

"THIS IS GOLD": FREUD, PSYCHOTHERAPY AND THE LURIANIC KABBALAH

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Freud's reported interest in the Lurianic Kabbalah is explored from both theoretical and psychotherapeutic points of view. The Lurianic symbols are understood both as important historical antecedents to psychoanalysis and as a significant source of both insight and inspiration for contemporary psychotherapists.

David Bakan, in the paperback edition of his work, *Sigmund Freud and The Jewish Mystical Tradition* relates a story which, I believe, bears repeating. It's a fascinating story. I'm not sure if it's true, but even as an apocryphal tale it should command our attention. The story involves two rabbis by the name of Chayyim, two rabbis by the name of Bloch, Bakan, and Sigmund Freud. In his book, first published in the 1950s, Bakan had argued that Freud had either consciously or unconsciously made use of Jewish mystical ideas in formulating psychoanalysis [1]. After the book's publication Bakan received a letter from a Rabbi Chayyim Bloch, who had been an acquaintance of Freud some years back. Bloch had read Bakan's book and informed Bakan that he had some information that might be of interest to him. According to Bloch, many years earlier he had been asked by his own mentor, the eminent Rabbi Joseph Bloch, to do a German translation of the works of Chayyim Vital, a 16th century rabbi who had been the most important student of Isaac Luria, the great master of the theosophical Kabbalah [2]. Bloch told Bakan that he'd begun work on the translation but soon lost interest and ceased work altogether when Joseph Bloch died in 1923. Sometime later, however, Chayyim Bloch had a dream in which Joseph Bloch came to him and asked him why he had not finished the project. Chayyim Bloch then completed the translation but felt he needed someone to write a forward to the book and to help assume responsibility for its publication.

Apparently Bloch had some understanding of the psychological significance of Chayyim Vital's work, because he decided to approach his acquaintance, Sigmund Freud. Freud agreed to read the manuscript, and upon doing so exclaimed to Bloch "This is gold!" and wondered aloud why Chayyim Vital's work had never been brought to his attention in the past. Freud agreed to write the forward to the book and also agreed to assist in securing its publication. At this point, Freud informed Bloch that he too had written a book that was relevant to Judaism, and hurriedly presented Bloch with the manuscript of what was to become *Moses and Monotheism*. Freud and Bloch were meeting in Freud's library, and Bloch quickly perused Freud's manuscript. The work, however, incensed Bloch, who, saw that Freud had not only denied that Moses was Jewish but had placed responsibility for Moses' death on the Jewish people. Bloch exclaimed that the Christian world had always blamed the Jews for the death of their Christ, and now Freud would blame the Jews for the death of their own liberator, Moses. Freud himself was deeply angered by Bloch's reaction and left the room, leaving Bloch alone in Freud's library for a period of time. During that time Bloch reports that he had

nothing to do but to browse through the books on Freud's shelf, amongst which was a French translation of the classical Kabbalistic text, the *Zohar*, as well as several German language books on Jewish mysticism [1].

What we might ask, was the gold that Freud had seen in the pages of Bloch's translation of Chayyim Vital's work? Interestingly, and somewhat surprisingly, David Bakan in his own book on Freud and Jewish mysticism work barely even mentions Vital or Luria. This is the case even though it should be plain to anyone familiar with the Lurianic Kabbalah that it is a system of thought which is far more dynamic and, I would daresay, far more psychoanalytic, than any other aspect of the Jewish tradition.

Chayyim Vital (1542-1620) was 20 years younger than Isaac Luria and outlived him by 50 years, but during the period of time when the two of them were together in Safed, Vital acted as Luria's Boswell, taking down his words as if they were the words of a prophet. Indeed, Luria was one of the greatest Kabbalistic masters, who taught his mystical and theosophical doctrine to a few select pupils in one of Judaism's four holy cities. Those who have had an opportunity to visit Safed in modern day Israel cannot fail to be impressed. Perched above the Galilee it is a tranquil and remote site of ancient synagogues and mosaics. Luria himself was a poet whose odes to the Sabbath adorn even today's Jewish prayer books. On Friday nights he would lead his followers in spirited song greeting the "Sabbath Queen" outdoors as the sun set on the horizon of Palestine. Luria's ideas were little known outside orthodox Jewish circles, however, until Gershom Scholem brought them to the attention of western intellectuals in the 1930s [3,4,5]. Since that time, Scholem, a number of his students, and others have catalogued and commented upon the works of Luria's disciples including Vital [6]. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that even Carl **Jung**, who himself professed more than a passing interest in the Kabbalah, and whose works are filled with references to Kabbalistic ideas, only became aware of the Lurianic Kabbalah in 1954. Judging from Jung's letters it is fair to say that he himself found gold in Luria's ideas, commenting in particular that he was impressed by Luria's notion that it is man's divinely appointed task to help restore the broken vessels of a shattered cosmos [7]. Several years later Jung commented that "a full understanding of the Jewish origins of psychoanalysis would carry us beyond Jewish Orthodoxy into the subterranean workings of Hasidism and then into the intricacies of the Kabbalah which still remain unexplored psychologically" [8].

The Lurianic Kabbalah is a relatively late development in Jewish mysticism. The *locus classicus* of the Kabbalah, is, of course, the *Zohar* which contemporary scholars date to the 13th century but which Jewish Orthodoxy insists goes back to the 2nd century and was authored by the rabbinic sage, Simeon Bar Yohai [9]. Many of the ideas in the Lurianic Kabbalah are dynamic developments of concepts and symbols that appear in the *Zohar*. One can also find many ancient Gnostic themes reappearing suddenly in the Lurianists, and the study of both Christian and Jewish Gnostic sources is invaluable as a background to the ideas of the Kabbalah [10,11,12] (see **Gnosticism**). Lurianic ideas are also prominent in the 17th century messianic movement surrounding Sabbatei Zevi in Poland [5]. They are also to be found amongst the Lubavitch Hasidim, whose psychological interpretation of the Kabbalah is invaluable for our own contemporary

understanding of this tradition [13]. Those who wish to pursue a study of the Kabbalah are referred to the valuable works by Gershom Scholem and Isaiah Tishby[4,5,6,9]. The latter's recent compilation and translation of the *Zohar* is unparalleled, finally making this work truly accessible to the English speaking public. Unfortunately, none of the works of Chayyim Vital have as yet been translated into English. His *Sefer Etz Chayyim* is extremely rewarding in the original but requires a knowledge not only of Hebrew but also a familiarity with the specialized Kabbalistic terminology [2]. There is also a Christian Kabbalah, which is detailed in English in the esoteric *Holy Kabbalah* of Waite [14] and which, in the Latin writings of Knorr Von Rosenroth, was heavily relied upon by Jung in his interpretation of alchemy [15,16]. The Kabbalah also echoes and is echoed by many of the themes in [Platonism](#) and Neoplatonism, Christian mysticism, German Idealism (particularly [Hegel](#)); and, interestingly, both in Hindu and Buddhist thought (see [Indian Philosophy](#)). A full contemporary understanding of the Kabbalah would indeed take into consideration these and many other mystical, theological and philosophical movements. The Kabbalah is also, as I have intimated, a subtext to Jung's prolific work on alchemy. This is because the alchemists themselves were greatly influenced by, and implemented, Kabbalistic ideas in their work. Indeed it can be argued that Jung's spiritual and psychological reinterpretation of alchemy is nothing more than a return to alchemy's Kabbalistic roots.

There have, of course, been numerous works which treat of the presumed Jewish pedigree to psychoanalysis [1,17,18]. With the exception of Bakan none of them deal specifically with Jewish mysticism and most understand Freud's Judaism as a kind of general impetus to his work in psychoanalysis. Rice, for example, has argued that the social position of the Jew as an outsider enabled Freud to make a breakthrough in an otherwise conservative scientific climate [17]. Gay, in his book *Freud: A Godless Jew*, argues that it was not Freud's Judaism but rather his godlessness, his atheism, which enabled him to make the discoveries leading to psychoanalysis [18]. Gay comments that all of the comparisons between, for example, the methods of dream interpretation in the Talmud and psychoanalysis are superficial and coincidental, and that there is no real theoretical thread that can link psychoanalysis with any specific Jewish or other religious phenomenon. I am, unlike Bakan, not of the firm opinion that Freud consciously or unconsciously borrowed Kabbalistic or Jewish themes in creating psychoanalysis; this may or may not be the case. What is more interesting, however, is the light that can be shed both on psychoanalysis and Jewish mysticism through a dialog between them. It is nevertheless significant that Gay, neither in his work on Freud's Judaism nor in his major biography of Freud [19], takes any cognizance of the Lurianic Kabbalah and its potential relevance to psychoanalytic thought. The same is true for each of the other authors who have written about the impact of Judaism on psychoanalysis. However, if there is a specific convincing relationship between Jewish mysticism and psychoanalysis it is to be found in the work of Luria and Vital, the very work which Freud himself presumably declared to be gold.

The Lurianic Metaphors

The **Lurianic Kabbalah** is extremely complex. However, in basic outline it can be understood as a grand myth or metaphor about the origin and destiny of the universe [20,21]. According to Luria the creation of the universe is the manifestation of a cosmic drama involving the emanation, channeling, structuring, and containment of God's infinite energy or light. This light is referred to as *Or Ein-sof*, and is conceived of by Luria in sexual terms, as divine sexual energy. According to Luria, the original creation process, involved a contraction, withdrawal and concealment of God's infinite presence. This act is known in the Lurianic Kabbalah as *Tzimtzum*, a notion which expresses the view that creation is essentially a negative, rather than a positive act. The *tzimtzum* resulted in a void within which a finite world could be created. The initial act of creation involved a process which might be described as being analogous to the creation of a detailed scene by interposing obstructions (e.g. a series of "negatives" in an otherwise uniform plenum of light. In this manner, God is said to have emanated a series of ten archetypal structures known as the *Sefirot* which are understood as crystallized representations of God's intellectual, spiritual and emotional characteristics.

These structures were meant to become vessels for the further emanation of God's creative energy. But because they were disjoint, they were not strong enough to contain the light of the Infinite and a majority of them shattered, causing a portion of the Infinite's light to cling to and become entrapped within the broken shards which were then dispersed throughout the world. The resulting pieces, known in Hebrew as *Kellipot* (nutshells or husks) become in the Lurianic system the metaphysical source of all that is dark, negative, alienated and evil. These *kellipot* are said to have exiled a portion of God's infinite light from its source and to have thus given rise to an alienated, evil realm, the *sitra achra*, what the Kabbalists call "the forces of the other side." At the same time, the breaking of the vessels resulted in a disruption of the flow of divine procreative energy throughout the cosmos, and, particularly, in a disturbance in the normal conjugal relations between the masculine and feminine aspects of the godhead. As a result, much of the divine sexual energy was entrapped in the "husks" of the "other side". It is mankind's divinely appointed task, through proper ethical, spiritual and psychological conduct to discover the *kellipot* as they manifest themselves in our world, and to free or raise the sparks of light within them (known in Hebrew as *netzotzim*), in order that they may return to their proper place as forces serving the divine will. In so doing, mankind is said to liberate the "feminine waters" necessary for the renewed sexual union within God. The act of liberating the divine light or energy and restoring it to the service of the infinite God is known in the Lurianic literature as *Tikkun ha-Olam*, the restoration of the world. On a personal level, each individual is enjoined to liberate the sparks within his own soul in order that he may ultimately achieve his personal restoration and divine destiny.

The Kabbalists themselves recognize this cosmic drama, to be a metaphor for deeper theological and also psychological events, and if we examine this metaphor from a contemporary psychological perspective we discover it to be strikingly psychoanalytic in nature. Indeed, the metaphors of psychoanalysis and the Kabbalah are so similar that if it were not for the fact that the Lurianic Kabbalah antedated Freud by 300 years we would be tempted to call the entire scheme a "psychoanalysis of God".

Luria and Freud

According to **Freud**, the development of the individual involves the channeling of procreative energy, which is itself modified into structures, the ego and superego, whose function it is to channel and modulate further emanations of the individual's *libido*, much as the *sefirot* were designed as vessels for channeling the light and energy of God's light, energy and will. For reasons which are inherent in the structure of the conflict between instinct and culture these structures (the ego and the superego) are not consistently able to maintain and modulate the libidinous energy in ways that are most adaptive to the individual. There is, one might say, a partial shattering of each of these structures, which results in a splitting off or alienation of ideas and emotions from the main fabric of the individual's personality, just as, in the Lurianic system, divine sparks are separated or exiled from their main source in God. This psychological splitting of f occurs, for example, when the individual becomes aware of an impulse, thought, or desire which his conscious self finds unacceptable. The impulse or idea, and its associated affect, is repressed and subsequently exists in a nether psychological realm known as the unconscious, which is quite analogous to Luria's *sitra achra* or "other side". Once in the unconscious these complexes of thought and affect, which are akin to the Kabbalist's *kellipot*, are inaccessible to the individual. They are, in a sense, exiled psychosexual energy which becomes a source of all manner and variety of psychological mischief which the individual experiences as depression or other neurotic symptoms, in the same way as the *kellipot* entrap the divine sexuality and become the source of negativity and evil on a cosmic level. The job of the analyst is to make these unconscious complexes conscious and, more importantly, to free the libidinal energy attached to them so that it can again be made available to the individual for his life goals; just as in Kabbalah the energy trapped in the *sitra achra* must be freed and made available for the service of God. From a kabbalistic perspective, the psychoanalytic endeavor is itself a form of *tikkun* or restoration, which brings an end to a *galut* or exile of aspects of the individual's personality, and ushers in a *geulah* or psychological redemption.

Philosophy, Kabbalah and Psychoanalysis

We might be tempted, at this juncture, to look upon the Lurianic Kabbalah in the same way that Jung looked upon alchemy, that is, as a dimly understood projection of the Kabbalists' own psychological processes onto the cosmos as a whole. Indeed, the Hasidim understood the Lurianic Kabbalah in essentially this way. On their view the human mind, the microcosm, perfectly mirrors the divine mind or macrocosm, and the events which the Kabbalah had described as cosmic events were understood by the Hasidim as transpiring within the individual's own psyche or soul. While I believe that this is a fruitful approach, it is not the only one, and a reverse perspective, one which raises the application of psychoanalytic concepts to the cosmos as a whole, may be fruitful as well.

Such a perspective will be attractive to those who refuse to draw sharp distinctions between psychology, philosophy, and theology, and who hold, as did the Kabbalists, that our deepest psychological insights can also satisfy many of our philosophical and theological urgencies as well. My experience is that many individuals who are attracted to

psychoanalysis (as opposed, for example, to behavioral or cognitive psychology) hold just such a view, and, in spite of Freud's well known disavowal, regard psychoanalysis as a *weltanschauung* with profound cultural, political, and *philosophical* significance.

In this regard, it may be worth our while to compare our own intellectual situation with that of the 19th century in Germany, in the years, immediately prior to the advent of psychoanalysis. At that time, German philosophy had been dominated by the philosophical perspectives of Kant and Hegel. Kant had attempted to answer philosophical skepticism through a constructivist doctrine in which certain presumably universal categories such as space, time and causality were understood as invariant properties of the human mind, but completely inapplicable to the *noumenal* realm or the "things in themselves". Hegel had turned Kant on his head, arguing that the very categories of the human mind which Kant had held to be solely applicable to appearances were indeed applicable to the real world. Through an understanding of the dynamic or dialectical relationship amongst these categories, Hegel sought to obtain a synoptic view of the nature, origins and destiny of the cosmos as a whole. Hegel argued that it made no sense to confine the Kantian categories to the psychology of man. Any talk about "things in themselves" which lay behind or which *cause* our psychological experience, is itself conditioned by that experience, and it simply makes no sense to speak of such a presumably unknowable realm at all.

If we examine the psychologies of both Freud and Jung we discover that both take up a position which is very similar to Kant's, but whereas Kant regarded the categories of the *conscious* mind as the vehicles through which we construct our world, Freud and Jung argued that such construction is at least in part the result of *unconscious* mental activities, activities like displacement, condensation, projection, repression and symbolization (and the work of the archetypes in the case of Jung). I would argue that the psychoanalysis of Freud and Jung has yet to find its 20th or 21st century version of Hegel, one who would systematically draw the full philosophical and theological implications of the theory of the unconscious, and who would acknowledge what Hegel, if he were alive today, would have readily seen, but which Freud and Jung refused to consider, that the experience of a God archetype, for example, is all we can ever mean with the word "God", and that the depths of our own souls are the only conceivable windows we have into the depths of the world. Psychoanalysis strikes us as deep and profound precisely because its categories grant us insight not only into personal minds but (as the Kabbalists, in speaking of analogous ideas, intimated) into the nature of the cosmos as a whole. As James Hillman has affirmed, when we do psychoanalytic work we are not simply talking about 'you and I' but have an opportunity to enter into the soul of the world as well [22,23].

As psychotherapists I believe we can find something of considerable psychological interest in each of the Kabbalistic symbols, in each phase of their mythical account of the origin and destiny of the world. Consider, for example, the kabbalistic theme of exile and redemption, a theme which is not only prominent throughout Jewish history but which appears to be *universal* in our own time. That man is somehow exiled from himself is an assumption which not only pervades psychoanalytic interpretations of contemporary man but also existentialist and Marxist interpretations as well. That Freud himself identified

with the Jewish theme of exile and redemption is made clear by his long-standing preoccupation with the liberator of the Jewish people, Moses. That analysis offers deliverance from man's self-alienated condition has led some to regard psychoanalysis as a redemptive movement in the tradition of Judaism [17]. Or consider *Ein-sof*, the Kabbalist's term for the infinite unknowable God, the source of all energy, will and interest. *Ein-sof* has its analog in the notion of a primal unknowable unconscious, what Jacques Lacan sometimes refers to as "Little a," that primitive scintilla of desire which exists outside of the symbolic order and about which we therefore cannot speak. *Tzimtzum*, the withdrawal concealment and contraction, by which the Infinite is said by the Kabbalists to have created the world, has many psychological ramifications which I will discuss momentarily. The same, we shall see, can readily be said about the *sefirot*, the structures, dimensions or archetypes which are the building blocks of the cosmos and human personality, the *shevirat-hakelim*, the breaking of the vessels, or the necessary destructive process which is part of all creativity, and *tikkun ha-olam*, the process by which man raises the sparks of divine light which have been trapped in the "other side."

Tzimtzum: "Contraction and Concealment"

We can begin with the Lurianic notion of *tzimtzum*. This idea, which is unique in the history of religion and philosophy, involves the notion that creation is essentially a negative as opposed to a positive act. The Infinite God must withdraw, conceal, contract himself and, in effect, get himself out of the way in order to create, and ultimately reach out to a world. Without getting into the logical details of this doctrine I should note that the Kabbalists speak as if the very act of contraction involved in the *tzimtzum* is enough to allow a world (and particularly a Primordial Man, who embodies all of the characteristics of the universe) to emerge. The Hasidim interpreted this doctrine psychologically in their admonition that in relating to others, in particular our children, we must emulate the Infinite God and perform an act of *tzimtzum* whereby our own thoughts and desires, are contracted and concealed so that the other may emerge in his or her own individuality. Rotenberg, has created an entire social psychology based on the notion of *tzimtzum*, arguing that mutual I-Thou relationships and communal institutions must be based upon mutual contraction rather than the assertion which is taught by contemporary psychology [24]. I have often found that the most difficult task for a new psychotherapist is that of getting him or herself out of the way in order that the patient may emerge as an individual in his own right. Indeed, the psychotherapeutic relationship may be the one relationship in which patients can experience an other who is not asserting his or her will over against the patient's own. If this can truly be achieved, then perhaps the patient can emerge spontaneously in his or her own full being in much the same way as the Lurianic Kabbalists held that the Primordial Man emerged spontaneously with the *tzimtzum* or contraction and concealment of God. This is an attitude, it should be noted, which is even more difficult to take with respect to our own children, who we may be inclined to see as a narcissistic extension of ourselves. Yet it is only through an act of contraction in which we overcome our own narcissism that we are able to see either our patients or children in the context of their own desire.

How is such an act of *tzimtzum* with respect to our patients, our children and others possible? I do not have an easy answer to this question. but a few words and metaphors

come to mind. Amongst these are becoming *transparent as opposed opaque, naive instead of knowledgeable*, and perhaps even *foolish instead of wise*. I think that those of us who are unable to allow ourselves to be fooled, manipulated or completely baffled by our patients have not reached the requisite state of humility to conduct meaningful psychotherapy. It is, I believe, also of interest that in the writings of Chayyim Vital, we learn that before God could contract Himself away from a point He first had to concentrate all of his energies upon it. This provides us with the insight that the very process of "contracting" with respect to our patients is not simply one of ignoring them or leaving them to their own devices, but rather involves an intense focus and interest upon them, and at the same time a restraint or withdrawal which allows them to emerge as themselves.

None of this is to say that there is no place for assertion, wisdom and knowledge, on the part of the therapist. The Lurianic Kabbalists recognized that the negative act of *tzimtzum* must be followed by a positive act of *hitpashut* or emanation, and that the relationship between God and the world, or between man and man, is an ebb and flow of contraction and expansion, withdrawal and assertion, retreat and encounter. In psychotherapy, however, there must first be a getting out of the patient's way before one can achieve the requisite understanding to make a useful interpretation. When the analytic hour is filled with the patient and his or her desire as opposed to the therapist's, then what, if anything, must be said will become quite evident, for the therapist will have succeeded in identifying himself as completely as possible with the feelings, thoughts and situation of the analysand. I believe that it is just such a contracted, naive kind of listening that enables a Hasidic rebbe to give such profound advice to his Hasidim, for such advice turns out to be simply a tracking or reflection of the Hasid's own desire.

An act of *tzimtzum* is also required on the part of the analysand. The patient, in regressing to critical moments in his early life, by becoming absorbed in the world of his fantasies and dreams, and by taking a curious and naive interest in his own mental productions, performs an act of contraction or withdrawal with respect to his own ego or self. The dream is of particular interest in this regard. The Kabbalah (like the Vedanta) regarded the whole of creation as akin to a dream in the infinite mind of the Absolute. In withdrawing himself from himself and (what amounts to the same thing) by concealing himself from his own reality, the infinite God creates an illusion of finitude and multiplicity which is our world. Interestingly, this illusion is for the Kabbalists the very perfection and completion of the deity himself, for without man existing in a finite world, God would have no capacity to see or comprehend himself or to instantiate the values which are implicit in his infinite goodness.

We each perform an act of *tzimtzum* and, in effect, play God to dream worlds of our own creation each night. In dreaming we perform an act of contraction whereby we withdraw or remove our cathexis from the world and substitute a new world or reality in the dream. But, paradoxically, just as the world is said to complete God, our dreams can be said to complete ourselves, for it is only through our dreams and fantasies that we can achieve a perspicacious notion of who we really are. Jung who was far more theologically inclined than Freud, viewed the dream as our portal into "heaven", for in the

dream we gain access to the archetypes which, according to Jung, are the psychological foundation for what were traditionally spoken of as the gods.

As I have already mentioned, the word *tzimtzum* has a connotation of concealment as well as contraction, and it is this connotation which is of particular relevance to an aspect of human creativity which has been much discussed in psychoanalysis: the origin of personality or *character*.. We might say that an act of *tzimtzum* or concealment lies at the very core of our character, for it is only through concealment and its variants, i.e.: denial, repression, symbolization, displacement, condensation, etc. that a division is set up between the conscious and the unconscious mind and our personalities are born. As we know, it is the unconscious mind which adds depth and flavor to life, and is essential to the formation of an individual's character. Just as God, according to the Kabbalists, creates a world through an act of concealment (if you will a cosmic repression) man creates his own character, and, as Freud understood it, his culture, through an earthly concealment: the repressions of everyday life. We can see a Hegelian dialectic at work on both the theological and psychological levels, for in both instances we find that reality gives rise to illusions which are in turn productive of the very realities which gave rise to them. The "illusion" of a finite world is theologically the perfection and completion of God, and the "illusion" of a world of fantasies and dreams is the ground and the depths of the *reality* of man. This, by the way, is a wonderful example of the Kabbalistic notion of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the principle that profound opposites compliment and complete each other. It also illustrates the Kabbalistic (and psychoanalytic) principle that the unknown (or unconscious) is not simply the result of repression, but lies at the core of man's very being.

There is one more clinical theme that I would like to pursue with respect to the concept of *tzimtzum*, and this relates to the problem of getting ourselves and even our psychologies out of the way so that we as individuals can make room for an external world. Since the time of Copernicus man has become decentered within the physical universe while at the same time becoming far more essential in the spiritual world. Man has become spiritually central to such a degree that he himself has become completely coextensive with "soul"[23, p. 100]. The world itself has lost its soul and the hermeneutic method which was once used to find spiritual meaning in nature and cosmos has now been confined to the study of man. Indeed, one of Freud's greatest innovations, perhaps his greatest, was that at a time when Darwin had subjected an aspect of the world (the origin and nature of biological species) which had once been understood hermeneutically, to the methods of natural science, Freud subjected a phenomenon (neurosis and psychopathology), which in his day had been understood scientifically, to the methods of textual interpretation, the very methods, by the way, which formed the basis of the Jewish intellectual tradition. However, a consequence of these Darwinian and Freudian developments has been a further bifurcation between man and the world, between the humanities and the natural sciences; to the point where the soul has been taken out of the world and confined to man.

James Hillman, has spent the past 30 years bemoaning this occurrence, urging us to regard the world itself as well as our own productions in art, language, and science as

filled with soul and spirit [22,23]. We have boxed ourselves into such a corner that the psyche is confined to ourselves and our relationships, and we are no longer as capable as previous generations of sensing the great depth and soul in the world at large. Indeed, our generation is one in which to be deep means to turn inward toward the self, and to be involved in such matters as politics, science or the natural world is deemed psychologically uninteresting. Many of the most creative minds of our own generation have spent the better part of their lives in self absorption on the analytic couch or in other primarily psychological activities. As such, we are in a position that is in some ways analogous to that of God before creation: we are narcissistically preoccupied and unable to get ourselves out of the way so that we may genuinely encounter an ensouled world. Perhaps another human act of contraction or *tzimtzum* is necessary at this stage to recognize that the hermeneutic categories which we have eagerly applied in psychoanalysis to ourselves are relevant to the world at large, and that there is as much psyche and depth in that world as there is within our own souls. When patients take a genuinely deep and abiding interest in the world around them and turn away from their own inner preoccupations I consider this a most hopeful sign. While such an interest can, on occasion, be a sign of resistance, it is very frequently also a sign that the patient has contracted himself, that, he has gotten himself out of the way to such an extent that he has permitted a world to emerge outside the confines of his own psyche. Achieving this might be considered a wonderful act of *imitatio dei*, and when it occurs the Kabbalists would find it as a warrant for the assertion that man was created in the image of God.

One more word on the function of the world in both the Kabbalah and in psychoanalysis. We know that according to Freud, each of us has a *thanatic* urge to return to the complete state of entropy, disorganization, or nothingness from which we arose. This is what I have elsewhere referred to as Freud's negative mysticism: a mysticism in which the goal, instead of being a union with the one resplendent God, is dissolution or death [25]. According to Freud, our attachment to the objects of the world prevents us from acting out on our *thanatic* urges. A similar theory is found in the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, who held that our interest in the objects of the material world is the one thing that prevents our soul from prematurely returning to its origins in God. I would say then that for both Freud and the Baal Shem that the world is a good thing, for Freud because it forestalls our entry into nothingness, and for the Baal Shem Tov because it prevents a premature *unio mystico* that would prevent us from accomplishing our work on earth. The world is also, according to the Kabbalists, in spite of its immense challenges, evils, and hardships, or (to be more precise) *because of them*, the perfect setting in which man can assume his life task. What this task is, I will discuss later, when we turn to the concept of *tikkun haolam*.

The Sefirot

Sefirah and its plural form *sefirot* have no clear linguistic derivation. The term has been variously interpreted as relating to Hebrew words meaning luminary, brilliance or sapphire, number, scribe and book (the Hebrew word for which is *sefer*) and each of these proposed derivations can provide us with some insight into the nature of the *sefirot* symbol. The Kabbalists indeed describe the *sefirot* as luminaries, dimensions, numbers or archetypes with which God has created or *written* the world. The *sefirot* are ten in

number, and even their names (e.g. wisdom, kindness, beauty) suggest that they represent values, archetypes or dimensions of both the human soul and (according to the Kabbalists) the world. As we have seen, it is a fundamental tenet of Kabbalistic thought that the microcosm mirrors the macro-cosm, that the elements of the soul of man mirror the ultimate constituents of God and the universe. As we have already seen, these elements or *sefirot* are in a sense illusory in nature, having been brought into existence by the *tzimtzum* or concealment of the infinite unity of God, in much the same way as a multiplicity of mathematical equivalencies can appear to have a separate existence as a result of our ignorance of the fact that they are all, for example, equal to the number one.

The *sefirot* refer to such dimensions of existence as the ultimate will, ideal wisdom, and deepest understanding, as well as, love, power, and judgment, beauty and compassion, endurance, majesty, foundation, and kingship. These dimensions have been interpreted by the Kabbalists as instantiating the spiritual, psychological, and material dimensions of the known world. Beyond the four dimensions of space and time which are recognized by contemporary physics, the Kabbalists recognize six value and ideational dimensions which characterize an object's spiritual, conceptual, psychological, and physical properties. Moses Cordovero, a kabbalist who was a contemporary of Luria's in Safed, understood the *sefirot* as the constituent elements or "molecules" of the objects in the world, and held that each thing obtained its specific character through the relative admixture and dominance of *sefirot* which comprised it. The Kabbalists also held that the *sefirot* were organized into worlds, some of which (being spiritual) were dominated by such *sefirot* as will and wisdom while others (being more material) were dominated by less exalted *sefirotic* archetypes. An interesting and important aspect of the *sefirot* doctrine is the existence of the so-called ten negative crowns or "counter *sefirot*", which are said to exist in an infernal realm, providing an evil or negative counterpart to the *sefirot* which dominate the upper worlds. According to the Kabbalists man must pay his due to the world of the counter *sefirot* as well as to the upper realms. If he fails to recognize the negative forms of will, wisdom, strength and kindness within himself, he runs the risk of being dominated by these same forces emerging from the "other side".

An entire psychology can be developed on the basis of the *sefirot* doctrine. Not only can the *sefirot* be put to fascinating use in the understanding of character, but the kabbalistic doctrine of "Worlds" can be utilized in understanding such phenomenon as higher and lower states of consciousness and dreams. Freud himself well understood that a dream, after all, brings us into a realm which is dominated by dimensions of will and desire, and in which the material aspects of things are subordinated to desires and ideas. Such a realm corresponds very closely to some of the alternative worlds spoken of in the Kabbalah.

Several other aspects of the *sefirot* symbolism are striking from a psychoanalytic point of view. For example, the *sefirot* are organized in the *Zohar* into a series of parent and child personalities whose dynamic interactions and family romance are strikingly premonitory of the Oedipus and Elektra complexes. The *Zohar* describes how the "celestial father" has a particular fondness for his daughter which stirs the jealousy of the

"celestial mother". In his love, the *Zohar* relates, he calls her daughter, but this is not enough for him and he calls her sister. This too is not enough for him and he calls her mother. An enraged supernal mother says to her daughter, "is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband, for all his love is centered on you?" But at the same time the mother is said to favor the son over her husband [9, Vol. 1, p. 299], thus, completing a sort of cosmic Oedipal triangle; a vision of the universe in which the world itself is conditioned by archetypal interest and desire, the very desire which contemporary psychoanalysts have discerned in the psychology of individual man and at the foundation of human society.

There is also a decidedly sexual connotation to the *sefirot*. The *sefirot* are spoken of in metaphors of sexual intercourse and love, and the Kabbalists affirmed that the harmony of all the worlds is dependent upon a sexual arousal and unification which occurs between the celestial beings (*partzufim*) which emerge as elements of the *sefirotic* system. Of course, the division of the godhead into a multiplicity of *sefirot* and further into several *partzufim* or personalities is, according to the Kabbalists, one of those paradoxically necessary *real illusions*, and the division amongst these entities and personas is a state of affairs which must ultimately be overcome. The unification of the *sefirot* is spoken of as *zivvug* or copulation between male and female aspects of the godhead, and in order for an appropriate unification to take place mutual male and female orgasms are deemed necessary. The "male waters" are derived from the grace of the heavens above, but, as we have seen, the "female waters" are to be supplied by mankind itself, who is often identified in the Kabbalah with the feminine aspect of the deity. While the Kabbalists warned against taking these sexual metaphors literally, it is clear that theirs is a highly eroticized universe, the dynamics of which are most perfectly expressed in the unification of man and woman in erotic love. That such erotic love is important for the psychological unity of individual man and woman is a plain inference from the Kabbalist's cosmological theories. A Jungian, of course, is entitled to take the entire scheme of multiple personalities (male, female, young, old etc.) within the godhead as symbolic of the inherent multiplicity within the personality of man, and their various "unifications" as representing the dialectic between "animus" and "anima", and "senex" and "puer" within man's psyche.

The *sefirot* are ways in which we as individuals structure our lives and cope with the psychological energy radiating from our own psychic core. The Kabbalists adopted a view in which the perfection of each individual soul involves the full recognition and development of each of seven *sefirot*, which they regarded to be the seven basic emotions of the human psyche. Each of these "emotional *sefirot*" is said to be comprised of both itself and each of the other six so that a scheme is developed in which there exists, for example, the love of love, the strength of love, the beauty of love, the endurance of love, etc. All forty-nine combinations are necessary in order to achieve the full human potential. There is also a dialectical relationship amongst a number of the *sefirot*. One such relationship, in particular, that between *Chesed* (love or kindness) and *Din* (strength or judgment), forms a critical moment in kabbalistic psychology. It is only when love is modified by judgment, and judgment modified by love, resulting in the *sefirot Rachamim* (compassion), that the human soul can be said to be complete. Indeed,

it is a severing of judgment from love which is said to give rise to the "other side" and the infernal realm of the *kellipot*; this providing an analogy to the Freudian notion that repression and neurosis results when the harsh judgments of the super ego are unmodified by erotic or compassionate trends within the personality. Psychotherapeutically, the Kabbalists, and particularly the Hasidim who succeeded them, sought to obtain a balance between kindness and judgment, such that neither dominates and overwhelms the psyche. This balance is expressed in the *sefirah Rachamim*, which connotes "compassion". Those who are familiar with the Yiddish word *rachmones* will understand that it is precisely the deeply felt empathy and compassion expressed by this term which is critical to the psychotherapeutic attitude.

I should note, if only in passing, that the Hasidim developed a *sefirotic* psychology which antedates Freud by more than 150 years, but which anticipates many of the elements of psychoanalysis, including the view that the psychology of the average man is characterized by extreme inner conflict, that such conflict can be partially ameliorated only through the sublimation of emotions in creative activity, and that one can only ascend psychologically by first descending into the rejected aspects of one's soul [25]. The psychological theories of the Lubavitcher or Chabad Hasidim, who take their name from the first three spiritual and intellectual sefirot *Chochmah*, *Binah*, and *Da'at*, (knowledge, wisdom and understanding) is a subject of considerable interest in itself, one, by the way, which can be studied *in vivo* even today in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn where the Lubavitcher Hasidim have their world headquarters. I think it is fair to say that these and other contemporary Hasidim are in some ways a living representative of the Kabbalah.

The "Breaking of the Vessels"

The *sefirot*, we should recall, are spoken of by the Kabbalists as *kelim* or vessels which are designed to structure the light or energy of the Infinite God. Interestingly, these vessels are composed of the very energy which they are meant to contain. However, as a result of their disunification, of their failure to allow their energy to pass freely between them, the *sefirot* were unable to contain the immensity of the "cosmic libido." As a result many of the *sefirot*, shattered, resulting in the metaphysical and psychological event known in the Lurianic writings as the *shevirat hakelim*, the breaking of the vessels. With the advent of the *shevirah*, or "breakage" the harmony of the cosmos is destroyed. According to Vital, as a result of the breaking of the vessels the "Celestial Mother and Father", who had hitherto existed "face to face" in *coniunctio*, turn their backs on each other and the divine energy, embodied in the *sefirot*, becomes entrapped in "the other side" [2,21].

The "*shevirah*" is regarded as an event which occurs in every sphere of human and cosmic activity and which inevitably repeats itself in each historical age and in the life of each individual. The breaking of the vessels is perhaps the most important Lurianic symbol. It is a second symbol of negation (*tzimtzum* being the first) and it teaches us that there is a destructive aspect to all creativity. Old structures must, in effect, be shattered before new ones can be reorganized to transcend them. This principle holds true for the history and development of nations, for transitions in the history of science and ideas, for

the ontogenetic development of human cognitive capacities, and, most significantly for our purposes, for the personal growth of the men and women who we psychotherapists encounter in the consulting room. The cognitive, ethical and spiritual structures which contained our own psychic energies at age 19 or 21 may be totally insufficient to contain them at 25 or 30 and those same containers which worked well for us in our 30s may not work well at all in the 40s, 50s and beyond. While many will be able to make gradual modifications in their personal *sefirot*, others will experience what can only be described as a tectonic upheaval in their lives when old forms of thinking, feeling, and behaving shatter in the face of new life experiences. This is not such a bad thing, and, as James Hillman has pointed out, as therapists we should not always be in the business of preventing our patients from falling apart [22]. Sometimes the breaking of the vessels which occurs in our personal lives is an entree into the deepening of the self and soul. When the structures shatter, a bit of genuine desire, or a glimpse of what Winnicott speaks of as the "true self" is visible through the cracks. Usually, this truth is experienced as a fall into chaos or the unknown, and it might well be analogized to the terrifying dark nights of the soul which for ages have been reported by the mystics and which, on my reading, served as the basis for the initial insights of psychoanalysis. When such a crack becomes visible in the personas of our patients, we have an important decision to make. Do we rush in to close it off and "heal it", or do we decide to ride out the storm and watch as elements of our patient's persona fall in pieces before our therapeutic eyes? What to do in such situations is, on my view, one of the most difficult decisions a psychotherapist ever has to make, and it is the mark of a sensitive and wise clinician that he or she is able to judge when to withdraw and observe and when to suggest, for example, psychopharmacological treatment in the face an apparent psychological breakdown. When an individual experiences the breaking of the vessels, it is, from a psychiatric perspective, a portent of depression, anxiety, or perhaps psychosis. From a theological perspective, however, it is akin to a test from the gods. We must remember that man does not pass all such tests and that sometimes more than a sure and compassionate hand is necessary to assist the patient in emerging from the breaking of the vessels to the next stage, knows as *tikkun*: repair or restoration.

Before moving on, however, I wish to dwell a bit more on the theme of disintegration, in psychotherapy. Why, we might ask, should we ever welcome our patients' falling apart, ever wait out the storm of their pathology with an anticipation of creativity and progress coming in its wake? I have a few thoughts on these questions. The first of these (which I have already intimated) is that psychopathology is very often a clue to desire. A man who finds himself with the impulse to suddenly drive his car into oncoming traffic, or a woman who suddenly stops acting as a wife and mother and secludes herself in the corner of a dark room, may each be registering a protest against a life in which they are not acting from their true desire, or conversely they may be trying to destroy or incapacitate themselves before desires which are unacceptable to them have a chance to show their face. Pathology is often an indication of that kernel of light which is hidden inside the "husk of darkness" (to use the Lurianic metaphor) and which may not, in fact, become available for extraction or release, unless the pathology is, so to speak, permitted to run its course. The "falling apart" which is pathology can be valuable in other ways as well; it can serve as a humbling experience, and the means for transcending or

disintegrating our own narcissism. In breaking up the structures and securities of which we were once so sure, pathology can also lead to moral development as we take a fresh perspective on ourselves and our relationships. Finally, in bringing ourselves face to face with the darkest corners of our experience we become deeper and more complete as individuals. With Jung, I cannot help but feel that the man or woman who has come to recognize the murderer within is somehow more complete as a human being than another whose murderous impulses are unconsciously manifest in biting sarcasm and extreme competitiveness.

The *sefirot* have shattered and the broken shards go hurtling through the cosmic void, trapping sparks of divine light which attach themselves to the shards like drops of oil that cling to the pieces of a shattered clay vessel. These sparks, surrounded by the dead shards, comprise, as we have seen, what the Kabbalists refer to as the *sitra achra* or the "other side." It is incumbent upon the individual to discover those sparks which are relevant to his own life, to free the divine light contained within them, and, in effect to assemble the vessels in a manner which is superior to the way they were assembled originally by God himself. Theologically speaking, mankind is enjoined to complete and perfect creation. Psychologically speaking, the individual is responsible for the reformation of his own character, and, particularly, for the transcendence of the personality formed by his heredity and early life. As James Hillman has pointed out, it is the "falling apart" of psychopathology which provides the opportunity for this transcendence.

There is an analogy to the dynamic of the breaking of the vessels in the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams. We have already seen how, in dreaming, the individual performs a miniature *tzimtzum* (concealment, contraction) which enables him or her to withdraw cathexis from the external world and create a new reality which is dominated by will and desire. The dreamwork furthers this process through the use of displacement, substitution, condensation and symbolization which further conceals the inner meaning of the dream from the dreamer. In order for this meaning to be restored the dream itself must, according to Freud, be broken up into its component parts and reorganized in a manner which, in effect, recaptures the original spark of creativity entering into the dream's formation. The kabbalistic process of *tikkun* might be said to be akin to this interpretive process, only on a much wider scale. As a result of the cosmic *tzimtzum* or concealment, the world itself is a distortion of the original divine light or essence. This cosmic distortion, like the manifest dream, must itself be broken apart into constituent elements which, having fallen into a nether world akin to the unconscious, must then be restored by man through the process of *tikkun* in order that he may discover and complete the divine essence or purpose. This process is perfectly analogous to the alchemical *solve et coagulum* which Jung understood to be the means through which an individual attains wholeness of self [15]. The alchemists, in their quest to create gold from common substances, themselves adopted the Kabbalistic concepts of *shevirat* and *tikkun*, holding that base elements must first be dissolved or broken apart before being reassembled (with the aid of the philosopher's stone) into gold.

Tikkun: The Restoration

The process of *tikkun* was a continuous source of fascination for the Kabbalists who created a far ranging set of symbols to express its essence. We have already encountered several of these symbols in our discussion of the raising of the sparks, the unification of the masculine and feminine aspects of God and the soul, the integration of *sefirot*, the modification of judgment by kindness and the consequent emergence of *Rachamim* or compassion, the sublimation of instinct into intellectual and spiritual activity, and the descent into the infernal world of the *kellipot* for the purpose of extracting the divine essence and reconciliation with one's true self. Amongst the other similes with which the Kabbalists described the process of *tikkun* are the "discovery of the roots of one's own soul", "development in the womb of the celestial mother", and "the reunification of the trees of life and knowledge". Each of the Kabbalistic metaphors are extremely suggestive and, looked at from the point of view of contemporary psychoanalysis, we can discover amongst these metaphors economic, dynamic, structural, developmental and even object-relations themes.

A discussion of each of these metaphors is beyond the scope of this essay. However, as an illustration, it may be worth our while to focus upon one of these metaphors, "the development in the womb of the celestial mother". In the Lurianic Kabbalah, several world personalities or *partzufim* are said to have emerged spontaneously as a result of the breaking of the vessels. Psychologically, these *partzufim* can be understood to be distinct personas or aspects of a fragmented self, such fragmentation being inevitable in the course of human development. One of these *partzufim*, *Zeir Anpin* the "short faced" or "impatient one" is, according to the Kabbalists of Safed, connected with the phase of *tikkun* which involves the efforts of mankind. Of interest to us here is the fact that *Zeir Anpin* himself is described as developing within the womb of another of the *partzufim*, *Imma*, the celestial mother. Theologically we have, as Scholem has pointed out, a myth of God giving birth to himself [3, p. 141]. Psychologically, we have an account of a self initiated rebirth or personal development. Within the celestial mother, *Zeir Anpin*, is said to progress through five distinct stages: conception, pregnancy, birth, childhood and *godolot* or maturity. This final stage is reflective of mankind's own intellectual and moral maturity. Of great significance is the fact that the *partzufim Imma*, within which *Zeir Anpin's* development takes place, is dominated by the *sefirah Binah* which is representative of divine understanding. Before the six emotional *sefirot* which are embodied in *Zeir Anpin* can achieve their *tikkun* or restoration they must undergo a developmental process whereby they come under the guidance of a motherly understanding which is internal to God or, psychologically speaking, internal to the individual. Through such a process of understanding an individual becomes a mother to himself, one who empathically understands the various emotional aspects of his or her personality.

By now it should be evident that for Kabbalists our contemporary distinctions between such disciplines as psychology, theology, philosophy and even politics make little or no sense. For the Kabbalists a self restorative act is at the same time a world restorative act, and the individual who discovers the roots of his own soul also discovers his purpose in life in the world at large. I think that we as contemporary psychotherapists

would do well to keep this message in mind in our work with our own patients. One sure sign that treatment is resolving to good effect is that the patient shows a deep and abiding interest not only towards others but towards some aspect of the world at large where he or she feels satisfaction in making a distinctive contribution. In getting to know and understand my patients I oftentimes ask myself what sparks are there in the world that this individual is destined to raise, and by this I mean no more than "how can this individual actualize his or her unique talents in a manner which is deeply satisfying to himself and beneficial to others". The Hasidim affirmed that there are divine sparks in all things; in the substance of earth, food and air, the laws of society, the thoughts and emotions of men. A sculptor, for example, by imposing a form on formless clay or marble, can be said to raise sparks in transforming an earthly material into a human or divine symbol. Each of us is enjoined to a similar task appropriate to our own talents and abilities. In listening empathically to our patient's passions, desires and all but forgotten aspirations we are in a position to help them grasp their *tikkun* and, by creating an environment in which those aspirations are nurtured, direct them to those sparks which they themselves can raise. In this regard I take particular interest in my patient's earliest loves, asking straight out in the beginning of the therapy if they have ever been in love and listening intently upon the answer. For falling in love is more likely to emanate from the true self than any other experience or passion; one can hardly fall in love out of obligation. Once our patients have re-experienced and genuinely grasped the nature of their love life, they are in a far better position to enter into the very essence of their desire and the nature of their *tikkun*. While this is by no means always true, there are enough cases in which an individual's rediscovery of a sense of romantic passion ignites him or her in creative and intellectual pursuits so as to make this avenue a worthwhile one to explore.

In some ways, the Kabbalists' psychology is perhaps closer to Jung than to Freud, yet the Kabbalists remain quite Freudian in their energetic model of the psyche, in their emphasis upon sexuality and, their view of the family romance as an ultimate imperative in the human and cosmic realms. That the kabbalistic psychology is imbedded within the context of a world view which (though it recognizes the significance of negative forces and the dissolution of the spirit) affirms mankind's role as the completer of creation, should only make it that more attractive to psychotherapists of a humanist and world affirming outlook. If I have indeed recovered some of the gold which Freud himself seems to have recognized as being buried in this age old tradition, then perhaps I myself have raised a spark and performed a piece of my own *tikkun* as well.

SUMMARY

The author considers the report of a Lithuanian rabbi, Chayyim Bloch, that Freud exclaimed "This is gold" when presented with a German translation of one of the works of Chayyim Vital, a 17th century Kabbalist and disciple of Isaac Luria. The psychological significance of the Lurianic Kabbalah is explored, and the Kabbalah is shown to be an important historical antecedent to psychoanalysis, and source for contemporary psychotherapeutic practice. Specifically, the Kabbalists, in their theory of the concealment, shattering, and restoration of the light of the infinite God, provide a theosophical analog to the psychoanalytic theory of libido, repression, and therapy. The

Kabbalistic symbol of "the other side" is seen to be a theosophical version of the unconscious. Further, the notion of *tikkun haolom*, the "restoration of the world", through which divine sexual energy, entrapped in the "husks" of the other side, is restored to God's service, is interpreted as a metaphor for the therapeutic processes of "making the unconscious conscious" and restoring the libido to the service of the individual. Finally, the psychotherapeutic implications of several Lurianic symbols, including *Ein-sof* (the infinite godhead), *tzimtzum* (concealment/ contraction), the *sefirot* (the archetypes of creation), *shevirat hakelim* (the breaking of the vessels) and *tikkun haolom* (the restoration of the world) are explored.

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The Lurianic Kabbalah is treated in detail in Sanford Drob's *Symbols of the Kabbalah* and *Kabbalistic Metaphors* .

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