often betray unconscious desires or motives. Indeed, we can often glimpse the unconscious more readily at such moments than when the person is acting in full knowledge and deliberation. Inadvertent sins suggest something amiss in the soul of the sinner. It is this fault which may lie beneath the threshold of consciousness, which is atoned for by the chattat.
  - <https://rabbisacks.org/sin-offering-vayikra-5777/>

### **18. The Spiritual Child (Bo 5776)**

- For some time now, along with many others in the West, we have sometimes neglected this deeply spiritual element of education. That is what makes **Lisa Miller's** recent book *The Spiritual Child*,[3] an important reminder of a forgotten truth. Professor Miller teaches psychology and education at Columbia University and co-edits the journal *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Her book is not about Judaism or even religion as such, but specifically about the importance of parents encouraging the spirituality of the child.
  - <https://rabbisacks.org/the-spiritual-child-bo-5776/>

### **19. Spirits in a Material World (Vaera 5776)**

- Spiritual achievement, says Maimonides, is higher than material achievement, but we need to ensure the latter first, because "a person suffering from great hunger, thirst, heat or cold, cannot grasp an idea even if it is communicated by others, much less can he arrive at it by his own reasoning." In other words, if we lack basic physical needs, there is no way we can reach spiritual heights. When people's spirits are broken by harsh labour they cannot listen to a Moses. If you want to improve people's spiritual situation, first improve their physical conditions.

This idea was given classic expression in modern times by two New York Jewish psychologists, **Abraham Maslow** (1908-1970) and **Frederick Herzberg** (1923-2000). Maslow was fascinated by the question of why many people never reached their full potential. He also believed – as, later, did **Martin Seligman**, creator of Positive Psychology – that psychology should focus not only on the cure of illness but also on the positive promotion of mental health. His most famous contribution to the study of the human mind was his "hierarchy of needs".

We are not a mere bundle of wants and desires. There is a clear order to our concerns. Maslow enumerated five levels. First are our physiological needs: for food and shelter, the basic requirements of survival. Next come safety needs: protection against harm done to us by others. Third is our need for love and belonging. Above that comes our desire for recognition and esteem, and higher still is self-actualisation: fulfilling our potential, becoming the person we feel we could and should be. In his later years Maslow added a yet higher stage: self-transcendence, rising beyond the self through altruism and spirituality.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/spirits-in-a-material-world-vaera-5776/>

## **20. Assembling Reminders (Shelach Lecha 5775)**

- Another researcher, **Deepak Malhotra**, surveyed the willingness of Christians to give to online charitable appeals. The response was 300 per cent greater if the appeal was made on a Sunday than on any other day of the week. Clearly the participants did not change their minds about religious belief or the importance of charitable giving between weekdays and Sundays. It was simply that on Sundays they were more likely to have thought about God on that day. A similar test was carried out among Muslims in Morocco, where it was found that people were more likely to give generously to charity if they lived in a place where they could hear the call to prayer from a local minaret.

Nazorayan's conclusion is that 'Religion is more in the situation than in the person,'[2] or to put it another way, what makes the difference to our behaviour is less what we believe than the phenomenon of being reminded, even subconsciously, of what we believe.

That is precisely the psychology behind the mitzvah of tsitsit in this week's parsha:

- <https://rabbisacks.org/assembling-reminders-shelach-lecha-5775/>

## **21. The Scapegoat: Shame and Guilt (Acharei Mot – Kedoshim 5775)**

- The psychology of shame is quite different to that of guilt. We can discharge guilt by achieving forgiveness – and forgiveness can only be granted by the object of our wrongdoing, which is why Yom Kippur only atones for sins against God. Even God cannot – logically cannot – forgive sins committed against our fellow humans until they themselves have forgiven us.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/the-scapegoat-shame-and-guilt-achrei-mot-kedoshim-5775/>

## **22. The Ethic of Holiness (Tetzaveh 5775)**

- In this essay I want to challenge that conception. The priesthood and the sanctuary made a moral difference, not just a spiritual one. Understanding how they did so is important not only to our understanding of history but also to how we lead our lives today. We can see this by looking at some important recent experimental work in the field of moral psychology. Our starting point is American psychologist **Jonathan Haidt** and his book, *The Righteous Mind*. Haidt makes the point that in contemporary secular societies our range of moral sensibilities has become very narrow. He calls such societies WEIRD – Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic. They tend to see more traditional cultures as rigid, hidebound and repressive. People from those traditional cultures tend to see Westerners as weird in abandoning much of the richness of the moral life.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/ethic-holiness-tetzaveh-5775/>

### **23. The Binding of Isaac (Vayera 5775)**

- **Sigmund Freud** famously had something to say about this too. He held that a fundamental driver of human identity[9] is the Oedipus Complex, the conflict between fathers and sons as exemplified in Aeschylus' tragedy. By creating moral space between fathers and sons, Judaism offers a non-tragic resolution to this tension. If Freud had taken his psychology from the Torah rather than from Greek myth, he might have arrived at a more hopeful view of the human condition.

Why then did God say to Abraham about Isaac: "Offer him up as a burnt offering"? So as to make clear to all future generations that the reason Jews condemn child sacrifice is not because they lack the courage to do so. Abraham is the proof that they do not lack the courage. The reason they do not do so is because God is the God of life, not death. In Judaism, as the laws of purity and the rite of the Red Heifer show, death is not sacred. Death defiles.

The Torah is revolutionary not only in relation to society but also in relation to the family. To be sure, the Torah's revolution was not fully completed in the course of the biblical age. Slavery had not yet been abolished. The rights of women had not yet been fully actualised. But the birth of the individual – the integrity of each of us as a moral agent in our own right – was one of the great moral revolutions in history.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/binding-isaac-vayera-5775/>

### **24. Beyond Nature (Noach 5775)**

- The Torah suggests we are both good and bad, and evolutionary psychology tells us why. We are born to compete and co-operate. Life is a competitive struggle for scarce resources. So we fight and kill. But we survive only within groups. Without habits of co-operation and trust, we would have no groups and we would not survive. That is part of what the Torah means when it says, "It is not good for man to be alone." So we are both aggressive and altruistic: aggressive to strangers, altruistic toward members of our group.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/beyond-nature-noach-5775/>

### **25. Shelach Lecha (5774) – Confidence**

- The Rebbe's words ring true today even more loudly than they did when he first spoke them. They are a profound statement of the Jewish task. They are also a fine exposition of a concept that entered psychology only relatively recently – fear of success.[3] We are all familiar with the idea of fear of failure. It is what keeps many of us from taking risks, preferring instead to stay within our comfort zone.

- <https://rabbisacks.org/shelach-lecha-5774-confidence/>