

Kabbalah, Jungian Psychology, and the Challenge of Contemporary Atheism

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A spate of recent books on the presumed errors and evils of religion (Harris, 2005; Dawkins, 2008; Hitchens, 2007, Dennett, 2006) prompts a fresh consideration of the nature and value of the God archetype and idea. Indeed, within the Jungian community itself there has recently been heated debate about the metaphysical and psychological status of the deity in analytic psychology, with such thinkers as Giegerich (2010) and Mogensson (2010) arguing that Jung entered into a historically and psychologically regressive mode of understanding when he remained favorably disposed to God and religion. This is a weighty charge, as it has often been observed that one of Jung's great contributions to both psychology and theology was to rethink the experience and function of religious symbolism in the context of the modernist critique of religion and the "death of God" as these had been proclaimed in his day.

In this essay I argue that a *mystical* understanding of the divine, particularly as it is expressed in the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria, provides the basis for a conception of God that is both psychologically meaningful and fully compatible (indeed expressive of) the transition to the open-ended, multi-perspectival, multi-cultural mode of understanding that is often thought to herald the demise of religious faith. I will explore the God idea as it is manifest in the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria, and examine this idea against aspects of the contemporary atheistic critique.

Isaac Luria (1534-1572) was born in Alexandria, Egypt, but later became the leading figure in the Kabbalistic community of Safed on the shore of Lake Tiberias. Luria developed a complex mystical theosophy that integrated earlier Kabbalistic symbols and ideas into a general account of the cosmos and the respective roles of God and man within it (Scholem, 1946; Drob, 2000). I will explore several of these symbols and the Lurianic system as a whole from both theological and psychological points of view. In the process I hope to show that the concept of God that emerges from Lurianic mysticism can help to restore the God idea in the wake of criticisms raised by contemporary atheism, just as Jung's archetypal reformulation of the God-idea helped to restore the meaning of religious faith and experience in his own time. I will endeavor to show how Luria's theosophical/mythological system can lead us to a conception of God or the "Absolute" that is satisfying from contemporary theological and psychological points of view. In the process I will explain how the symbols of the Lurianic Kabbalah produce a *coincidentia oppositorum* not only between the positive and negative aspects of God and Self but also between mysticism and reason, and theism and atheism. Indeed, it is my view that a contemporary reading of the Lurianic symbols leads to theism and atheism dissolving into each other.

Jung himself, as is well known, was highly ambivalent about theological claims—at times asserting theological ideas with apparent certainty¹, at other times claiming that theology is completely outside his province as an empirical scientist (Jung, 1963, p. 7).² Yet, a close reading of Jung's writings reveals him to be continuously struggling not only with religious images and symbols but with the very existence of God, and endeavoring to respond to the demise of traditional religious faith brought on by modernity. This has become even more clear with the recent publication of the *Red Book*, where Jung attempts to reformulate the *reality* of God in

imaginative terms, experiences God as a coordinate of the self, and is personally involved in the healing and rebirth of a sick and dying deity (Jung, 2009).

The Lurianic Kabbalah

Isaac Luria produced a complex theosophical system, a fusion of earlier Kabbalistic notions and symbols to account for the origin and destiny of God, humanity and the universe (Schochet, 1981; Jacobs, 1987; Scholem, 1946). Luria himself wrote very little, but his ideas were transmitted by his followers, the most important of whom was Chayyim Vital (1542-1620), whose *Sefer Ez Hayyim* (Menzi and Padeh, 1999) and other works contain detailed accounts of the Lurianic system.

According to Luria, the creation of the universe involves a cosmic drama in which *Ein-sof*, the unknowable “Infinite,” generates the cosmos through an act of *contraction and concealment* (*Tzimtzum*) of its infinite essence. This contraction produces a relative void in the divine plenum, within which finite entities can subsist without being annulled by God. Creation, for Luria, is a process of subtraction rather than addition; one, to use a modern analogy, that is akin to the production of a detailed visual scene by the interposition of a photographic film that partially obstructs an otherwise uniform plenum of white light. In this manner, God is said to form a series of ten archetypal structures, the *Sefirot*, which are comprised of the remnants of divine light that remain in the void after the *Tzimtzum*, and which crystallize into such values as wisdom, knowledge, kindness, judgment, beauty and compassion (Drob, 1997). The *Sefirot* serve as vessels or containers for a further emanation of God’s creative energy, and in this manner they become the structures or “molecules” of the created world. In addition, the *sefirotic* emanations contain or comprise the *Otiyot Yesod*, the 22 “primordial letters,” which are also held to contain the divine thought and light. As a result of their assembly into the words of Torah, these primordial letters become the template for the meaning structure of the world.

Together the ten *sefirot* and the 22 letters constitute the “32 paths of wisdom.” However, according to Luria, the *Sefirot* and the letters were disjoint (for example, “judgment” was completely divorced from “kindness” and the letters were not yet assembled into words) and were therefore not strong enough to contain the light emanated into them. Because of this, a majority of the *Sefirot* shattered, resulting in the cosmic catastrophe known as the *Shevirat ha-Kelim* or “Breaking of the Vessels.” The “shevirah” or “rupture” produced shards of the *sefirotic* vessels that fell haphazardly through the metaphysical void. Portions of divine light, the *netzotzim* or “holy sparks” adhered to and were ultimately trapped within the plummeting shards and were dispersed throughout the world. The sparks of divine light were, and continue to be, estranged from their source in God, and as prisoners of the broken shards they animate the “Husks” (*Kellipot*), which are the metaphysical source of all that is dark, negative, alienated and evil. The Husks exile a portion of divine light from its source and give rise to an alienated, evil realm, the *Sitra Achra*, the “Other Side.” Our world, according to the Lurianic myth is largely submerged within the husks of the Other Side.

Luria held that the Breaking of the Vessels also resulted in a disturbance in the conjugal relations between the masculine and feminine aspects of the godhead, producing a disruption in the flow of divine procreative energy throughout the cosmos. It is this (pro)creative energy that is entrapped in the “Husks” of the “Other Side,” and it is humanity’s divinely appointed task, through proper spiritual and ethical conduct to encounter these Husks and to liberate or “raise” the sparks (*Netzotzim*) of light and energy within them, thereby restoring the *Sefirot* to their full

value and meaning. In so doing, mankind is said to liberate the “feminine waters” necessary for a *conunctio* between the feminine and masculine aspects of God, and for returning the holy sparks to their proper place as forces serving the divine will. The act of liberating the sparks, reuniting male and female, and restoring divine light or energy to the service of the infinite God is known as *Tikkun Haolam*, the Restoration of the World. According to Luria, each individual is enjoined to raise those sparks he or she encounters within the world, as well as the sparks within his or her own soul, in order that he may ultimately achieve the *tikkun* (repair/redemption) of self and world. Luria taught that by restoring the vessels, humanity prompts the transformation of the *Sefirot* into *Partzufim*, divine “visages” or “personas,” which represent the development of the Primordial Human (*Adam Kadmon*) through both genders’ progression from youth to parenthood and old age. The “World of *Tikkun*,” having traversed the phase of rupture necessitating humanity’s ethical, aesthetic and spiritual restorative acts, is far richer and more valued than the “World of Points” that was originally emanated by *Ein-sof*.

“God,” in the Lurianic Kabbalah, is thus an *evolving completion*, rather than a *static perfection*. The entire Lurianic system, beginning with the infinite, *Ein-sof* and its contraction in *Tzimtzum*, proceeding through the emanation of *Adam Kadmon*, the *Sefirot* and the Primordial Letters, their rupture (*Shevirah*), and ultimate restoration and emendation in *Tikkun*, is constitutive of the deity, whose completion involves the participation and partnership of humanity. We will see that Jung himself was deeply in accord with this Lurianic idea.

Jung and Luria

The Kabbalists held that the cosmic drama described by Luria is both an account of the inner workings of God and creation and a representation of psychological events within the human mind, and if we examine the symbols of the Lurianic Kabbalah from a Jungian perspective we find a rich basis for the view that the Lurianic account of God accords both with the phenomenology of spiritual experience and the dynamics of the self. Jung, who late in his life stated that a Jewish mystic, the *Maggid* of Mezihirech anticipated his entire psychology (Jung, 1977, pp. 271-2), took an active interest in the symbols of the Kabbalah, which he knew through early Latin translations of Kabbalistic texts, the writings of Gershom Scholem, and indirectly through their presence and metamorphosis in European Alchemy. Indeed, Jung was very excited about Luria’s ideas when he encountered them later in life. In a letter to the Reverend Erastus Evans, Jung wrote:

In a tract of the Lurianic Kabbalah, the remarkable idea is developed that man is destined to become God's helper in the attempt to restore the vessels which were broken when God thought to create a world. Only a few weeks ago, I came across this impressive doctrine which gives meaning to man's status exalted by the incarnation. I am glad that I can quote at least one voice in favor of my rather involuntary manifesto (Jung, 1973, Vol. 2, p. 157).

Jung recognized that alchemy was deeply influenced by the Kabbalah (Jung, 1963), and as I have argued (Drob, 2003a), by uncovering the spiritual and psychological “gold” that lay hidden behind its pseudo-chemical metaphors, he was in large measure reconstituting the Kabbalah that had served as its spiritual foundation. I have previously discussed the psychological significance of the Kabbalistic symbols in some detail (Drob, 2010). Here I will do so only sufficiently to

show how these symbols, and the conception of the deity which they circumscribe, yield a psychologically and spiritually rich notion of God.

(1) *Ein-sof* (the Infinite) is the limitless, unknowable, source of all being, which unites within itself all contrasts and oppositions. *Ein-sof* is the “nothingness/fullness” that is the object of contemplation in various mystical traditions. It is the God of the *negative theologians*, unknowable except through the assertion that *it is not what anyone might think it to be*. The Jewish mystics held that *Ein-sof* (and the entire *sefirotic* system) is mirrored in the human soul, and from this psychological point of view, *Ein-sof* can be regarded as the infinite plenum of the unconscious, the wellspring of creativity and desire, and the foundation and origin of a subject or Self which is, by definition, *beyond the reach of human awareness*. From a Jungian perspective, the notion that *Ein-sof* embodies a coincidence of opposites between being and nothingness, good and evil, spiritual and material, etc. means that it conforms to our phenomenological experience of both God and Self.

(2) *Tzimtzum* (Divine contraction), as we have seen, is the concealment, contraction and withdrawal of God's presence that “makes room” for the world. The Chasidim understand the *Tzimtzum* as the contraction of the personal ego that enables one to “let in” the infinite God, and enables other people, indeed all other things, to achieve their fullest expression without being subject to our control or interference. Psychologically, the *Tzimtzum* can also be understood as an archetypal concealment or “repression,” which separates the ego from the unconscious, and creates the structures and characteristics of the personality.

(3) *Adam Kadmon* (Primordial Human) is the first being to emerge from after the *Tzimtzum* and embodies the value archetypes (*Sefirot*) through which the world was created. Jung, who made considerable reference to *Adam Kadmon* in his later writings, held that the Primordial Man is the archetype of the Self (Jung, 1963, p.p. 383-4), the “universal soul” (Jung, 1963, p. 409) and the process of personal transformation. According to Jung, as man's invisible center, *Adam Kadmon* is the core of the great religions, and as the Self-archetype, the psychic equivalent of the creator God. From a psychological point of view, the spontaneous emergence of *Adam Kadmon* from the unknowable void is symbolic of the psychological birth of the self. However, at this stage, the “self” is far from whole; in order to be complete, the Primordial Man must first enter into a process of deconstruction and restoration. Spiritually, the experience of *Adam Kadmon* involves an identification with humanity as a whole, and the fulfillment of the spiritual, ethical, and emotional values of the *Sefirot*.

(4) *The Sefirot*: For Luria as for all Kabbalists, the *Sefirot* are value archetypes that reflect the inner workings of the godhead and serve as the molecular components of both the world and individual men and women. In the conjugal metaphor common in the Kabbalah, each *Sefirah* is conceived bisexually, as male to the *Sefirah* below it and female to the *Sefirah* above it. Further, each *Sefirah* is complemented by a counter *Sefirah*, which embodies the negative/evil aspects of such value archetypes as desire, wisdom, knowledge, kindness, judgment, beauty, etc., In this manner, the Kabbalists were able to integrate what is effectively the *shadow* and *anima* archetypes into both the deity and the human psyche. The purpose of creation, according to Luria, is the full realization of the divine values/archetypes, but this can only occur once these

values shatter and pass through the shadowy realm of the *Kellipot* (Husks) and *Sitra Achra* (the Other Side), and are then reconstructed and emended through human acts of *Tikkun*. These acts reunite the positive and negative forces, as well as the masculine and feminine aspects of the cosmos and man, restoring their flow and balance. Spiritually, the *Sefirot* represent the struggle with, and commitment to values that is at the core of religious experience and faith. Psychologically, they signify the recognition that this struggle and commitment must involve an awareness and integration of the negative and counter-sexual, aspects of the Self that are initially thought to be antithetical to this quest.

(5) *Otiyot Yesod*: The *Sefirot*, and hence the whole of creation, are comprised of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each of which bears a unique meaning and significance. For the Kabbalists, everything in the world, from stones, water and earth to the human individual has a soul or spiritual life-force determined by the letters of divine speech from which their names are comprised, and it is for this reason that all meaning and spirit is intimately tied to language and scripture. From a psychological perspective, we might observe that the psyche (of both the individual and the world), is a structure of significance and meaning, and the key to understanding the "soul" of both man and the world is to be found in the hermeneutic disciplines that originally applied to the interpretation of narratives and texts. We will see later that for the Kabbalists the variations in such textual interpretation of humanity and cosmos are nearly infinite.

(6) *Shevirat ha-Kelim*, (The Breaking of the vessels) is an archetypal event in which the *Sefirot*, the value archetypes, were shattered and distributed throughout the cosmos as "sparks". Jung, as we have seen, was fascinated by the Kabbalistic symbols of the Breaking of the Vessels and *Tikkun* (the vessels "Repair") when he encountered them in 1954. For Jung (1960), these Lurianic symbols represented the role that humankind must play in the restoration of the world, the redemption of evil, and the restoration of the Self. However, even prior to that time Jung had encountered these notions in their alchemical guises, as the chaos and destruction that must precede the alchemical work, and which Jung understood as prerequisites for the forging of a unified Self. The Breaking of the Vessels suggests that the psyche, as James Hillman observed, is forged through its "falling apart" and "deconstruction." It is only through our major and minor life crises, through our confrontation with death, and in our uncanny sense of "crazy" differentness, that we glimpse the chaotic unconscious that is the source of our creativity and personal renewal. Kabbalistically, it is only when the "vessels break" that the individual can become truly human.

(7) The *Kellipot* ("Shells" or "Husks") capture and obstruct the sparks (*Netzotzim*) of divine light, thereby giving rise to the negative realm of the *Sitra Achra* or "Other Side." According to the Kabbalists, this evil realm is part of the divine plenum and must be "given its due." The Kabbalists' notion of the "Other Side" has its psychological equivalent in the Jungian archetype of the Shadow. The Kabbalists regarded the Other Side as a necessary part of the divine plan and, like Jung, held that the individual's baser instincts must be integrated rather than rejected or repressed. We read in the Zohar:

Mark this! As Job kept evil separate from good and failed to fuse them, he was judged accordingly; first he experienced good, then what was evil, then again good. For man should be cognizant of both good and evil, and turn evil itself into good. This is a deep tenet to faith (Sperling, Simon and Levertoff, 1931-4, p. 109).

(8) *Tikkun Haolam* (the Restoration of the World) is the process through which humanity repairs the world in the service of a "second creation." According to the Lurianists, one result of the Breaking of the Vessels is the formation of a hidden divine spark both in the soul of each individual, and the heart of all things. Jung considered the theory of the "sparks" or "scintillae" as they appeared in Gnosticism, Kabbalah (Jung, 1963, p. 301, n. 26) and alchemy and concluded that they represented an element of the primordial, archetypal unconscious in man (Jung, 1963, p. 48). Jung was not fully conversant with the "sparks" symbolism in the later Kabbalah and Hasidism, where, in contrast to Gnosticism, which understood them as vehicle for escape to a *higher* world, they are understood as an opportunity for the development of the person and the spiritualization of *this* world.

According to the Hasidim, in the course of a lifetime an individual encounters sparks both within his/her own soul and the world that only he/she can redeem. Each individual is responsible, through ethical, spiritual, aesthetic and intellectual acts, for redeeming these sparks of divine energy and contributing to the *Tikkun* of his/her own soul and the world. The *Sefirot* as they were originally emanated by *Ein-Sof* are abstract, empty values, and it is only through the activities of humanity in a "broken" world that the "wisdom," "knowledge," "kindness," "beauty," "judgment," "compassion" of the *Sefirot* attain full, concrete reality: and for this reason, according to the author of the Kabbalistic *Sefer ha-Yichud* humanity not only helps complete creation, but is credited as if he created God Himself" (Idel, 1988, p. 188).³

(9) The *Partzufim* (Visages) are, understood by the Lurianists as the archetypal personalities through which the Primordial Man must evolve as the world proceeds towards *Tikkun*. The *Partzufim* correspond to basic archetypes within Jungian psychology, archetypes that express essential organizing principles of the human personality. *Attika Kaddisha* (the Holy Ancient One) corresponds to the Jungian *Senex* (the old man: wise, conservative, reasonable, beneficent), *Abba*, to the archetypal Father, *Imma* to the Mother, *Zeir Anpin* to the *Puer* (the emotional, romantic, impulsive eternal boy) and *Nukva* to the *anima* (the feminine, seductive, soulful young woman). Each of these archetypes has their place in the unity that constitutes the overarching archetype of Primordial Man, or in Jungian terms, the Self.

Kabbalah and the Open Economy of Thought and Experience

Thus far, and within the limitations that are inherent in this brief account, I have endeavored to provide a summary of the Lurianic understanding of God in psychological, spiritual and axiological terms. What remains to be considered is the compatibility of the Lurianic conception of God with the open-minded, critical, multi-perspectival modes of understanding that are said to constitute modern and postmodern consciousness.

The notion that Kabbalistic symbols are compatible with modern notions of science and epistemology receives considerable impetus from Alison Coudert's (1995, 1998) studies of the Kabbalah and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and Francis Mercury Van Helmont (1615-

1698). Coudert argues that Leibniz, one of the key figures of the enlightenment, was deeply influenced by the Lurianic Kabbalah, especially by the idea of *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the notion that human beings have the power to perfect creation and impact upon and alter the course of the world. Coudert holds that the concept of *Tikkun* was a very liberating idea, one that provided a rational/spiritual justification for the science and the emerging free-inquiry of the enlightenment. On Coudert's view, the Kabbalah, which is typically thought of as a farrago of occult symbols and ideas, was instead an impetus to modern modes of open, *scientific* inquiry

Even without a specific historical warrant for a modernist interpretation of the Kabbalistic symbols, we are entitled (as have past ages) to pass Kabbalistic symbols through the sieve of the thought of our own age. Let us re-examine several of the Kabbalistic symbols from this perspective. Our examination of these symbols will reveal that the Lurianic Kabbalah points to a decidedly *non-dogmatic* consciousness and an increasingly open economy of thought, understanding and experience.

Ein-sof and Ayin: "Unknowing"

Ein-sof (the Kabbalists's Absolute/Infinite) is paradoxically both everything and nothing (*Ayin*). It is said to be completely unknowable, ineffable and unsayable, and also to be that about which everything is said. According to Azriel of Gerona,

Ein-sof cannot be an object of thought, let alone of speech, even though there is an indication of it in everything, for there is nothing beyond it. Consequently, there is no letter, no name, no writing, and no word that can comprise it (Tishby and Lachower, 1989, I, p. 234).

The *Zohar* describes *Ein-sof* as:

the limit of inquiry. For Wisdom was completed from *ayin* (nothing), which is no subject of inquiry, since it is too deeply hidden and recondite to be comprehended (*Zohar* 1:30a, Sperling, Simon and Levertoff, I, p. 114).

Ein-sof, as *Ayin*, is precisely *that which is impossible to know*, as it lies behind and before the subject-object, word-thing-distinctions that make knowledge and description possible. As such, the Kabbalists' absolute lies completely outside the realm of "thinghood," conceptualization and comprehension and is thus clearly not the sort of thing that can or cannot be "cognized." For the Kabbalists, and especially the Chabad Chasidim who inherited their symbols, all experience, from our perception of everyday objects to our intuition of "higher worlds," is a fallible construction of the human mind, and, as such, "the world" exists and has its character and definition only "from the point of view" of humankind. The discrete things that make up the world are the necessary byproducts of the *Tzimtzum*, the rupture between subject and object, words and things, mind and matter, that sets into motion all distinction, finitude and experience

For these reasons, the appropriate mode of understanding *Ein-sof* involves a deconstruction or "forgetting" of conventional theological knowledge and indeed an "unknowing." According to David ben Judah ha-Hasid, "The Cause of Causes...is a place to which forgetting and oblivion pertain...nothing can be known of It, for It is hidden and concealed in the mystery of absolute nothingness. Therefore forgetting pertains to the comprehension of

this place” (Matt, 1995, p. 81). According to the Maggid of Mezeritch, who succeeded the Baal Shem Tov as the leader of the nascent Hasidic movement, intuiting the divine involves a forgetting in which one returns to a pre-conceptual, pre-linguistic, pre-conscious state. For the Maggid, “Thought is contained in letters, which are vessels, while the pre-conscious is beyond the letters, beyond the capacity of the vessels. This is the meaning of the Maggid’s phrase: ‘Wisdom comes into being out of nothingness” (Matt, 1995, p. 87).

As a form of consciousness, such “unknowing” frees us from the view that there must be a specifiable truth, meaning, or answer to our theological, philosophical, and psychological questions. It opens us to the possibility that there is an inscrutable “remainder” that cannot be encompassed by thinking at all, and suggests that it is an illusion to hold that one has a complete or true view of God. This brings to mind Jung’s view of the impossibility of attaining complete knowledge of the self:

There is little hope of our being able to reach even an approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and undeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self (Jung, 1966).

***Tzimtzum*: The Contraction of God and Self**

With *Tzimtzum*. God conceals and contracts Himself in order, as it were, to make room, for a finite world. Here we have one more phase or logical moment in the “indeterminate” God; indeed with their doctrine of *Tzimtzum* the Kabbalists held that the very existence of the finite world and humanity is conditioned by God’s concealment and unknowability. Yet beyond this there is yet another aspect of *Tzimtzum* that makes it congenial to an open-ended, open-minded mode of thought and action. The Hasidim held that we should imitate God and perform an act of *Tzimtzum* in our dealings with the world; for it is only by contracting and concealing ourselves (i.e. our egos, desires, demands) that the other (both human and natural) is able to blossom in its own nature. This “ethics of *Tzimtzum*” is not only a general guide for our interaction with others, but is specifically relevant to the psychotherapeutic process—where it is often incumbent upon the therapist to get out of the way of his/her patients so they can experience their own desires and identity. Such “getting out of the way” is diametrically opposed to the dogmatic assertion of a particular set of beliefs and specific prescription for conduct. It is also essential to a truly open, scientific view of knowledge, where one must give up one’s preconceptions in the spirit of inquiry and experimentation.

Sefirot

As the *middah* or “traits” of the deity, the values and constituent elements of the world, and the components of the human psyche, the *Sefirot* are for the Kabbalists, the nodal points where God, humanity and the world meet. Subject to a myriad of permutations, combinations, descriptions, and interpretations, the *Sefirot* provide the Kabbalists with an archetypal language that can be applied to everything from biblical exegesis to personal transformation. However, one intriguing aspect of the *Sefirot* is their epistemological character, as each can be understood as a *mode of knowing* that can only be completed by each of the others. Very briefly, through the lens of the highest *sefirah Keter* (Crown, also referred to as *Ratzon*, Will), the world is understood as a function of desire. *Chochmah* (Wisdom), grasps the world through cognition and perception, while *Binah* (Understanding) harmonizes desire and cognition into a form of intuitive

empathic awareness that might be likened to what Dilthey referred to as “*verstehen*,” interpretive understanding. Successive *sefirot* grasp the world through the aspects of *Chesed* (loving-kindness), *Din* (judgment) and *Tiferet* (harmonizing beauty). A third triad *Netzach* (endurance), *Hod* (splendor) and *Yesod* (*Foundation*) add historical and cultural aspects to the quest for knowledge, while the final *Sefirah*, *Malchuth/Shekhinah*, integrates the prior perspectives and establishes a point of view that takes into account the (feminine) other. Understood in this manner, the *Sefirot*, like the four functions that Jung described in *Psychological Types*, open a succession of perspectives upon self, world and God that is, again, conducive to an open, multi-perspectival, economy of knowledge and experience.

Otiyot Yesod and Infinite Interpretation

The Lurianic understanding of language and Torah gives rise to an archetypal form of consciousness which understands the world as a narrative *text* that is subject to an indefinite, if not infinite number of interpretations (Scholem, 1969, pp. 32-86; Idel, 1988, pp. 83-99; Dan, 1999, pp. 131-162). As we have seen, the Kabbalists held that the cosmos, including the upper, divine worlds, is comprised of the “foundational letters” (*Otiyot Yesod*), which through their permutations produce everything that exists (Zohar I:29b-30a, Sperling, Simon and Levetoff I, p. 114). Conversely, the interpretive, hermeneutic, process is one that penetrates beyond the superficial appearance and significance of the letters, and is itself a mystical act that brings one into proximity with the divine essence (Drob, 2000a, pp. 236-62). The Kabbalists in Safed, for example, held that there are 600,000 “aspects and meanings in the Torah” (Scholem, 1969. P. 76), corresponding to the 600,000 souls of Israel who ventured forth from Egypt, and whose soul sparks are present in each subsequent generation. The Lurianists held that scripture, text, and cosmos change their meaning and/or reveal ever new depths of significance in response to changing inquiries and circumstances (Idel, 1988, p. 101) and some, including the followers of Israel Sarug, even went so far as to identify Torah with all of the potential letter combinations in the Hebrew language! (Scholem, 1969. p. 73). Such interpretive latitude leads to an archetypal mode of understanding that opens up a myriad of hermeneutic and epistemological possibilities, permitting multiple (including atheistic) perspectives on self, God and world.

Ha-achdut Ha-shvaah: The Coincidence of Opposites

The Kabbalists use the term, *achdut hashvaah*, to denote that *Ein-sof*, the Infinite God, is a “unity of opposites” (Scholem, 1974, p. 88), one that reconciles within itself even those aspects of the cosmos that are opposed to or contradict one another (Scholem, 1987, p. 312; Elior, 1993, p. 69). This leads to a form of consciousness in which one recognizes the interdependence of seeming contradictory attitudes and ideas. For example, the 13th century Kabbalist Azriel of Gerona held that *Ein-sof* is the union of being and nothingness, “and...the common root of *both* faith and unbelief” (Scholem, 1987, pp. 441-2). In the 13th century Kabbalistic text *Sefer Ha-Yichud* we find the doctrine that God creates man, but that man by writing a Torah scroll is credited with creating God (Idel, 1988, p. 184). Isaac Luria held that God is both *Ein-sof* (without end) and *Ayin* (absolute nothingness), that creation is both a *hitpashut* (emanation) and a *Tzimtzum* (contraction), that the deity is both the creator of the world and is itself completed through the acts of humankind, that the *Sefirot* are both the original elements of the cosmos and only realized when the cosmos is displaced and shattered (*Shevirat ha-Kelim*) and then reconstructed by humanity (*Tikkun*). Later, the Chabad Chasidim held that “the revelation of anything is actually through its opposite” (Elior, 1993, p. 64), that “all created things in the world are hidden within His essence...in *coincidentia oppositorum*...” (Elior, 1987, p. 163) and the

unity of worldly opposites brings about the completeness (*shelemut*) of God. In all of this the Jewish mystics were in accord with what Jung once referred to as the “unspoken assumption (of Eastern thought) of the antinomial character of all metaphysical assertions...not the niggardly European ‘either-or’, but a magnificently affirmative ‘both-and’” (Jung, 1953). Such views are thoroughly inimical to dogmatism, as they invite and even celebrate propositions that are opposed to the doctrines of normative religion.

Shevirah, Kellipot and Tikkun

As we have seen, according to Luria, the *Sefirot*, the values, vessels or archetypes which comprise the world, were unable to fully contain the divine light that was (and is) poured into them during the process of creation. All ten *sefirotic* vessels overflowed with divine energy, were displaced, and seven of them shattered, their broken shards falling through the metaphysical void, each shard trapping a spark of divine light. The Lurianists held that the Breaking of the Vessels was not a one time occurrence, but is rather inherent in all events and things. Each moment, each entity, each self, each idea has an aspect of *shevirah* or rupture that must be emended or repaired. This suggests that all conceptions of God, world, and self are subject to revision and, indeed, that it is precisely this revisionary, emendating process that is essential for the completion of God and the world.

There is yet a further emancipatory significance of the divine light entrapped in the husks of the Other Side. The shards, together with the light they imprison, form the *Kellipot*, the “husks” that comprise the *Sitra Achra*, the Other Side, and which penetrate deeply into our world of *Assiyah*, the world of “making” or “action.” According to Luria, it is humanity’s divinely appointed task to recognize and “own” the energy of the “Other Side,” and through spiritual and ethical action, i.e. the *mitzvot*, to extract (*birur*) the sparks from their husks and to *liberate* the imprisoned divine energy, so that it can be placed in the service of *Tikkun ha-Olam* (the emendation and restoration of the world). In the meantime, the divine light entrapped within the *Kellipot* lends vitality to the Other Side, thereby sustaining the forces of negativity and destructiveness, but also providing the necessary balance without which both God and world would be incomplete.

We should recall that the light encased in the husks was originally destined to fill vessels that represent intellectual, spiritual, ethical, emotional and aesthetic values, and on this basis we can understand the husks as symbolizing a certain imprisonment of, or rigidity in thought, faith, ethics, emotions and taste. Psychologically, the *Kellipot* lead to *dogmatism* in intellect, and *constriction* in emotion and behavior. In short, the *Kellipot* represent what in recent philosophy has come to be known as a “closed economy,” where thought, faith, emotion, etc. are impervious to change in response to dialog and experience. The doctrine of the *Kellipot* symbolizes that such a dogmatic, closed economy is the source and sustenance of much of the evil and destruction generated by humankind. **On the other hand, the process of *Tikkun*, in which divine light is liberated from the *Kellipot*, produces a continual emendation of the world through an open economy of ideas, experience, action and interpretation.**

Tikkun Ha-Olam

For Luria and his followers every moment, act and encounter is an opportunity for *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the repair and restoration of the world. The Hasidim developed this theme in their view

that there is a spark of divinity in all things, a spark that is at once the true reality of the things it informs, and an exiled aspect of the light of *Ein-sof*. The purpose of human existence is for the individual to raise (highlight, understand, develop) these divine sparks, both within him/herself and the objects he/she encounters in the world. An individual, as he or she proceeds through life, encounters objects, people and events that are uniquely suited to aid him/her in raising the sparks within his/her own soul. Conversely, each encounter provides the individual a unique opportunity to raise the sparks in those people, things and events, which he/she encounters on life's path. The events in an individual's life constitute the unique opportunities for *tikkun* for that individual, defining that individual's potential identity in the process.

On the one hand the parallels between the raising of the sparks and the *psychotherapeutic* process are quite clear. Jung himself suggested that the "sparks" represent aspects of the collective unconscious, and it is a small step to understand the *entrapped* sparks as fully akin to neurotic complexes that prevent the individual from actualizing his or her full potential, and which must be released as part of the therapeutic and individuation process. However, for the Kabbalists and Hasidim, the raising of the sparks is not just an individual affair. Psyche, as James Hillman has taught us, is also in the world, and the process of *therapy* (*tikkun*) is incomplete if it remains exclusively on the personal level.

For the Jewish mystics, the holy sparks inherent (and entrapped) in all things derive from the ten *Sefirot*, each of which is said to instantiate a divine value. In this way, the processes of *Tikkun ha-Olam* and the raising of the sparks amount to the realization of *intellectual, spiritual, and emotional values* in each of one's life encounters, and, more significantly in the current context, a liberation of intellect, spirit and emotion. The liberation of these values constitutes the *raison d'être* of the individual self and the completion and perfection of God and creation. In restoring the vessels humanity brings value and meaning into the world, and in effect realizes the essence of God Himself, which Jung, as early as *The Red Book* identified as "The Supreme Meaning" (Jung, 2009, p. 229b). That such emendation involves the *liberation* of values, feelings and ideas that have been entrapped by the husks of the "Other Side" is yet one more indication that the Lurianic theosophy is commensurate with an open economy of thought, experience and values.

The Open Economy God and Contemporary Thought

The open economy of thought and experience that we have revealed through our examination of the Lurianic symbols, reflects the *nisus* of western culture over the past three hundred years, as it has moved increasingly away from dogma and authoritarian religion. (Indeed, we would be fooling ourselves if we did not acknowledge that our own interpretation of the Kabbalistic symbols is conditioned by this very movement.) One needs no more than a general awareness of modern intellectual history to recognize that so many of the critical developments in philosophy and psychology over the last four centuries have expanded horizons in a manner that is inimical to dogmatism and the authority of tradition. In addition to developments in natural science, we can cite the *Kantian revolution*, through which hitherto unrecognized contributions of the subject to "truth" and "reality" are progressively understood; *Hegelian dialectics*, which holds that any particular perspective upon self and the world must be critiqued and transcended in favor of more comprehensive points of view that are themselves subject to similar critiques; *historicism*, which brings into awareness the contributions of history and culture to knowledge; *Husserlian phenomenology* and the *verstehen* approach to interpretive understanding, each of which expands the notion of knowledge to include modes of

apprehension that are not expressible in positivistic terms. In addition, thinkers from *Nietzsche* to *Derrida* have expanded knowledge and experience through an interest in and elevation of the formerly disenfranchised poles of opposing ideas, Freud widened our understanding of experience through his attention to unconscious ideas and affects, and Jung, broadened the horizon of the self through his insistence that experience is informed by multiple functions (sensation, feeling, reason and intuition) and the excluded aspects of the personality symbolized in the *anima* (*animus*) and Shadow. Each of these thinkers and movements have reinforced (and have themselves been reinforced by), the ideals of an open society that have become increasingly tolerant and welcoming of differences in experience, world-view, race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

However, there are many psychological, sociological and religious factors that continue to fuel dogmatism and a closed economy of thought, action and experience, and the recent “atheistic” reaction to fundamentalism in religion is, in my view, both understandable and warranted. While the idea that liberal interpretations of religion are compatible with a secular open society certainly has its adherents, the mystical traditions within the major faiths remain a largely untapped source for rapprochement between God and secular liberalism, and even between theism and atheism.

I have argued that the view that God can and should be understood in the context of an open economy of thought follows from the mystical view of an infinite, unknowable God in general, and the Kabbalistic view of God in particular. Having seen how this view of God follows from several key symbols of the Lurianic Kabbalah, it should now be clear how the concept of God that arises from these symbols is not only spiritually, psychologically and axiological rich, but is also compatible with contemporary thought and culture, commensurate with an open society, and rooted (at least in certain key aspects) in a religious/spiritual tradition. We might, however, ask, is this “God” a fitting object for spiritual contemplation, worship and prayer?

Mystics the world over have affirmed that the God they experience in states of mystical union and ecstasy is so vast, so all-inclusive as to be undefinable, and indeed, unsayable. Yet this is the very God or Absolute that in mysticism is held up as the highest goal of spiritual contemplation and union. In the Kabbalah, God’s essential unknowability is expressed in a series of symbols that articulate a system of ethical, aesthetic and spiritual values, but which derail any efforts to claim certain and final knowledge about God, world and self, and which yield a form of consciousness that is increasingly open to unknowing, multi-perspectivism and change. In contemplating *Ein-sof* we are prompted to confess our ignorance; in *Tzimtzum* we imitate God by concealing and withdrawing our ego-investments; through the *Sefirot* we learn that all things have multiple values and aspects; through *Otiyot Yesod* we acknowledge the possibility and value of multiple if not infinite interpretations; through *Ha-Shaweh* we come to recognize truth in the opposite of what we at first believed; in *Shevirat ha-Kelim* we find that all our concepts and experiences “deconstruct”; and, finally, in *Tikkun*, we repeatedly revise our ideas and selves in the service of mending our lives and our world.

I would suggest that an encounter with the ineffable God, *Ein-sof* in the Kabbalah, occurs in moments of thought and experience that reflect the “open economy” inherent in these symbols; for example, when one is awed by the infinite expanse of being and the mystery of its origins, when one suddenly breaks through previous constraints on thinking or experience and sees life and world in a completely new light, when one contracts one’s ego to fully permit the emergence and recognition of another, where one traverses a dialectic among multiple

perspectives and interpretations and comes to understand the deep interdependence of all things and points of view, and when one works towards an as yet unrealized meaning and value in one's life and world. Such encounters, such a *God*, in my view, is certainly a fitting object of contemplation and spiritual awe. It is also, I might add, a God that accords with the principles and process of psychological change, and with a science and philosophy that does not rigidly (and idolatrously) adhere to certain theories and methods. It is a God that has the potential to unite scientist and mystic, atheist and theist, psychotherapist and theologian.

According to the Chabad Chasidic Rabbi Aaron Ha Levi, "...the essence of [the divine] intention is...that all realities and their levels be revealed in actuality, each detail in itself...as separated essences, and that they nevertheless be unified and joined in their value" (Elior, 1987, p. 157)." This is a God who is open to all perspectives, possibilities, transitions and transformations and who creates and informs a world that is only fully realized through the full flowering and expression of thought, knowledge, humanity and nature in each and all of their manifold forms; each idea, each culture, each species, each individual, fully actualized and *individuated* according to its particular nature; each contributing to the spiritual totality which is the soul of the world.

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¹ When asked during a 1959 interview with the BBC if he believed in the existence of God, Jung replied, "I don't believe, I know."

² See, for example, C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. vii, where Jung writes:

if I make use of certain expressions that are reminiscent of the language of theology, this is due solely to the poverty of language, and not because I am of the opinion that the subject-matter of theology is the same as that of psychology. Psychology is very definitely not a theology; it is a natural science that seeks to describe experientiable psychic phenomena...But as empirical science it has neither the capacity nor the competence to decide on questions of truth and value, this being the prerogative of theology.

³ In *Sefer ha-Yichud* we find the dictum that "each and every one [of the people of Israel] ought to write a scroll of Torah for himself, and the occult secret [of this matter] is that he made God Himself (see Idel. *M. Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 188.