

The Guru and the Rebbe: Relationality in the Devotional Practices of Neem Karoli Baba Maharaj-ji and Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson

Jonah Gelfand
Oberlin College

ABSTRACT

When reading through the stories of Hindu gurus and Hasidic rebbes, the similarities are immediately apparent. This paper will argue that these similarities are due to a parallel need among devotees for ‘relationality,’ which can be seen in case studies of the devotional practices of *darshan* of the Hindu guru Neem Karoli Baba Maharaj-ji and *yechidut* with the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe of Chabad, Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Additionally, it will be argued that the primary function of saints is to provide their devotees with an accessible form of divinity thereby fulfilling the underlying human desire to be in a relationship with the divine.

Relationality’s central role will be proven by exploring a composite definition of the term that draws on four building blocks; the theory of intersubjectivity, Buberian Dialogism, and the practices of *darshan* in Hinduism, and *yechidut* in Hasidism.

Keywords: *darshan*, *yechidut*, Chabad-Lubavitch, Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Neem Karoli Baba Maharaj-ji, intersubjectivity, Buberian Dialogism

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Jonah Gelfand¹
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Maharajji's company was very special... his presence was more than inspiring; it was enlightening. While mediating in or near his presence, even though he'd be talking and joking loudly, one quickly reached the place of clear light, a place difficult to achieve without his grace and power.²

I know of no one who left the Rebbe without being deeply affected, if not changed by the encounter... In his presence, you come closer in touch with your inner center of gravity. Whenever I would see the Rebbe, he touched the depths in me... [and I] felt [I] had lived deeper and ... on a higher level.³

When reading through the stories of Hindu gurus and Hasidic rebbes, the similarities are immediately apparent. The same types of miracles are attributed to each; the same connection to the divine; and, most amazingly, the same reverence by their devotees. Unfortunately, for many secularized American Jews, Hasidic tales are not readily available. Perhaps this is a reason why so many travelled to Asia in the 1960s and 70s to find the mysticism they perceived absent in their native Judaism. This narrative can be ascribed to a Boston-born Jew named Richard Alpert,

¹Jonah Mac Gelfand graduated from Oberlin College in 2020, where he concentrated in South Asian Traditions and Jewish Studies. He is primarily interested in finding modern applications for mystical traditions and the place of saints in facilitating a believer's relationship with the Divine. He hopes to continue his Jewish learning upon graduation and eventually attend yeshiva. This paper is a revised chapter of his Senior Capstone Project.

²Ram Dass, *Miracle of Love: Stories About Neem Karoli Baba*, (NY, Hanuman Foundation, 1979), 22.

³Joseph Telushkin, "Connecting to Individuals: The Experience of Yechidus (One-on-One Meetings)" in *Rebbe: The Life and Teachings of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Most Influential Rabbi in Modern History*, 43-73, (New York, Harperwave, 2014), 45.

who reluctantly followed a friend into a Himalayan *ashram* in 1969 and was introduced to Neem Karoli Baba Maharaj-ji (~1900-1974). After this fateful meeting, he took on the name Ram Dass (servant of God) and began studying and teaching bhakti Hinduism in the West. Eventually, a few hundred Americans (mostly Jews) followed Ram Dass back to India to find Maharaj-ji in an attempt to fulfill mystical desires they believed could not be satiated by their assimilated and secularized Judaism.⁴ Leaving behind no personal writings, the numerous volumes of devotee-compiled stories of Neem Karoli Baba Maharaj-ji perpetuate his legacy. Reading through these narratives, a mystical-leaning Jew like Ram Dass is drawn to the experiences that Maharaj-ji could provide for his devotees: experiences that offered a mystical validation perceived to be missing in Judaism. That is, until the stories of Hasidic rebbes are discovered.

Reading through Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim* sheds light on the first few generations of Hasidic leaders,⁵ and a reader familiar with Hindu Traditions is immediately struck by the similarities to influential Hindu gurus, such as Ramakrishna and Caitanya. What was alluring to Ram Dass in the Hindu tradition-- spiritually elevated saints that provided their devotees with an accessible form of divinity-- is clearly evident. Unfortunately for the India-bound Jews of the '60s and '70s, these stories speak of figures that lived centuries ago; what of modern Hasidic saints? Searching for a contemporary of Maharaj-ji, research inevitably lands on the Seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe of Chabad, Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994). The stories of Schneerson overflow with similarities to Maharaj-ji, even if their personal histories and cultural traditions are not analogous.

⁴ It was only later in life that Ram Dass started to explore Jewish mysticism. See Ira Rifkin, "RAM DASS EXPLORING JUDAISM," Sun, October 5, 2018, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1992-03-27-9201300673-story.html>.

⁵ Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, (New York, Schocken Books Inc., 1991).

These glaring similarities led to the current project of comparing the devotional practices around Neem Karoli Baba Maharaj-ji and Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson. While there is much comparative scholarship on Buddhism and Judaism, and on the Jewish *halakha* and Hindu *dharma*, there is a lack of scholarship on contemporary Hindu-Jewish relations. In his book *The Jewish Encounter with Hinduism: History, Spirituality, Identity*, scholar Alon Goshen-Gottstein lays out the history of this encounter and calls for more scholarship comparing the two rich traditions. This project aims to help fill this void by expanding on Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's comparison of the practice of *darshan* in Bhakti Hinduism to *yechidut* in Lubavitch Hasidism.⁶ These encounters are defined by 'relationality' and point towards an underlying desire for humans to be in relationship with a higher power. The place of the saint is to plug into this desire by providing their devotees with an accessible form of divinity.

In the remainder of this essay, 'relationality' will be defined and the two figures and practices in question will be explored. This analysis will illuminate the ways in which relationality is integral to the devotion around Neem Karoli Baba Maharaj-ji (hereafter, Maharaj-ji) and Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson (hereafter, the Rebbe), and show the underlying similarities between these two disparate traditions.⁷ To get to this understanding, it is imperative to understand the ways in which the practices of *darshan* in Bhakti Hinduism and *yechidut* in Lubavitch Hasidism manifest the quality of 'relationality.'

WHAT IS RELATIONALITY?

⁶ Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counseling in Hasidism*, (United States, Jason Aronson Inc, 1991), xv.

⁷ This is not a claim that these two traditions are analogous --in fact there are huge distinctions between their cultures and theologies-- but just that *these specific practices* are performed for analogous reasons. The large divergences between these two traditions are beyond the scope of this essay, with the most important of these distinctions being the conceptualization of Maharaj-ji as an *incarnation of divinity* while the Rebbe is seen as an *incarnation of Torah*.

Stories of *darshan* and *yechidut* abound with words such as ‘merging,’ ‘exchange,’ ‘sharing,’ ‘communing,’ etc., which alludes to a transactional encounter between the saint and devotee. This points towards a certain ‘quality’ that is mystical in nature and is facilitated by the saint’s high spiritual status. It is this very ‘quality’ that the label ‘relationality’ seeks to explain. A relationality-centered reading of these practices utilizes two methodological impulses, namely the theory of religious intersubjectivity and the philosophy of Buberian Dialogism, and then an exploration of the devotional practices shows how these theories function in practice. With these as inspiration, a basic definition is formulated as “the power-endowing relationship between saints and their disciples in which the ability of the saint to fully see their devotees’ ‘whole being’ transfers a spark of their higher spiritual state to them.” Each of the two methodologies and practices provide a different piece of the puzzle, starting with intersubjectivity’s explanation of the desire for relationality.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Religion scholars such as Robert Orsi have posited that religion is a matrix of intersubjective relationships.⁸ Intersubjectivity has a variety of definitions for different fields, but, for this project, it is understood to refer to shared agreements about the functioning of the world and “the process of psychological energy moving between two or more subjects.” This is to say that the psychological state of one subject can affect and alter the state of another.⁹ Matthew Ryan Robinson has built on Orsi to argue that humans desire “intersubjective relationships of interdependence” which “fill-up certain individual incompleteness but only by

⁸ Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.

⁹ The Audiopedia, "What is INTERSUBJECTIVITY? what does INTERSUBJECTIVITY Mean? INTERSUBJECTIVITY Meaning." Feb 2, 2017. video, 2:06, 2:33, 2:48, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXG3J8Tu684>.

expanding persons' awareness of the vastness of reality, and thereby intensifying and deepening the overall sense of incompleteness [sic]."¹⁰ Robinson supplements Orsi's intersubjective assertion by adding that the foundational human social need is 'lacking' until a relationship 'fills it up.'

This 'filling up' *is* relationality and, furthermore, the fundamental need to be in relation does not stop on the human level but extends to the divine realm. That this need extends to the divine realm is the very reason why people go to saints; the underlying human desire to be in relationship with God is mediated and fulfilled through the relationship with the saint who provides an accessible form of the divine. Additionally, it is through their encounter with the saint that the devotee is shown the essential claim of Hasidic Judaism (and, one could easily argue, Bhakti Hinduism); that "there is more to existence than our physical and material concerns."¹¹ The saint exposes the devotee to the spiritual truths that undergird the world and it is through this exposure that the devotee's "overall sense of incompleteness" is exacerbated. Their devotion to the saint then grows out a need for this lacking to be remedied. This model of transformative and intersubjective relationship is the basis for the assertion of 'relationality,' as the defining feature of the saint-disciple relationships in the devotional practices around Maharaj-ji and the Rebbe.

BUBERIAN DIALOGISM

Intersubjectivity explains the *desire* for the relationship, but it fails to explain *how* the saint is able to "fill up" their devotees. Martin Buber, a Jewish academic and theologian from the 20th century, offers a compelling account of the 'how' of relationality in his philosophy of

¹⁰ Matthew Ryan Robinson, *Redeeming Relationship, Relationships that Redeem: Free Sociability and the Completion of Humanity in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, (Germany, Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 7.

¹¹ Adin Even-Israel Stiensaltz, *My Rebbe*, (New Milford and Jerusalem, Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd, 2014), 1.

‘Dialogism.’ Drawing on Hasidic stories and philosophies, his philosophy of Dialogism argues that “the world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.”¹² This is Buber’s poetic way of declaring that there are two fundamental ways of seeing the world-- the “I-It” relationship and the “I-You” relationship. The former is an objectifying of the world into ‘experiences’ and the way in which virtually everyone sees the world, while the latter is labeled by Buber as ‘relation’ and can only be experienced with one’s “whole being.”¹³ To ‘experience’ the world is to see everything in terms of what it can do *for you*. For example, looking at a tree, one might see shade, kindling, or wood, while looking at a person, one might see a source of labor, someone to laugh at your jokes, or even a spouse. If one were ‘relating’ in the I-You mode, on the other hand, they would see the tree and person for what they are a tree and a person in their full being. This is the state of consciousness that the saint is always embodying.

In the third section of his famous book on this philosophy, titled *I and Thou*, Buber furthers this notion by espousing the idea that the “lines of relationship intersect in the eternal You.” When he refers to this ‘eternal You,’ he is introducing his dialogic version of divinity. Not theistic in the traditional sense, Buber’s ‘divinity’ is addressed in part each time one addresses any You.¹⁴ The eternal You is always available, but is usually untapped. In a more theistic vernacular, one might say that understanding the place of the eternal You is to see the world as a manifestation of godliness (a belief that is commonplace in both Hasidic and Hindu circles). It is the saint’s ability to live this-- that is, not only function in the I-You mode, but also maintain an awareness of the eternal You-- that elevates them. This ability to ‘relate’ to everything as a manifestation of godliness is what makes them compelling to their followers. By addressing their

¹² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman, (New York, Touchstone/ Simon and Schuster, 1970), 53.

¹³ Buber, *I and Thou*, 54, 56.

¹⁴ Buber, *I and Thou*, 123.

devotees as ‘You’s, these saints are able to ‘fill up’ (to use Robinson’s language) their devotees to a larger extent than all their other mundane relationships. As Buber puts it; “For those who enter into the absolute relationship [with God/saint]... everything is included in the relationship.”

¹⁵ This is to say that all dualities and inconsistencies of mundane life are subsumed within the relationship and the devotee obtains a degree of the saint’s higher consciousness, as will be discussed in the exploration of *darshan* below. This reorienting of the devotee is Robinson’s ‘filling up’ and representative of the fulfilling of the devotee’s need for relationality. With the theoretical framing provided by intersubjectivity and Dialogism in place, the definition of relationality can be completed by exploring their practical application in the two devotional practices.

DARSHAN

Darshan, the central devotional practice around Maharaj-ji, exemplifies the ‘filling up’ of a devotee through the transmission of a spark of the saint’s higher consciousness. This practice is the principal way in which devotees engage with the divine in Hinduism. When a Hindu goes to the temple or to see a saint, they are not necessarily going to attend worship or hear a lecture, but to quite literally ‘see’ the icon/saint. This seeing *is* the practice of *darshan*, and scholar Diana L. Eck claims that this “exchange of vision lies at the heart of Hindu worship.”¹⁶ According to Ram Dass, devotees would travel immense distances to have this pleasurable experience with their guru:

The intense desire of the devotees to be with Maharajji, combined with his elusive and unpredictable behavior, gave rise to the most intricate dramas of hide and seek, labeled by one waggish devotee as the “great grace race.” Being a devotee of Maharaj-ji was like participating in a continuous and unending treasure hunt... the pot of gold, of course, was darshan with Maharajji. And gold it was! One Indian

¹⁵ Buber, *I and Thou*, 127.

¹⁶ Diana L. Eck, *Seeing the Sacred* In “Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India”, (NY, Columbia University Press, 1998), 7.

devotee put it succinctly when he said, “Even sexual intercourse with my wife cannot equal darshan with Maharajji.”¹⁷

As the quote makes evident, this experience was deeply impactful for devotees. Although *darshan* is commonly used to refer to an audience with the saint, a scholarly definition proposes that *darshan* is to “see and be seen by the deity [guru].”¹⁸ This is not to say that *darshan* is a silent exchange of eye contact-- there could be everything from humorous quips to silent meditation to hysterical crying during these audiences-- but this notion of ‘exchange’ is central to understanding the practice.¹⁹ *Darshan* is spoken of as being ‘given’ by the guru and ‘received’ by the worshipper, which is to say that the transaction is initiated by the guru. This notion of the saint initiating an interaction in which the devotee is ‘seen by the guru’ is representative of the saint’s Buberian ‘I-You’ consciousness validating the devotee’s “whole being.” In the stories around Maharaj-ji, it becomes clear quickly that the scholarly understanding of *darshan* is much narrower than *darshan* in practice. One Western devotee named Parvati Markus explains:

For those of us who were with Maharajji while he was in the body, darshan meant being in his physical presence. We called the time we spent with him darshan, but as Maharajji said “You don’t have to meet the guru in a physical body.” You can also have darshan through a dream, vision or deep meditation. You have darshan whenever you connect with the presence of the divine. Darshan is a gift, the moment when you are allowed to ‘see,’ like when the clouds blow away so you suddenly get a clear view of the awe-inspiring Himalayan peaks.²⁰

This mystical moment of being “allowed to ‘see’” does not happen for every person who sat in front of Maharaj-ji. Scholars explain this by positing that an understanding of the practice and culture of *darshan* precludes one's ability to engage in the practice. Like all modes of seeing, the ‘seeing’ that occurs in *darshan* is not a “passive awareness but an active focusing... [T]he

¹⁷ Dass, *Miracle of Love*, 19.

¹⁸ Lawrence A. Babb, “Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no. 4 (Dec 1, 1981), 396; Kama Mclean, “SEEING, BEING SEEN, AND NOT BEING SEEN: Pilgrimage, Tourism, and Layers of Looking at the Kumbh Mela,” *CrossCurrents*, Volume 59, Issue 3, 2009; Eck, *Seeing the Sacred*, 3.

¹⁹ Eck, *Seeing the Sacred*, 7.

²⁰ Parvati Markus, *Love Everyone: The Transcendent Wisdom of Neem Karoli Baba Told Through the Stories of the Westerners Whose Lives He Transformed*, (New York, HarperOne imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 44.

object we see... is dependent on who we are and what we recognize from past experience.”²¹

Scholars such as Eck and Lawrence A. Babb assert that the viewer’s past experiences and belief in the deity/guru inform their ability to receive the benefits of the *darshan*.²² This project hopes to complicate this notion by positing that what is needed is not necessarily past experiences, but rather an ‘openness’ to a mystical experience. This can be seen in the self-selecting nature of those coming to Maharaj-ji; it is those who are ‘open’ to mysticism that travel to a saint. As seen in Markus’ quote above, stories of culturally ignorant Western devotees coming to Maharaj-ji for *darshan* and experiencing life-altering exchanges-- while others left unaffected-- is evidence that past experiences cannot be a requirement. Beliefs and past experiences can facilitate such ‘openness,’ but cannot be necessary.

It is also important to understand how these scholars understand the phenomenon of ‘seeing.’ The seer is not passive but an active participant in meaning-making.²³ Babb understands this to be “an extrusive flow-of-seeing that brings seer and seen into *actual contact*.”²⁴ He asserts that there is quite literally something to be *gained* from the exchange of *darshan*:

this visual interaction between deity and worshipper establishes a special sort of intimacy between them, which confers benefits by allowing worshippers to ‘drink’ divine power with their eyes, a power that carries with it- at least potentially- an extraordinary and revelatory ‘point of view.’²⁵

It is precisely this quality of relationality that enables the *guru* to grant the benefits of *darshan* to the devotee, and similarly, the openness of relationality that allows the devotee to receive it. To put this into the theoretical language, Babb’s claim of a ‘gaining’ is Robinson’s ‘filling up,’ and the devotee’s impassioned descriptions of the ‘gift of *darshan*’ is representative of the Buberian

²¹ Eck, *Seeing the Sacred*, 15.

²² Babb, “Glancing,” 400; Eck, *Seeing the Sacred*, 15.

²³ Eck, *Seeing the Sacred*, 14.

²⁴ Babb, “Glancing,” 387.

²⁵ Babb, “Glancing,” 388.

‘I-You’ relationship through which Maharaj-ji relates to his devotees. This mystically beneficial relationship will be mirrored below in the exploration of *yechidut*.

YECHIDUT

Yechidut, the main practice around the Rebbe, exemplifies the necessary surrender in an intersubjective relationship. Broadly, it is a formulaic interview in which the Hasid is able to meet one-on-one with the Rebbe and ask for advice, which the Rebbe then prophetically answers. This interview is fundamentally an act of devotion in which the Hasid ‘giv[es] oneself over to the Rebbe.’²⁶ A famous Hasid named Zalman Jaffe accounts his first *yechidut* as follows;

We remained closeted with the Rebbe for two hours. Until this meeting we had only seen the Rebbe at the services and at the *farbrengen*; it was amazing for us to behold such a transformation in a human being. Instead of the serious expression and far away look which the Rebbe habitually seemed to wear, we found ourselves now conversing with a very cheerful, happy and friendly- albeit holy- person. He had a gorgeous smile, and the dazzling twinkle in his eyes lightened the seriousness of the occasional criticism or rebuke. (Soon enough we learned that the Rebbe saw and knew everyone and everything. That far-away look was really far-sighted and far-seeing.)²⁷

Initiated by the first Chabad rebbe, this deeply impactful experience was an attempt to be able to provide not only material, but also psycho-spiritual support to his Hasidim:

during *yehidut*, the Hasid would open his heart ... and lay bare his spiritual difficulties and failings and [the Rebbe] would offer him ways to restore his faith. He would give the Hasid individual guidance based on his Hasidic teachings according to the individual's personality and intellectual abilities.²⁸

Although this might appear one-sided at first glance, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi posits that an understanding of “mutuality is essential” in this transaction.²⁹

²⁶ Stiensaltz, *My Rebbe*, 117.

²⁷ Zalmon Jaffe, *My Encounter with the Rebbe: Volume 1*, (Brooklyn, PCL Publishing, 2002), 23. A *farbrengen* is “an assemblage addressed by a Rebbe and/or an informal gathering of chassidim characterized by singing and inspiring talk.” See Chabad.org for a further discussion: https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/2225/jewish/Farbrengen-The.htm.

²⁸ David Biale, David ‘Asaf, Binyamin Bra’un, Uri’el Gelman, Samuel C Heilman and Marcin Wodzinski, *Hasidism: A New History*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2017), 127.

²⁹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy*, 167.

The *yechidut* ritual is where the Hasid's theological understanding of the Rebbe becomes manifest, as it would be one of the only times they would be able to spend close to their Rebbe.³⁰ Their reverence can be seen in the protocol Hasidim are told to follow during the ritual, such as "real Chassidim don't shake hands with the Rebbe," nor do they sit.³¹ The Rebbe did not always follow these protocols-- as seen in the story of Zalmon Jaffe's first meeting with the Rebbe when the Rebbe reached out his hand for a handshake and then asked him to sit down!³² -- and he seemed to be uncomfortable with the devotion paid to him, but understood that it was necessary for the Rebbe-Hasid relationship to be fruitful.³³

During *yechidut*, the Rebbe is understood to be in contact with the Divine and the words spoken by the Rebbe are taken as prophetic, even if no explicit prophecy was given.³⁴ As a divine intermediary, the Hasid entering his quarters assumes that the Rebbe knows *everything*.³⁵ Their devotional surrender is what allows the Rebbe to make God real for the Hasid and become an "attuned mouthpiece of the group's God-presence" during *yechidut*.³⁶ This is to say that it is through the submission of the devotees that the Rebbe is elevated; it is in the Rebbe-Hasid relationship that "temporal and spiritual power[s] [are] given [to] the Rebbes *by* their followers" (emphasis mine).³⁷ There are many stories of the advice received during *yechidut* predicting the future, displaying unshared knowledge of someone's past, or changing the direction of someone's life forever.

³⁰ As Chabad grew, the practice of individual *yechidut* was replaced by group *yechidut* in 1981, and eventually by the practice of Sunday 'dollars.' (Stiensaltz, *My Rebbe*, 121-2).

³¹ Jaffe, *My Encounter*, 22.

³² Jaffe, *My Encounter*, 23.

³³ Stiensaltz, *My Rebbe*, 92.

³⁴ Stiensaltz, *My Rebbe*, 119.

³⁵ Stiensaltz, *My Rebbe*, 126, 117.

³⁶ Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy*, 171, xvii.

³⁷ Mark Avrum Ehrlich, *The Messiah of Brooklyn*, (Jersey City, KTAV Publishing House, 2004), 12.

Schachter-Shalomi posits that *yechidut* is a “moment when two persons, Rebbe and Hasid, merge into the Infinite One.”³⁸ This can be seen by exploring the etymology of the word *yechidut*. Coming from *yechidoo*, which has the same stem as the words *yachid* (single) and *echad* (one), this term literally means ‘aloneness.’³⁹ To use a term denoting singularity to refer to an interview might seem contradictory at first, but upon exploration of the mystical nature of the encounter, it becomes clear. The ‘one’ in *echad* designates not singularity, but Oneness between many- the Oneness of God that encapsulates all things. This Oneness is reminiscent of Buber’s all-encompassing eternal You. Similarly, the ‘aloneness’ denoted by *yechidut* does not refer to the Hasid’s solitude but to a oneness experienced *between* the Hasid and his Rebbe-- Buber might call it a ‘dialogic aloneness.’ Entering the Rebbe’s chamber for *yechidut* brought the two distinct people together in singularity.

Despite the mystical nature of the encounter, the actual practice of *yechidut* is very formulaic. After preparing themselves in the form of a ritual bath and dressing in nice (perhaps brand new) clothing, the Hasid dons a prayer sash and waits outside the Rebbe’s office for many hours.⁴⁰ Most often, this was a family unit or a married couple going in to see the Rebbe-- rarely would people have *yechidut* alone. Upon finally entering, the Hasid hands the Rebbe their *kvittel* (written question) and waits to be addressed to speak. Next is the *pidyan nefesh* (cash donation, or “soul’s ransom”), which is conceptualized similarly to a sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple in ancient times.⁴¹ Then comes the main attraction; the *etzen* (council), during which the Rebbe gives his advice that is expected to be followed unquestioningly. Lastly is the departing *brakhah*

³⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy*, 120.

³⁹ Thank you to Oberlin Chabad Rebbetzin Devorah Elkan for bringing this to my attention.

⁴⁰ Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy*, 123.

⁴¹ Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy*, 118.

(blessing).⁴² This formula is roughly followed in every *yechidut* and clearly lays out not only the formality of this encounter, but also the transactional nature in which the Rebbe acts as support for the Hasid.

COMPOSITE DEFINITION OF RELATIONALITY

Having now explored the four ‘building blocks’ of relationality (the two methodological frameworks and the two practices), a composite definition can be crafted to explain the nature of relationships between saints and devotees. First, the theory of intersubjectivity laid out the underlying human desire to be in an intersubjective relationship not only with other humans, but with the divine, and how saints plugged into this desire for mystically-leaning people by providing an accessible form of divinity. Second, Buber’s Dialogic philosophy shed light on two disparate ways of living in the world-- namely, I-It’s ‘experiencing’ and I-You’s ‘relating’-- and on how saints are constantly in the I-You mode and conscious of the eternal You. Furthermore, it is through this ‘You’-ing that the saints are able to ‘fill up’ their devotees’ shortcomings that fed their desire for intersubjective relationships. And finally, third and fourth, an exploration of the practices of *darshan* and *yechidut* displays the ways in which the saint is able to transfer their wisdom and higher way of seeing through an exchange with their devotees.

By pulling from these four streams of relational theories and practices, a synthesized definition of ‘relationality’ is formulated as the power-endowing relationship between saints and their disciples in which the ability of the saint to fully see their devotees ‘whole being’ transfers a spark of their higher spiritual state to them. This revelatory experience fosters stronger faith in the devotee that thereby endows the saint with further powers. The powers that the saints receive

⁴² Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy*, 117.

from devotion then function to reinforce the devotee's faith, creating a cyclical and reciprocal relationship. This is not to say that the saints are not already understood to be highly developed spiritual beings, but that it is precisely by being in relation to their devotees that they are endowed with their spiritual gifts. Additionally, it is important to note that the devotee is not a higher spiritual individual from then on but is elevated *during* the experience with the saint.

There are countless stories from both traditions of devotees having a life altering experience with their saint and vowing to live a certain 'holy' lifestyle, only to realize later on that they continuously fall short. That moment of realization might also be the moment that the devotee decides to go for another *darshan/yechidut!*

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