

PART II:

The Psychoterapeutic Process in Traditional Jewish Sources: Musar

The Educational Process

"Behold, the matter of character traits which are imbedded in the more mundane aspect of the soul And behold that to this soul are linked the positive and negative traits, and they constitute the seat and foundation of the loftier, intellectual soul, to which are linked the 613 commandments of the Torah. Therefore, the character traits are not included in the 613 commandments, however they constitute the main preparations for the 613 commandments, either in fulfilling or forsaking them, since it is not within the power of the intellectual soul to fulfill the commandments through the ... limbs of the body if not by means of the fundamental soul [i.e., character traits] which directly relates to physical functioning Therefore negative traits are worse in their effect than the transgressions themselves. With this you will understand the words of our Rabbis: 'Anyone who becomes excessively angry is as an idol-worshipper,' i.e., as one who has forsaken all 613 commandments, and so they said: 'Anyone who is excessively haughty is as one who has denied G'd,' and similar statements ... so we find that one must take greater care to avoid negative

traits than he takes in the actual observance of the positive and negative commandments, because when a person possesses positive character traits, he will readily fulfill all the commandments." (Rabbi Vital, 1953; Rabbi Wolbe, 1972, p.64)

Seeing what an important place is accorded to a healthy character in Jewish thought, it is obviously a matter of course that we find a wealth of theory relating to the modification of character traits in a classical Jewish literature: the process of Musar, a lifelong process of self- improvement.

We must reiterate here the idea we stressed in pt. I - Judaism regards man as totally responsible for his actions, and views him as having absolute free choice and reign over the course of his life. However, habit and education are fully recognized and acknowledged as key determinants of behavior. As Rambam (1975, Eight Chapters, chap.4) writes: "Know that these moral virtues and vices are acquired and firmly established in the soul by frequently repeating the actions pertaining to a particular moral habit over a long period of time and by our becoming accustomed to them. If those actions are good, we shall acquire the virtue; if they are bad, we shall acquire the vice. Since by nature man does not possess either virtue or vice at the beginning of his life ... he undoubtedly is habituated from childhood

to actions in accordance with his family's way of life, and that of his town. These actions may be in the mean, excessive, or defective"

Therefore, as Rabbi Wolbe (1972) points out, Rambam in his Code grouped his principles of character traits under the title "Laws of De'ot" - "de'ah" being the Hebrew term for a "knowledge" or "learned concept". Although the character traits are "imbedded" in the soul, and basic derivations of man's spiritual and physical makeup, their expression in specific modes of behavior is a "learned concept" which is subject to re-education and modification. It is therefore the responsibility (in the Judaic existential understanding) of the individual to undertake that process of behavior modification and self-improvement - the process of Musar.

It is superfluous to compare this educational framework to the almost totally congruent framework of behavioral counseling (LaFleur, 1979). The underlying concepts of social learning are practically identical (Goodstein and Lanyon, 1979). It is in the definition of normality that the key differences may be found.

Normality

LaFleur (1979, p.224) writes: "Behavioral counseling does not distinguish client actions on an abnormal-normal continuum. All client actions, whether labeled as abnormal or normal by some judging agent, are learned behaviors, and the principles by which they are learned are the same." To a degree, this view is reminiscent of that of Ellis (1962) and others that claim that human values are not absolutic or completely given, although they are to some extent biologically and socially determined. Judaism vehemently repudiates this view, and pronounces it in diametric opposition to what is seen as true human nature. We find in Genesis 1:26 - 27 that G-d created man in his likeness and image, and entire tracts - most noteworthy being Rabbi Kordevero's "Tomer Devorah" (1974) - explain exactly how each character trait of a person should be similar to the traits of G-d - in the areas of mercy, kindness, etc. Thus, Judaic normality is akin to divinity, and man is seen as essentially inherently good - most similar again to Frankl's (1967) stance. As the Talmud brings down (Shabbath, 133b): "And you shall walk in the ways (Deut. [Devarim] 28:9); just as He is called gracious, you too be gracious; just as He is called merciful, you too be merciful; just as He is called holy, you too be holy." (see Sotah 14a and Sefer Ha'Hinnuch, Mitzva 611).

Rambam (1975) in the Laws of De'ot (chap.1) specifies how this applies in general to character traits:

Between two character traits at opposite extremes there is a character trait in the middle, equidistant from the extremes. Some character traits a man has from the beginning of his creation [conception, i.e., genetically] depending upon the nature of his body; some character traits a certain man's nature is disposed to receive in the future more quickly than other character traits, and some man does not have from the beginning of his creation but learns from others or he himself turns to them due to a thought that arose in his heart, or he hears that a certain character trait is good for him, and that it is proper to acquire it and he trains himself in it until it is firmly established within him.

For any character trait, the two opposite extremes are not the good way, and it is not proper for a man to follow them nor to teach them to himself. If he finds his nature inclined toward one extreme or if he is disposed to receive one of them or if he has already learned one of them and becomes accustomed to it, he shall make himself return to the good way and follow the way of good men, which is the right way.

The right way is the mean in every single one of a man's character traits. It is the character trait that is equally distant from the two extremes, not close to one or the other. Therefore, the wise men of old commanded that a man continuously appraise his character traits and evaluate them and direct them in the middle way so that he becomes perfect [see Talmud Moed Katan 5a; Sotah 5b].

How so? A man shall not be irascible and easily angered, nor like a corpse which feels nothing, but in between; he shall only become angry about a large matter that deserves anger so that something like it not be done again

We are commanded to walk in these middle ways, which are the good and right ways Since these terms applied to the Creator refer to the middle way that we are obliged to follow, this way is called the way of the L-rd

Rambam both there and in "Eight Chapters" (1975) brings down many Talmudical and Biblical sources for his system of normality, which is obviously optimum adjusted behavior, and which constitutes practically - if not theoretically - the goal of most counseling.

Self Management

Based upon the belief that clients can often become their own counselors, Thoresen and Mahoney (1974) provided a comprehensive description of the process of self management. The primary, unique component of this process is self-observation, which serves several functions: a) It provides the client with descriptive data which will make the client more aware of interacting situational variables associated with specific behaviors; b) The process of observing and recording behavioral data may itself be a treatment strategy to the extent that it affects behavior; and, c) The data gathered by this process can be utilized in the counseling process. Often clients must be trained in relevant observation and recording skills.

Musar includes all these elements in its theoretical framework. Basing himself on Talmudic dictums (Eruvin 13b; Baba Bathra 78b) Rabbi M. H. Luzzatto (1964, p.16) writes:

"One who wishes to manage himself, requires two perspectives:

- (a) That he should examine what is the true good he should choose (goal-setting) and what is truly negative that he should avoid;
- (b) He must examine his behavior and assess whether it falls into the positive or negative categories. This process must occur both at the time of action, and after the action. At the time of

action, he should not perform an action before assessing it in terms of the former perspective. After the action, he should recall his general behavior and assess it too in this manner in order to observe what is negative behavior to reject, and what is positive behavior to continue and reinforce. If he finds negative behavior, he should logically examine and explore possible strategies to turn away from that negative action And I believe it necessary for the individual to examine and weigh his ways daily ... and he should arrange specific times for this, and not approach it in a haphazard manner, but with great regularity, as it yields rich returns."

To facilitate this process, Rabbi Israel Lipkin Salanter, the "father of modern Musar" republished the book Heshbon Ha'Nefesh ("Examination of the Soul") by Levin (1936) which contains many practical suggestion for self-evaluation plus a check-list of traits for this purpose (to be filled in daily). Rabbi Salanter also directed his students to keep diaries in which to enter daily records of achievements and failures for purposes of self-analysis and self-management (Ury, 1970). Rabbi Luzzatto (1964) also touches on the necessity of seeking competent, objective counseling in certain problematic areas.

The Therapeutic Encounter (see also pt. III)

Although we are attempting to analyze the Musar process from a behavioral perspective, some attention must be paid to the therapeutic encounter, rooted in Rogerian theory, and its presence in Jewish sources. We should not be surprised to find that Robert' (1957) theory of conditons necessary for effective therapy are the core of what Judaism regards as true friendship. Indeed, Rogers himself (1974) recognizes the basic human need for deep interpersonal relationships. Grummon (1979) lists the three basic Rogerian conditions:

1. The therapist is "congruent" or "genuine" in the relationship.
2. The therapist experiences "unconditional positive regard" or "warm acceptance" for the client.
3. The therapist exhibits "accurate, empathetic understanding" of the client's "internal frame of reference."

We find the Talmudic sages, in expounding the commandment "and love your friend as yourself" (Lev. [Vayikra] 9:18) in Avoth [Chapters of the Fathers] 6:6 practically paraphrased Rogers with their definition of true friendship: "[A friend] shares in the burden of his friend [- empathetic understanding]; and tends to judge him favorably [- unconditional positive regard - note the word "tends" -

Grummon also notes the practical impossibility and inadvisability of totally unconditional regard]; and he brings him to truth and peace and tranquility [- congruence - direct personal encounter of feelings and values]."

These basic conditions were elucidated by Rabbi Salanter's foremost disciple, Rabbi Simcha Zizel Ziv of Kelm (1957) who stresses above else the necessity to achieve maximum empathy, by the counselor's organismic experience of what it would be like to live the experiences of the client - Grummon's language serves as an exact translation of Rabbi Ziv's - and he bring numerous Biblical and Talmudical proofs to one's requirement to feel a friend's emotional state to its full extent.

As regards "unconditional positive regard" Rabbi Eliezer of Avoth 2:10 stated explicitly "Let the honor (respect) of your friend be as dear to you as your own." Rambam also codifies (Laws of De'ot, 1975; 6:3) that, as to another human, one must "speak in praise of him and to have concern for his possessions, just as he has concern for his own possessions and wants to be honored himself." Congruence is best demonstrated by the prerequisites of genuineness included in the laws of the commandment of "hokheakh tokhiakh," which we will discuss at length in pt. III, that provide for true, direct personal exchange of

feelings and values. However, it must be admitted that Musar requires behavior modification and counselor intervention after basic relationships are established as stipulated in the tenets of "hokheakh tokhiakh" (see Rachlis, 1974).

We may conclude this brief survey of the Jewish definition of friendship - a relationship which the Torah commands each person to actualize with all his fellow men - by theorizing that Rabbi Joshua b. Perakhya's statement in Avoth 1:6, "purchase for yourself a friend" may well be the first historical reference to professional counselors!

Technique and Methodology

Let us consider the conditioning therapies. These methods stem from the conception that neuroses are persistent unadaptive habits that have been conditioned (that is learned). If this conception is correct, the fundamental overcoming of a neurosis can consist of nothing but deconditioning or undoing the relevant habit patterns. (Wolpe, Salter, and Reyna, 1964, p.9)

Since Musar views most problems from the same perspective, i.e. regarding them as conditioned behavior, it stands to reason that the method of treatment should also consist of conditioning techniques.

This is indeed the case. Rambam (1975) in both De'ot and Eight Chapters provides a detailed behavioral methodology:

Should his soul become sick, he must follow the same course in treating it as in the medical treatment for bodies. For when the body gets out of equilibrium, we look to which side it inclines in becoming unbalanced, and then oppose it with its contrary until it returns to equilibrium. When it is in equilibrium, we remove that counterbalance and revert to that which keeps the body in equilibrium. We act in a similar manner with regard to moral habits. We may, for example, see a man whose soul has reached a condition in which he is miserly towards himself. This is one of the vices of the soul, and the action he performs is one of the bad actions Thus, if we wanted to give medical treatment to this side of a person, we would not order him to be liberal. That would be like using a balanced course for treating someone whose fever is excessive; this would not cure him of his sickness. Indeed, this man (with a miserly soul) needs to be made extravagant time after time. He must repeatedly act in an extravagant manner until the condition that makes him miserly is removed from his soul, and he just about acquires an extravagant disposition or comes closer to it. Then we would make him stop the extravagant actions and order him to perform liberal actions continually. He must always adhere to this course and not go toward the excess of deficiency.

Similarly, if we were to see him acting in an extravagant manner, we would order him to perform miserly actions repeatedly.

But we would not make him repeat miserly actions as many times as we made him repeat extravagant actions. This subtlety is the rule of therapy and is its secret. For a man can more easily turn from extravagance to liberality than from miserliness to liberality. Likewise, it is easier to turn from being insensible to pleasure to being moderate than from being lustful to being moderate. Therefore, we make the lustful man repeat actions which lack pleasure more than we make the insensible man repeat lustful actions, we require the coward to practice rashness more than we require the rash man to practice cowardice; and we train the stingy man in prodigality more than we train the prodigal man in stinginess. This is the rule for the medical treatment of moral habits ... (Eight Chapter, chap.4).

Other examples of treatment activities are given by Rambam, e.g.:

"... if his heart is haughty, he shall train himself to endure much degradation. He shall sit lower than anyone else and wear worn-out, shabby garments, which make the wearer despised, and do similar things, until his haughty heart is uprooted. Then he shall return to the middle way" (Laws of De'ot 2:2)

Rambam also clarifies that due to the relative ease of, for example, modifying insensibility to moderation as opposed to modifying lust to moderation, a worthwhile precaution is a slight inclination from moderation towards insensibility, thus safeguarding the individual from the more maladaptive aspects of the lustful trait on the behavioral continuum. He points out that this rule should be kept with particular caution in the traits of haughtiness and anger, which are relatively more serious than other character traits in their potential as causes of social and religious maladjustment.

Rambam has thus presented us with a basic synopsis of the principles of operant conditioning. But what is the opinion of Musar regarding reinforcement schedules? We find their opinion expressed by the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Elijah (1974, p.1):

"... but he [the client] should not jump at once from one end of the continuum to the other, but more gradually from level to level" Rabbi Ziv also stressed that progression must be "deliberate, consistent, constant and systematic" (Ury, 1970, p.49) (For a more detailed description of the gradual process, see Rabbi Elijah, Proverbs 4:26 and Rabbi Sher, 1936). Apparently, one must begin with a continuous schedule, systematically introducing activities and events serving as

reinforcers of the goal behavior higher up in the hierarchy. However, at the "return to the mean" leveling-off stage, in order to retreat to the middle of the continuum, it would be necessary to switch to an intermittent schedule, which would, by varying activities and events, have the dual effect of lessening the intensity of the goal behavior, while at the same time rendering it difficult to extinguish (see LaFleur, 1979).

Strategies and Methods

While it is clear from Rambam's synopsis, that the types of reinforcers to be employed must be decided on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of client and counselor (and here Musar stands to benefit from modern casework developments), nevertheless, we may find behavioristically therapeutic strategies and concepts in Jewish sources, some of which parallel accepted behavioral strategies, and some of which are uniquely Jewish. The scope of such strategies and concepts is too vast to be examined in detail here, but we will attempt to present some examples:

The Commandments

The fourteenth-century Sefer Ha'Hinnuch (1978) writes: "And now, my son, if you have understanding, hear this ... I will teach you of the Torah and the commandments ... Know that a man is influenced in

accordance with his actions. His heart and all his thoughts are always (drawn) after his deeds in which he is occupied, whether (they are) good or bad. Thus even a person who is thoroughly wicked in his heart ... if he will arouse his spirit and set his striving and his occupation, with constancy, in the Torah and the commandments, even if not for the sake of Heaven, he will veer at once toward the good, and with the power of his good deeds he will deaden his evil impulse. For after one's acts is the heart drawn." (Mitzva 16)

Further yet goes Ramban (Nachmanides) (1960) in Deut. 22:6, basing himself on early Midrashim, in explaining that G-d gave the commandments only to purify and morally uplift us. One example he gives is that of "Shekhita" - ritual slaughter. Ramban explains that it makes no difference to G-d whether an animal is killed or slaughtered, but in order to instill in us the trait of kindness, G-d directed us to slaughter animals in the most humane manner possible. Similar explanations relating various commandments to various traits may be made (see Sefer Ha'Hinnuch, *ibid*). Gold (1962) also points out the constant fulfillment provided by the Jewish calendar with its rich schedule of events and holidays playing on different themes. Indeed, the Sefer Ha'Hinnuch see the holidays as being given for the express purpose of providing the Jew with regular happiness-generating occasions - necessary for mental health - thus, the commandments to rejoice on the holidays.

Covenant control

This strategy consists of encouraging the client to focus upon particular cognitive behaviors (coverants), which can be either positive or negative, providing thus either positive or negative reinforcement for the behavior being treated (Homme, 1965). Central to the use of this technique is evidence that internal, covert events such as perceptions, thoughts and beliefs influence overt behavior of clients (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, the clients are engaged in imagining themselves engaging in the behavior they wish to change or develop, under the guidance of counselor instruction.

Rabbi Salanter (1953) details this method with regard to maladaptive behavior. "The most important and chief method in application of the curative powers of the Torah for the maladies of the inclinations is to study with vigor and with profound meditation all the laws pertaining to that very transgression, the Halakhah (Jewish Law) about it with all its ramifications ... the main point in guarding ourselves from committing a sin is to make it habitual and natural not to commit it And this much is well known, that one's nature can be changed only through incessant study and behavior modification. And therefore, the chief basis of this theory is: one should prepare himself to be on his guard against transgressing and ready to observe the precepts through the perusal of that Halakhah

which is related to that transgression or that precept. Particularly, the study must be profound for only by this method will the soul acquire a natural aversion to that sin." (Epistle of Musar). Here the profound imagery of intense study of optimum behavior serves as therapy.

Covert sensitization

This term, coined by Cautela (1966) describes aversive - therapy technique used to suppress feelings or behaviors that are wanted by the client.

From ancient times, great Jewish thinkers had compiled volumes on the topics of ethical and moral behavior, especially noteworthy among which are Rabbi Bahya Ibn Pakuda's (1050 - 1120) and Rabbi M. H. Luzzatto's (1707 - 1747) texts. The process of utilization of these texts was formulated by Rabbi Salanter. Rabbi Salanter maintained that ordinary study of a Musar text reaches only the intellectual, conscious realm of one's self, and does not effect one's subconscious realm - or, in behavioral terms, modify one's learned negative behavior. In order to modify internalized behavior, which invariably includes elements of emotion and passion, it is necessary to utilize strategies employing ecstasy and emotional experience. Reason and intellect alone are insufficient.

Therefore, Rabbi Salanter formulated the format of "Musal BeHitpa'alut" - "in ecstasy," consisting of frequent emotion-charged periods of Musar study to keep one alert and aware of his weaknesses. Only through the vehicle of emotion will the ideas of ethics and morals - the intellectual part of Musar - effectively modify behavior through the emotional arousal, stimulation and reinforcement - either negatively or positively, depending on the material - of the individual. (Rabbi Salanter, 1979; Ury, 1970. cf. Berakhot 5a for the Talmudic basis for this system).

Dereflection

A technique introduced by Frankl (1979) especially for use in family therapy, involves removing the focus from one's personal gratification, and placing it on one's partner which, as a result of the improved relationship, will lead to personal satisfaction too. Rabbi Dessler, a famed Musar authority, made this precept the foundation of marriage counseling.

... love arises between husband and wife because they complement each other. This fact flows from the nature with which the Almighty has endowed them. Alone, every person is defective and unable to carry out his proper function ... together, they complement each other, and by giving each other this completion they come to love each

other, on the principle we have already established: the one who gives, loves. Of course, their love in its turn, will make them want to go on giving, and the pleasure and happiness which each bestows on the other will maintain and intensify their love. (1964, p.38; 1978)

Rabbi Dessler attributes problems and conflicts on switching focus to personal gratification, and goes on to provide some basic marriage counseling principles. (See also Wiler, 1979a for additional Jewish marriage counseling principles).

Instant Extinction

A final, but most important principle of Jewish behavior modification is based on its underlying premise that all humans have free choice and total responsibility and the concept of "one who acquires his world to come in a single moment." (Avodah Zarah 17a) - the ability to change an entire moral and value system, from bad to good (and vice versa), with one choice (see pt. I). Although the individual may have to withstand many subsequent tests of that choice and resolution, nevertheless Judaism recognizes the very resolution as an expression of true behavior change, no matter how dramatic the change in question. In fact, the theories of an entire school of Musar thought - that of Novardock - were based on this principle (Rabbi Horowitz, 1976; Ury, 1970). Although it is rare - but possible

- to realize a total change of personality in a single resolution (see Rabbi Dessler, 1964) it may be most effectively applied to a single trait - similarly to "quitting cold turkey" in smoking, and the technique of abrupt stoppage employed by Alcoholics Anonymous (Amsel, 1969). Whether in fact an individual under treatment can use this technique must be examined on a case-by-case basis by both client and counselor.

We have touched here on but a small number of examples of therapeutic strategies and institutions involved in the Musar process, and one is well advised to survey the literature which examines other strategies such as group guidance; Musar lectures; practical wisdom, Musar Conventicles, etc. (Ury, 1970; Rachlis, 1974; Gottlieb, 1975).

Practitioners

It is obvious that already in ancient times the Rabbis functioned as counselors - their theories brought down in the Talmudic and Midrashic literature point to their amazing expertise in this field.

Rambam (1975) writes clearly of the role of counselors: What is the remedy for those whose souls are sick? Let them go to the wise men - who are physicians of the soul - and they will cure their disease by means of the character traits that they shall teach them,

until they make them return to the middle way. Solomon said about those who recognize their bad characteristic traits and do not go to wise men to be cured: "Fools despise admonition (Proverbs 1:7)." (Laws of De'ot 2:1).

Such wise men obviously were knowledgeable in basic psychology - the tenets of which are clearly to be found in Torah (see Spero, 1980) - and could thus deal with underlying factors where behavioral techniques might not suffice - a good possibility, in view of the complexity of human nature we perceived in pt. I. However, they were most accomplished in the area of empathy, which Rabbi Ziv (1957, see above) has identified as the basis of understanding all human conditions, and the prime qualification for leadership in Judaism at all times in history.

However, there is a relatively new type of counselor, which has evolved since Rabbi Salanter's day, at his initiative, which merits our special examination - he is the "Mashgiakh" (lit.: supervisor), the dean of students in the Musar-oriented yeshiva (rabbinical school) who is responsible for the moral and ethical growth of students. To achieve this goal, he must successfully present an approach which synthesizes intellectual study with spiritual gratification. He is frequently looked to for guidance in areas such as marriage, career

choice, and academic advancement; and questions of faith and personal problems are also his department (Helmreich, 1982).

In counseling students, and providing individual guidance, the Mashgiakh refrains from infringing upon a "student's" privacy and dignity, leading him rather to self-understanding and spiritual self-sufficiency. To attain these ends, the Mashgiakh conducts informal discussions with students, encouraging them to explore problems freely, prodding him to remember his ultimate responsibility and goals, and making some pungent comments and suggestions relative to the student's behavior. Other strategies employed by the Mashgiakh include group guidance/counseling ("Va'adim") and Musar lectures (the "schmuess") which deals with human problems, conflicts, values etc. Various Mashgikhim deliver "schmuessen" in different styles and modes, but they invariably have a profound impact on listeners (Ury, 1970).