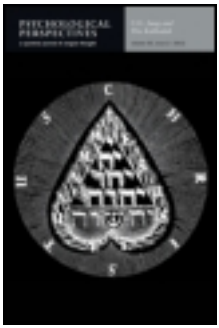

Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/upyp20

Kabbalah, Jungian Psychology, and the Challenge of Contemporary Atheism

Sanford L. Drob

Version of record first published: 29 May 2012.

To cite this article: Sanford L. Drob (2012): Kabbalah, Jungian Psychology, and the Challenge of Contemporary Atheism, Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought, 55:2, 142-162

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00332925.2012.677386

Psychological Perspectives, 55: 142–162, 2012

ISSN: 0033-2925 print / 1556-3030 online
DOI: 10.1080/00332925.2012.677386

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Kabbalah, Jungian Psychology, and the Challenge of Contemporary Atheism

Sanford L. Drob

The major symbols of the Lurianic Kabbalah are examined from both theological and psychological points of view. It is argued that these symbols, including *Ein-sof* (the infinite), *Ayin* (divine nothingness), *Tzimtzum* (divine concealment/contraction), *Sefirot* (value archetypes), and *Shevirat ha-Kelim* (the breaking of the vessels), provide the basis for a conception of God that is spiritually and psychologically meaningful, while at the same time suggestive of, and fully compatible with, the open-ended, diverse, and multicultural mode of experience and understanding that is often thought to herald the demise of faith and provide the basis for an atheistic critique of religion. The Lurianic symbols are shown to reflect a form of consciousness and a conception of divinity that is characterized by "unknowing," diverse perspectives, multiple interpretations, the deconstruction of dogma, the potential revision of all ideas, the interdependence of contrasting beliefs and attitudes, and the celebration of diversity and difference. The author continues the process, begun by Jung, of rethinking the meaning, function, and experience of religious symbolism in the context of modern and postmodern sensibilities, and in the wake of the declaration of the death of God and the loss of meaning of religious myths and symbols.

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 analytical psychology, with such thinkers as Giegerich (2010) and Mogenson (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.

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 with (indeed, expressive of) the transition to the open-ended, diverse, multicultural mode of understanding that is often thought to herald the demise of religious faith. Here I explore the God idea, as it is manifest in the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria, and in relation to 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 in modern-day Israel. 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 humanity within it (Drob, 2000; Scholem, 1946). Several of these symbols and the Lurianic system as a whole are explored here 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. Luria's theosophical/mythological system can indeed lead us to a conception of God or the "Absolute" that is satisfying from contemporary theological and psychological points of view. The symbols of the Lurianic Kabbalah produce a *coincidentia oppositorum* (unification of opposites) not only between the positive and negative aspects of God and self but also between mysticism and reason, and theism and atheism. Indeed, a

While Jung repeatedly claimed that theology was completely outside his province as an empirical scientist, a close reading . . . reveals him to be continuously struggling . . . with the very existence of God.

contemporary reading of the Lurianic symbols leads to theism and atheism dissolving into each other.

While Jung repeatedly claimed that theology was completely outside his province as an empirical scientist (Jung, 1963, p. 7),[1] a close reading of Jung's writings reveals him to be continuously struggling not only with religious images and symbols but also with the very existence of God, and endeavoring to respond to the demise of traditional religious faith brought on by modernity. This pursuit has become even clearer with the recent publication of *The Red Book*, wherein 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 (Jacobs, 1987; Schochet, 1981; 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* (*The Tree of Life*; Menzi & 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 divine 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 a uniform field of white light. It is in this manner that the Infinite God is said to form the

---

[1]See, for example, C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963):

> 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 experiencable 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. (p. vii)

Sefirot, the ten archetypal structures, 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 disjointed (e.g., *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, which 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 negative, constricted, 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 to encounter these husks and, through proper spiritual and ethical conduct, to liberate or "raise" the sparks (*Netzotzim*) of light and energy within them, thereby restoring the *Sefirot* to their full value and meaning. In this manner, humanity is said to liberate the "feminine waters" necessary for a *coniunctio* 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 ha-Olam*, 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 or she 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*—constitutes the deity, whose completion involves the participation and partnership of humanity. We will see that Jung himself was very much 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. 271–272), 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

Jung recognized that alchemy was deeply influenced by the Kabbalah, and . . . by uncovering the . . . "gold" . . . behind its pseudo-chemical metaphors, he was . . . reconstituting the Kabbalah that had served as its spiritual foundation.

Luria's ideas when he encountered them later in life. In a letter to the Rev. 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 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 unknowable source of all being, within which all contrasts and oppositions are united. *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. From this psychological point of view, we can regard *Ein-sof* as the infinite plenum of the unconscious, the wellspring of creativity and desire, and the foundation and origin of a subject or self that is essentially *beyond the reach of conscious 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 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), the first created being, emerges from the *Tzimtzum*. His body is said to comprise the *Sefirot*, the value archetypes through which the world is created. Jung, who made considerable reference to *Adam Kadmon* in his later writings, held that the primordial human is the archetype of the self (Jung, 1963, pp. 383–384), the "universal soul" (Jung, 1963, p. 409), and the process of personal transformation. According to Jung, *Adam Kadmon* is our invisible center and the psychic equivalent of the archetypes of both God and self. From a psychological point of view, the emergence of *Adam Kadmon* from the unknowable void is symbolic of the psychological birth of the self—a self, however, that in order to be completed 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. *Sefirot* (value archetypes), for Luria as for all Kabbalists, reflect the inner workings of the godhead and are the molecular components of both the world and individual men and women. In the conjugal metaphor common in the Kabbalah, each *Sefirah* is understood bisexually, as a receptive female to the *Sefirah* above it, and an emanating male to the *Sefirah* below 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 value archetypes, but this can occur only once the values shatter, become entrapped in the *Kellipot* (husks), pass through the shadowy realm of the *Sitra Achra* (the other side), and are finally liberated, reconstructed, and emended through human acts of *Tikkun*. These acts reunite both the masculine and feminine and positive and negative aspects of God and humanity, thereby restoring the flow and balance of divine and human energy. Spiritually, they represent the struggle with, and commitment to, values that are 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 contrasexual aspects of the self that are initially thought to be antithetical to this quest.

5. *Otiyot Yesod* (foundational letters): Using a metaphor that complements the image of the *Sefirot*, the Kabbalists held that creation is also comprised of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each of which they understood as carrying a unique essence 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 are intimately tied to language and scripture. From a psychological perspective, since the self and cosmos are structures of significance, the key to understanding the "soul" of both human and 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) involves the displacement and shattering of the *Sefirot* and their distribution as "sparks" (*Netzotzim*) of divine light throughout the cosmos. Jung himself took considerable interest in the Lurianic symbols of *Shevirah* (rupture) and *Tikkun* (repair and restoration) when he encountered them in the 1950s, and he came to believe that they anticipated and confirmed his own ideas, as he articulated in *Answer to Job* (Jung, 1960), regarding humanity's role in repairing the damage wrought by creation. Earlier, Jung had encountered these Kabbalistic ideas in their alchemical guises, as the chaos and disorder which the alchemists saw as a condition for the alchemical opus and which Jung understood as a necessary precondition for the forging of an individuated self. The breaking of the vessels suggests that the psyche, as James Hillman observed, develops through its "falling apart" and "deconstruction." It is only through life crises and the confrontation with mortality, alienation, and the uncanny that we glimpse the chaotic unconscious that is the source of our creativity and personal renewal. In Kabbalistic terms, it is only when the "vessels break" that the individual can become truly human.

7. The *Kellipot* (husks or shells) capture and obstruct the sparks of divine light, thereby giving rise to the negative realm of the *Sitra Achra* or other side. According to the Kabbalists, this malevolent realm, which has its equivalent in the Jungian archetype of the shadow, is part of the divine plenum and must be recognized and given its due. For the Kabbalists, as for Jung, evil and negativity are also an essential part of the self, and the individual's baser instincts must be integrated into the total personality rather than ignored or repressed. The *Zohar* recites:

> 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, & Levertoff, 1931–1934, p. 109)

8. *Tikkun ha-Olam* (the restoration of the world) involves a partnership between humanity and God in the restoration and repair of the shattered vessels, and a "second creation," which, by virtue of having passed

through a phase of disorder and deconstruction, is superior to the first. As a result of the breaking of the vessels, divine sparks were scattered throughout the cosmos and ultimately implanted in the heart of all things, including the human soul, and in *Tikkun* these sparks are extracted from matter and raised on high in service of humanity's and the world's redemption. Jung was familiar with the symbol of the sparks or *scintillae* from both the Kabbalah and alchemy, and he came to believe that they were primordial symbols of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1963, p. 48). However, he was not fully conversant with this symbol as it appeared in the later Kabbalah and Hasidism, where, in contrast to Gnosticism, which understood the sparks as a means of escape to a *higher* world, they are spoken of as the vehicles for the spiritualization and redemption of humanity and *this* world.

According to the Hasidim, in the course of a lifetime an individual encounters sparks within his or her own soul and in the world that only he or 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 or 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," and "compassion" of the *Sefirot* attain full, concrete reality. For this reason, according to the author of the Kabbalistic *Sefer ha-Yichud*, the individual not only helps complete creation, but is credited "as if he created God Himself" (Idel, 1988, p. 188).[2]

9. The *Partzufim* (visages) are understood by the Lurianists as the archetypal personalities through which the primordial human 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 archetypal 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 its place in the unity that constitutes the overarching archetype of primordial human, or in Jungian terms, the self.

[2]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 M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 188).

Kabbalah and the Open Economy of Thought and Experience

Thus far, and within the limitations that are inherent in this brief account, I have provided 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, diverse 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 of the writings of 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 profoundly influenced by the Lurianic symbol of *Tikkun ha-Olam*, which embodied for him the idea that humanity is enjoined to direct the course of history and to complete creation. For figures like Leibniz and Van Helmont the symbol of *Tikkun* provided both a spiritual and rational justification for their pursuit of free philosophical and scientific inquiry. In 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.

The Lurianic Kabbalah points to a decidedly *nondogmatic* consciousness and an increasingly open economy of thought, understanding, and experience.

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 reexamine several of the Kabbalistic symbols from this perspective. Our examination of these symbols will reveal that the Lurianic Kabbalah points to a decidedly *nondogmatic* consciousness and an increasingly open economy of thought, understanding, and experience.

Ein-sof and *Ayin*: "Unknowing"

The Kabbalists held *Ein-sof*, the "infinite God," to be both everything and nothing (*Ayin*), the object of all attributes and completely ineffable and

unknowable. 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 & Lachower, 1989, I, p. 234). According to the *Zohar*, *Ein-sof* is "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, & Levertoff, 1931–1934, p. 114).

As an unknowable, unsayable "absolute," *Ein-sof* lies behind and before the subject–object, word–thing distinctions that make knowledge and representation possible. For this reason *Ein-sof* is *Ayin*, or "no-thing," and as such, it is not the sort of entity that can either be known or unknown. Although it falls completely outside the realm of conceptualization and comprehension, it is paradoxically also the one *true* "reality." On the other hand, the finite, discrete entities that comprise our world are products of the *Tzimtzum*, the divine contraction that created a rupture between subject and object, mind and matter, words and things. For this reason, the Kabbalists, and the Chabad Chasidim who based their philosophy on the Lurianic symbols, held that all knowledge, and hence all "knowable things," are a fallible construction of the human mind. Therefore, "the world" exists and is known only from "the point of view" of humankind. What exists in itself cannot be known and understood, and what is known and understood exists only within human experience.

For these reasons, our approach to *Ein-sof* should be one of "unknowing" and a concomitant deconstruction or "forgetting" of conventional theological knowledge. As the Kabbalist and philosopher David ben Judah ha-Hasid states, "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). The Maggid of Mezeritch, who became the Baal Shem Tov as the leader of the nascent Hasidic movement in 1761, and who Jung once said had anticipated his entire psychology (McGuire & Hull, 1977, pp. 271–272), held that an intuition of the divine involves a forgetting in which one returns to a preconceptual, prelinguistic, preconscious condition. This is the significance of the Maggid's phrase: "Wisdom comes into being out of nothingness" (Matt, 1995, p. 87).

"Unknowing" liberates us from the idea that there must be a single answer to our philosophical, psychological, and theological questions; opens us to the possibility that there is an inscrutable mystery at the core of both the world and psyche; and implies that it is an illusion for us to believe that we have a complete or even "true" view of God. This perspective brings to mind Jung's view of the impossibility of attaining complete knowledge of the self:

"There is little hope of our ever being able to reach even approximate consciousness of the self, since however much we may make conscious there will always exist an indeterminate and undeterminable amount of unconscious material which belongs to the totality of the self" (Jung, 1966, p. 177).

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 or her patients so that they can experience their own desires and identities. Such "getting out of the way" is diametrically opposed to the dogmatic assertion of a particular set of beliefs and specific prescriptions 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 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 (Makkreel & Rodi, 2010) 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)—adds 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, diverse economy of knowledge and experience.

Otiyot Yesod and Infinite Interpretation

Isaac Luria and his followers developed the view that the world is like 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). This followed from their "linguistic atomism," in which they held that since heaven and earth came into being through God's word, all things are comprised of the "primordial letters" (*Otiyot Yesod*), their permutations and combinations (*Zohar* I:29b–30a; Sperling, Simon, & Levertoff, 1931–1934, p. 114). The Lurianists held that the creative process involved a divine *Tzimtzum* or contraction into the letters/phonemes that comprise the Torah, and that the interpretive, hermeneutic process is a mystical act that reverses this contraction and penetrates beyond the superficial appearance and significance of the letters, bringing one into proximity with the divine essence (Drob, 2000a, pp. 236–262). However, because there are at least 600,000 "aspects and meanings in the Torah" (Scholem, 1969, p. 76), corresponding to the 600,000 souls who were liberated by Moses from Egypt, scripture, text, and cosmos alter their meaning and reveal new depths of meaning in response to changing inquiries and circumstances (Idel, 1988, p. 101). Indeed one of Luria's disciples, Israel Sarug, held that the Torah itself could be interpreted in terms of all the potential letter combinations in the Hebrew language (Scholem, 1969, p. 73). Such interpretive latitude yields an archetypal consciousness that opens a myriad of epistemological and hermeneutic possibilities, permitting multiple (including atheistic) perspectives on self, God, and world.

ha-Achdut ha-Shvaah: The Coincidence of Opposites

The Kabbalists used the term *Achdut ha-Shvaah* to denote the "unity of opposites" (Scholem, 1974, p. 88) that in their view characterizes *Ein-sof*, the

infinite God. The notion of a unity between aspects of the cosmos that oppose or contradict one another (Scholem, 1987, p. 312; Elior, 1993, p. 69) leads to a form of consciousness in which one recognizes the interdependence of conflicting attitudes and ideas. For example, the 13th-century Kabbalist Azriel of Gerona held that *Ein-sof* is the union of being and nothingness and is thus "the common root of *both* faith and unbelief" (Scholem, 1987, pp. 441–442). In the 13th-century Kabbalistic text *Sefer ha-Yichud* we find the doctrine that God creates human, but that the human, by writing a Torah scroll, is credited with creating God (Idel, 1988, p. 184). Isaac Luria suggested that God is both *Ein-sof* (everything) and *Ayin* (nothing), that creation is both a *Hitpashut* (emanation) and a *Tzimtzum* (contraction), that God both created the world and is Himself created/completed through/by humanity; that the *Sefirot* are both the origin of the cosmos and only come into being when that cosmos is displaced, 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 that the unity of the world's 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, 1935/1953, para. 833). 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, Luria held that the *Sefirot*—the vessels, values, or archetypes that comprise the cosmos—failed to contain the divine light that was emanated into them. As a result each of the ten *Sefirot* overflowed with divine energy, was displaced, and the lowest seven shattered, resulting in *Sefirotic* 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 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 notion 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 another emancipatory significance to the notion that divine light is entrapped and alienated in the husks of the other side. These

shards penetrate deeply into our world, the world of *Assiyah* (the world of "action"), and according to Luria and his followers, it is humanity's divinely appointed task to both acknowledge and integrate this negative, alienated energy, and through the *Mitzvoth* (divine commandments), through spiritual and ethical action, to liberate this energy for the service of *Tikkun ha-Olam*: for the restoration, emendation, and redemption of the world. Prior to this redemption, which is represented by the symbol of the Messiah, the *Kellipot* sustain the forces of negativity and evil and thereby provide an essential balance between good and evil in the world—a balance, the overcoming of which is essential to the world's and God's completion.

It is important to recall that the *Kellipot* or husks entrap light that was originally emanated into, and was intended to illuminate, the vessels that represent the intellectual, spiritual, ethical, emotional, and aesthetic values that were to comprise the world. By entrapping the energy that was to infuse these values, the *Kellipot* imprisoned, alienated, and rigidified thought, faith, emotions, ethics, and aesthetics. From a psychological perspective, the *Kellipot* symbolize a closed economy of thought, values, and experience, a dogmatic mindset in which the individual is unable or unwilling to change in response to dialogue and experience. As the *Kellipot* are thought to be the origin of evil, we can infer that for the Kabbalists, evil is precisely that which is impervious to dialectics and change. By way of contrast, *Tikkun*, which extracts and liberates divine energy from the *Kellipot*, emends, restores, and redeems the world through an open economy of ideas, experience, action, and interpretation.

Tikkun ha-Olam

Luria and his followers promoted an ethic in which every moment, act, and encounter is an opportunity for the individual to engage in *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the repair and restoration of the world. The Chasidim followed Luria in holding that there is an "exiled" spark of divinity in all things, a spark that constitutes each individual's and each entity's essence, and which must be liberated in order to achieve the redemption of humanity and the cosmos. The Chasidim held that the very meaning and purpose of human life are to extract and raise on high both those sparks that one discovers within oneself and those that one encounters in the world. Indeed, the people, places, and objects that one encounters in life are thought to be uniquely suited to aiding one in raising the sparks within one's soul and fulfilling one's unique role in the world's redemption. The sparks are traditionally thought to be liberated through adherence to the 613 *Mitzvoth*, or divine commandments, and it is these *Mitzvoth* and the ethical, spiritual, cognitive, and artistic activities that they entail, which constitute the unique opportunities for *Tikkun* for each individual soul.

Interesting parallels can be drawn between the raising of the sparks and the *psychotherapeutic* process. Jung himself suggested that the Gnostic's and the Kabbalist's "sparks" or "*scintillae*" represent aspects of the collective unconscious, and it is possible to understand the *entrapped* sparks as libidinous energy bound by neurotic complexes that prevent the individual from actualizing his or her personal and creative potential, and which must be freed in therapy in service to the client's individuation. However, the Kabbalists and Chasidim held that the raising of the sparks must move beyond the liberation of the individual psyche. Like James Hillman, who teaches that psyche also exists in the world, the Kabbalists and Chasidim held that the process of therapy (*Tikkun*) is incomplete if it remains only on the individual/personal level.

As we have seen, the Kabbalists held that the holy sparks entrapped in all things derive from the broken *Sefirot*, the archetypal values that constitute the tangible world. Thus the raising of the sparks and *Tikkun* involve the realization of the *intellectual, spiritual,* and *emotional values* that the *Sefirot* represent, and a *liberation* of the intellect, emotion, and spirit within the individual's soul. Indeed, the liberation of these values constitutes both the meaning of human existence and the completion and perfection of God and the world. 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 uncovered through our consideration 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 the natural sciences, 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, thinking, and intuition) and the excluded aspects of the personality symbolized in the anima, animus, and shadow. All of these movements and thinkers 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, worldview, race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

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.

However, there are many psychological, sociological, and religious factors that continue to fuel dogmatism and a closed economy of thought, action, and experience, such that 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 conception of God that arises from these symbols is not only spiritually, psychologically, and axiologically 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?

The history of mysticism is replete with affirmations that the God or "absolute" experienced in states of mystical union and ecstasy is so vast, so all-inclusive as to be ineffable, undefinable, and 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 unknowingness, diversity 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-Shvaah* 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 the 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 do 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 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 blossoming and expression of nature, thought, knowledge, life, and humanity in each of their varied forms; each species, each culture, each idea, and each person, actualized and *individuated* according its nature; each contributing to *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the manifestation of the divine and the completion of the world.

Sanford L. Drob, Ph.D., is on the Core Faculty of the doctoral program in clinical psychology at Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, California. He holds doctorates in philosophy and clinical psychology and is the author of Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, and* Kabbalistic Metaphors: Jewish Mystical Themes in Ancient and Modern Thought *(both published by Jason Aronson, 1999),* Kabbalah and Postmodernism: A Dialog *(Peter Lang, 2009),* Kabbalistic Visions: C. G. Jung and Jewish Mysticism *(Spring Journal Books, 2010), and* Reading *The Red Book:* A Thematic Guide to the C. G. Jung Liber Novus *(Spring Journal Books, 2012).*

FURTHER READING

Coudert, A. (1995). *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Coudert, A. (1998). *The impact of the Kabbalah in the seventeenth century: The life and thought of Francis Mercury Van Helmont (1614–1698)*. Boston: Brill Academic.

Dan, J. (1998). The name of God, the name of the rose, and the concept of language in Jewish mysticism. In *Jewish mysticism. Vol. II: The modern period* (pp. 131–162). Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Drob, S. (1997). The Sefirot: Kabbalistic archetypes of mind and creation. *Crosscurrents: The Journal of the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life*, *47*(1), 5–29.

Drob, S. (2000a). *Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and psychological perspectives*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Drob, S. (2000b). *Kabbalistic metaphors: Mystical themes in ancient and modern thought*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Drob, S. (2003). Towards a Kabbalistic psychology: C. G. Jung and the Jewish foundations of alchemy. *Journal of Jungian Theory and Practice*, *5*(2), 77–100.

Drob, S. (2005a). The mystical symbol: Some comments on Ankori, Giegerich, Scholem, and Jung. *Journal of Jungian Theory and Practice*, *7*(1), 25–30.

Drob, S. (2005b). Jung's Kabbalistic visions. *Journal of Jungian Theory and Practice*, *7*(1), 33–54, 61–64.

Drob, S. (2005c). Giegerich and the traditions: Notes on reason, mythology, psychology and religion. *Journal of Jungian Theory and Practice*, *7*(2), 61–73.

Drob, S. (2007). Jung for academics?: Negotiating the obstacles. Review of *The handbook of Jungian psychology: Theory, practice and applications* (R. K. Papadopoulos, Ed.). *PsycCRITIQUES*, *51*(51).

Drob, S. (2009a). *Kabbalah and postmodernism: A dialogue*. New York: Peter Lang.

Drob, S. (2010). *Kabbalistic visions: C. G. Jung and Jewish mysticism*. New Orleans, LA: Spring Journal Books.

Elior, R. C. (1987). The contemplative ascent to God. In A. Green (Ed.), *Jewish spirituality: From the sixteenth century revival to the present* (pp. 157–205). New York: Crossroads.

Elior, R. (1993). *The paradoxical ascent to God: The Kabbalistic theosophy of Habad Hasidism* (J. M. Green, Trans.). Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Giegerich, W. (2010). God must not die! C. G. Jung's thesis of the one-sidedness of Christianity. *Spring Journal*, *84*, 11–71.

Harris, S. (2005). *The end of faith: Religion, terror, and the future of reason*. New York: Norton.

Hitchens, C. (2007). *God is not great: How religion poisons everything*. New York: Random House.

Idel, M. (1988). *Kabbalah: New perspectives*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Idel, M. (2002). *Absorbing perfections*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Jacobs, L. (1987). Uplifting of the sparks in later Jewish mysticism. In A. Green (Ed.), *Jewish spirituality: From the sixteenth century revival to the present* (pp. 99–126). New York: Crossroads.

Jung, C. G. (1953). Psychological commentary on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In *Psychology and religion: West and East. Vol. 1. Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1935)

Jung, C. G. (1960). *Answer to Job*. New York: Meridian.

Jung, C. G. (1963). *Mysterium coniunctionis. Vol. 14. Collected works of C.G. Jung*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung C. G. (1966). Relations of the ego to the unconscious. In *Two essays on analytical psychology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C. G. (1973). *Letters* (Vols. 1 and 2; G. Adler, Ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C. G. (1977). *C. G. Jung speaking* (W. McGuire & R. F. C. Hull, Eds.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jung, C. G. (2009). *The red book*. New York: Norton.

Makkreel, R. A. & Rodi, F. (Eds.). (2010). *Understanding the human world: Selected works of Willhelm Dilthey, Vol II*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Matt, D. (1995). *Ayin*: The concept of nothingness in Jewish mysticism. In L. Fine (Ed.), *Essential papers on Kabbalah* (pp. 67–108). New York: New York University Press.

Menzi, D., & Padeh, Z. (1999). *The Tree of Life: Chayim Vital's introduction to the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson.

Mogenson, G. (2010). Jungian analysis *post mortem dei*. *Spring Journal*, 84, 207–270.

Schochet, I. (1981). Mystical concepts in Chassidism. In S. Zalman (Ed.), *Likutei Amaraim-Tanya* (pp. 810–894). Brooklyn, NY: Kehot.

Scholem, G. (1946). *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Rev. ed.). New York: Schocken Books.

Scholem, G. (1969). The meaning of the Torah in Jewish mysticism. In *On the Kabbalah and its symbolism* (pp. 32–86). New York: Schocken.

Scholem, G. (1974). *Kabbalah*. Jerusalem: Keter.

Scholem, G. (1987). *Origins of the Kabbalah* (R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Ed., & A. Arkush, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sperling, H., Simon, M. & Levertoff, P. (Trans.). (1931–1934). *The Zohar*. London: Soncino Press.

Tishby, I., & Lachower, F. (1989). *The wisdom of the Zohar: An anthology of texts* (D. Goldstein, Trans.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.