



פסיכותרפיה רוחנית יהודית בישראל
Jewish Spirituality Integrated Psychotherapies in Israel



Jewish Spirituality – Integrated Psychotherapies in Israel

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Project Background

- Pioneering study of psychotherapy in Israel that integrates Jewish spirituality
- Quantitative and qualitative methodologies
- Participants were certified therapists in Israel who integrate Jewish spirituality into their work



Quantitative Research Questions

- **What types of spiritual interventions do therapists actually use and how often?**
- **How effective are these interventions?**
- **16 therapists from different psychotherapy schools, 26 clients with a total of 109 sessions**
- **Collection process ~ 10 months**

Qualitative Research Questions

- **In what way is the Jewish-spiritual aspect manifested in treatment?**
- **Spiritual interventions? Jewish-spiritual interventions?**
- **What are the therapists' worldviews on Jewish-spirituality?**
- **15 semi-structured in-depth interviews with therapists**

Challenges

1. **Difficulty recruiting therapists for the study:**

- Therapists needed to be academically trained
- **Therapists unwilling /cautious to offer to clients**
 - **Reluctance to involve clients for fear of impingement in the relationship**
 - **Fear of alienating clients due to the spiritual/Jewish label**



Some more challenges...

2. **Difficulty recruiting clients for the study** (sample bias: participants are those who are emotionally available to fill out questionnaires, and those who are open to spirituality and Judaism)
3. **Irregularity in filling out the questionnaires**



Successes of the Project

- **A community of Israeli therapists who integrate Jewish spirituality - eager to connect with each other, the academia and the world of research**
- Through the study and community activities that we initiated we found that **many of the therapists see beyond the secular/religious dichotomy; they view these aspects as co-existing in different forms in people's lives**

Successes (continued)

Most therapists hold an open, eclectic approach and create their own unique blend of integrating Jewish spirituality in therapy, which mostly relies on their own personal and professional developmental processes.





Successful Events:

- We held the **first inaugural academic conference in Israel dedicated to the integration of spirituality and psychotherapy** (March 11, 2019) Great success with around 350 participants
- Follow-up **Seminar on Psychotherapy and Jewish spirituality in Israel**, (September 8, 2019). More intimate with small group discussions, more than 100 participants

Seminar on Psychotherapy and Jewish spirituality in Israel-

small group
discussions



Successful events (continued)

- The World Psychiatric Association held a congress on psychiatry and spirituality in Jerusalem (December 1-4, 2019) prominently featured a session where therapists taking part in our study presented lectures on Jewish spirituality integrated therapy.
- Together these events demonstrate that our project has contributed to practice in the field, and that showcasing the subject of integrating Jewish spirituality into psychotherapy has drawn the interest of large and varied audiences.

Congress on psychiatry and spirituality in Jerusalem

Central Session on Jewish Spirituality



Quantitative Findings - Highlights

Therapists

- (a) Therapists and clients included a variety of religious/spiritual perspectives from secular to ultra-orthodox;
- (b) Despite lack of formal education how to incorporate spirituality or Jewish spirituality in therapy, their professional life is in tune with their personal spiritual perspective and development;
- (c) Therapists' approach to integrating spirituality was composed of responsiveness to clients' need and questions and also actively initiating integration of spirituality when it was appropriate;

Quantitative Findings (continued)

Therapists:

Leading interventions were general and not clearly Jewish or spiritual.

These included: unconditional acceptance (57.1 percent usage), use of metaphors (49.0 percent), assigned homework practice (48.0 percent), attention to client's emotions (45.9 percent), encouraging present awareness (41.8 percent), emotion identification (41.8 percent) and focusing on a supportive warm environment (40.8 percent);



Quantitative Findings (continued)

Therapists:



(e) **Spiritual interventions** were described in 83 out of the 109 sessions and included "to be attentive to their heart" (64.3 percent), exploring the client's spiritual soul (39.3 percent), discussing choice from spiritual perspective (30%), hope (30%), listen to spiritual issues (28%) recognition of spiritual inner goodness (18%), prayer, (17%).

(f) **Unique Jewish intervention**: *Tikkun* ("repair") process, using Jewish texts (20%), Gratitude (20%).

Quantitative Findings (continued)

Clients

- (a) The majority of clients was ready to discuss religious and spiritual issues in therapy and reported that the Jewish tradition is important in their life
- (b) Clients showed different patterns of change in their emotions (positive and negative) and wellbeing throughout the therapy process.
- (c) The most clear association found with therapists' interventions was an association between adopting the therapist's suggestions and increase in wellbeing as assessed by calculating a positive to negative emotions ratio.

Qualitative Findings

Theme 1 : Caution regarding explicit discussion of the Jewish-spiritual element of the treatment

Cautious and/or gradual discussion of the spiritual and/or Jewish element of the treatment

- To avoid their treatment being labeled as such
- To refrain from causing antagonism or feelings of coercion on the part of the client
- as a consideration towards the client
- as a professional stance holding that therapeutic themes should come from the client

Qualitative Findings (continued)

Therapists mentioned adapting their language / metaphors / stories according to the clients' background, to avoid alienating them and to allow them to be open to therapy and to the therapeutic relationship.

Sarah: "I'm really careful not to be, or don't want to be, labeled as looking religious...I'm afraid of being labeled as [part of a certain] faction...I think there's a very thin line between conveying Jewish spirituality – because that's my "language" – and socially being a part of a Jewish faction... **It's like, I would only need to look religious [e.g., in clothes] and talk about God for it to have the potential to be perceived as imposing religion on someone, if someone doesn't want it."**

Qualitative Findings (continued)

Theme 2: Therapeutic Methods



The spiritual perspective as the "tool".

Therapists stated that the Jewish-spiritual perspective guides both their therapeutic approach and their interventions, but is not necessarily explicit.

Rivka: “It’s all faith and spirituality, it’s not a tool.

It’s the approach, it’s the stance, the outlook. It’s the worldview. [To say] “tool” minimizes it.”

Qualitative Findings (continued)

- **Texts - using texts from Jewish sources during therapy.** Sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, such as using stories, fables, folktales, and quotes from the Bible and other Jewish religious writings
- **Language - using Jewish concepts.** Therapists use Jewish concepts which they imbued with psychotherapeutic meaning
- **Prayer.** Practitioners used prayer with Jewish religious characteristics, spiritual (not necessarily religious) prayer, writing a personal prayer, praying together with the client; praying themselves before or during a session without the client's knowledge.

An illustrative excerpt from an interview

Gabriel Strenger Clinical Psychologist



Qualitative Findings (continued)

Interventions not mentioned in the interviews:

Surprisingly, apart from prayer, interviewees did not mention any other therapeutic interventions related to common Jewish practices (such as donating to charity, lighting candles, laying *tefillin*).

This finding is possibly related to another major theme in the interviews, namely the therapists' cautiousness regarding the expression of the Jewish-spiritual element in therapy.

Summary and Discussion



- Therapists feel confident in the way they integrate spirituality and Jewish spirituality in the psychotherapy.
- They are eclectic, see themselves as universally good also for non-religious clients and indeed both therapists and clients have diverse religious perspectives from secular to ultra-orthodox.
- Therapists are cautious in the way they introduce Jewish spirituality in therapy (adaptation to clients' needs, reflected in language and type of intervention).

Summary and Discussion

- Therapists tend to focus on emotions ("the heart"), use mind-body perspectives and interventions, highlight the centrality of acceptance and inner goodness and tend to highlight issues of meaning, purpose and hope.
- Clients appear to benefit from therapy and their wellbeing increases when they report following the suggestions of the therapists regardless of which intervention was used.
- Larger samples are required to delve more deeply into these initial and promising findings.

Our Team

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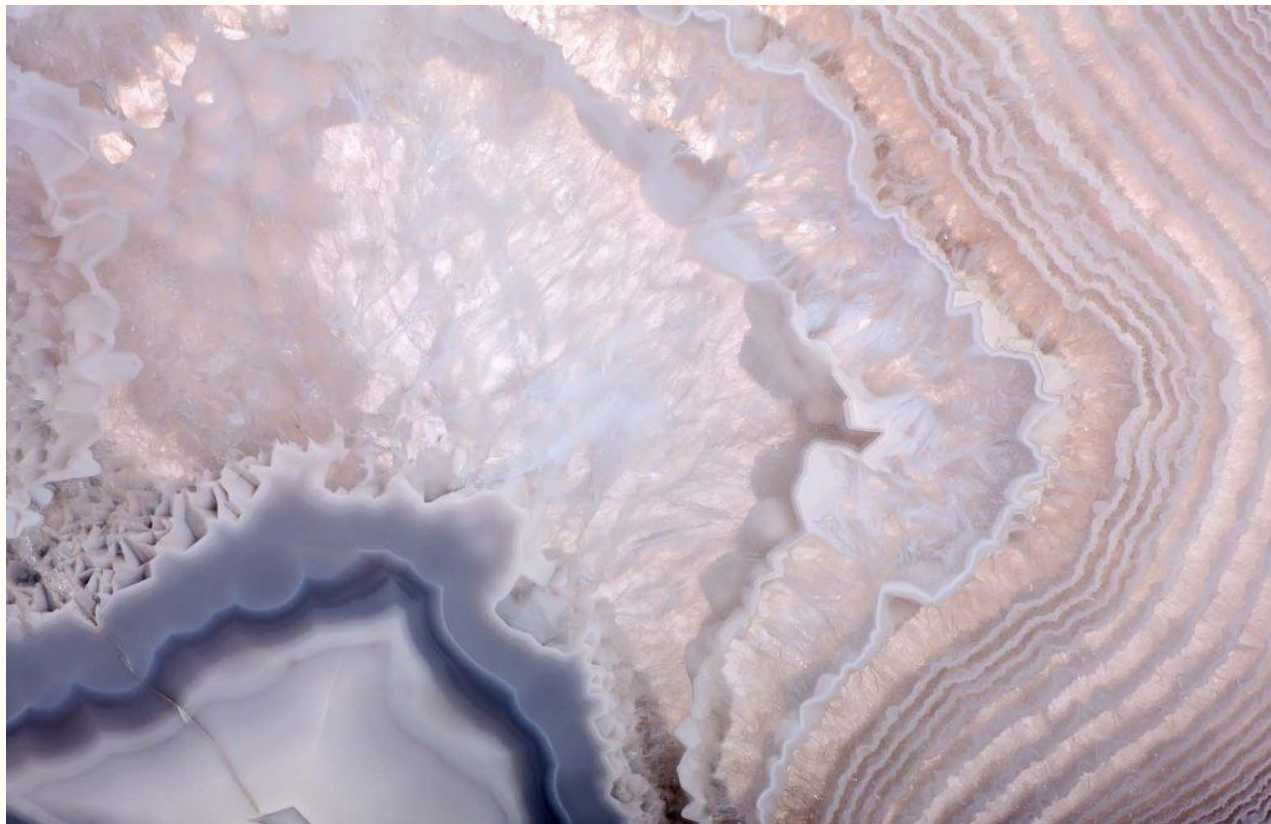


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A final note...

**Thank you from our emerging community of
Jewish Spirituality Integrated Psychotherapists
in Israel that BRIDGES helped create!**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/13PSPz_kLWgBOutQMvdBSf2DpQclv7HQ3/view