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Couples and Spirituality

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Couples and Spirituality: A Jewish Perspective on Exile, Yearning, and Return

Deane H. Shapiro
Johanna F. Shapiro

SUMMARY. This article examines, from the developmental perspective of midlife, the potential interconnection between the psychological construct of a healthy interpersonal relationship and spiritual teachings. To examine this interconnection, several universal themes of midlife are examined: Exile: the slumber of devotion; Yearning: the renewal of the search; and Return: transformation and reconciliation. Using Judaism as a metaphor, the article presents a spiritual map by which to guide the journey of relationship, and a framework within which to practice yearning, tolerance, forgiveness, healing, and return. The beneficial effects of a spiritual perspective on relationship is discussed, both in terms of individual and global healing. Finally, a cautionary note, warning against the limitations and pitfalls of integrating a spiritual perspective in therapy, is included.

Many spiritual traditions emphasize "the importance of human relations in transpersonal development" (Chinen, 1987, p. 123), and see such relationships as important expressions of one's spiritual advancement (cf. Shapiro & Shapiro, 1983, 1984). Metaphors and insights from the mystical and spiritual teachings of Judaism are one particularistic path for

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addressing these universal issues of relationship and spirituality. While other religious teachings could be used for illustrative purposes equally well, Judaism is also appropriate to this task because of its awareness of the opportunity for spirituality within (and as a context for) relationship. Further, it may be of special relevance to reflect on such metaphors and insights regarding spiritual wisdom and healthy relationship from the developmental perspective of midlife. Precisely because this is one of the more secular periods of human existence, often characterized by what Hans Kung (cf. Chinen, 1987) has called the "repression of the religious," it is instructive to consider whether spiritual wisdom can speak to couple development during this phase.

A couples relationship can be a vehicle for deepening spiritual understanding (diagrammed schematically as line 3a in Figure One). In turn, a spiritual perspective can create a context for enhancement of the relationship (diagrammed schematically as line 3b in Figure One). The first approach represents a view that spiritual wisdom—both about the universe (3a, Figure One) and about oneself (2a, Figure 1)—is achieved through relationship. To truly love someone is to "know" not only them, but also to gain knowledge of the harmony of the universe; and knowledge of oneself. As Martin Buber expressed this, God is not created by humans nor is God independent of them, but rather is "met" in relationship (Buber, 1958). The second approach (represented by lines 3a, and lines 1a and 1b in Figure One) suggests that it is only through spiritual understanding of oneself and one's connection to the universe that one can truly be ready for and experience a deep dyadic relationship. Quoting Buber again, "Through the Thou a man becomes I" (Buber, 1970); and, one might extrapolate, a relationship becomes "we."

Our approach, as diagrammed in Figure One, is based on a systems model in which reciprocal influences exist (cf. Bandura, 1978). In other words, there may be different levels of influence from different sources at different times in a person's life. Relational and spiritual developments and insights have the potential to inform each other synergistically. Using

FIGURE ONE

AN INTERACTIVE SYSTEM'S MODEL SHOWING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN VIEWS OF SELF, THE DYADIC RELATIONSHIP, AND THE TRANSPERSONAL

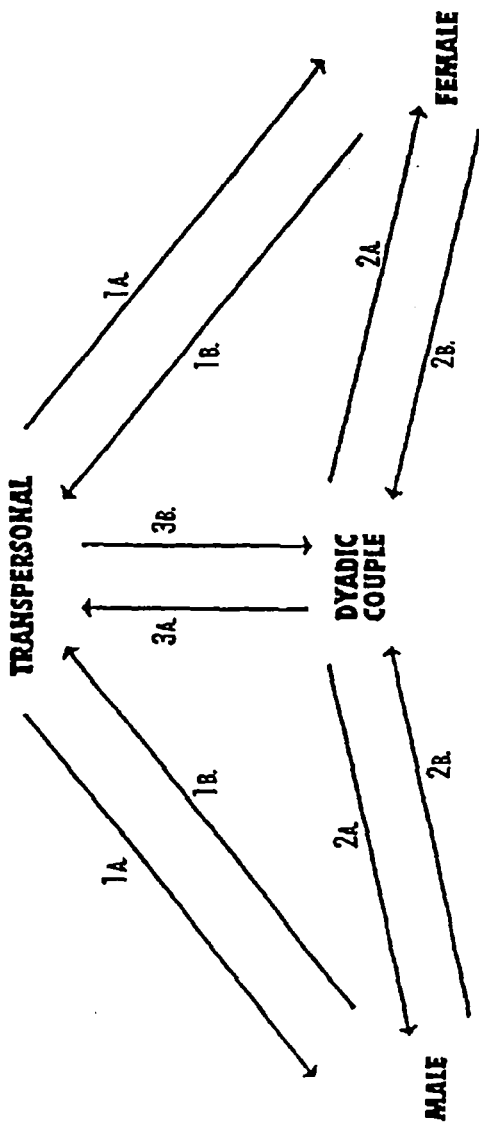


FIGURE ONE (Continued)

1. **Individual - Transpersonal Connection.**
 - 1.A The Transpersonal's influence upon the individual.
 - 1.B The Individual's search for and understanding of the transpersonal.

2. **Individual - Relationship Connection.**
 - 2.A The effect the relationship has on the individual.
 - 2.B The effect the Individual has on the relationship.

3. **Relationship - Transpersonal Connection.**
 - 3.A The way in which a relationship can point the way to the "Eternal Thou".
 - 3.B The way in which the Transpersonal can provide understanding and a context for the relationship.

this model, we delineate three cyclical stages of relationship at midlife: *Exile: The Slumber of Devotion*; *Yearning: The Renewal of the Search*; and *Return: Transformation and Reconciliation*.

In exploring these three stages, passages from the *Song of Songs* (Tanakh, 1985) will be used as metaphoric framework. This biblical work can be interpreted both on a literal level as a beautiful and sensuous poem of love between man and woman; and on a symbolic level, as representing the relationship between the individual and God. In Martin Buber's terminology, the *Song of Songs* may be understood as a statement of God's existence expressed in the relationship itself. According to Buber, it is only through relationship that one can find the Eternal Thou, the particular Thou of one's relational love, and even the Thou of one's core self (Buber, 1970; cf. Boorstein, 1979).

EXILE: THE SLUMBER OF DEVOTION

I let my devotion slumber. (5.2, *Song of Songs*)

As mentioned earlier, midlife can involve a submersion in and an exclusive preoccupation with the values and concerns of secular life. The middle years are a time when many people are most fully committed to their careers, often achieving a degree of success but laden with increasing professional duties and obligations. In this phase many individuals are also involved in building a family (cf. Levinson, 1978).

Perhaps difficult, both spiritually and in terms of the couple relationship, is the "loss of magic" (Chinen, 1987) which seems to occur in midlife. As Levinson noted (Levinson, 1978, p. 102), the structure of early adulthood is based on illusion—the dream. During the phases of settling down and becoming one's own person, a "man must believe in himself—even in the face of reality, if need be." But then comes the subsequent task of "deillusionment" (p. 192). The goals and aspirations of youth either have been met and found to

be unfulfilling, or it is seen that the dream has not, and perhaps cannot ever, be met. This may be true in terms of one's intimate relationship as well.

This sense of loss (often compounded by losses on other levels, such as the loss of youth, perhaps the loss of parents) occurs concomitantly with the recognition of the depth and range of our own shortcomings. In youth, the "enemy" frequently is defined as external; the self is still viewed as innocent and pure. At mid-life, all of us have lost some of this innocence and purity. There is the recognition that evil lurks not only without, but within.

We also become aware that there does not appear to be any magical force that can rescue us from the dark places we find in the world and in ourselves. We have become the parents who were supposed to be able to create magic, but have lost our limitless belief in our own powers. From a relational perspective, we are no longer "the perfect couple," but fallible human beings who squabble about decision-making, sex-roles, financial concerns, and "mundane" areas of life that often do not seem worthy of the energy with which we embellish them. We begin to realize that some of the "evil" in our relationship we have created ourselves.

Amidst all these external and internal losses and uncertainties, it is easy, relationally and spiritually, to "let my devotion slumber," to withdraw from the demands of relationship with both one's significant other and with God. In this situation, we enter into an interpersonal and spiritual exile that appears like an endless desert. Although we long for closeness and acceptance from our relational other and from God, we find ourselves isolated and alienated. Sometimes the gulf between us and our loved one, between us and God appears unbridgeable.

YEARNING: THE RENEWAL OF THE SEARCH

O my dove, in the cranny of the rocks,
Hidden by the cliff,

Let me see your face . . . (2.14, *Song of Songs*)

I must rise and roam the town . . .
I must seek the one I love . . . (3.2)

I was asleep,
But my heart was wakeful . . . (5.2)

Yearning cannot begin until individuals acknowledge that, relationally and spiritually, they are in a state of exile. Just like the Israelites in Egypt, it is possible to be so enslaved to the secular that the bondage itself remains unrecognized. The secure and comfortable ways of normal existence, the worshipping of “false idols,” the fear of the unknown and of appearing deviant can keep us physically and psychologically trapped.

Ironically, it is often precisely this immersion in the secular and the conventional which can prompt an awakening, a yearning to recommit to, return to, and deepen one’s connection with the relational other and with the divine Source. We begin to realize that, like the Jews in Egypt, we are bound by “narrow places” (a literal translation of the Hebrew word for Egypt, “Mitzraim”) of our own choice and creation. What follows is a deep longing, a crying out, and a seeking for help in our struggles to escape from exile. We become painfully aware of our condition of disconnectedness, and long for the intimacy with the “one” (both interpersonally and spiritually) who is far away.

RETURN: TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION

Scarcely had I passed them (those who patrol the town)
When I found the one I love.
I held him fast, I would not let him go . . . (3.4, *Song of Songs*)

As the above lines suggest, the Jewish tradition believes that no matter how great the exile—from one’s relational

love, and/or from God—no one is ever too far to return. All that is needed is the yearning, the willingness to renew the search. As the great compilation of rabbinical teaching, the Talmud, states (cf. Kukoff, 1981), “Where people truly wish to go, there their feet will take them.” We have identified six components of the process of Return: personal efforts and divine guidance; freedom and commitment; masculinity and femininity; forgiveness; suffering and healing; duality and unity.

Reconciliation of Personal and Others' Efforts (Human and Divine. Often in relationship, while we may yearn for intimacy, we feel overwhelmed at the prospect of reconciliation. The enormity of the interpersonal gap seems especially insurmountable as long as we are trapped by the omnipotent fantasy that our unilateral efforts hold the key to restoring harmony. It is at these moments that understanding the interplay of self and partner efforts within the couples relationship becomes crucial (Shapiro, in press, a, b). In the Jewish tradition, one is expected to do one's part toward healing the alienation that arises in relationship. We are not expected to do it all; nor are we required to do it alone. Discovering significant limits to one's ability to control one's interpersonal relationship create a state of openness and “broken-heartedness” (Nachman, 1980), which allows the efforts of one's partner to be accepted with gratitude and relief.

The balance between personal and divine effort to effect a Return of the individual to intimacy with God serves as a useful metaphor for the couple in search of reconciliation. Whether returning to relationship or to God, the individual must take responsibility for personal effort (Shapiro, 1991). On the other hand, the process of return is never conceived of as being solely under our control, nor are we viewed as totally alone in the process. There is a Jewish story that tells of a King's son who had traveled a hundred days journey from his father. His friends advise him to return home, but he replies, “I cannot, the trip is too long.” Then his father sends him word, “Come back as far as your strength permits,

and I will go to meet you the rest of the way” (Pesikta Rabbati 44, 184a–185b; Buber, 1947). Similarly, God says to Israel, “Return to Me, and I will return to you” (Malachi, 3:7).

This reconciliation of personal and other’s efforts has important implications for relationship at middle life. In the formative years of relationship, control of the relationship often becomes a key issue. Partners power-struggle back and forth, experimenting with different distributions of dominance, acquiescence, and mutuality. However, these struggles are often perceived to occur only as expressions of the specific relationship, and no larger spiritual context is apparent. With the addition of a spiritual perspective, the relationship is more easily understood not as the sole creation of the partners, but as a gift or trust from God, the Ultimate Owner (Hacohen, 1976), of which the partners are merely the guardians and caretakers. They are aware of their obligation to nurture this trust to the best of their ability. Simultaneously, they also may begin to glimpse that its purposes and directions are not wholly penetrable or accessible to them. At these moments of fragility, risk, and pain, the couple has the choice to cry out for help, and accept whatever response comes as an expression of the ultimate benevolence of God’s will.

At times within a couples relationship, it may feel as though there is not enough energy or reason to seek to reestablish a loving commitment. One of the interpretations of the festival of Chanukkah provides a relevant metaphor to this problem of “relationship burn-out.” According to legend, after the Temple in Jerusalem was reclaimed from the Assyrians in 165 B.C.E. Jewish freedom fighters and their supporters found only enough oil to keep the Eternal Light burning over the Ark for one day. The “miracle” refers to the fact that this oil somehow continued to burn day after day, for eight days, until new oil could be brought. In applying this lesson to relationships, the couple is granted hope that, when personal efforts appear insufficient, a “miracle” may occur, and the necessary “oil” to keep the relationship kindled will appear, surpassing our limited beliefs and expectations.

Reconciliation of Freedom with Commitment. At some point in each individual's life there comes a time of feeling trapped and limited, a feeling of enslavement, or that something is missing. Mid-life in particular is frequently equated with lack of freedom. These feelings may arise from obligations incurred to family and jobs (cf. Gauguin, 1937; Hanson & Hanson, 1955; Levinson, 1978). They are also likely to result from the commitments involved in relationship, which at midlife may begin to appear stultifying. The challenge of course is to respond to the need for freedom without losing commitment, of finding freedom within the couples relationship.

What insights into the relationship between freedom and commitment can we glean from examining Jewish teachings? Freedom, of the individual and the community, is highly valued in Jewish tradition, and its central metaphor is Passover. This yearly festival recounts the liberation of the Jews from Egypt. But, in spiritual interpretations, "Egypt" is not only an external place but an internal space as well. According to this interpretation, we are trapped not so much by external burdens, as by our psychological "narrow places." Thus, attaining freedom involves both outer and inner struggles:

Our symbolic relational Egypt is the "narrow places" of our involvement with our partner, the internal Pharaohs that cut us off from our significant other. Passover holds out the possibility of transformational freedom—that by challenging the Pharaoh within who hardens our hearts to change, and by listening carefully to what God requires of us, we can begin to leave the bondage of slavery.

The events of Passover make clear that freedom from bondage is a multi-stage process. After the escape from Egypt came seven weeks of wandering "in the wilderness," with the Israelites continually complaining and mistrustful of God's (and each other's) benevolence. The festival also emphasizes that freedom is meaningless without the concomitant concept of commitment. With care and preparation, the metaphor of freedom *from* bondage can be used to mean the

freedom to choose commitment as the Israelites chose the yoke of God's commandments 3300 years ago at Mt. Sinai. Thus, true freedom requires commitment. The real issue is to choose well what we wish our yoke to be. This spiritual lesson suggests that the personal freedom we find through self-exploration and psychological growth needs to be reflected back into a relationship, just as the Hebrew people used their freedom to enter into relationship with God through the establishment of the Mosaic covenant.

Masculine and Feminine: Reconciliation and Transformation. During early adulthood, certain instrumental qualities often appear necessary to survive in the external world (Levinson, 1978), and certain nurturing ones are required for raising a family. The literature on traditional sex roles suggests that men have tended to be more instrumental, and women more expressive (Bem, 1976; Broverman, 1970). Based on this traditional model, the masculine and feminine principles are sometimes regarded as antithetical to each other. However, we would suggest (Shapiro & Shapiro, 1984), as have others, that this duality represents a state of exile, and that at mid-life, there is an opportunity, perhaps even the necessity, for reexamination.

In relationship, this masculine-feminine issue involves the challenge of reassessing and reintegrating gender-opposite qualities in the other and in the self. At times, this phenomenon may take the form of sex-role reversals, in the sense of reversing traditional role designations. However, it is ultimately the complementary aspect, rather than the polarity, of these principles which is important. In other words, it matters less who is capable of manifesting a given attribute than that the attributes of masculinity and femininity fit together within relationships to form a whole. From this perspective, the goal for a healthy relationship may be to incorporate the masculine and feminine in ways which are fluid and relationship-enhancing, rather than divisive and conflictual.

In this respect as well, Jewish spiritual teachings provide some guidance. In Judaism, God has both male and female aspects. At times He is seen in the masculine guise of Lord,

Master, King. On the Sabbath, God's presence is represented by the feminine Shechinah, often called Israel's "bride" (Epstein, 1978). At other times, God is referred to simply as "The Name," an appellation that integrates and transcends sex-role dualities.

The *Song of Songs* and other sources teach that the Shechinah is often in exile, separated from her Beloved (the people of Israel), and longing for return. It is believed that the Shechinah will be permanently reunited only when the world itself is restored to a state of perfect wholeness, but that transitory experiences of unity are always possible (for example, on the Sabbath). In relationships, we can hope that, just as there is the potential for masculine and feminine being reconciled in God, so they can achieve a state of unity in the couple as well.

Forgiveness: Transformation and Reconciliation. Recently, the importance of forgiveness in healing "fractured relationships" (Worthington & DiBlasio, 1990) has been noted. These authors point out that granting forgiveness to others is only half of the equation; seeking forgiveness for hurts inflicted on others and attempting to cease future hurtful behaviors are also of great importance in promoting healing. Self-forgiveness plays a similar role in allowing us to release historical wrongdoing within the couples relationship, and deal with present issues as a couple without the encumbrance of guilt.

Forgiveness as a precursor to Return is a potent Jewish concept as well. The ten day period of the High Holy Days culminates in Yom Kippur, or the Day of Repentance. The themes of this time are those of remorse and forgiveness. It is a time to put in order one's relationship with God and with others. Yom Kippur encourages us literally to approach significant others in our lives with remorse and humility, seeking and extending forgiveness, to cleanse the relational slate for yet another year of ascents and descents (Nachman, 1980).

True Return requires forgiveness on both sides. The Bible is filled with many examples of God forgiving the Israelites, and makes clear that this forgiveness was not based on their worthiness, but rather on God's compassion. Similarly, we

might speculate that, in order to remain true people of faith, biblical characters such as Sarah or Job needed to forgive God for the anguish they suffered. From these passages we may conclude that, within the couple's relationship, mutual repentance, forgiveness, and atonement on a regular basis can be essential for continued interpersonal health.

Transformation of Suffering into Healing. Unlike youth, "middle-aged individuals have suffered defeats and injuries, both physical and emotional" (Chinen, 1987). While such suffering spans the gamut of human experience, it derives in part from painful encounters in interpersonal relationships. By mid-life, the couple in relationship has an accumulation of both purposive and unintentional hurts. One of the great challenges of mid-life is how to respond to this suffering.

The experience of suffering has the potential to increase a person's compassion and sensitivity, thereby deepening one's ability to empathize with and help heal the pain and suffering of others. Within the couples relationship, the challenge becomes to transform the interpersonal suffering which has accrued into acts of love and healing. This may mean using insights gleaned from one's own relational struggles to treat others more compassionately. It may also mean directing healing toward the relationship itself, to act more lovingly and compassionately toward one's significant other.

Humor and joy play a critical mediating role in the transformation of suffering into healing (Cousins, 1979). Humor for this purpose has a long and honorable tradition in Judaism. Jewish stories delight in gently mocking kings, sages, scholars—even God! Especially in the teachings of the Hassidic rabbis, a mystical Jewish sect which rose to prominence in the 17th and 18th centuries, Judaism contains what might be considered an imperative to joy. "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy" (Psalm 32). While the openness of a truly "broken heart" (Nachman, 1980) is recognized and commended, despair is forbidden. Beyond every personal tragedy, every individual anguish, God's greatness and glory are transcendent (Donin, 1980).

The importance of joy is further reflected in the Jewish

holiday of Purim, celebrating the defeat between 485–465 B.C.E. of the evil Grand Vizier of Babylonia who wanted to put all Jews to death. On this holiday, Jews are enjoined to become “joyous fools,” mocking the Torah, the rabbis, the Jewish tradition itself, allowing joy and humor to fill their hearts (Strassfeld, 1985).

What do these metaphors teach us about relationship? First, we learn that humor and joy can be catalysts in helping us to gain the strength, perspective, and inspiration to transform the pain and suffering that exist in relationship into healing. Second, we may conclude that, just as despair has no place in one’s relationship with God, it is a similarly destructive emotion in one’s relationship with one’s significant other. Finally, a transcendent perspective can help the couple to realize that their suffering occurs within a larger and more exalted spiritual context; and this awareness may introduce an element of hope even in the darkest moments.

Transformation of Duality (Good and Evil) into Unity. In a condition of exile within the relationship, the couple has a tendency to experience their relationship in dualistic terms. They see the “good” aspects of the relationship, which they wish to preserve and expand on. But there are also the “bad” parts, which the partners wish to eliminate. Judaism’s fundamental premise, however, has to do with the unity of God, and therefore of the world.

The teachings of the 16th century Jewish mystic, Rabbi Isaac Luria (Epstein, 1978), state that all aspects of the world, including every human being, have a holy spark of goodness within them. However, sometimes these sparks of Light are covered and hidden by husks (what we perceive as evil). Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, an eighteenth century Jewish mystic (1980), refers to the continually cycling spiritual ascents and descents of the human soul as all within the unitive context of God. Utilizing this understanding, the couple can begin to regard the various aspects of relationship differently. They may consider complementing efforts to eliminate “evil” in their interactions with efforts to investigate the possible meanings and purposes of these rapid descents into hostility

and mistrust. In this interpretation, the couple can begin to view the anger, distrust, and fear in the relationship as the husks which separate them from each other. This metaphor also provides the couple an opportunity continually to seek beneath the husk for the core goodness in self and other. Slowly, each partner can become adept at seeing God in the other.

Repairing the World. Through healing our relationships and making them whole, we can contribute to a healing wholeness and unity in the world. This concept encourages the couple to look beyond the boundaries of their relationship to consider how they fit in the larger world. They can begin to be aware of how the "evil" of their own souls at times serves to contaminate not only the couple relationship, but also their interactions with others, their attitudes toward work, and their relationship with the physical environment.

Luria taught that when God created the world, He attempted to fill it with His perfect Light, which was contained in certain vessels. But the Light was so strong that the vessels shattered. Because of this shattering, everything in creation contains a spark of God's Light and holiness. Part of the task of human beings, what God asks of them, is to repair the shattered world on all levels, from the most insignificant to the most dramatic, and in so doing elevate these sparks back to their intended state of unity. Thus, the couple can understand working on their relationship as a small, but vital contribution to the healing of the planet.

The belief and trust in a unitary God (lines 1a and 1b, Figure One), both reinforces and enriches trust in one's relational partner (lines 3b and 2b), and vice-versa: trust in one's partner reinforces trust in a benevolent universe (3a) and in oneself (2a). It is apparent that the process of repair toward unity is an interactive one; it is through the healing of the relationship with God and the relationship with one's loved other that unity is achieved. The implication is that in tending one's relationship—opening one's heart in I-Thou relationship to the other (Buber, 1970)—one is contributing to bringing to fruition a small piece of God's divine plan—the

unity of the Eternal Thou. Thus God requires that we care deeply about our relationships, not only for our own sakes, but for God's.

This pursuit of unity is not considered easy in Jewish tradition. The word "Israel" in Hebrew means to wrestle with God. Thus, the relationship between human and God is not seen as smooth and uncomplicated, but filled with ascents and descents, alienations and reconciliations. However, as is suggested in the central prayer of Judaism, which states "The Lord our God; the Lord is One" (Kaplan, 1985), this struggling with God is contained within a context of unity, the Oneness of God.

Given the complexities of interpersonal relationships, this model of struggle is reassuring and somehow validating. It suggests that the process of struggle, so long as it is in the service of God (Avot 5:28), may lead to resolutions of increasing love and respect. It also suggests that, at the deepest level, beneath the husks that hide the Light, the couple can discover a certain inherent wholeness or completeness in their relationship. Thus, while we can rejoice in the exhilarating ascents that occur in relationship, the "running" within the relationship toward the other, the descents no longer need be so terrifying. Each partner can recall that "Even when I make my bed in hell, You are with me" (Psalm 139), and this awareness can provide a contextual comfort for times of relational drift and difficulty. It suggests that even though the partners in relationship temporarily may abandon each other, at a more fundamental level a return to the other is always possible.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE

We have highlighted the relevance of the teachings of one religious tradition insofar as they apply to couples. In so doing, we have used only positive examples and lessons. However, three cautions are necessary. First, we do not believe that, as therapists, we have a right to proclaim that

any person, or couple, "should" believe a certain way—e.g., that the universe *is* sacred and holy at its deepest level (Shapiro, 1989). Further, we believe that there are many equally valid "paths up the mountain." Therefore, even if a person does believe the universe is unitive and sacred, it is critical to honor that person's own path, tradition, and discipline.

Finally, religious beliefs, as any other kind of belief, can be misused. We are familiar with cases in which individuals have been in abusive and unproductive relationships, and justified staying in the relationship based on spiritual beliefs: "If I were truly spiritual, I would be more able to forgive"; "I feel it was God's destiny that we are together"; "God is a God of love, and so are all God's creatures; if I look harder, I'll find the sacred part of my spouse." Therefore, even though we have written frequently using declarative (rather than conditional) sentences these positive assertions should be considered as beliefs and working models rather than as absolutes. It is important to recognize that ennobling and sacred truths, no matter how poetic and graceful they sound, always have the potential to be misused in defensive, destructive, and pathological ways.

CONCLUSION

At mid-life, the goal of the search for and encounter with the spiritual is not to transcend the world, but to reconnect with the more ultimate values which spirituality endorses, feel their transformative power, and then return to the world, to one's relational love. Knowledge of the spiritual can provide a strong and enduring context for relationship; yet the primary relationship also becomes a way of drawing closer to God.

Using Judaism as a metaphor, a kind of spiritual map has emerged, which may be used to guide relationship, a flexible framework within which to practice yearning, tolerance, forgiveness, healing, and return. The spiritual passage depicted

in Exodus from slavery to freedom becomes a metaphor for understanding the journey of relationship. With this as a context and vision to help us in the darkness, the often overwhelming ascents and descents of relationship become more understandable and meaningful. No matter what joys and pains we experience in relationship, we can continue to follow the spiritual map God has given us. It reminds us to ask ourselves the question, within the context of God's plan, how, at the deepest level, we are meant to be together, and for what purpose.

It is possible to become aware that interpersonal relationships are at once infinitely small yet necessary pieces of a world in fragments which needs to be made whole again. Inescapably, we experience that brokenness every day through the flaws and struggles of the relationship. But we simultaneously have the opportunity to experience its great potential for wholeness, for oneness, for unity. In the words of the Song of Songs (2.16):

I am my beloved's
And my beloved is mine.

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