Abstract

The paper examines various aspects of the relationship between Judaism and counseling, including: theories of personality and development, counseling and psychotherapeutic processes, and special issues and concerns in dealing with the Jewish community. The paper is based on a comprehensive review of both Judaic and counseling literature, and points at many similarities, as well as some differences, in theory and practice.

Ben Bag-Bag said: Delve in it (the Torah) and delve in it

(again), for everything is included in it.   (Avoth 5:22)

When I undertook this study, I was somewhat skeptical of the

application of these ancient words of the Talmud to modern counseling

theory and technique.   I am not skeptical anymore.   The review of the

literature in which we shall presently engage demonstrates that

classic Jewish sources predated and anticipated modern counseling

theory by hundreds, even thousands of years.   The Torah - the

all-encompassing Jewish heritage of law and ethics - has in fact a

special branch devoted to character development and behavior

modification - that of "Musar".   An exact definition of Musar is

almost impossible, but let us nevertheless see Epstein's definition

quoted by Gottlieb (1975, p.112), and use it as a tentative guideline:

The improvement of moral character through a process of self-

education.   This process consists of three stages:

(1)   The subjugation of all evil desires and impulses through

        the constant discipline of the will-power.

(2)   The recognition of one's own faults and failings as a

        result of honest self-analysis and self-criticism; and

(3)   The conscious effort at the improvement of character,
       making of virtue a second nature.

Alas, this definition is too brief to suffice - in truth, this
entire paper may be viewed as a definition of Musar.

However, Judaism - in the form of Musar - encompasses an
extremely broad spectrum of theory, process, and concerns, all of
which we will hopefully touch upon - although necessarily briefly. It
is therefore worthwhile pointing out specifically, the fact that the
counseling encounter is actually alluded to in the Bible. We find in
Proverbs [Mishle] 12:25: "[If there is] a worry in the heart of a
person, he should remove it, and gladden himself with a good thing."
The sages Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi in Talmud Yuma 75a lend this
"removal" complementary interpretations. One holds it to mean simply
"he should remove it from his mind", while the other takes it to mean
"he should remove it by speaking it over with others". The
commentators (see Rashi, Malbim) explain how the interpretations
complement each other, and the end of the verse: A person who has a
worry in his heart should remove it by speaking it over with his
friend, who will console him and give him advice on how he may gladden
his heart.

Yet this but a small example of the amount of modern theory to be found in the Torah. Let us proceed to examine in detail the theories, processes, and concerns, of classic and modern Judaic sources, in the light of modern counseling theory.

However, we must note that the paper does not attempt to distinguish between counseling and psychotherapy. The distinction between the fields is at best vague and ill-defined (see Stefflre and Burks, 1979) and for our purposes, there is no reason to require us to resort to a distinction, as in underlying theory, the two fields are essentially congruent. For the most part, we will attempt to utilize the viewpoint of the behavioral school of counseling.

PART I: The Judaic Theory of Personality and Development

Free Will vs. Determinism

Every man is endowed with free will; if he desires to bend

himself toward the good path and to be just, it is within his

power to reach for it, and if he desires to bend himself toward

the corrupt path and to be wicked, this too is within his power

... . There is none to either force things upon him or decree

things against him ... but he alone, of his own free will, with

the consent of his mind, bends to any path he may wish to

follow. (Rambam [Maimonides], 1965, Laws of Teshuvah 5:1-2;

Spero, 1980, p.36).

Thus expressed, Judaism's view of the cause of behavior, stands

in direct contradiction to the views of behaviorism, expressed by

Skinner (1974):

Operant behavior is called voluntary, but it is not really

uncaused; the cause is simply harder to find. The critical

condition for the apparent exercise of free will is positive

reinforcement, as the result of which a person feels free and

calls himself free and says he does what he likes or what he

<u>wants</u> or is <u>pleased</u> to do ... . Man is perhaps unique in being a
moral animal, but not in the sense that he behaves morally; he
has simply constructed a social environment in which he behaves
with respect to others in moral ways (pp. 54, 231).

Rambam (1975, Eight Chapters, chap.8) proves that Judaism
maintains that "all of man's actions are given over to him ... .
There is no compulsion on him nor is there any external cause which
makes him incline toward a virtue or a vice, except for his being
disposed by temperament so that something is easy or difficult for him
...," from both Biblical and Rabbinical sources, and the very
foundation of religion, "If man's actions were done under compulsion,
the commandments and prohibitions of the law would be nullified and
they would all be absolutely in vain, since man would have no choice
in what he does ... . Reward and punishment would also be sheer
injustice ... ."

Yet, we find on the other hand, clear manifestations of
determinism in Halakhah (Jewish Law). Some major examples are
provided by Spero (1980). These include such critical concepts as
"hazakah" (behavioral norm), "um'dena" (presumptive expectation) and
"anan sahadi" (lit. "we testify", similar to a norm established by

custom). Spero cites numerous examples of the application of such concepts to behavioral patterns. Although he also notes that the use of such concepts is circumscribed, it is clear that absolute libertarianism is not necessarily the attitude taken by Judaism regarding human behavior. On the contrary, from such Halakhic concepts it is clear that Jewish sources clearly recognize that human behavior submits to enough regularity to make rational action possible. Even more indicative of Jewish acceptance of behavioral theories of human adjustment is Rambam's analysis of character traits and behavior based on social-learning theory, which we will examine extensively in pt. II.

However, it is equally clear that behavioral and genetic determinants cannot account for such uniquely human characteristics as choice, intentionality or creativity. Skinner maintains that man is not unique in his moral behavior, yet he is unable to explain man's sense of morality - why a human being will sacrifice his life out of loyalty to a symbol or belief. We are thus left with a dilemma we must resolve - to what extent do each of the two contradictory factors of free will vs. determinism influence and cause human behavior?

A resolution of the dilemma is provided by Rabbi E. E. Dessler (1964). He discusses the two sides of the issue, and likens the

proponents of either position to two people gazing at a rectangular piece of paper from different perspectives. One person is only looking at the paper's surface, whereas the other only sees the width of the page. If not for the fact that they know that the surface view and the side view do not contradict each other, they would each believe that the other's description of his perspective was incorrect. Why in fact is there no contradiction? Because the surface and width are two distinct dimensions which coexist, and simply represent different traits of the object observed. Similarly, human behavior is neither exlusively free, nor exclusively determined, but is both free and determinable, depending from which viewpoint behavior is observed. A similar thesis was advanced by Carr (1961).

In explaining the extent to which a person's free will determines his behavior, Rabbi Dessler utilizes the following analogy: When two nations go to war, the actual battles occur at the front. The area behind the lines of either side is not under contention. If one nation should emerge victorious in battle, and push its adversary back some distance, then when they engage again in battle, the engagement will take place at the new front, while the area the one nation had just conquered would be behind the lines and its sole possession. Thus, in fact, there is only one front, although potentially the entire area of both countries is under dispute.

Free will may be understood in a similar manner. Every person has free will, but only at the point where behavior he has consciously decided to engage in, meets up with behavior which results from social learning and is adopted by habit. This point or boundary is not fixed but is in a constant state of flux. The positioning of the boundary is dependent on the result of a person's interactions with the physical environment, his own physical limitations, and interpersonal challenges. If a person in a specific area follows an existential course, taking responsibility for his destiny, and acting on the basis of a subjective, personal, conscious decision, then that area of contention falls into the realm of free will. If, on the other hand, the person simply copes with the issue, allowing his environment, physical limitations and inter-personal challenges to evoke within him a reaction based on previously internalized behavioral determinants, then that area of contention falls into the realm of determinism.

As in the analogy of the two warring countries, so too in the conflict of free will vs. determinism, the actual area of battle, the front, is very restricted. On either side of that front are areas not under contention, which may be the result of previous conscious decisions, or caused by behavioral determinants, which may be firmly entrenched. Yet, no matter what the original cause of the behavior in question, it must be internalized by an educational process. We may

take any given behavior, place it on a continuum, and measure a person against that scale. We will find that parts of that behavior - or trait - were originally generated by a conscious decision to strive towards a goal - which that person then set out to reach by self-education and training, whereas other parts were originally generated by societal determinants which were then internalized by the person. We may thus view all behavior as the result of a process of education - the difference being in the cause of the behavior in question - is it internally-generated, or externally- imposed. This does not bear in any way on whether the behavior under examination is positive or negative - both positive and negative behaviors (in terms of religious ideals, which beside keeping the Halakha involves definitions of behavioral normality, which we will discuss in pt. II) can be either results of free will or determinism.

While not negating the importance of positive behavior which has been externally-imposed and internalized, Judaism, as an existential religion, sees "mitzvat anashim mi-lumada" (Isaiah, 29:13) - rote performance of commandments - as a lower-level of religious observance, and Rabbi Dessler and others (cf. Rabbi Levovitz, 1980 p.132; Rabbi Sher, 1936) stress the preference for fulfillment of religious precepts intentionally - as a result of a conscious will to perform the commandments, and as the result of a free choice and

resolution to follow the Torah. Once this nuclear resolution has been made, the process of implementation is then one of education or re-education and behavior modification. Although at this point, behavioral methods of modification may be utilized (as we discuss at length in pt. II), nevertheless, since the nuclear resolution pertaining to the area of behavior in question was decided freely and independently, the entire ensuing process is regarded as an existentially based one. This principle is to be found in the quote from Rambam with which we opened this section. The "free will" pertains to the "bending" - the nuclear resolution on the direction to follow. After that decision is made, then one must follow the "path" - the methodology of behavior modification necessary to reach that goal, set out by Rambam (1975) elsewhere (see pt. II).

In continuing his explanation, Rabbi Dessler refers back to his analogy and notes that although the front is narrow in width - as the actual free choice is only a nuclear resolution, bordered on the one side by internally-generated learned behavior, and on the other side by externally-imposed learned behavior - it may be many miles in length, stretching over vast distances. Similarly, although with each specific behavior the point of free will decision at any given time is normally restricted, that point exists in all behaviors and traits inherent in the personality, and each respective behavior or trait

provides the individual with free choice at whatever level he or she is at in that area. This is also akin to a battlefront where a nation may find itself advancing in one area and retreating in another one.

The flip side of free choice is the ability to choose negative behavior, and the human's inherent capability for evil, which, although contrary to the basically positive creation of humanity (see Genesis [Bereshit] 1, 26-27 and commentaries there), is necessarily intrinsic to free will. The test of humanity is to utilize such free will to extinguish negative behavior.

This existential view of human free-will is similar to Frankl's logotherapy (Amsel, 1969; Bulka, 1972, Ury, 1970) and is in fact expressed by Frankl (1967, p.79) "For in every case man retains the freedom and the possiblity of deciding for or against the influence of his surroundings. Although he may seldom exert this freedom or utilize this opportunity to choose it is open to him to do so". Although beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that Judaic ideas of satisfaction in life are also similar to Frankl's, as noted by the above-mentioned sources.

It is important to clarify, that although normally free choice is indeed limited in scope, there is a Judaic concept of "one who

acquires his world to come in a single moment" - the idea of a radical change in values and attitudes stemming from an extreme existential moment of decision which completely changes one's life. The conditions under which such a resolution can occur are extraordinary (see Talmud Avoda "Zara" 10b, 17a, 18a and Rabbi Dessler, ibid. p.24) However, this concept provides the basis for certain limited methods of behavior modification to be discussed in pt. II.

Generally, however, after the nuclear resolution, re-education is implemented utilizing behavioral modification techniques similar to standard conditioning theories, also to be discussed in pt. II.

The quote from Rambam we opened with is from the "Laws of Teshuva". "Teshuvah" literally means "return" and is used normally in the context of repentance on a transgression. However, this is a very superficial understanding of the concept, which in reality is a lifelong process of self-regulated therapy. Based on the principles we have just examined, let us attempt to put Teshuvah in perspective.

Teshuvah: A Lifelong Psychoterapeutic Process of Development

We are accustomed to thinking of the work of Teshuvah as beginning after sin, but that until man sins there is no context for repentance. However, this is not so. It is the case that all of our

work in Torah and the commandments is after the sin of Adam ... . It is thus that all of our work has as its purpose to restore the world to that original order and wondrous state ... . Thus, all our work is the work of Teshuvah, and if one goes astray and sins, this sin is an additional diminution in the work of Teshuvah. (Rabbi Gifter, 1977b; Spero, 1980,p.24)

With these words, one of the greatest contemporary Jewish thinkers, Rabbi Mordekhai Gifter, captures true Judaic regard of the concept of repentance and return - its definition as a lifelong process of self-improvement directed towards returning the world to its ultimate perfection - as opposed to other religious perspectives on the process as one of specific penance on isolated sins.

Indeed, Rambam (1965; Laws of Teshuvah 7:3) clearly states that the process of "Teshuva" must be applied to character traits such as anger, animosity, jealousy, sarcasm, etc. Rabbi Gifter (1977a) explains that these traits are the roots of specific transgressions, and their cause (see Rabbi Vital, below pt.II). Therefore, the Halakhah requires the individual to modify the underlying trait, in order to extinguish overt manifestations of sin. Without treatment of these covert causes, recurrence of the overt effects would be inevitable.

Spero (1980, p.24) notes, that, when viewed in this perspective, Teshuvah "bears a therapeutic, growth oriented connotation analogous to our general understanding of psychotherapy", in that, "Teshuvah and psychotherapy share an a priori foundation in the desirability of monitoring, modifying, and improving upon aberrant behavior - be it moral, religious, social, or intrapsychic - which stands in the way of spiritual growth."

This growth ideally leads to behavior in the pattern of Rambam's (1975) famous "mean" (see Laws of De'ot, chap. 1; and Eight Chapters - which we will examine at length in pt. II). The ideology behind this mode of behavior is existentially profound, as the "return" to this situation in essence means the return to freedom, to the ability to exercise free will in implementing the respective traits, rather than being influenced and subjugated by them. The individual thus "returns" to himself, re-educating himself in a manner which gives him control over his overt character traits and overt actions, rather than they controlling him.

Yet, a key component in the psychotherapeutic process is seemingly missing in the Teshuvah process - the counselor. As Wrenn (1951, p.60) defines the process (interchanging "student" with "individual"), "Counseling is a dynamic and purposeful relationship

between two people in which procedures vary with the nature of the student's need, but in which there is always mutual participation by the counselor and the student with the focus upon self-clarification and self-determination by the student." In this framework, the counselor, from his objective standpoint, is crucial in that clarification and definition, seeing what the client, from his subjective perspective cannot, and bringing those observations to the realization of the client. How can the individual achieve this goal on his own in the Teshuvah process?

Answers and methodology for achieving these necessary goals of self-clarification and self-determination on one's own are detailed by many Jewish sources, and a major compotent of the process is the "heshbon ha'nefesh" - self-management concept (detailed in pt. II). In fact, due to the centrality of growth to religion, the literature leaves almost no stone unturned in detailing possible techniques that may be utilized. Of course, Jewish sources also leave open and even stress the advantages of consulting wise men - or friends - when necessary, or just advantageous (see Avoth 1:6). However, much of Rambam's works on ethics, and later works of Musar, are intended to assist individuals in personal self-development. The vastness of the literature involved puts this topic beyond the scope of this limited survey.

However, especially noteworthy is the principle of "detachedness"
which is regarded as crucial to the identification of problems. In
fact, Rabby Y. Y. Horowitz of Novardock (1976), disciple of the
renowned Rabbi Israel Salanter, views this detachment, with the
resulting objectivity, as the basis for Teshuvah - without which the
individual would be incapable of identifying the areas which required
work.

In explaining the complications arising from subjectivity, Rabbi
Horowitz presents us with a well known parable. A person who had been
attempting for some time to become expert at shooting arrows to the
center of a bullseye, once chanced upon a series of bullseyes, all of
which had arrows imbedded in dead center. This person of course
assumed that the individual who had shot these arrows was a true
marksman, and he set out to find him in order to learn that skill from
him. When he found the assumed sharpshooter, he asked him what the
secret of his success was. The "sharpshooter" replied, "It is really
quite simple. First I shoot the arrow, and wherever it falls, I draw
a bullseye around it, placing the arrow in dead center."

This is also the case, states Rabbi Horowitz, of a person viewing his
or her character traits from a subjective viewpoint. No matter what
the status of the trait - positive or negative - the individual makes

sure to justify it by building his or her self-image in a manner which allows the trait - or behaior - to take on a positive aspect. For example, if a person has an inclination towards hostility, it will be rationalized by claiming it necessary in order to cope with an antagonistic world. It is therefore crucial for the individual to break away from a subjective framework, take up an objective perspective, and examine his behavior critically and honestly. Only after the realization of this important principle is one fit to serve as his own counselor.

At this point, after a person has utilized free will in determining shortcomings and/or goals, and has objectively and critically assessed present behavior, he or she is ready to undertake behavior modification, which we will examine in pt. II.