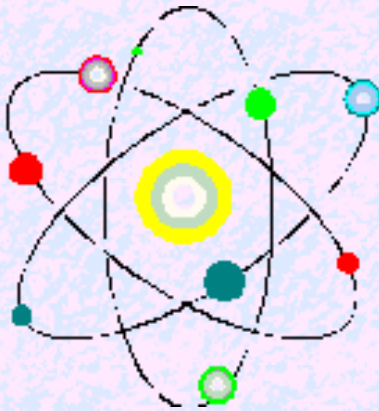


What is the relationship between mysticism, kabbala and science?



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Making the Connection between Science and Mysticism

By Yechezkel Gold

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Science's historic iconoclasm is well known. Replacing scholastic dogma with investigative rigor, it attacked man's notions of reality. Science is not free of dogmatism, however. It makes assumptions and has deep prejudices. When these prove erroneous, they

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remain difficult to eradicate or change as in any field. Some of these prejudices are directed against spirituality. However, scientific method officially eschews dogma in favor of objectivity.

Kabbalism is more extremely iconoclastic than science. Studying Torah and particularly Kabbala demand continual readiness to accept and grapple with what is not understood or expected. This forces the mind open. Even to begin understanding Kabbalistic concepts, one must have explored and questioned reality to a great extent, besides attaining a high degree of objectivity and intellectual depth. Arrival at a mystical perspective requires scrutiny of usually unconscious assumptions underlying one's outlook. This process can be painful and threatening. Exploring the psyche, the spiritual pathway connecting one's being-in-the-world with one's spiritual root, requires extreme honesty. Usually, advance in these matters occurs by undermining lower levels to expose higher states. What emerges often differs from what one anticipated, learning about them. Mystical development, then, is more extremely iconoclastic than science.



VARIOUS LEVELS OF REALITY

Both mysticism and science seek unifying patterns in a multiplicity of individual cases. Discovering consistent behavior leads science to posit scientific laws across the gamut of scientific investigation: physical science, life science, psychology and sociology. This approach renders these fields vibrant intellectual disciplines rather than mere compendia of facts. Similarly, elucidating patterns in spirituality is Kabbalism's task.

The notion of different levels or spiritual worlds is a famous Kabbalistic theory. Scientists look askance at

such ideas, but employ the same approach. They divide reality into levels, each with its own set of rules.

Physics is inadequate to describe biology, which is inadequate for describing psychology, which in turn is inadequate for describing social systems. Each field is an independent sphere operating in its own terms.

Maintaining a constant thermal state, for example, is a biological law for mammals, but is not required by all matter. Nevertheless, relations between these different fields are hierarchical; they are not unrelated. Scientists would object, for example, to a biologist purporting that living systems violate physical or chemical laws.

Similarly in Kabbala, each world's character is distinct but expressing a higher level must simultaneously respect lower levels of functioning. Thus, the soul's perfection and idealism must be expressed in the body's terms. However, exaggerated bodily considerations deny expression to the soul. We have not refined ourselves through Torah and Mitzvos to render our body receptive to higher states, so most of us are unaware of higher spiritual strata.

Nevertheless, higher levels exist potentially even for people oblivious of them.



PATTERNS AND WISDOM IN **NATURE**

For both religion and science, nature is imbued with profound wisdom. Kabbala regards nature as a reflection of God, a sublime expression of His Will. Science would shy from these terms, but its concepts are close to this view.

Science regards organisms as systems driven by interplay of biochemical reactions. Rather than deliberately generating itself, an organism's life "happens to it". Life is a product of nature, not an

independent entity. Except for humans, organisms' functioning is mainly preprogrammed. They are entirely unaware of biochemical processes producing their behavior. This parallels the religious view of God's wisdom directing the essentially harmonious course of nature.

Ecology manifests this idea strikingly. Ecologists view nature as a balance of different organisms, each occupying an environmental niche. A species will not survive if no niche exists for it in the environment. Organisms' strategies for survival in their environment are inborn, not chosen. For example, parasitic wasps do not know that by laying eggs, they perpetuate their own genes, and they favorize this by preferring individuals of the species they parasitize having certain characteristics. Wasps' preferences display the wisdom of nature, not of wasps. A sparrow fleeing a sudden noise lacks the intelligence to imagine what danger the noise represents. These behaviors reflect wisdom of a higher intelligence not contained within the natural system. Nature contains only products of that intelligence. Through scientific inquiry, man discerns some of this intelligence and control from above.

Some scientists claim that order we discern in nature is not real, reflecting controlling intelligence, but only human approximation, because it is impossible to anticipate how a species will adapt, if at all, to environmental challenges; nor can one predict sudden changes of environment. Their argument errs to equate their ability to predict with higher intelligence. Clearly, higher intelligence can be creative. We see, after the fact, that nature is organized, not random.

Science sets up "straw men", attributing puny ideas to religion so they can knock them down. This is an intellectually dishonest political technique. One notion scientists advance is that randomness is antithetical to religion. Then they purport to discover randomness in nature. This requires deeper discussion, though.

Intuitively, it is unreasonable to suppose that if we can not forecast behavior, it happens by itself. If we can not predict the manner of spin of a particle thrown off in certain subatomic collisions, must we suppose that nothing controls it? Does a positron itself, then, decide to be one? Something causes changes independent of our understanding, perhaps not following any pattern because it is above intellect. Randomness is a sign that the Cause of change acts in a manner we can not predict.

Indeed, we still see a statistical pattern - a sign of control from above. Random phenomena form bell-shaped curves.

Research into chaos indicates that randomness does not occur in nature. What seems disorganized behavior, in fact, follows complex exponential equations. This approach probably can be applied to describe parameters and limits of changes in speciation and adaptation. These phenomena suggest basic patterning, as when similar species occur in remote lineages, such as marsupials paralleling placental adaptive types (marsupial wolves, cats, and bears). Chaos theory suggests patterning across lineages is not random. Exponential equations describe the patterns though the exact form of variation (what they consider evolutionary change) is unpredictable. Obviously, this does not obviate control by higher intelligence. On the contrary, we must raise our estimation of that intelligence's magnitude and creativity.



UNDERSTANDING CHAOS

Science stops short here, but Kabbala analyzes the connection between spirituality and nature. Laws of nature are not intrinsic and did not generate themselves. Nor are they free to change. This fixed pattern signals control from above, locking it into this

pattern. The ultimate source of control is total freedom. The source is not fixed in a pattern but freely generates control. This level is keser, the Kabbalistic Crown, free of restraint. It is the level of mystical sefiros called Tohu, random or chaos.

The idea of randomness takes different forms in Kabbala and in science. Science views chaos as support for atheism. It thinks if there is no pattern, there could be no control from above, so there must be no God.

In Kabbala, though, randomness indicates power above nature and intellect. The top of the hierarchy of control is a level that is controlling, not controlled. Therefore, it has no character; what could fix a character upon it? Thus, it can not be grasped by intellect or limited by pattern.

In this regard, Kabbala discusses thirteen attributes of mercy. Surprisingly, these are associated with mazal, chance. To grasp the connection between these two seemingly disparate concepts, let us review the Torah episode where the thirteen attributes of mercy are introduced.

When Israel worshipped the golden calf days after having powerful revelation of God and receiving the Torah, Moses ascended Mount Sinai to beg God's forgiveness. After forty days of prayer, God acceded to his plea, even revealing to Moses the entire extent of His glory graspable by a mortal. These are the thirteen attributes of mercy which render repentance and forgiveness possible.

Logically, a deed can not be erased. But the thirteen attributes of mercy are higher than logic, and accomplish the impossible: it is regarded as if there was no sin. This is possible only if God acts independently of intellect and causality. For this reason, there may be no punishment, or a delay, for sin. Man may regard this Divine behavior as random since it follows no pattern. Hence, we associate the thirteen

attributes with chance. Delving deeper, though, we may ask what, then, does determine the course of Divine behavior.

That we cannot predict or explain it does not imply that it is undirected, only that direction does not follow consistent laws. Indeed, there can be no random, undirected behavior. If it follows no pattern, it must be entirely deliberate. If nothing external guides it, it follows a course set without external guidelines. That is, it behaves exactly as God wants.

This is the meaning of the thirteen attributes of mercy: God treats Israel directly, choosing them without external consideration of logic or causality. Entirely free, God chose to forgive Israel and disregard their sin simply because it is as He wants.

This level is called Ein Sof, infinite, because it is limitless, not contained or defined by any parameters. It is the absolute power (crown) of the King.

With this view, one grasps another mystical concept: Divine Providence. Every occurrence originates from God's absolutely free will, and therefore is meant "on purpose".

Nevertheless, most occurrences respect laws of nature. This derives from God's promise to Noah to respect natural laws, disregarded during the flood. God's continual creation follows consistent patterns because this is His will, and because He committed Himself to do so. Still, as science acknowledges today, the universe is not a fixed machine with everything fated at the beginning of time. Flexibility in the system allows for Divine Providence.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the determinist theory dominating scientific thought until about one hundred years ago still influence our conceptions so we may deny the possibility of Divine Providence.



SPIRITUALITY AS REALITY

Most scientists' refusal to consider this dimension of reality denies (perhaps intentionally) existence outside science's boundaries, hence beyond human ability to grasp and control. As Talmud states, though, there are two realities, this world and the spiritual world.

Practicality does demand our attention. Most anyone ignoring it for long confirms that this world is real. However, another reality exists. When we withdraw from involvement in extrinsic affairs as on Shabbos, and occupy ourselves with inner matters, we become aware of a more cogent reality - true reality. A realm of perfect calm, even above chaos, free from coercion, it is eternal and has ultimate meaning. Each person can and should contemplate sometimes, to glimpse something of life's ultimate purpose and meaning, to know why we live, to perceive true reality.

This awareness, not practicality, is true realism. It perceives nothingness, infinite potential, transcendent truth unconstrained by externals, and absolute reality. Awareness of nothingness is true objectivity. Only then can one perceive spirituality, which science ignores.

Temporal reality is not absolute. It passes, and also conceivably could have been otherwise. Absolute reality is eternal and unchanging, without limit or characteristic. Contemplating it brings awareness of spiritual pathways leading to physical creation. For example, laws imply two levels, general and specific, combining to form a branching structure. Sequence must precede space or time, implying a spiritual mathematics preceding behavior. Cause and effect rely on the pathway of sequence. Otherwise, all would be random.

These metaphysical pathways are "attributes" God chose to create and govern the world. Ignoring them, science became even theoretically antagonistic to religion, which focuses on God's ways. One wonders whether scientists are spiritually blind or whether their denial is intentional, motivated by desire to escape moral responsibility.

Preoccupation with spiritual matters is not scientific, obviously. If one's concern is to master and change the cosmos, spirituality is a diversion which may even undermine this mission by questioning its value and motivation.



REALITY: SUBJECT OR OBJECT?

Discovering patterns beyond data, science, too, deals with transcendent reality - laws. Its discomfort with the term "God" is consistent, though. Science regards reality as an "it". "It" behaves in a certain manner, entirely passive, incapable of freedom, profoundly inert. Matter is reality, for scientists.

Religion, obviously, regards matters differently. The Psalmist queries: "Does He who placed ears not hear, and He who formed eyes not see?" It is inconceivable that life, in all of its manifestations, is really nothing but dead matter. There must be more to reality, something beyond. This is evident in man. Not content with subsistence, man strives to make life meaningful, opulent, and exciting. Are these dimensions of life unreal, mere firing of neural connections, entirely a function of material, and not dignified as existing in its own right? Religion considers form real independent of matter.

At any rate, above pattern, law, and spiritual pathway, affecting all and not contained by any, is randomness. Since boundless, awesome chaos is above

pattern or limitation, it is the spiritual source of all. An infinite outpouring from nothingness, it is limited by no shape or boundary. Through serious contemplation, one may confirm this truth, radically different from science's conception of reality as an "it". An "it", entirely defined by outside forces, is a mere object. But the Nothingness which is source to infinite randomness is entirely a subject: totally free and undefined, beyond grasp. This Nothingness limits natural laws, keeping them and the behavior they control constant over time and space. Otherwise, behavior would be entirely random.

In short, God is inconceivable, unlimited, ungraspable, unpredictable, uncontainable, and beyond man's control. This is no reason to abjure active striving. It does mean, though, that one can accomplish only what God permits. We might rage against dependence on God, but can not escape it. No person escapes dealing with myriad situations one would rather avoid. Through this, we recognize that God is master.



PROPER ROLE OF SCIENCE

Science has overstepped its mandate. Entrusted with discovering patterns of physical behavior, science presumes to have knowledge of religious and ethical matters outside its boundaries. Reality beyond experiment exists, but may be beyond physical verification. However, contemplation gives access to non-materiality. There is ethical right and wrong, for example, though scientific experiment can not grasp it.

Moral questions of our legitimate goals take precedence over controlling matter. Science should recognize its limits and serve religion. This acknowledgement puts life into proper perspective. We would stop emulating animals, and discover the exalted

state of being humans and Jews.

The preceding point does not negate great intellectual depth or impressive accomplishments science has achieved. Our purpose is to distinguish different kinds of knowledge and recognize the limits of each.



SIGNIFICANCE OF CONCEPTS

The character of Kabbala's concepts differs from science's. This is because realms they explore have different natures. The scientific domain is material, so concepts merely describe, but are not part of the subject matter. In Kabbala, though, concepts are part of the subject matter, being elements of the spiritual universe.

In science, concepts distill reality; they are not truly real. They function to contain and describe reality as much as possible. Reality is so dense and complex, though, that no human concepts can adequately contain it all.

The main purpose of science is to control nature for man's benefit and ease. This motivation and concerted effort to accomplish it began early, in the Tower of Babel, where mankind grouped together striving for independence from nature. They were unsuccessful, of course. This episode in Torah teaches that man can never be free from forces outside his control. Very likely, reality can not be contained, and there is no final, human solution to mankind's problems.

(Historically, man's lot has improved greatly in certain areas, but new difficulties often arise when old ones are solved. With threat of cancer beginning to wane, AIDS arose. Psychological anguish and social

ills wax while we overcome technological challenges. Indeed, man may not be happier than in previous generations.)

Torah's perspective is different. Torah ideas are not static distillations with which we endeavor to grasp reality, but active entities with their own character and behavior participating in and affecting reality directly rather than being merely applied.

Halachos, the main ideas of Torah, are imperatives of behavior. They are not material, yet generate behavior. Power to do that is in their very nature; they are the essence of spirituality, the detailed form of awesome, overpowering mystical oneness. If we are sensitive to the mystical, moral truths they represent, we can not resist them. Even when we sin, lacking this sensitivity, repercussions in the upper worlds are profound.

Thus, Torah recounts God's saying He would descend to Sodom to see if it really caused the scream reaching Him. The sages explain that they tarred, feathered, and killed a young girl whose crime was to feed a hungry wayfarer. When hearing such atrocities, we, too, hear a spiritual scream echoing through the upper worlds. A rationalist mindset may prevent verbalizing it in this manner, and we might deny the scream by rationalizing, but if we are honest, we are aware of it.

This energy of mystical and moral meaning forms halachic imperatives to do or not to do. Demanding positive action, it shapes the righteous' behavior, damning and causing ultimate downfall of the wicked. This well differentiated energy develops specific insights and principles, concepts yielding attitudes and emotions, generalities yielding particulars, all constituting spiritual pathways leading to behavior.

These pathways are genuine and specific; one can not falsify. Tanya, classic mystical work by Rabbi

Shneur Zalman of Liadi, states that forbidden substance is imprisoned in the realm of evil and can not be elevated from there (i.e. never justifies its existence). Thus, forbidden food is never elevated; if one ate forbidden food unintentionally to derive energy for a good deed, and performed the good deed, the food and its energy remain trapped in the realm of evil.

An analogy can explain this. Someone robs a bank, kills several persons, and makes off with the loot. Settling in a different locale, he establishes a hospital for the poor with the stolen money, saving people's lives or health. Indeed, building a hospital is a good deed, but that money is tainted. Murder and robbery depriving people of much-needed savings remain evil, not elevated (justified and made spiritually laudable) despite good deeds they made possible. The money's tainted spiritual status is precisely fixed.

Similarly, eating non-kosher food is moral wrongdoing. It opposes God's desire and has negative consequences on the eater, dulling and distorting his spiritual sense. Even if energy derived from this food is employed for a good deed, it can never justify and elevate eating that food, which is eternally incarcerated in the realm of evil.

Thus, besides logical spiritual pathways like the notion of sequence, there are also moral spiritual pathways which exactly determine - are the context and meaning of - reality. The paths are God's ideas, not man's, but are potently real. As creations, we follow them, not for our own purposes, but for God's, which may affect us cogently: we sometimes obey commandments altruistically, against our own selfish interest, not even knowing the full reason behind them.

This is Judaism's structure: we follow commandments because we must, understand them or not. Even where we have great insight into their meaning, total grasp eludes us. Rabbi Yisroel Meir of Radin, revered author of Mishna Brura, stated that he understood no halacha completely. Learning Torah

makes inroads into comprehension, but one never finishes the work. The ideas are infinite because they are God's, not human.



NOTIONS OF MAN'S CHARACTER

Torah and commandments are superhuman expressions, then. Man uses finite, graspable concepts, but Torah ideas describe the cosmos more accurately, not trying to contain ungraspable reality. Engrossing himself in this orientation by studying Torah and following commandments, man becomes vigorous and active, rather than cerebral, distant, and cold. The vibrant, enthusiastic, and morally exemplary Kabbalistic personality develops through the wisdom of Torah, higher than man's.

Torah principles address human reality rather than human conceptions. Thus, Torah begins recounting creation. Man is created last. All is ready for him, the chosen creation. God directs man to conquer the land and master it. Torah, too, is directed to man. Paralleling this, natural human perspective places man above all creations. This is not hubris, based on something external. Rather, it describes man's uncontainable and indomitable character.

This character is man's root in the Divine. Physical limitations, intellect, or limits of possibility can not suppress the soul. Thus, man finally invented airplanes, once thought impossible, now almost trivial. Man is now exploring genetic engineering, quite recently considered science fiction. More important, man has occasionally reached awesome moral heights. We are restrained most by our conceptions, by accepting artificial limits.

Connecting with Torah and adopting its portrayal of his character, man induces and expresses the

spiritual pathway for realizing that true nature. The history of us Jews, this vigorous, unstoppable, creative, ethical people, is zesty and truly alive. Rising above personal limitations, Jews connect with our true nature, transcending individual life, maximizing and fulfilling the individual through something deeper: eternity, soul of the cosmos. This is one meaning of the injunction considered the underlying principle of Torah: "Love thy neighbor as thyself!" It focuses specially on other people, rather than being general concern for the entire universe, because this transcendent, sublime reality is contained only in souls.

The commandments capture this perspective, true reality. It is the outlook of Torah ritual: our time and actions are dictated by Halacha, not practicality or whim. Torah life is not defined by circumstance. Rather, it creates and defines reality from a higher outlook.

Is this imaginary? Only for someone unperceptive or dishonest. Somewhere within us, the eternal Divine will press for expression. Perceiving it requires first removing what Kabbala calls filthy garments: inaccurate, flawed expressions of soul in selfish or impure thought, speech and deed. Eternity is present in each Jew, but one must develop courage and calm objectivity to examine reality, especially one's inner workings, honestly and unflinchingly. When no longer caught in egoism and worldly demands, one begins to perceive eternity.

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