

Psychotherapy and Judaism Today The Interface¹

As Rabbi/Psychologist, Psychologist/Rabbi having both feet planted firmly in both camps, I have been intrigued about the interface between Judaism and Psychotherapy and the gifts each might bring the other, in creating a mutually beneficial relationship.

The line drawn between psychotherapy (psychology's healing sibling) and religion which in the past, had full responsibility for human mental health, is of recent vintage, as such things go.

Before psychotherapy was split off, it was the religious officiant who was responsible for healing one's emotional life, which was undifferentiated from one's spiritual life. Mental illness as a separate entity did not exist.. The term itself is a neologism of the last 100 years. When we look back from the perspective of psychology/psychotherapy upon past behavioral aberrations, we as it were project mental illness backwards. People had physical illness but there was no such thing as mental illness. From a religious point of view, what we call mental illness, was often spirit possession, which the religious officiant could exorcise, resolve or alleviate by religious, ritual means and restore the sufferer to spiritual wholeness.

Psychotherapy has become a separate field, named, differentiated and with a framework of its own. It is only the religious fundamentalist who maintains that religion can do all the mental and emotional healing humankind requires. During this last century Freud, his disciples and those who broke from discipleship, crowned psychology and its operational tool psychotherapy "queen of the ball". Religion became the superannuated relative who though related, was an embarrassment to the bright sparkling and attractive young queen who held such promise for human well being. Religion initially, rejected its renegade daughter. Psychotherapy was the province of the godless. Only those lacking religious faith and practice were involved in psychotherapy. And if it didn't start out that way, atheism for sure was how it would end. Despite the objections of the traditional religions, their renegade daughter made immense progress. The traditional religions were like immigrant parents in a new land, watching as their children

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assimilated, being "with it" by taking on the culture, the "new" language and rejecting parental mores, their arcane accents, and "weird" behavior. Some traditional religions fought the new ways, by insisting on the old. Some saw some worth in the new ways and struggled to adapt while not losing their integrity.

Less traditional religion often deferred to the daughter and with the zeitgeist assumed that somehow the daughter knew more about the world of human understanding than religion did. This was implicit in the training of an entire generation of theological students. Pastoral psychology meant a bit of Freud, a smidgen of psychopathology and how to be a good referral source. Rabbis were to deal with "religious" issues. Mental illness was the province of the mental health professional. The implicit message in Seminary training of that generation was; 'you guys are all right for what you're doing but don't get in over your head. You'll do great damage.' It was a demeaning message about the inadequacy of religion, Judaism and us as rabbis in doing the very work we were being trained for. We were not taught about using the psychotherapeutic potencies of our role as symbolic exemplars, as spiritual leaders. We were not taught how as rabbis we could communicate wellness, heal and create wholeness in the people we would be working with. The rabbi was left in care of the religion for those, often of course "unanalyzed", who might therefore need it, but it was a religion largely shorn of its spiritual and emotional healing potential.

Perhaps psychotherapy, religions child, needed to go through its own adolescent rebellion, and break away so as to establish its own identity. Perhaps only after standing on its own two feet could a rapprochement take place after years of estrangement. There was more than some surprise when the grandchildren raised on psychotherapy looked back to their grandparents religion for emotional sustenance, - the very same religion their parents had rejected.

Psychotherapy discovered that the ignored grandparents still had a great deal of wisdom to offer, and a mutually respectful adult relationship was possible. To use a metaphor from our own religious myth; though Eve was taken from Adams' rib, once she was differentiated she became a totally separate individual. She shared similarities with Adam; a similar body structure, and nervous system; though similar she was nonetheless, separate and different in her hormonal balance, different in her body structure and different in how she would perceive the world. Yet it was the marriage of these two that allowed the world to grow and flourish. Neither was sufficient. Both were needed. It was in the encounter of difference,

with distinct perceptions, divergent genetic structures, and variant personalities that the world was able to progress.

The time is at hand for today's heterodox religions, grown in their ability to tolerate otherness, and today's mature psychotherapy to enter into relationship, perhaps even marriage, - valuing each others individuality and uniqueness, maximizing their contact while respecting each others boundaries.

PSYCHOTHERAPY TODAY

Dominant in psychotherapy today is the recognition that each human being constructs his or her own reality. People experience the same "objective" stimulus "out there" yet each responds differently to that stimulus. Each selects from an overwhelming amount of experience, in known and unknown ways, the parts of "reality" to respond to. Each creates out of the world of experience, a separate and distinct reality, and a map of reality, with which one can navigate in the world. Reality refers today to two different orders of reality; *first order reality and second order reality*. The difference is crucial. "First order reality" concerns itself with the properties of things, with agreed definitions, with measurements that we make that establish what something "is". We have a consensus in the community that something is "real". We determine that a red dress is not a blue coat because when we apply our spectroscope we know a certain space is called red, another space blue, and we have agreed that if a garment is cut in one way it is considered to be a dress and if cut in another, it is sold as a coat. We agree, that a whale, though it swims in the water like a fish, is nevertheless a mammal. We define what we call a mammal by the way it reproduces, not that it spends its life in the water. We know that gold is a certain color and demonstrates certain properties when subject to analysis. We have created categories, measurements, tests, that define that things are thus and so, and a community has agreed that that is how things are. These things are " *first order reality*." Therefore, one who is in touch with reality knows that a red light is red, a whale is a mammal and gold is yellow.

"*Second order reality*" concerns itself not with the properties of things, not with what things are, (which in itself is a matter of community consensus) but rather with what they *mean*. Both psychotherapy and religion are concerned with the meaning of things, i.e. with second order reality. We may be absolutely sure that a light is red, but what a red light means is a quite different thing. If the light being red means STOP, we teach that meaning to our children, to save them from harm.

A red light may also signify the presence of a house of ill repute. Red may be mandated by the authorities for constructing an EXIT sign. Yet clear headed, "reality" oriented individuals may with integrity argue at a zoning meeting that the exit signs should be green because green means moving forward and red means stop. Whether a whale is a fish or a mammal is objectively "verifiable". Whether whales should be protected or what their meaning is in the nature of the world is a question of "second order reality". Paul Watzlawick² gives yet another example of someone who dives into the water to save the life of a drowning man. We can certainly establish, in "first order reality", what has taken place, - a body is flailing about in the water, - another body has moved towards the first and one has removed the other from the water. But the question intriguing us in both psychotherapy and religion is; -why did one do it? What meaning does the action have for each of them? What things mean and how we act upon our perception of what they mean, is a "second order reality question". As Jews, we specifically think of righteous gentiles who during the second world war hid and saved Jews from extermination. We wonder; What made them do it? What was their motivation? What was their intention? What meaning did their act have? These questions of meaning are second order reality.

The "second order" meaning we attribute to aspects of "first order reality" helps determine what we are able to do and not do in our world. Knowing that the red of a traffic signal means stop and the green means go, enables us to build larger cities where traffic can move more easily. We have a tinge of guilt and even fear being ticketed and fined for passing a red light in the middle of the night with no traffic around. Yet these same set of useful meanings have limitations. Anyone who has been involved in a New York City gridlock situation knows that in intensely heavy traffic situations, one needs additional sources of meaning beyond red and green lights. In New York City those sources of meaning, wear brown uniforms. The color denotes them as traffic controllers, not police. They supersede the red and green lights and have the authority to give signals which direct traffic in a new way, ignoring the previous meanings.

The sum total of our first and second order reality-what things are and what things mean comprises the internal map we use to get around in the world. Each of us consciously and unconsciously operates in the world out of our own unique

² Paul Watzlawick ed. *The Invented Reality, How Do We Know What We Believe We Know?* (Contributions to Constructivism) (New York: W.W.Norton, 1984).

internal map. That is a map of how things are, and more importantly, what they mean. All maps are not equal. *Some maps work more adequately.* There are consequences to having one map rather than another. What happens when a map doesn't work? What happens when no matter what solutions a person attempts, things only get worse? Maps that don't work bring people to psychotherapy. Psychotherapy's purpose today, might well be described as realigning peoples internal maps, so that they might function more effectively.

In pursuit of that goal of realigning maps, psychotherapy today increasingly recognizes that the myths and language we use are powerful forces in governing our lives. Whether those myths and maps are that we are an abused child, or the adult child of an alcoholic, or someone who was dominated by their father, or whose mother was competitive with them --- those myths and maps govern and determine our lives. Psychotherapy further recognizes that those myths and maps are selected constructs out of the vast amounts of data that exists. We have learned in psychotherapy that the stories clients tell us are always their particular, unique perception and understanding of what may or may not have happened. They are not, nor can they really be for the purposes of psychotherapy, descriptions of what "actually" did happen. They are not "first order reality" (if there is such a thing). They are rather descriptions of the meaning sequences that our clients have attributed to whatever did happen, edited for meaning and shaped by its perceived significance to them. Clients tell us how they live their lives, think about themselves and others, and act according to those set of meanings. We used to talk about patients stories as though they were fact. So of course, we blamed mothers for ruining their children because our patients complained that mother did thus and so. We ignored the frames that we therapists put around our patients recounting, influenced by Freud's teachings that mothers were the cause of children's trouble. Therefore we asked questions and led the discussion in that direction. Finding what we knew was there anyway, we said, "ah ha, so it was your mother who ruined you." We compiled the evidence and wrote articles and books about mother's responsibility and helped create a generation in which mothers ended up blaming themselves for how their children turned out. We used to believe that the stories our own presuppositions elicited were "reality". Hopefully we no longer do.

To reiterate; it is the meaning our clients attribute to their stories, the myth that the stories support, the map of reality the stories buttress, that is crucial in bringing a

client into our office and crucial in considering how psychotherapy may help that client.

A story out of my own psychotherapy. Though my father and mother were never separated, I was raised almost totally by my father. My mother was very much in the background. [That, in itself, is an interesting statement of framework.] Experiences that most people associate with their mother, are for me, associated with my father. My father read bedtime stories to me, sang lullabies, cooked breakfast, took me to school, bought my clothes, was the more physically affectionate parent, etc. During the second year of my psychotherapy, (back then it was really serious business, three times a week, and I had friends who were on the couch five times a week, so mine was a bargain), after having talked for a year and a half about my relationship with my father, my therapist one day said; “What about your mother”? I offered that she seemed to be a rather nice lady with whom I had a pleasantly enjoyable relationship. He quickly began to educate me in his particular up to date view of the world, influenced I now know by Freud & Co, which embraced the idea that children should be raised by their mothers. We talked about how my father had “kidnapped” me from my mother, and how she surrendered me to him with barely a whimper. I vividly remember (or at least I think I do) him saying that “a lioness fights for her cubs”-letting me draw the inevitable conclusion that my mother was less woman and less mother than she should have been. And so, I “inevitably” developed, or “got in touch with”, as my therapist would have put it, a great deal of anger and resentment towards my mother. He had changed my map, the very meaning of my story, and that had “inevitable” consequences. I am aware that he could have framed the “facts” differently, thus changing my story's meaning. He could have wisely offered that my mother recognized that she was more limited than my father in her ability to raise me and therefore she graciously and courageously made the greatest sacrifice a woman can make. She backed away and allowed my father to do the job he could do better than she. That framing of the “reality” would have given a different meaning to the story and might well have produced feelings of gratitude, warmth, kindness, and appreciation for a mothers courage and caring.

Psychotherapy today is intently focused on rearranging the meanings in people's lives, in their maps of second order reality. If a person becomes depressed, seemingly as the result of losing a job, the depression is linked to the meaning being "laid off" has in that person's map. A person going through divorce, responding with rage, depression, desperation, worthlessness, all elements of the

divorce roller coaster, is acting out the meaning of the partner in their life. They may perceive the partner as the only partner they will ever have. They may be unaware of other options. They may have learned that a marriage ending marks them a failure. And what a terrible thing it is to fail at something so important. Alternately they could perceive the end of the marriage as a blessing; an end to pain and an entrance to another phase of life. Their response will be determined by the meaning map that guides them, the “second order reality” they have constructed.

Psychotherapy deals ever more explicitly with the issue of meaning. Meaning may be **the core** issue in psychotherapy. As psychotherapy has focused more clearly and overtly on meaning, it has inexorably found itself facing issues long dealt with by religion. Spirituality, human worth, the source of our resources, the quest for meaning, symbolic meanings, ritual, and so on, have come to the fore in psychotherapy. Religion, psychotherapy’s superannuated antecedent has been struggling with these for countless eons. Psychotherapy, in its attempts to alter the inner map, has been experimenting with meditation, trance, guided imagery, turning inwards to ones own resources, adopting a style close to prayer, perhaps a first or second cousin once removed. Yet cousins do tend to replicate ancestral behavior. Books are now appearing on psychotherapy shelves on symbols in psychotherapy; workshops are being offered on using rituals in therapy.

Overt spiritual statements, echoes and reiterations of historical religion, are commonplace talk at coffee breaks at therapist conventions. Ten or fifteen years ago these authors would not have ventured to talk about such things, much less publish them. Such talk would have embarrassed a psychotherapist just a few years ago. Psychotherapy and religion have converged, as psychotherapy has become more and more concerned with “second order reality.” Religion, certainly heterodox religion, has long been concerned with “second order reality”, being less concerned with what things are than with what they mean. The danger of fundamentalist orthodoxies is in their taking religion to be a description of first order reality. In this area an orthodoxy gets stuck, when it affirms not only what things mean but what they *really* are, and **therefore** insist that their way is the only true way.

So psychotherapy has turned back to take a closer look at religion, realizing that religion has always been concerned with the search for meaning in life, and it is of

such meanings that psychotherapy is made, and with such meanings that it does its work.

Since each of us comes to the world with distinct sensibilities, perceptions, backgrounds and training, each person creates their own map of reality. There may be similarities in the pattern of meanings, yet, no two maps are identical. Psychotherapy has come full circle to understand the Mishna;

“In the beginning, only one person was created as a demonstration of God’s greatness. A human being mints many coins from a single mold and all are duplicates, interchangeable with one another. Yet, God creates everyone in the mold of the first person and there are no duplicates; each human being is unique. Therefore, each and every one of us is obliged to affirm;

For my sake, the world was created.” (Sanhedrin 4:5)

It is in our uniqueness that each of us fashions out of creation, our map, our myth, our symphony of meanings upon which we act out our lives. These are ultimately our own singular constructs, no matter what may or may not be out there. Paul Watzlawick³ points out that this inevitably leads to three outcomes crucial in the work of today’s psychotherapy.

“First of all....”if we come to see the world as our own invention, we must apply this insight to the world of our fellow creatures as well. **If** we know that we do not or cannot know the truth, that our view of the world is only more or less *fitting*, we will find it difficult to ascribe madness or badness to the world views of others and to remain caught in the primitive Manichean conviction that ‘whoever is not for me is against me.’ The realization that we know nothing as long as we do not know that we shall never know the ultimate truth is the precondition for ones respect for the realities others have invented for themselves.” The **first** outcome therefore is **tolerance and an appreciation of difference**.

“Secondly, such a person” (who knows that he has constructed his own world) “would feel *responsible* in a very deep ethical sense, *responsible* not only for conscious decisions and actions, not only for dreams, but in a much wider sense--even for the reality created by self fulfilling prophecies.” The *second outcome* therefore is a sense of **responsibility**, of ownership, of ones thinking and action.

³ Watzlawick. *The Invented Reality* p.326

Thirdly, “This total responsibility would mean total *freedom*. Whoever is conscious of being the architect of his or her own reality would be equally aware of the ever present possibility of constructing it differently. In the truest sense of the word this person would be a heretic; that is one who knows that choice is possible.” This **third** outcome points toward creativity.

The three precious gifts modern psychotherapy brings to its rendezvous with religion today are: Tolerance **and forbearance** for the world others have created; **Responsibility** for one’s own world as one’s own creation; and Freedom to move around in it, to recreate it and thereby maximize choice.

Heterodox Judaism/Religion

If tolerance, responsibility, and freedom are the gifts psychotherapy brings to this rapprochement, what gifts does Judaism bring?

I refer to heterodox, non-fundamentalist Judaism. The fundamentalist and orthodox positions assume that the truth is already known; that the truth they hold is essentially first order reality and thus *reality is as “they” see it*. Reality has been discovered, largely through revelation, and humanity must be brought to witness and live by “the revealed truth”. If we judge a position by its outcome, orthodoxies of all kinds have throughout history led to a blasphemous aggregate of death and destruction. They have divided people into those who knew the truth and those unfortunates who did not and must therefore be brought to the truth or removed from the scene. Orthodoxies, whether religious or secular have led to *intolerance* of monumental proportions. Orthodoxies have led to people *not taking responsibility* for their actions, claiming that they were acting in the name of the god, the politics or the belief in which they trusted unequivocally. Fundamentalists do not permit themselves the freedom to *create* anew, to be heretics in the best sense of the word. It is also forbidden for others to explore new paths, lest they stray from the “true” way. What is true and real is already known and applicable to all! Orthodoxy is as sure as each football team is, as each army going to war is, as each demagogue is, that “God is on our side”. The other side, benighted, if not heretic in the worst sense of the word, will be defeated, if not sooner, than later. The outcomes of this have been to put it mildly, less than benign. My interest

therefore is in what non-fundamentalist, heterodox religion brings to the relationship with psychotherapy.

A common objection to non-fundamentalist, heterodox religion is that it is wishy-washy, not really standing for much of anything. Liberal religion, it is said, doesn't give its adherents something solid to hold onto amidst the vicissitudes of the world. Non-orthodox religions are too "subjective", as if there is such a thing as objectivity. How is one to know how to behave, what to believe, what to do, if everyone has their own opinions, and all seem equally valid; if each of us inhabits a different and unique world?

Religion has too often been misunderstood to be a search for certainty. Certainty for how things really are, precludes having everyone thinking and behaving differently. If Reform Judaism asserts that each individual is religiously autonomous and Conservative Judaism offers that one can follow either the majority or minority position of its law committee, how does one know what's *really* right? We humans crave certainty. We abhor chaos. We want to see things as others see them. We feel reassured when others experience "reality" as we do. We prefer being "in sync", for it confirms that we are OK and avoids the sense of confusion we mostly detest. When confronted with cognitive dissonance, we wonder; how come "they" don't experience things the way "we" do? "Any right thinking person would see it that way". And as the cognitive dissonance literature demonstrates, we often wonder how come we "don't see it "their" way. Someone must be *right*! We want to agree, but how can both we and they be right. A monotheistic world view complicates our accepting multiple "truths" by implicitly postulating is that there is only *one* ultimate truth. So we hold to our own (often inculcated) perceptions and reject others "realities", assuming that they are wrong, or at best, woefully inaccurate. Sometimes, when our maps do not seem to be working, when nothing we try succeeds, when our map fails to get us anyplace worth going, we adopt someone else's map in toto, making a leap into a new way of thinking, seeing, hearing and feeling. We *convert* and are reborn to a new reality, with an entirely new set of perceptions and meanings, and a new, this time *correct* understanding of how things *really* are. This is an outcome of our search for certainty and our struggle to avoid the confusion of multiple "realities".

Religion need not be the pursuit of certainty. It can and has been, the search for meaning (fullness). --*not* ultimate meaning, for that is the search for certainty in disguise.

If non-orthodox religion cannot provide absolute certitude nor ultimate meaning, of what use is it anyhow? Non-orthodox religion can be vitally, even crucially useful in our search. From birth, our reality is significantly molded by the world around us. Our communities' beliefs, our parents' constructions of reality, themselves influenced by their forbearers, the very language we inherit, helps choose what in the environment is attended to, what is ignored, what is important, what is trivial, what the meaning and meaningfulness of "reality" is. All of these help construct our idiosyncratic maps of reality, determining how we will get around in the world. One does not nor can one make the map by themselves. It would take inordinately long, and be terribly limited in its usefulness. We are of necessity, heirs of those mapmakers who went before. As Watzlawick⁴ has put it, "No living being can afford to "reinvent" the world every day.... most of the time, there is no good reason to abandon a proven solution."

As Jews, we are members of a community that has historically specialized in the search for meaning. We might well describe ourselves as the newest members of the ancient and most honorable guild; "Meaning Map Makers." To be sure, ours is not the only guild, nor is our way of working the only way, our plan is not the only useful one, ours is not the only map, but our guild nonetheless has an illustrious history.

Our maps have been in use for countless generations. They have helped our people, and others who chose to make use of parts of our maps, to find their way in the world in meaningful and useful ways.

Parts of our map show highways that now lead to dead ends. Others lead to quicksand pits in which countless people have been swallowed up. Some show roads that lead to caves containing wondrous treasures, and somehow a new super highway leading from now to nowhere has blocked access to those caves. Other winding roads, difficult to ascend, lead to mountain tops from which the vista is magnificent and awe inspiring. Some of our maps have useful landmarks that have been eroded with time, encrusted with debris and that may need to be cleared off or perhaps reconstructed in order to once again be useful. Yet, all in all, our maps have served well.

⁴ Watzlawick. *The Invented Reality*, p.165.

And we, today's guild members, are the inheritors not only of those maps, but even more valuable, of a long tradition of meaning map makers. Their maps are part of that tradition. We cannot be members of the guild without knowing what they did and what they strove to accomplish with their maps. They were adept at finding meanings that work, meanings that fit, that help in getting around in the world. Their ability to find useful sources of meaning in a variety of places and situations, is legendary. They were able to adjust their maps to new circumstances, to respond to change in their environment with new, useful structures, which other people were unable to do. As apprentice members of the guild, we do well to study their process and assess their results.

Worshipping one's deity in a foreign land presented a severe problem not only to the local map our ancestors used, but also to the general map used throughout the ancient world. Though the idea that the God of Israel was creator and ruler of the whole world was struggling for acceptance, the maps of meaning generally in use accepted that a people's god and land were inextricably linked. A god ruled over a specific territory and its inhabitants. II Kings; 5 reflects this map. Naaman, Chief of Staff of the king of Aram, is cured of leprosy by Elisha. Impressed by the God Elisha represents, Naaman affirms that "there is no God in the whole world except in Israel!" Naaman, wanting to worship the God of Israel, faces a curious problem. How does he do that, if God's domain is the land of Israel? Using the available map, Naaman solves his problem, by packing a suitcase of holy land dirt, spreading it in its new foreign location and so worships the God of Israel on the soil of Israel- a patchwork solution at best. If a land and its inhabitants were conquered, the god of the land was thereby defeated. If the populace was exiled to a foreign land, they expected to worship the god of that locale, as the Samaritans did when they were exiled from their home to the land of Israel, in exchange for the exiled northern tribes. In 586 B.C.E. Judah and Jerusalem were conquered by the Babylonians, the God of the Jews "defeated", God's people exiled to the jurisdiction of a god to whom they were fully expected to pay allegiance. This would have brought a noble experiment to an ignominious end. We would at best have been a footnote in history.

Our good fortune was that the "Meaning Mapmaker Guild" was headed up at the time by one Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin.⁵ He made some needed adjustments to the map. He mapped out a new road, new points on the compass. The *God* of Israel had *not been* defeated. In

⁵ Biblical book of Jeremiah; Ch. 1

fact the defeat and exile, were all God's plan. God was punishing Israel for lack of covenantal fidelity and nonetheless God was going into exile with Israel. Israel's exile and suffering were evidence of God's *concern*. One day, they would return in triumph to reclaim the land. A new map had been created that fit what was happening. A map that enabled Jewish life to continue in conditions of exile and persecution for over two thousand years. The map worked at least until the emancipation⁶, when new maps pointed in other directions. Auschwitz raises profound questions and doubts about our maps utility. Our long used map no longer fits our reality. We have since the emancipation been working on a revised map to deal with those awesome events. Whether we will succeed is another question.

Jewish tradition tells⁷ of Moses himself, standing in the back of Rabbi Akiva's classroom. Moses did not understand a word of what was going on and was astonished when at the end of the lesson, Akiva offered that he was teaching the law according to Moses. The rabbis recognized that changes in the map had made it unrecognizable, even by he who was arguably, the greatest meaning mapmaker of all time.

Our maps *have* changed. The tradition, recognizing that change has happened is often unaware how it happened, and more often sloughs off responsibility for the change. Change is not easy. The old becomes stiff, rigid and stuck in place. However, the guilds recognition that the maps *have* changed, supports change and a modicum of tolerance. Change also implies the maps limited utility. And limited utility means that no one person has the final say. No one map covers all the possibilities- horizontally, throughout the world, and vertically, down the generations. The Mishnah in Sanhedrin, alludes to this sense of tolerance for varieties of meanings, when it offers a second reason for the creation of only one person, -- so that no one might say "my ancestor was greater, truer, more correct, than yours."⁸

For a relationship to work, commonality, difference and each partner's awareness of their own deficiencies are needed. We heterodox Jews have change and tolerance in our dowry. Yet we have been deficient in understanding that others experience and construct the world differently. We know from our own historical

⁶ Usually dated from the French Revolution in 1789.

⁷ Talmud Bavli: Menahot 29B.

⁸ Ibid. Sanhedrim 4.5

behavior towards others, and more painfully, from what has happened to us, how difficult it is for humankind to allow for change and tolerance. We know how hard it is to be tolerant because intolerance is deeply engrained in our history. It is difficult to be tolerant when one is part of a community that has a particular view that supports a particular map of the territory. So paradoxically a gift we bring to this match is the history of intolerance that we have inflicted on each other and have had inflicted on us. We know the price of intolerance. Among modern psychotherapy's strong points is its tolerance for the varieties and vagaries of human experience. Psychotherapy struggles to accept that someone else's meaning though different, can be as valid and "true" as ours. Psychologically we are prone to be intolerant; it is in our nature to believe that "they" ought to understand and experience the "world" the way we do. With psychotherapy's striving for open mindedness, and our religious underpinnings for tolerance, and never forgetting the price of intolerance, together we must zealously *guard tolerance* in every way.

Beyond being heirs to a long line of meaning mapmakers, with a proven record of creative map-making, and beyond our hypersensitivity to intolerance, we bring another priceless gift to this encounter. We bring a sense of *community* -- often missing in today's psychotherapy. We are B'nai B'rit⁹ -- a community, living in a covenantal relationship with a divine other. It is in and by community that peoples' maps of reality are shaped and formed. So much of how we think, what we perceive, what we ignore and what has meaning, the very maps we use are community constructs. Historical Judaism is community oriented. One prays in the plural, shares a common history going back thousands of years; is commanded to think of oneself as present at the Exodus and at Sinai; participates in a common destiny, awaiting the Messianic era when the community will be restored to its glory. In the meantime, each member of the community is responsible for every other member. A religious community provides a rich environment for nurturing tolerance, responsibility and creativity. In community the guild can do its work of taking responsibility for the reality it authors, creatively changing it where needed, and demonstrating tolerance not only for the changing, but for those who differ. A community provides a place where fit can be ascertained, where what works can be experienced and evaluated in situ.

Being in community, in a covenantal relationship, we are not only responsible for our own individual map, our own created reality, but also accountable beyond

⁹ Literally, Children of the Covenant

ourselves for what we do with the map we have created. Judaism assumes *accountability* to a divine covenant partner, to those who are our fellows within the covenant, and to those who find themselves outside of its circumscribed parameters. *Individual and community accountability* is a profound gift that Judaism brings to the relationship with psychotherapy. Accountability makes us take responsibility more earnestly. Accountability provides a crucial nuance all too often absent in psychotherapy, whose focus has been on the individual, his or her maps, his or her well being, with only peripheral attention paid to the usefulness, influence and importance of community.

The map utilized by this particular community of priests and holy nation, obliges each individual to pay exquisite attention to the frame one creates for *the details of daily living*. The meaning is in the details. Our task is to make those details fit into a covenantal frame; to realize them fully in community, and make their created meaning a part of one's relationship with God, the covenantal partner.

One compass point for Jewish attention to the details, has been what we eat. "Kosher" has passed into the English vernacular. Curiously enough, its meaning in the vernacular is similar to what it meant in its original framework. Something Kosher was appropriate for use by a member of a covenant community. We well know that kosher has nothing to do with clean - that was a fallacious reading by a cartographer of an altogether different persuasion.

How I introduced my wife, who came from another tradition to the vagaries of a kosher kitchen, may elucidate this. I had always lived in a kosher home, and wanted that to continue in our forthcoming marriage. I needed to convince her that this was important and to enlist her help in day to day maintenance. I started by explaining that foods are divided into those that are kosher and those that are not, (trayf). This seemed to make some sense because her apperceptive mass included that Jews did not eat pork. True enough, but in a kosher home only certain meats that met specified criteria, and had been processed in a certain way, could be eaten. An eyebrow seemed to lift. I went on to offer that we also distinguished between milk and meat. Her pupils widened a bit. Undaunted, I went on to explain that chicken is defined as meat, while fish (with fins and scales of course) is neither meat nor dairy, but is in a third category called *pareve*. I then proceeded to explain that though chicken is meat, yet chicken eggs are pareve, neither meat nor milk. That though milk comes from cows, it is nonetheless dairy and not to be eaten with the meat of the animal it comes from. By now, her eyes had glazed over, and she

was approaching a deep trance state. I proceeded to explain that dishes and other utensils can only touch either milk or meat, with the notable exception of glass, which I fearlessly added, was exempt from this prohibition. If silverware violated these prohibitions in any way, the offending utensil can only be reused after being planted in the dirt for twenty four hours. Her trance deepened! I further explained that there is some question about dishwashers being used for milk and meat and as a matter of fact, some very traditional families have two dishwashers and even two kitchens to guarantee that no milk products, utensils, items, etc. would come in contact with meat products, utensils, items, etc. Watching her response I was sure she was wondering if she still had time to get out of this relationship with a patently psychotic man. What other craziness might he be hiding from her? She offered as she came out of trance, “Why make life so difficult?” I realized that if someone came into my office and described behavior like this I would immediately start treatment to relieve them of obsessive-compulsive behavior of a most disturbed sort. They might indeed need years of therapy with our goal being to enable them to use the meat silverware with milk products, and further to cure them of this obsessive need of counting the hours between meat and milk, etc.

My future wife’s reaction made crystal clear to me that a set of rules I had lived with and accepted since I was a child could also be seen as an obsessive’s nightmare. It was only because the map I inherited gave these behaviors a frame of meaning, that they made sense to me. My frame had to do with marking our home as a Jewish home and being reminded of that every time we ate. These were important details in a covenantal relationship with the people Israel throughout the world, and with their God, who it is told, had taken the time to command something about what one might eat and might not. It meant taking seriously that the guild of Meaning Map Makers, had taken that command and expanded it into the kosher laws. A kosher home was a reminder in conscious and unconscious ways every day, at life’s most repetitive acts that I was accountable and that every small act of eating was meaningful. Since entering the covenant my wife has started to read labels, ensuring that only kosher products enter our kitchen. With the frame the map provides, the behavior has some meaning; without the frame, the behavior is ludicrous.

The sense of accountable responsibility for our own behavior, and that of the community of which we are a part, our burning desire to seek meaning in all of the highways and byways of our maps, thus being zealous members of the Guild of Meaning Mapmakers. are among our contributions to the new interface. We add to

this as our partner psychotherapy often does not, that *not all meanings are equal*. A danger in the message of psychotherapy is, that since all meanings are constructed, none are any better than others. Our emphasis on accountability in the meanings we create, can help psychotherapy not lapse into solipsism.

Both partners know, each from its own history that people have created new understandings and new meanings and that meanings change over time. Sometimes meanings change more rapidly, sometimes more slowly. And both partners know from historical struggles that have taken place in their own communities, the freedom to create must be guarded, for meaning making comes hard, and people think that when they have meanings that seem to fit, they don't want others to tamper with what they have worked so hard to achieve.

Religion and psychotherapy have come a long way. Of common antecedents, and having individuated sufficiently, they now enter a new alliance, contributing to a life rich with meaning, marked by their similarities and nourished by their differences. They can co-create a community dedicated to meaning making in the details of life, and fashion an experiential framework in which new constructs are tested and evaluated. Their conjoined attributes of tolerance, responsibility, creativity, and accountability can make this a bounteous and blessed relationship. May we live to see the offspring.