

# The Baal Shem Tov and Freud

*“People are strange when you’re a stranger, faces look ugly when you’re alone, women seem wicked when you’re unwanted, streets are uneven when you are down...”*

*(The Doors, ‘People Are Strange’)*

The Baal Shem Tov, in one of his most radical teachings, often quoted and quite often interpreted in an overly simplistic fashion, explains that the deficiencies and smallness that we perceive in the other, and the other’s other are but a reverberating light of our own incompleteness. Any failure, or miss, or stain that we sense when unconsciously judging our surroundings is somehow, somewhere rooted in our personal shadows.

In Freud’s language this is referred to as projection. One of the many mechanisms of defense that individuals utilize, both consciously and unconsciously, in order to protect their immature and underdeveloped Ego from external harm is projection.

We feel a certain way about ourselves, albeit un-verbalized and unthought, that may prove to damage my delicately developed sense of self. Faced with the conundrum of feeling a certain way while simultaneously defending the self from acknowledging this feeling, we project our feelings of inadequacy onto others.

The assumptions I have about other peoples thoughts or feelings regarding me are often the shadow of how I feel about myself.

As the Baal Shem Tov taught us, recognition is the first step towards sweetening...