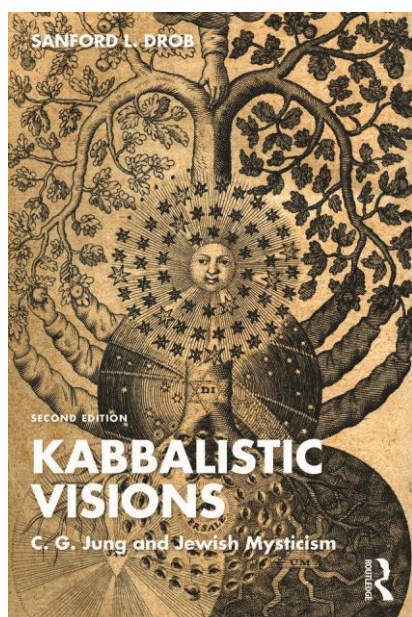


## REVIEWS

# The Kabbalah and Jung's Final Metanoia

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Review of: Sanford L. Drob, *Kabbalistic Visions: C. G. Jung and Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Routledge, 2023.



Jungians attracted to the “concealed secrecy” of the Kabbalah, with its enigmatic gematria and golems, have relied for decades on Gershom Scholem’s authoritative studies.<sup>1</sup> After all, he presented no fewer than eleven Eranos lectures on Jewish mysticism to groups sympathetic to Jung and is widely considered as having restored the academic respectability of the Kabbalah, which rationalists had long dismissed. Now we have a new edition of Sanford Drob’s lucidly written and thoroughly researched *Kabbalistic Visions* directed squarely to Jungian readers in a way that Scholem never attempted. While Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* may still orient us to the Kabbalah’s *historical* evolution, Drob brings its *psychological* meaning to life by revealing it as the key to Jung’s own deeper character.

Jewish mysticism did not hand off its evolution to Christianity as it entered the Common Era. It continued unfolding in relative independence along the same archetypal undercurrents that Jung posited in *Aion* (CW 9ii) were shaping the Christian *coniunctio* of word (spirit) and flesh (matter) in the so-called Piscean Age. During the high-medieval period in Catalonia and culminating in sixteenth-century Safed in post-exilic Palestine, the Kabbalah evolved its archetypal parallel in the figure of *Adam Kadmon*, the Primordial Human who emanates the inverted tree of the ten *Sefirot* (vessels of inner light). This most widely recognized of Kabbalistic images is an esoteric “flow-chart” crowned by an apophatic Godhead, the *Ein-sof* (endless Being), and anchored in the receptive feminine, the earth-realm *Malchut*.

Following Jung closely, Drob presents *Adam Kadmon* as nothing less than the primordial “undifferentiated unity of the collective unconscious . . . the archetype of the self and the process of transformation” as well as “the psychological equivalent of the creator God” (Drob 2023, 117). Kabbalists openly embrace the figure’s androgyny and the wedding conjunction of two principal *Sefirot*—the masculine *Tiferet* and the feminine *Malchut*. Indeed, during his later visions Jung declared his very identity to be the marriage of *Tiferet* and *Malchut* (1963, 294). Although the pair’s celestial parents had turned their backs on one another after the cosmogonic “shattering of the vessels” (*Shevirat-ha-Kelim*), through *Tikkun* (repair) they come face to face in restored relationship. Translating these themes into the domestic lives of their patients, both Jung and Freud would discover gold.<sup>2</sup> But for the wise, Drob reminds us, the deeper reference is more precious than gold; it is to that part of the human soul that survives death (97).

The Kabbalistic Tree recalls the seminal distinction that Joseph Henderson, the co-founder of the San Francisco Jung Institute, makes in “Dualities of the Self,” where he augments *horizontal* symbols of the Self (e.g., mandalas) with the often underemphasized *vertical* representations (e.g., ladders, towers). In the latter, a process of ascent from a *primal* God-image to an *ultimate* Self-image is frequently exemplified by “the erect human body with its symmetry ordered in relation to the spinal column” (Henderson 1984, 82), a centering symbol well-represented by *Adam Kadmon* and the Sefirotic Tree. In therapy, Henderson traces an analysand’s recapitulation of development in processes of vertical evolution that “review and repair damage” by returning to a primal self-image and progressing upward through a sequence of trickster, hero, and initiate stages to reach “the ultimate Self” (84). Drob finds a similar progression in the Sefirotic Tree whose “archetypal visages” (*Partzufim*) develop serially from youth to sage and whose central column mediates left- and right-side attributes, as when severe judgment (*Din*) and ever-ready forgiveness (*Hesed*) are held in balance by compassionate understanding (*Tiferet*).

“Repair of the world” is the most fitting translation of *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the restitution of our damaged world to its original status as paradise. Whereas Jungian analysis heals by restoring connection to the numinous, the Kabbalist repairs the world by ethical perfection, releasing sparks of light from their concealment in dark shells (*Kellipot*), ultimately adding to God’s own consciousness, an unorthodox notion favored by Jung. The Lurianic Kabbalah of the sixteenth century evolved into the Hasidism of the eighteenth century when, in close analogy to analytic shadow-work, confrontation with the evil *Sitra Achra*, the so-called Other Side, became the task of the “Righteous One,” the *Tsaddik*, the “Pillar” of the community (another vertical symbol). Speaking of the Maggid of Meseritz, the successor to the founder of Hasidism (Baal Shem Tov), Scholem writes, “I have found no terser, finer, or more exhaustive definition of the nature and function of the Hasidic *Tsaddik* than an utterance made by the Maggid in 1770: ‘The *Tsaddikim* make God, if one may phrase it thus, their unconscious’” (1991, 139).<sup>3</sup>

Drob intrigues us with Jung’s statement that the Maggid of Meseritz “anticipated my entire psychology” (McGuire and Hull 1977, 271f). Such congruence reconciles the debate between Jung and Martin Buber whether God is eclipsed by Jung’s alleged Gnosticism in

reducing the sacred to psychological terms or whether in the modern mind, the sacred is encountered principally within psychological experience, which in turn evolved from recollected projections onto traditional religion. Or, as Daniel Matt more simply describes the converging streams of psyche and religion, “imagination becomes an instrument for the holy spirit” (Matt 1995, 116).

What the Maggid anticipated in Jung’s psychology is explored in Drob’s appendix devoted to the recent publication of Erich Neumann’s *The Roots of Jewish Consciousness* (2019). Neumann sought to reconcile Jungian psychology with the mentality of his Israeli compatriots, making the Maggid’s anticipation highly relevant to him as a Jew. Drob is not alone in the soul-searching that Jewish scholars may undergo in relating their heritage to a figure they might associate with antisemitism. And non-Jewish readers should hesitate before marginalizing the primacy of Judaism within depth psychology by interpreting it solely as a secondary expression of more primary structures in the collective unconscious and merely embrace it in perennialist inclusivity. Neumann had more pressing needs in the 1930s and chastised Jung for his ignorance of Hasidism, warning him of the danger of seeing in Wotanism a positive reconnection of post-Weimar Germans to their dissociated archetypal roots. Jung downplayed his misgivings, and Drob suggests that Jung’s neglect of Jewish culture could rest in his abiding rivalry with Freudian psychoanalysis, regarding it as a Jewish psychology irrelevant to Gentiles.

Whether or not we wish to revisit the “lingering shadows” cast by Jung’s troubling comments about Jewish psychology before WWII, Drob’s discussion of Jung’s subsequent Kabbalistic visions brings us to the heart of the book, the visions that Jung described as the “most tremendous things I have ever experienced” (Jung 1963, 295). As Jung tells us in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he slipped on an icy walkway in 1944 and, in losing his step, broke his foot (289). The resulting embolism left him in a quasi-comatose state punctuated by visions of a Garden of Pomegranates (the title of Moses de Cordovero’s Kabbalist classic). Jung crossed the threshold into a dimension that transcends the earthbound psyche—one more familiar to Kabbalistic theosophists. After the war, and once recovered, Jung sought reconciliation with Leo Baeck, the former Rabbi of Berlin, who when visiting Zürich declined Jung’s invitation, recalling Jung’s earlier statements. Coming undaunted to Baeck’s hotel, Jung confessed to him that he had “slipped up” and “lost his footing,” referring not to the curious parallel of his fall on the ice, but to his prewar pronouncements that reinforced Nazi perceptions of Jews as legitimate scapegoats.

It was not a small “slip-up”—and if it cannot disqualify Jung’s greater achievements, it grounds hagiographic excesses and leaves us with a human figure whose introverted brilliance was at times offset by indigestible generalizations about outer reality. Drob’s judicious presentation of all sides without imposing final judgments creates the space to hold these opposites together, generating a profound sense of integration in his reader. Is it not plausible to conclude—using Jung’s own theory of compensatory enantiodromia—that a more mature attitude originated in his objective unconscious, triggered by a synchronistic fall, and via the emotional power of his Kabbalistic visions inaugurated the notable deepening of his writing after his crisis? Rather than the banal antisemitism we dreaded to discover, Jung appears to have had left undeveloped what Henderson calls a “social cultural attitude” (1984, 17f), permitting

him to make caricatures of entire peoples in complete contrast to his interior profundity. Jolande Jacobi, one of Jung's few extraverted followers, remarked that "Jung simply had no understanding of the outside world" (Drob 2023, 162).

Drob suggests that Jung's Kabbalistic visions were a "feeling-toned compensation for his own intellectual blind spot regarding the role of the Jewish material in the development of the *coniunctio* symbolism in alchemy" (Drob 2023, 48), but this prompts a more dramatic interpretation. This emerging "feeling tone" is first apparent in Jung's caring remark to his night-nurse, whom he imagined as an elderly Jewish woman warming up kosher meals for him: "I asked the nurse to forgive me if she were harmed" (1963, 295). Perhaps Jung's tendency to typify groups in unfeeling generalizations could only be compensated by feeling its effects on a single person.

The fact that Jung rose from his hospital bed on April 4, 1944 (note the fourth four), may prove the quintessential synchronicity of his lifetime. The phase of life that followed included not only a greater awareness of Kabbalism, but also a deeper insight into what this date symbolized in his own psychology. Fourness to Jung signified the completeness both of groundedness in the feminine earth and of confronting evil itself, themes that were radically developed in his works after 1944, especially *Answer to Job* (1952), *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (1952), and *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1956). May we consider Jung's near-death experience as an atonement led by the autonomous spirit that animated his deepest visions over the course of his life—objectively mystical visions that we cannot reduce to Jung's prior studies or his intellectual functions? His "ultimate Self" appears to have adopted a Judaic idiom late in life guiding him to live out a Kabbalistic *Tikkun* in compensation for his lapses. It is into this *mysterium* that Drob invites his readers, a mystery never absent from Jung's mind. Indeed, Jung finds his greatest closure in the Kabbalah, the last deep harbor of his odyssey—one he reached only after a nearly fatal "slip-up." Sanford Drob's masterful presentation of the intricacies of the Kabbalah allows Jungians to understand at last the ramifications of Jung's crucial metanoia.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Scholem's eleven Eranos lectures are found in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (1969) and *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (1991). *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1961) presents the Kabbalah's development in chronological order and is considered a classic in the field.
2. "This is gold!" Freud exclaimed after his encounter with Chayyim Vital's Kabbalistic text, asking why it had not been shown to him earlier (Drob 2023, 16).
3. Scholem's anachronistic usage of "unconscious" in an eighteenth-century context is his translation of the Hebrew *Kadmuth-ha-Sekhel* ("preconscious origin of intellect") (Scholem 1991, 293, n. 107).

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#### ABSTRACT

Sanford Drob's *Kabbalistic Visions: C. G. Jung and Jewish Mysticism* examines the parallels between Kabbalistic spiritual practice and Jungian analytic work, including the conjunction of such opposites as male and female and especially of light and dark. The Kabbalah is presented in its historical evolution from an exoteric Jewish tradition to an esoteric interior process that is mirrored in Jungian analysis. This enables us to understand how Jung's late visions were rooted in his controversial but evolving attitude toward Jewish psychology, resulting in the widely noted deepening of his last major works.

#### KEY WORDS

Adam Kadmon, antisemitism, C. G. Jung, Gershom Scholem, Jewish mysticism, Joseph Henderson, Kabbalah, Sanford Drob<sup>117</sup>