

To Build a World of Affection:

Life and the Torah According to Rav Shlomo Wolbe

Translated by Micha Berger

Rav Shlomo Wolbe was a transitional figure in Jewish thought, presenting pre-Holocaust yeshiva *mussar* to students steeped in modern Charedi idiom. A German-born, university-educated *ba'al teshuvah*, he studied in one of the premier East European yeshivas and became a *Mussar* devotee, eventually marrying the daughter of R. Avraham Grodzinski, the martyred *mashgiach* of the famous Slobodka yeshiva. Until his passing in 2005, R. Wolbe disseminated a unique, sophisticated version of traditional *Mussar* that spoke directly to the concerns of traditional yeshiva students while still attracting university-educated newcomers to Orthodoxy.

In an important section of one essay, R. Wolbe lays out his basic worldview. Our text is a 1982 article titled “*Psychiatria ve-Dat* (Psychiatry and Religion)” that Rav Wolbe contributed to a Torah journal published by Laniado Hospital in Kiryat Sanz (*Bishvilei haRefu'ah* (In the Paths of Medicine), vol. 5, Sivan 5742, pp. 57-90). We will be examining the second section of the article (pp. 60-70), in which R. Wolbe discusses the purpose of Torah and life, from his *Mussar*-based perspective.

The following translation, section headings and footnotes are my own.

A World of *Yedidus*

If we wish to outline the Torah of Israel in great brevity, literally “on one foot,”¹ we would call it: “a world of *yedidus*” (affection). A great closeness predominates between Israel and God. “You are close, Hashem” (Tehillim 119:151) The Nation of Israel is called “His close nation” (Tehillim 148:14). The Jew does not approach God with celebration like to a god who is a rare, exalted guest, but like a son who approaches his loving and devoted father. A typical statement in the Talmud (*Menachos* 53a):

¹ This idiom, “on one foot,” is a reference to an exchange in the Talmud later retold in this article between Hillel the Elder and a conversion candidate. It is usually taken in accord with the literal translation: that the explanation is quick, fitting within the time someone could balance standing on one foot. However, it could also mean “foot” idiomatically: to explain a major concept using a single foundational principle. This second interpretation also fits here and in the Talmud.

[God said:] “Let the *yedid* (dear one) the son of a *yedid* come and build a *yedid* for a *Yedid* in the portion of a *yedid* and the *yedidim* will be atoned with it.”

“Let the *yedid* come” — this is King Solomon (... [called] “*Yididyah*...”)

“the son of a *yedid*” — this is Avraham...

“And build a *yedid*” — this is the *Beis haMikdash* (“How much *yedidus* have Your Tabernacles...” Tehillim 84:2).

“For a *Yedid*” — this is *HaKadosh barukh Hu* (... “I will sing to my *yedid*” Yeshaiah 5:1).

“In the portion of a *yedid*” — this is Binyamin (... “[to Binyamin he said] ‘Hashem’s *yedid*.’” *Devarim* 33:12)

“and the *yedidim* will be atoned with it” — they are Israel...

This closeness is not uni-directional. Not only did Avraham and subsequent generations draw themselves close to the Holy One, but He also draws Himself close to us. He gave us His Torah and rested His *Shechinah* on us. The clear feeling of Hashem’s closeness — which is called *Shechinah* — accompanies us in all periods: “Every place where they were exiled — the *Shechinah* was exiled with them” (*Megillah* 29a). This closeness is pervasive in all areas of life and even gratifies one’s physical life. The closeness between Israel and the Holy One establishes a *yedidus* and closeness between a person and his friends, which is what Hillel the Elder answered the non-Jew who wanted to convert on the condition that [Hillel] teach him the entire Torah “while he stands on one foot.”² Hillel said to him, “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your friend -- this is the entire Torah, and the rest is its explanation. Go study!” (*Shabbos* 31a). We see the central point of the Torah: “Fellowship”! This establishes a very close bond with each Jew, behavior in accord with the “ways of peace”³ with all people, caution against causing pain to any living being, and a positive relationship toward everything in the Holy One’s world. This finds expression in the maxim, “Despise no one and disdain nothing, for there is no person who does not have his moment and there is nothing that does not have its place” (*Avos* 4:3).

² Or, a demand that Hillel teach him the entire Torah as stemming from a single principle. See above, footnote 1.

³ An idiom used in a number of places, e.g. Mishnah, Gittin 5:8-9; BT Sotah 61a, describing our duty to uphold peace and amicable relations, both among Jews and in our relationship to non-Jews.

Excursus: Everything Has a Place, Even Insanity⁴

It should be stated quickly that our Sages also saw mental illness from this perspective. This is why they said (*Yalkut Shimoni*, Shmuel 1:21 #131):

“He made everything beautiful in its time” (Koheles 3:11) — everything the Holy One made in His world is beautiful. David said before the Holy One, “Master of the universe, everything that You made in your world is beautiful. Wisdom is the most beautiful of everything. Except for insanity; what benefit exists in this insane person? A person walks in the marketplace, tears his clothing and children laugh at him and run after him, and the people laugh at him — this is pleasant before You?” The Holy One said to him, “David, you call a challenge over insanity?! By your life, you will need it!... You will be pained and pray for it until I give some [insanity] to you.” David didn’t do anything but [immediately] went to the Philistines... The Holy One said to him, “You are going to Akhish [the Philistine ruler of Gath]? Yesterday you killed Goliath and today you go by his brothers with his sword in your hand, and his brothers are Akhish’s bodyguards. The blood of Goliath hasn’t yet dried!” When David reached Akhish, they came to Akhish and said to him, “Let us kill the one who killed our brother!” ... At that point David became afraid... he started to pray and said, “Master of the universe, answer me at this time!” The Holy One said to him, “David, what do you request?” He said to Him, “Give me some of that thing [insanity]!”... He made himself like that insane person, writing on doors, “Akhish the king of Gath owes me 10,000, and his wife — fifty [thousand]....” Akhish said to them, “You know I am short on fools?” as it says, “Do you think I lack crazy people?” (Shmuel I 21:16)

As is well known, in this way David was then saved. Our Sages didn’t reveal to us the reason, the need for which God created mental illness in the world. They only said that David questioned the existence of mental illness and through this he entered the domain of “despise it.”⁵ His punishment was that he himself needed to appear like a mentally ill person in order to be saved. Our Sages implied to us with this that even the mentally ill have a place in the Holy One’s world. Let us return to our topic....

⁴ I presume this paragraph was added because of its role in the larger paper. Insanity does not play a central part in Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe’s worldview, but here serves to highlight the contrast between how psychology and Torah view the world. Everything has its place, as Rabbi Wolbe was saying. Mental illness is a means of pulling a person, in this case King David, toward *yedidus*. Insanity is not only something to be cured and disposed of, but first poses an opportunity for growth. Perhaps this growth happens by overcoming the malady, perhaps in another way — “our sages didn’t reveal to us the reason and need.”

⁵ By denying the value of insanity, he violated the previously cited dictum from *Avos* of “Despise no one and disdain nothing.”

Torah, Halakhah and Yedidus

When we enter the world of Torah, we find ourselves in the world of *yedidus*. This *yedidus* is not an abstract theory. The Torah speaks in the language of action: It gives us commandments. They are what establish the connections between a person and his Creator, between a person and his peers, and between a person and himself.

Here there isn't merely a religious ritual but a lifestyle that encompasses all aspects of life. All the *mitzvos*, even though they are many, would still remain isolated points in the broad expanse of life if it were not for the thread that ties it all together, and like a faint web which actually surrounds all the situations of life: this network is the *halakhah*. The Talmud from which we draw practical rulings is not a collection of stringent decrees but a profound and specific wisdom. As the Rambam expressed, "Its way [of *halakhah*] is exceedingly deep" (introduction to the Code of Jewish Law). This wisdom is not the privilege of rabbis; every Jew is invited to take part in it.

Halakhah is the workshop of the Jewish lifestyle. One who stands on the outside would perhaps think that the *mitzvos* and *halakhah* do not leave space for an emotional life and stifles individual development. Later we will see that this is not the case. Of course, the Torah does not declare that the spirit is a hostile power to the soul, as [Ludwig] Klages⁶ thinks. On the contrary, the spirit completes the soul. *Halakhah* guides a person even in confusing and unusual situations in a sober, objective manner without giving the person the feeling of being alienated. That approach which characterizes the modern psychologist's relationship to his patient is precisely the approach of *halakhah* and [its] decisors, even to questions about ethical failings. Instead of causing a person to be mired in guilt feelings, *halakhah* determines how to behave and fix his failings according to his abilities.

The Torah of the Heart

The high road of Judaism is *halakhah*. However, a unique segment established for itself the "Torah of the Heart." Its fabric was woven by the prophets and poets (Tehillim!), the masters of *agadata* in the Talmud and Midrashim, philosophers and kabbalists. Two later developments in this area are the Chassidic (established by R' Yisrael the "Baal Shem Tov," 1700-1760) and Mussar (established by R' Yisrael Lipkin — Salanter, 1808-1882) Movements. Emotion occupies a central position in Chassidus; the sublime experience of communal unity around the Chassidic Master, and the encouragement and paternal supervision of the Chassidic Master — the *rebbe* for his chassidim — are the mainstays of Chassidus.

⁶Ludwig Klages (1872-1956) was a German philosopher and psychologist.

In the Mussar Movement, too, emotion occupies a central position. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter emphasized that a person could not reach *sheleimus* (wholeness) if he doesn't straighten out his subconscious forces. He calls these "dark forces."⁷ (Rav Yitzchak Blazer's *Or Yisrael*, ch. 6) His classical example:

A man has a wild son whom he hates because of [the child's] belligerence, and an excellent and very beloved student. The son and the student live in the same room. A fire breaks out in the house and the father-teacher rushes to rescue the two youths. He runs to their room, and who does he save first? His son, even though he hates him. His love for [the son] was suppressed into the subconscious, but in the chaos of the danger it overcomes the love of the student that was in his conscious. (*Even Yisrael*, Jerusalem 1954, p. 62) (These things were written some 60 years before Freud!)

Rav Yisrael Salanter further found that the subconscious forces are not influenced by intellectual persuasion alone, but specifically by *hispa'alus* [working on oneself experientially and emotionally] (*Or Yisrael*, ch. 30). (This principle is also known from psychoanalytic technique, and as already said — Rav Yisrael preceded it by sixty years!) We achieve this *hispa'alus* through Mussar study "with the soul's feeling and the spirit's storm" (Ibid., "The Mussar Letter," [ch. 10]) in other words, self-study. The Mussar Movement also created an institution like the Chassidic Rebbe in respect to authority and stature--the spiritual dean of the Lithuanian Yeshiva (called "The *Mashgiach*"). He guides his students with Mussar talks, small working groups, and a close personal connection with the students.

We tried to portray, in a nutshell, the "World of *Yedidus*" of Judaism. In practice, every congregation that Jews establish, on foundations of its assistance and the mutual feelings of responsibility of the community members, makes a microcosm of the "World of *Yedidus*." Here we have a complete lifestyle based on the *mitzvos* of the Torah, enhanced by *halakhah* and the Torah of the heart and feeling.

Yedidus vs. Fear

It can be said that the fundamental feeling of someone who lives in the world of Torah is *bitachon*—trust. "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid!" (Yeshaiiah 12:2) Or, "[A psalm] of David: Hashem is my light and salvation, of whom would I fear? Hashem is the stronghold of my life, of whom would I be afraid?" (Tehillim 27:1) This is the spirit that blows through all of the Holy Scriptures — and in the Jewish home established in the World of *Yedidus* of Torah.

It is clear that the cold world that is embedded in "the battle of life," which is essentially materialistic, is fertile ground for fear. It is not coincidence that fear is a common theme for modern

⁷ Emanuel Kant refers to unconscious aspects of our thoughts as occurring in *der dunkel*, the dark.

philosophy and psychology. Martin Heidegger claims that fear is man's basic sense in the world (*Sein u. Zeit*). There is no need to point out the broad space that fear occupies in psychology and psychiatry. Perhaps fear is the stigma of our generation. It is made that way by the economic faithlessness and certainly also the development of nuclear arsenal. But there is no doubt that also the loss of faith in God is a strong cause for the spread of fear. A person born and raised in the "World of *Yedidus*" knows and feels that the main existential feeling is **not** fear but specifically *yedidus*. (Of course, these explanations are not said about fears caused by trauma in one's youth or the like, but in existential fears like the feelings of life's emptiness.)

★ ★ ★

Alienation and Cruelty

The World of *Yedidus* is not an idealized world without any opposing forces. Forces of **alienation** stand in its way and constantly threaten to harm or even destroy it. The World of *Yedidus* is a unified world, built upon great closeness between a person and their Creator and between people and their peers. But there is a force within a person that does not want this closeness — estrangement that grows step by step until all connection to others is lost, and until it is the worst of all *middos*: *akh-zariyus* [pure alienation, an unpacking of the word *akhzariyus*, cruelty], that is to say, absolute alienation. The *akh-zar* person is happy to gloat over his peer, gets pleasure from his pain. The final step of alienation is that the person is a *zar* (a stranger) to himself and even *akh-zari* (cruel) to himself. (See at length in Wolbe, *Bein Sheishes leAsor*, Jerusalem 1976, the essay "*Olam haYedidus*" on p. 15 ff.)

We find in the Talmud (Shabbos 105b),

One who tears clothing in his fury, who breaks his vessels in his fury, or who scatters his money in his fury should be in your eyes like an idolator. Because such is the job of the evil inclination: today it says to him "do this" and tomorrow it says to him "do that," until eventually it tells him "worship idols!" — and he goes and worships. Rav Avin said, "Where is the scripture (Where is this written in Tanakh)? 'Do not have within you a **zar** (foreign) god' — What is a foreign god who is within a person's body? This says it is the evil inclination."

This text outlines evil as a force of alienation. The Talmud here portrays the process of alienation which begins with a person's alienation from himself through anger, and from there he reaches alienation from G-d — idolatry. It is not for naught that pagan gods are called by the term "*avodah zarah*" (foreign worship), to point to the source of the phenomenon in the power of *zarus* (alienation / foreignness).

Middos and Intellect

What is this process of alienation? There isn't any power in the soul which is specifically evil (Naftali Wessley, *Sefer haMidos* part I, ch. 4). Every power has some place in the World of *Yedidus*. Even egotism and anger are necessary sometimes. When you use each power in its proper place and time — it is good, and every force in the soul is necessary. However, in order to build the World of *Yedidus*, there has to be coordination of all the forces together, so that they work together in cooperation and a proper distribution of their duties.

The ruling power, which sets each of the other powers in their proper place, is the intellect, which is therefore the central power of *yedidus* in a person. (C.f. Kuzari, Rav Yehudah HaLeivi, 3:2 onward.) Without the rule of the intellect, there is no World of *Yedidus*. When any power from among the powers of the soul exceeds its boundaries and requires excessive satisfaction or even total control — this power alienates itself from the other powers and rebels against the intellect. This is where *zarus* begins, and that power thereby changes to become “evil.” This process is depicted in the Talmud quoted above with the example of anger. Elsewhere the Talmud depicts the same process of alienation with regard to sexual lust (which the Gemara describes as “[Rav said:] someone who intentionally stimulates himself [should be excommunicated. And why is it prohibited? Because he incites the evil inclination against himself.]” – *Niddah 13b*)

Free Will

Here we reach the question of free will. We explained that there is no power in a person that is specifically evil. We are able to use our powers to build the World of *Yedidus*, through the coordination of those powers by the intellect. The excessive use of one power or a rebellion against the intellect cause the destruction of the World of *Yedidus*. This choice is in the person's hands, whether to choose *yedidus* or alienation. Indeed, he **can** choose.⁸

In the Talmud we find an example of this (Shabbos 156a): “A person born under the sign of Mars will be a person who sheds blood — a blood-letter, a thief, a ritual slaughterer [for meat] or a *mohel*.” A person cannot change the basic attribute, in this example — the inclination to shed blood. But this attribute can be used for good, and the spectrum of possibilities is broad: he could be a doctor, a slaughterer or a *mohel*. Only the thief who won't flinch from murder uses his attribute in a manner of

⁸ I believe this is why it was so important for Rabbi Wolbe to assert in the prior installment that everything has its role in creation, buttressing it with an entire digression about even insanity serving its purpose. As he quoted, “Despise no one and disdain nothing, for there is no person who does not have his moment and there is nothing that does not have its place” (Avos 4:3). Every inclination and power of the soul has its role. Therefore the Torah does not compel us to suppress any of them; rather it teaches us how to find its purpose within the ultimate goal of a World of *Yedidus*.

alienation. Here we have an example of an extreme inclination, and there is still nothing that compels a person to be evil because of it. He has the choice to use it for more beneficial ends.

For the sake of completeness, we will give a historical example from our Sages on this topic (Yalkut Shim'oni, Samuel I, 16:124):

When Samuel saw that David was “red,” he grew fearful. “This one will shed blood like Esau!” The Holy One said to him, “With beautiful eyes” — Esau killed by his own decision, but this one kills by the decision of the Sanhedrin!

In any case, there is a limit to choice; the basic inclination cannot be changed! In the above example, someone born with the inclination to shed blood **cannot** uproot this inclination. The only choice in his control is whether to use it for good or for evil, to build the World of *Yedidus* or to destroy it.⁹

Torah and Middos

Here the **Torah** comes to the aid of the intellect, to strengthen the person to choose good. The Torah of Israel wages an all-out war against all the forces of alienation. Therefore, first of all, “The intent of the Torah is to extend the intellect to all the desires of the soul, and to assert its power over them” (Chovos HaLvavos, Shaar Perishus, ch. 2). The intent is not to suppress desires, but to put each force in its proper place. For that is the way of Torah in all its *mitzvos*. Torah has three pillars: “On three things the world stands — on Torah, on worship and on supporting kindness” — taught Shim'on haTzaddik (Avos 1:2). Learning **Torah** completes the person **himself**. Worshipping God — whether in the *Beis haMikdash* or with his prayer — connects us with the Holy One. Supporting through acts of kindness is *yedidus* toward the other. These are the parts of Torah.¹⁰

⁹ Maimonides famously describes the proper tuning for each inclination to be the Middle Measure (Code, Laws of Dei'os 1:2). The Orchos Tzadikim (introduction) likens it to a recipe or a meal; some ingredients, such as the meat, are desired in large quantities, others, like salt, in far smaller ones. We saw this kind of description in the previous section, when Rabbi Wolbe writes, “When any power from among the powers of the soul exceeds its limits and requires excessive satisfaction or even total control...”

However, it is notable that his primary focus in both that section and the current one is not so much the quantity or intensity of each inclination, but coordinating when and how each is used. As when he writes, “When you use each power in its proper place and time — it is good, and every force in the soul is necessary.” Or as we find here, “The only choice in his control is whether to use it for good or for evil, to build the World of *Yedidus* or destroy it.”

¹⁰ Note that these are also the three forms of relationship that Rav Wolbe earlier said characterize the World of *Yedidus*.

The Torah is also meticulous about subtle instances of alienation: “When you see your enemy’s donkey collapsing under its load, you refrain from removing it? You should surely remove it with him!” (*Shemos 23:4-5*) Ignoring damages to one’s peers is also alienation — “you may not hide!” (*Devarim 22:3-4*)

Subconscious and Super-Conscious

There is one last question for us to discuss: Does the Torah recognize the [existence of a] subconscious? The answer is in the affirmative. In the Tanakh we find that “Hashem [Tzevakos is a righteous judge] who examines the kidneys and heart” (*Yirmiyahu 11:20*). And the Talmud establishes, “the kidneys advise, the heart understands” (*Berakhos 61a*). The heart is the seat of the conscious, the kidneys — an idiom for the subconscious.

There is an interesting comparison here between Rabbi Wolbe’s model and those of two earlier figures of the 20th century.

Rabbi Shimon Shkop (introduction to *Shaarei Yosher*) also speaks of the goal of the Torah in terms of the person who is connected to others:

The entire “I” of a coarse and lowly person is restricted only to his substance and body. Above him is someone who feels that his “I” is a synthesis of body and soul. And above him is someone who can include in his “I” all of his household and family. Someone who walks according to the way of the Torah, his “I” includes the whole Jewish people... And there are higher levels of this in a person who is whole, who can connect his soul to feel that all of the world and worlds are his “I,” and he himself is only one small limb in all of creation. Then, his self-love helps him love all of the Jewish people and [even] all of creation.

However, Rabbi Shkop’s notion is more radical; his perspective is outright humanistic. Spirituality is only the second step in a progression towards connecting to all of humanity. He opens by telling us, that God “planted eternal life within us, so that our greatest desire should be to do good to others, to individuals and to the masses, now and in the future, in imitation of the Creator...”

Similarly, Dr. Nathan Birnbaum’s HaOlim Society carried a three-part motto of “*Da’as, Rachamim, Tif’eres*” to parallel Shimon haTzaddik’s three pillars. Translating, it called for “knowledge [of God], compassion [toward others], and a splendid harmony [within].” And yet, he too gave his vision a very humanistic hue (*Yavneh*, year 3, issue 156-157 – *Kisleiv-Teiveis 5691*, published in Lemberg, p. 8-9). He describes Hashem’s Good as flowing from under the Throne of Glory and our job to aid its bestowal on ourselves and others. This requires being close to Him and thus connected to the Source, compassionate and thereby connected to others, and to form and master ourselves to become conduits through which that Good can flow.

Whereas R’ Wolbe makes each kind of relationship – God, others and self – equally primary, both of these earlier thinkers speak of the value of relating to God and being whole in ourselves as deriving (at least in part, although possibly in total) from their being necessary to properly assist others.

However, the subconscious known to Torah scholars is not that of Freud, which is created by the suppression of desires or unpleasant experiences. It is also not the unconscious of Jung, who believes in archetypes which reside in a collective unconscious. We must turn to the words of the Gra, “the Vilna Gaon”: “All of a person’s ways follow the **original desire**; the original desire as it initially arises is correct in his eyes.” (Commentary on *Mishlei 16:1-2*) As if to say, the desire is formed in such depths that our conscious has no dominion over them. The “I”¹¹ that is known to us is only a very small part of the essence of a person. Hidden desire directs our ways — they are the “*advising kidneys*” in the idiom of Tanakh and our Sages, which we don’t directly feel in our activities. For the sake of brevity, we will have to refrain here from bringing examples from the Torah about how this “original desire” acts. Suffice it here to say that the hidden desire has the ability to strive for things of the body or the spirit.

From the Torah’s perspective, we would have to speak of a subconscious and also of a super-conscious. There are lofty desires which originate in the godly soul within us. They push us to ethical elevation and closeness to God, and they bring us to more lofty emotions. This spiritual original desire is appropriately called “super-conscious,” and we must leave the term “subconscious” for original desires that draw one to satisfy physical indulgences. The desires of our super-conscious are certainly no less strong than the desires of the subconscious. This understanding of super- and subconscious does not invalidate the mechanisms of repression. We already saw above that it was already known to Rabbi Yisrael Salanter 60 years before Freud. But the Torah understanding does contradict Freud in a sharp way in that he only finds the Libido in the subconscious, and in dreams which are the window into the subconscious, only sexual matters. (Cf. [Victor] Frankl’s writings, *Das Menschenbild der Seelenheilkunde*, Stuttgart 1959, and *Der Unbewußte Gott - Psychotherapie und Religion*.)

¹¹ Perhaps: “Ego” in the Freudian sense.

Excursus B: Jewish Mysticism

This is the right point to dwell briefly on Jewish **Mysticism**. Judaism does **not** recognize that which we call *unio mystica*.¹² A creature could never be entirely unified with his Creator. A person can greatly purify himself through the power of his Torah and worship; he can lower and abnegate himself before his Creator until he feels God's closeness to him, but he remains constantly aware of the great distance that is between creature and His Creator. Non-Jewish sources which speak of a *unio mystica* apparently refer to specific ecstatic states from within which they feel **as though** they are in union with God. Jewish mystical enlightenment¹³ entirely negates the possibility of actual unity. However, there is a section of the Torah called "the esoteric Torah" which Kabbalah deals with. It is part of the Oral Torah like the Talmud. However, whereas there is an obligation on every Jew to learn Talmud, only "people of stature" involve themselves in "Kabbalah." Until our generation there were Kabbalists who developed deep insights in the area of Kabbalah. We will briefly follow their means of innovation.

The Torah's system has two axes: The horizontal axis are the practical mitzvos which obligate every Jewish individual — they create the World of Yedidus of the entire nation. The vertical axis — these are the ways of ascent of each person according to their ability. These ways of ascent are primarily built upon the service of the heart, like love for, *yir'ah* (awe-fear) of, attachment to [God], etc... The more a person delves into the depths of Torah, the more he feels the subtle nuances of holiness. These sublime powers we discussed aid a person in this. The more deeply he delves into Torah, the more these powers are strengthened within him. With this he can reach the point where in the purity of his heart and clarity of his mind he could grasp very deep knowledge of Godliness, the world, and humanity.

This is the direct opposite of ecstasy, where through the nullification of consciousness one sees visions of secret worlds. On the contrary, the conscious is in operation at the time of comprehension, and the Kabbalist feels with total certainty that he is grasping the truth. A superlative example of this is the Gra from Vilna, about whom those close to him were known to say that they sent him [angels] from heaven to reveal to him lofty secrets. He **refused** to accept these revelations, because his mind was only at rest with ideas that he himself established with his study (introduction by Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner to the Gra's commentary on *Sifra deTzeneiu'sa*, p. 4).

Therefore the person of Torah **can** reach purity of thought and sacred behavior until he merits sublime understanding and truths that reach the depths of creation. But this is the exclusive border of the Torah of Israel. Psychiatry cannot bring one to these kinds of spiritual states, and also one cannot benefit from the ideas which are revealed in them.

¹² The Latin is in the original: a mystical union between the practitioner and G-d.

¹³ *Behirus* means mystical enlightenment, in contrast with *Haskalah*.