Some Notes about Jewish Spiritual Assessment

Very Much A Work in Process
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Jewish spiritual assessment entails a shared exploration of an individual's life -- its structure, meaning, purpose, direction, challenges and blessings -- through the values, vocabulary, norms, and resources of Jewish tradition and community.

Participants may include:
- Rabbi/Moreh/ah Derekh
- Jew
- Haver/ah / Companion

It may be broached/approached in various ways -- some examples:

- open-ended questions (as when R. Johanan and colleagues, in Talmud, Berakhot 5b, asks the sufferer, "Are your sufferings beloved to you?");
- the use of stories (personal, biblical, Hassidic, etc., etc.);
- the analysis of mitzvot and their personal resonance (Rabbi Simcha Weinberg's annual "spirituals");
- the exploration of Psalms;
- original writing to set a spiritual agenda (Hassidic kvitlach);
- the interpretation of the present juncture of the Jewish year and its meaning for the individual (e.g., Pesah, High Holidays, weekly Torah portion, etc.)

It may result in a Jewish spiritual profile that may include descriptives such as:

vulnerable (pagi’a) and exposed (m’guleh, ’arom)
  strengthened (hit’azer oz) and shielded (hugan)

despair (ye’ush) and hopelessness (hoser tikva)
  hope (tikva) and trust (bitahon)

bitterness (m’rirut) and sadness (atzvut)
  joy (simha) and contentment (sameah b’helko)

disconnection (hafradah) and loneliness (b’didut)
  relatedness (kirva) and at-oneness (ahdut)
disintegration, disarray (m’vulbal, hit’porerut)
and fragmentation, crushed (m’kuta, m’duka)
re-instanted (shav al kano) and reinforced, rebuilt (m’zuyan)
abandonment, neglect (’azoov, zilzul) and rejection (saruv, mius)
attended (nishgah) and received (m’kubal)
falling downward (n’filah) and plunging (nital)
soaring (hit’rom’mut) and climbing (alah)
overwhelmed (nitzah, ayum) and compressed (dahus)
awe-struck (maleh yir’at kavod) & expansive (r’hav yadayim)
encycled (hukaf) and linear (m’surgal)
spiralling up (sh’il p’tiltal) and painterly (tsiyyuri)
wounded, attacked (pagua) and besieged (tsur)
bound up (hashur, masur b’lev) and released (shihrur)
obscured, ignored (satum, nitraker) and devalued (hafhet erekh)
known (yadua, muvan) and validated (kuyam)
withdrawn (n’sigah) and imploding (parotz p’nimah)
exploring (hoker) and overflowing (shif’a, r’vayah)
alienated (’ituk, harhakah) and aberrant (galuz, soteh)
familiar (mukar) and normal (bari b’ruah)
starved (ra’ev) and desperate (no’az)
nurtured, satisfied (s’va ratzon)
meaninglessness (hoser mashma’ut) and emptiness (reikut)
significance (hashivut) and fullness (shefa)
chaos (tohu va-vohu) and aimlessness (hoser matarah)
wholeness (shleimut) and direction (kivun)
guilt (ashmah) and missing-the-mark (het)
return, responsiveness, responsibility (t’shuvah)

These understandings are critical to both the immediate Jewish spiritual response and to designing and maintaining an ongoing relationship/intervention and are intended to further:

- a holistic, flexible understanding of the person/situation;
- a sense of challenge, purpose and direction that is shared by the different parties;
- and
- an opportunity to “differentially diagnose” and continuously re-shape agendas, foci, and strategies.