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Abulafian - Vitalian Kabbalistic Meditation Made Easy

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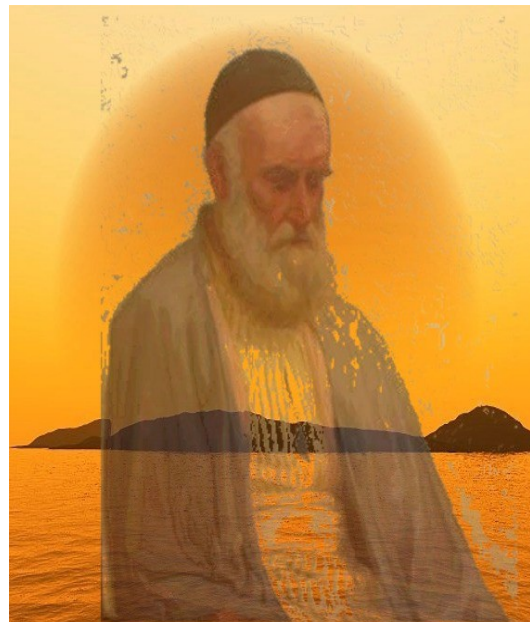
“As one thinks... there he be!” (SBST, Noah 56)
Think not . . . be not!

*It is well known that
all authentic meditative experiences occur
while in altered states of consciousness.*

*Yet, today so many people have no idea
how to get into one of these states,
and to interact in it in a way
that will bring about some glimpse
of authentic spiritual enlightenment.*

There are many different types of meditative techniques that can lead one into an altered state of consciousness. Two of the major Kabbalistic sources of instruction in how to engage in meditative trances are the teachings of R. Abraham Abulafia (13th century), and R. Hayim Vital (16th century).

Both of these authors have left for posterity practical directions that anyone willing to follow the instructions that they outline may follow. The full forms of the techniques that they describe are intricate, and not always “user-friendly” to the modern layman not familiar with the intricacies of Kabbalistic language, and terminology.



However, one should not be dismayed by the exclusive nature of ancient, secret mystical traditions. Many of the “secret teachings” passed down by these systems have been discovered to be psychological in nature, and therefore accessible to all human beings, because of the common make-up of the human mind.

Centuries after Abulafia, and Vital, certain schools of psychology independently (?) also discovered similar methods to induce a trance-state. These schools of psychology described their findings in modern secular terms, without all the layers of arcane mysticism, and void of any overt religious connotations.

The discoveries of the modern psychology enable the religious/spiritual practitioners of ancient traditions to realize the essential psychological fundamentals of their spiritual/meditative practices. By reviewing the two forms together, the ancient in light of the modern, we can successfully outline a practice of trance-meditation for modern people, who otherwise would not be able to associate themselves with the practices.

The techniques of the Prophetic Kabbalah meditative tradition are originally found in the writings of Abulafia. Granted, earlier techniques did exist in Judaism, dating back to Biblical times. However, these techniques are only more advanced forms of the fundamental techniques outlined by Abulafia.

In every system, one needs to start at the beginning, and work progressively through the proper steps, in order to successfully accomplish what the system offers. One cannot expect to gaze upon the holy Merkava, until one first masters the ability to conjure its mirror image within one's mind, and then proceed to understand what it is that one sees reflected.

Abulafian techniques are numerous, ranging from beginner to advanced levels. While the advanced levels require much training, the beginning levels are easy to practice, and are accessible to everyone.

In his book, “Sefer HaHeshek” (Book of the Passion), Abulafia outlines a simple beginners technique that can have a profound effect, especially when we understand it in light of modern psychology.

“Focus your face on the Name [of God], and contemplate [it] as if it is a man standing before you, waiting for you to speak with him. He [in turn] is ready to answer you about everything that you ask him. You speak, and he answers. This [then] is the way to go.” Sefer HaHeshek (Gross ed. Pg 24)

Abulafia instructs his students to visualize the appearance of a man standing before one. Once this internal image becomes coherent in one's mind, Abulafia instructs the student to engage the internal image in conversation.

One does not need to initiate the conversation. One should wait for the image to talk first. This technique of engaging a mental image in dialogue is what is referred to in modern psychology as "active imagination." It requires one to take an imaginative step into one's inner mind, and to engage one's inner image in conversation, even if one starts this process by a sheer act of make-believe.



Usually, self-doubt is the main cause of one's inability to practice active imagination. In religious teachings, the inner image was always considered to be an actual spiritual guide, a Magid. Therefore, for the religious, belief in the inner-image was well received. In our modern secular times when, for the most part, we do not believe in such things as actual "spirit guides," to believe that a conjured image can take on a life of its own, is for most, a frightening, and unbelievable thought.

Abulafia continues to emphasize the importance of proper mental focus on spiritual matters, thoughts, and ideas. One good way to accomplish this is to recite specific verses of scripture that will set one in the right spiritual mood.

Once the conversation begins in the imagination, one may be surprised to realize that not all dialogue coming out of the mouth of the imagined mental image is coming from one's own conscious thoughts, and choices. After a while, once one gets comfortable with the practice, one may discover that this inner dialogue does indeed take on a life of its own. The mental image in one's mind seems to come alive, and actually presents thoughts to one's conscious mind that one may not have thought about previously.

Psychologically speaking it is believed that these other thoughts are arising from within one's own unconscious. Abulafia, and Vital would say that one has made contact with a spiritual being. Maybe the two are indeed the same. After all, what do we really know about the true nature of the unconscious, or of the true nature of spiritual beings?

In his book, "Sha'arei Kedusha," (Gates of Holiness), R. Vital uses the same basic active imagination technique as did Abulafia. R. Vital taught his students to visualize

God's Name YHWH. He taught that one should visualize the individual letters, Yod, Hey, Vav, and Hey, each as big as a house.

“Picture a great white curtain, and written up it is the name YHWH, written in thick block Hebrew, each letter as large as a mountain, white as snow. Start by uniting the letter Yod with the letter Hey, then Hey back with Yod; Vav with Hey, then Hey with Vav... then Vav with the final Hey, and lastly the Final Hey with Vav”.

Sha'arei Kedushah Pt. 4, taken from Yikra B'Shmi



Once one can focus this image inside one's mind, R. Vital would ask his students to pay attention to exactly how the letters appear, (or do not appear). R. Vital ascribes numerous meanings to the different colors, and shapes of the letters that can appear in one's mind. He states that the status of one's soul is reflected in the image that one's mind conceives.

Essentially, R. Vital uses one's ability to internally visualize the Name of God in a manner similar to how later psychologists would use the Rorschach ink-blot test. What one sees in one's mind reflects the status of one's unconsciousness, or as R. Vital would say, one's soul.

R. Vital wrote Section Four of his “Sha'arei Kedusha” as a compendium of meditative practices. In this Section Four, R. Vital elaborates on a number of meditative techniques. He even quotes verbatim, R. Abulafia's “Sefer HaHeshek,” and the instructions about visualizing the “man” one is to engage in dialogue. R. Vital records Abulafia's instructions in detail, and, with regards to the dialogue with he visualized “man,” includes the following:

“You yourself answer [yourself] using a different voice, so that the voice answering [your question] is different from the one asking [the question].”

(Sha'arei Kedusha, Barzani ed. Page 138, Heshek, Gross ed. Page 25)

Based on these instructions, one can clearly see the psychological component inherent in the Kabbalistic practices.

Visualization techniques of holy images, and holy Names are just some of the tools used by Kabbalists to enter into an altered state of consciousness, and from there, to receive spiritual insights, and revelations. The underlying operations of this system

are psychological in nature, and therefore, the techniques are universal, and can work for anyone.

However, this does not mean that just by performing Kabbalistic visualizations one will automatically receive spiritual revelations. Everything depends upon the mind, (or soul) of the individual practitioner. Like the Ba'al Shem Tov taught, "*as one thinks, there he be.*" In this, ancient Kabbalah, and modern psychology agree.

What an individual will personally experience in a meditative state depends completely upon the state of one's mind, and personality. What one sees in a trance is usually a reflection of one's own deeper self. Sometimes this revelation may not be to one's liking.

Kabbalistic meditative training, much like modern in-depth psychological analysis requires a great deal of self-introspection on part of the practitioner. Without one's willingness to explore oneself in-depth, one will never be able to experience authentic spiritual revelations. Shallow is, as shallow be. Then again, deep is, and deep be. Each individual chooses for him/herself how far one wishes to walk along the spiritual path.

Anyone today can begin to practice the Abulafian, or Vitalian methods described above. All one needs to do to start is to close one's eyes, and allow one's imagination to kick in. Once one can take this first step, the next steps along the path come easier.

The KosherTorah School offers numerous online audio courses in meditative theory, and practice. In this format, one can learn, and proceed at one's own pace, and this is the right way, and best way to proceed. Go to www.koshertorahonlinestore.com and explore the numerous opportunities available to you for learning, beginning, intermediate, and advanced stages of Kabbalistic meditative practices.