THE KABBALAH’S REMARKABLE IDEA

by Paul Levy

During the question and answer period for the book release of my new book Dispelling Wetiko: Breaking the Curse of Evil, someone asked what was I going to write about next. Without having to blink, I responded “Kabbalah,” which is considered to be one of the most profound spiritual and intellectual movements in all of human history. Soon after the publication of my book I had discovered, much to my surprise, that the Kabbalah had a similarly radical view on many of the things I had written about, particularly the nature and role of evil in the cosmic drama. In my book, I contemplate how the wisdom traditions of alchemy, Gnosticism, shamanism, Buddhism, mystical Christianity and the depth psychology of Jung were pointing at and could help us to deepen our understanding of what the Native Americans call “wetiko” (which, simply put, refers to the spirit of evil), but I hadn’t written about the Kabbalah because I hadn’t realized that it was pointing at wetiko in a particularly unique and creative way. In Dispelling Wetiko, I point out, in as many ways as I can imagine, that encoded in the deepest evil of wetiko, which is the evil that inspires humanity’s inhumanity to itself, is actually a blessing in a very convincing disguise to the contrary, such that if we recognize what it is revealing to us about ourselves, it can help us to wake up. In essence, the Lurianic Kabbalah of Isaac Luria (1534-1572) says the same thing, i.e., that evil, which by definition is diametrically opposed to good, is, paradoxically, at the same time its very source.

Upon studying the Lurianic Kabbalah (henceforth referred to simply as “Kabbalah”), a place of deep recognition stirred within me. In reading its creation myth, it was as if images were being activated within my mind which matched a deep inner experience I had been having for years. According to the Kabbalah, when it first arose within the divine will to create a universe, there was a contraction (known as the “Tzimtzum”), a localized withdrawal and concealment of God so as to prepare a space and “make room” for a finite creation with all of its distinctiveness, multiplicity and limitation to be brought about. At the very moment that God then conceived of the world and poured his infinite light into the “vessels” that he had prepared for this very event, the vessels were instantaneously filled and shattered by this influx of divine light. This catastrophic event, called “The Breaking of the Vessels” shattered the vessels into shards which fell through primordial space, the metaphysical void, while at the same time severing the previously united (and unconscious) opposites that constitute the underlying unified structure of the universe. Each shard entrapped a portion of divine light, seemingly separating this primordial light from its source.

These shards, known as “kelipots,” represent malevolent constrictions in being, which, according to the Kabbalah, became the source of evil and personal suffering. The negation and mirror image of divine holiness and purity, the kelipots were like envelopes that concealed holiness just as a peel hides the fruit within. The kelipots were likened to husks or shells that imprisoned within themselves the divine light of God, which, because of its estrangement from its source, becomes malevolent. The kelipots altered the appearance of the light, but didn’t, however, change the essence of the light itself. The kelipots are themselves infertile and lifeless,
with no independent existence, vacuous apparitions sustained in their seeming vitality and existence only by the very divine light that they have captured. According to the Kabbalah, evil has no life of its own, as the very source of evil is both intrinsically connected to, and yet, parasitic in relation to the divine light. From the perspective of the Kabbalah, though parasitically dependent upon the light of God, evil seeks to destroy holiness, which is to ultimately destroy everything, including itself. By severing the primary reality from its source of being, the kelipots had assumed an illusory reality, becoming a lethal mirage that, though ultimately not truly existing, could potentially destroy our species. The kelipots were also thought to imprison and bind aspects of human souls as well, feeding parasitically on the divine light within them, which is to say that the Kabbalah’s view of cosmic events was also a description of the dynamics within humanity’s soul. The entrapped divine sparks of light symbolize each individual’s essential but forgotten reality. Significantly, just like the spirit of wetiko, the kelipots contained within themselves the source and very energy for their own undoing, and ultimately, the potential for their own redemption.

Like autonomous complexes within the psyche, the kelipots appeared to obtain a measure of independent existence, as if they had become separated from, and other than, the light of God itself (something which is inherently impossible). For the Kabbalists, evil emerges out of separating things that should (and necessarily do) remain united, a “splitting” of a deeper unity. It was as if the universe itself had been subject to a cosmic “dissociative reaction,” in which the underlying unity of the universe had been fragmented into a multiplicity of selves. Both the kelipots and affect-laden complexes become relatively inaccessible to consciousness, shrouded in the darkness of the unconscious. Becoming “exiled” from their source, these split-off complexes become the source of much suffering in the personal realm, just as the kelipots become the source of evil on the cosmic scale. Just as the divine light estranged from its source becomes evil, when our psychic energy becomes encapsulated through repression and severed from the wholeness of the psyche from which it arose, we develop all sorts of negative, neurotic and self-destructive symptoms.

It was as if in the process of creation, God (or in psychological terms, “the Self”), had become alienated from itself, as if “Being” was in exile from itself. And yet, according to the Kabbalah, this cosmic cataclysm was no accident, but was inherent in the overall scheme of things, built into the very design of the universe, as if God had to become estranged from himself in order to become more fully himself. To quote Jung, “And where would God’s wholeness be if he could not be the ‘wholly other’?” In becoming concealed and eclipsed from himself, the infinite God creates the illusion of finitude, limitation and separation.

As if clothing himself in a garment that is our world, God creates a very convincing illusion that is akin to a dream. According to the Kabbalah, our world is itself like a dream in the infinite mind of God. Dreams themselves are tailor-made so as to help us understand Kabbalistic thought in general. As long as we are under the spell of the dream that we are having, all of the people and objects within the dream seem separate and objectively existing. It is only upon awakening to the dreamlike nature of our situation that we recognize that who we thought we were is nothing other than a model of ourselves being dreamed by something deeper, and that the dream in which we find ourselves is a display of, and not separate from, who we have discovered ourselves to be. Similarly, it is only when God is differentiated into, and includes within himself,
a seemingly boundless expanse of apparently finite entities, which are then understood as all participating in his unified essence, that God completes himself as the Infinite All and his full infinity is achieved. This is to say that the deepest unity isn’t opposed to multiplicity, but, rather, requires and embraces it.

In the same way that God has to become estranged from himself in order to become who he is, according to the Kabbalah, it was only after the vessels break that humanity’s potential to become fully itself is set in motion. It is as if some form of destruction, deconstruction, or disintegration is a prerequisite for individuation and is necessary for the birth of the Self. Seen symbolically, the Breaking of the Vessels is an expression of the inevitable brokenness that everyone experiences at one point or another within, and even throughout, the course of a lifetime. It is when things seem most broken and shattered—when we hit bottom—that the deeper process of healing and transformation can begin. This archetypal idea is also expressed in the figure of the wounded healer, who accesses the ability to heal by going through and adding consciousness to the process of being wounded. Seen psychologically, the archetype of the wounded healer expresses the idea that the ego, if it’s to undergo transformation, must be wounded or broken in some way in order to open up to its connection to the healing energies of the unconscious. This idea of being broken, of experiencing failure and feeling psychologically and spiritually impotent is also related to the archetypal “Dark Night of the Soul,” an inner, psychospiritual experience which involves descending into the darkness—similar to the archetypal descent of the shaman into the underworld—which is the very process through which the light is discovered. This is similar to the personal process of spiritual emergence, which almost always looks like a nervous “breakdown.” The person who is spiritually awakening is typically experienced to be “falling into pieces,” as their psyche “melts down” and disintegrates, all potentially leading towards a higher form of integration more in alignment with their deeper, intrinsic wholeness. This process of falling apart is an iteration of the same fractal, a recapitulation on the microcosmic scale of an individual psyche, that the Kabbalah describes as initiating the process of divine evolution on a cosmic scale. The shattering of the vessels can also symbolize moments when life so shakes us up that we snap out of our fixed patterns of thought, rigid beliefs and assumed ideas about both the world and ourselves, such that a divine spark of creativity can come through us.

One of the striking features in the Kabbalah’s account of the origin of evil is that, unlike the Biblical myth, whose notion of the Fall of Humanity is attributed to a human act as described in the Garden of Eden story, the Kabbalah sees the origin of evil as an inescapable feature of the very process of cosmogenesis itself. Instead of seeing evil as existing outside of God, the Kabbalists saw evil as an essential component of the deity, woven into the very fabric of creation. From the point of view of the Kabbalah, evil issues forth from God himself, originating in the very heart of divinity, and is a logically necessary consequence of the very act of creation itself. In the earliest Kabbalistic writings it says “The Holy One praised be He has a trait which is called Evil.”IV From the Kabbalah’s point of view, to deny evil its rightful place in the cosmos is to do away with the Good as well. To quote Sanford L. Drob, author of Symbols of the Kabbalah: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives, “Evil is to creation, and the individual finite existence that is creation’s very essence, as the outside of a container is to the space it contains.”IV To one-sidedly strive after good and unilaterally reject and exclude evil would be like trying to grasp the container without taking hold of the boundary which defines it.
This “crisis in creation” was built into all things, both human and divine, into the molecular and subatomic structure of the cosmos itself. The dialectical tensions of the cosmos are mirrored in the psyche of each individual. This primordial rupture, which was a form of trauma on a cosmic scale, became the in-forming force behind human history itself, conditioning the experience of each individual, as well as our species as a whole. It is as if our entire species is suffering from a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Seen as a whole person, it is as if the wholeness of the universe had split into cosmic multiple sub-personalities who are dissociated from and seemingly separate from each other, desperately in need of recognizing their connection so as to come together and reintegrate.

When Freud was first introduced to the Kabbalah, he was so beside himself in excitement that he exclaimed “This is gold.” When Jung, who to my mind has the deepest insight into the nature of evil of anyone I have yet encountered, had his eyes opened to the profundity of the Kabbalah, he realized that his entire psychology had been anticipated by certain of their adepts. In an interview on his eightieth birthday in 1955, Jung declared, “the Hasidic Rabbi Baer from Mesiritz anticipated my entire psychology in the eighteenth century.” I can relate to how Jung must have felt, as the more I studied the Kabbalah’s cosmology, the more my mind was being blown, feeling as if I had found an alternative—and complementary—rendering of what I had written about in Dispelling Wetiko. The Kabbalah provides an ingenious model of how we have become entranced by the spell-binding powers of our own mind. It was as if the Kabbalist’s had been tracking wetiko for centuries, had created their own mythology and symbol system which “captured” it, and in so doing had presciently realized how to “break the curse of evil.”

Jung writes, “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.” Commenting on this novel idea, Jung writes, “Here the thought emerges for the first time that man must help God to repair the damage wrought by creation. For the first time man’s cosmic responsibility is acknowledged.” Jung was appreciating the Kabbalist’s (r)evolutionary insight that humanity was playing the crucial role of co-partnering with God so as to complete the creative act of his Incarnation. The radical and taboo thought was, “for the first time,” emerging into a monotheistic worldview that, to put it into religious language, humanity didn’t just depend upon God, but that God, as if to complete the circle, depended upon humanity as well. From the Kabbalah’s point of view, God did not just create humanity, but in a joint venture, humanity is reciprocally helping to create God as well – talk about a “cosmic responsibility!”

According to the Kabbalah, it was as if divine sparks, psychic/spiritual treasures were encoded within us and hidden throughout the physical universe. It is a Sethian notion, as expressed by Hippolytus, that the darkness “held the brightness and the spark of light in thrall,” the wording of which suggests that the darkness seems to have the light under a magical “spell.” This is quite remarkable, considering that, as mentioned earlier, the darkness parasitically requires the energy of the light in order to maintain its seeming existence and appear real. Ultimately speaking, the light has used its own creative energy to constrain its infinite radiance, as if the light has cast a spell upon itself. Seen as a reflection of a process happening within each of us, this expresses how something so incredibly powerful (i.e., ourselves as the radiant plenum
— the boundless luminosity which is the very fabric of our being) can fall under the spell of a nonexistent phantom appearance that arises from the immense creativity of our own mind such that it entrances the light within us into believing that this imaginary, illusory phantom of darkness is more powerful than the light that we are. These apparition-like “darker forces,” the result of a timeless, acausal, nonlinear and insidious feedback loop within our own mind, only have power over us to the extent that their illusory nature is not seen through. The powers of darkness cannot take our intrinsic power from us, rather, they can only take on seeming reality by tricking us into giving our power away to them.

The idea of sparks of divine light becoming trapped in the dark denseness of matter, and this state of affairs being linked with human salvation is a quintessentially Gnostic idea. The Gnostic Gospel of Phillip says, “I am scattered in all things, and from wherever thou wilt thou canst gather me, but in gathering me thou gatherest together thyself.” It was as if sparks of the divine, of our very Self were dispersed throughout the manifest world, waiting to be discovered and liberated.

To the Kabbalists, it was humanity’s divinely appointed task to find, extract and free this light that is hidden in the darkness of the material realm (this is called “The Raising of the Sparks”), thereby helping this light return to its divine source. It is the mission of each one of us to raise the sparks hidden within the kelipots that reside within our soul or that come our way over the course of a lifetime so as to fulfill our part in the healing of the world. According to the Kabbalah, plays a key role in the repair and restoration of the world, called “Tikkun ha-Olam” (henceforth “Tikkun” for short). Tikkun is a project in which humanity, the world, and God himself becomes more fully themselves, as if humanity plays a vitally important role in the completion and actualization of the universe, and if we can talk in such human terms, of God himself. The profound viewpoint of Tikkun reveals that the purpose and significance of evil in God’s plan is to provide a context for humanity’s redemption, which is to say that the vision provided by Tikkun puts evil, humanity, and God himself in their proper places within the cosmos.

This cosmic process is mirrored in humanity through the process of individuation, of becoming an indivisible unity or “whole,” which entails a gathering, recollecting and remembering of all of the split-off, projected parts of the psyche. Etymologically, the root of the word individuation means “un-divided,” as if the process of individuation is the antidote to the “diabolical” (whose etymology means “that which separates and divides”), disintegrating effects of evil. To quote Jung, “Individuation does not shut one out from the world, but gathers the world to oneself.” Elsewhere Jung writes, “Everything living dreams of individuation, for everything strives towards its own wholeness.” As Jung suggests, just as each one of us dreams of individuation as we strive towards the wholeness of our nature, can’t we say the same of the universe itself: that it too dreams of individuation, of gathering its nature to itself, and remembering all of its split-off parts? Are we all just playing roles in a cosmic process of individuation—a universal awakening—that is mysteriously being revealed and catalyzed through our darker half?

It is an age-old, archetypal idea, expressed in both alchemy and Gnosticism, that light is to be found hidden within the darkness, which suggests that evil is connected to the process of
redemption and individuation. Jung comments, “that not only darkness is known through light, but that, conversely, light is known through darkness.” According to the Kabbalah, the extraction of the light requires an acknowledgement of, and sojourn into the realm of darkness, which psychologically speaking, can be thought of as making a descent into the underworld of the unconscious and coming to terms with our base desires, what in Kabbalah is referred to as a “descent on behalf of the ascent.” Going inward is going upward in consciousness, dimensionally speaking. This descent always involves a coming to terms with the “shadow” of ourselves (which has both a personal, as well as transpersonal/archetypal component). Our totality must include a dark side if we are to be whole. Jung writes, “Where there is no shadow, there is no light.” By entering the dark realm of the unconscious, we are offered the possibility of refining ourselves as if in a crucible, as if the shadow-world of the unconscious is a divine furnace of purification. If we fail to take into account the shadow aspect of ourselves, we are unwittingly feeding it, increasing its power over us; if we don’t acknowledge and see our darkness, we deliver ourselves into its hands.

The kabbalistic idea of finding the light hidden in the darkness is also a basic psychoanalytic idea, having to do with making the unconscious conscious, as well as connecting split-off complexes to the wholeness of the Self. If we don’t acknowledge and pay our dues to the darkness, like the return of the Freudian repressed, it will take its due on its own terms, with a vengeance. In alchemy, the prima materia, which is considered the primal chaos that includes within itself elements of negativity and evil (and is symbolized by the element “lead”), is necessary and indeed indispensible for the making of the “gold” (which is the awakened consciousness) and the completion of the opus.

The entire process of Tikkun proceeds out of what the Kabbalah refers to as “The Other Side” (called “The Sitra Achra,” a nether realm of evil inhabited by and composed of the kelipots), which is to say that, kabbalistically speaking, there is no liberated light except that which issues forth out of the evil realm. The Zohar, the key Kabbalistic text, makes this very point when it makes the remarkable statement, “There is no light except that which issues from darkness…and no true good except it proceed from evil.” According to the Kabbalah, evil is the very condition of good’s realization. Evil, at cross purposes to the good at its core, is at the same time, paradoxically, its very foundation. It is only by attending to the darkness within ourselves and making the darkness conscious, however, that we become secure in the attainment of the good and begin to wake up. Jung writes, “He who comprehends the darkness in himself, to him the light is near.”

From the Kabbalistic point of view, evil brings into the world the possibility of choosing between sin and virtue, which is to say that evil is the very origin of the possibility of the highest good. Freedom of choice is a necessary postulate for responsibility, morality and the creation of values. Evil becomes the condition for free choice, and hence, the condition for the full realization of good. As if the revelation of everything is through its opposite, an idea is only complete when it reveals its opposite to be inextricably linked to its very significance, e.g., darkness is only known through light, just as light is only known through darkness. According to the Kabbalah, the world and the soul of humanity are partly immersed in the “Other Side,” which is to say that the evil impulse can’t be banished, but needs to be harnessed for the good. To quote Jung, “You can’t reject evil because evil is the bringer of light.”
Evil, according to the Kabbalah, reciprocally co-arises with the possibility of humanity’s freedom, as if God could not create true freedom for humanity without providing a choice for evil. Freedom and evil are thus two aspects of the same process. It is as if the Breaking of the Vessels, the seeming exile of divine light, and the production of evil which resulted made possible the process by which humanity can attain its autonomy and potential freedom. Only in an evil and tragic world can compassion and kindness be most fully realized. Jung succinctly expresses this realization when he writes, “The evil one is holy.” xvii This is not to justify, sanction or condone evil, but rather, to contextualize it. The chaos and negativity that resulted from the Breaking of the Vessels was, for the Kabbalists, the inevitable result of, and the price to be paid for, the infinite taking on finite form, of divine unity giving itself over to distinction, individuality and freedom. From the Kabbalistic point of view, evil is created by and for freedom, and it is only through freedom by which it can be overcome.

If the kelipots are solely the source of evil, how do we explain that is it is through their evil that we potentially actualize our freedom? Are the kelipots expressions of a higher intelligence, part of the divine plan to bring about a higher form of good that couldn’t be achieved without their existence?

As if intimately related, there is a deep interconnection between the forces of light and dark, as if at a certain point the dark and the light become indistinguishable from one another, a “coincidentia oppositorum” (co-incidence of opposites). The idea of the interpenetration, interdependence and the coming together of the opposites is at the root of every wisdom tradition on our planet, and is an idea that underlies, informs and animates the Kabbalah’s entire cosmology. In addition, the principle of coincidentia oppositorum can be considered to be the cornerstone of Jung’s entire psychology. In Jung’s personal journal, the recently published Red Book, whose reflections are the basis of his life’s work, he refers to the coincidentia oppositorum as producing the “supreme meaning.” xviii The part of us that is having the realization of, in Jung’s words, the “mysterium coniunctionis” (the mystery of the conjunction – the co-joining of things typically conceived of as being opposites) is the Self, the wholeness of our personality. The Self—who we are—is simultaneously the sponsor and result of this realization.

Through its choices, humanity can realize and actualize the values that are only abstractions and ideas in the mind of God. Humanity’s actions can instantiate, embody and make fully real the higher, spiritual values of our universe, helping God to see, and experience the totality of himself in the process. It is as if humanity is the vessel which God has created in order to complete and incarnate himself. It is the Kabbalah’s perspective that the unity and perfection that is provided with humanity’s help is of a higher-order than the unity that existed before the Breaking of the Vessels and prior to creation itself. This is similar to how, in the alchemical operation of “solve et coagula” (dissolve and synthesize), an original unity is separated into its opposing parts, and then reunited in a process that brings about a superior wholeness. From the Kabbalah’s point of view, it is as if God creates the world in order to fully realize himself in it. In a case where the microcosm mirrors the macrocosm, this is similar to how the unconscious manifests itself in a reflective ego in order to complete and know itself as a conscious “Self.”
It is only a broken and disordered state of affairs—such as we have in the world today—that provides the optimal environment within which humanity can best exercise the greatest spiritual, moral, aesthetic and intellectual virtues that truly make us a reflection of God. The discordant, unassimilated and antagonistic effects of both our personal complexes and the kelipots of the Kabbalah all serve to call forth our highest potentialities, similar to how a road test for a car involves being put under the most difficult conditions to push it to its edge and elicit the limits of its performance capabilities. This world is truly a perfect realm for the “road-testing” of our souls. Humanity’s highest virtues are called upon when confronted by evil.

Jung writes, “The self is made manifest in the opposites and in the conflict between them; it is a coincidentia oppositorum. Hence the way to the self begins with conflict.”xix Conflicting energies exist relative to, by virtue of, and at the expense of each other. Reciprocally co-arising, they belong together precisely insofar as they oppose each other; their antagonism is the very source of their essential oneness. The conflict that arises from the Breaking of the Vessels and the creation of evil is inherent to, and necessary for, the cultivation of the human spirit. Jung writes, “The stirring up of conflict is a Luciferian virtue in the true sense of the word. Conflict engenders fire, the fire of affects and emotions, and like every other fire, it has two aspects, that of combustion and that of creating light.”xx In other words, the conflict and friction that is the result of the Breaking of the Vessels can potentially create separation, hurt and misunderstanding—producing more trauma—or it can create light, the light of consciousness itself. From this meta-perspective, the shattering of the vessels allows, potentially, for more light to be revealed. To quote Jung, “But that which brings division ultimately creates union.”xxi

Though the Kabbalist’s envision the Breaking of the Vessels (and the kelipots entrapping the divine light and bringing evil into the world) as a cosmic event that happened back in the dawning of time—at the very moment of the creation of our universe—this process is also atemporal, in that it happens outside of time, which is to say that it is happening right now. The Breaking of the Vessels is a symbolic articulation of a process that is active in us right now and is informing our human condition in each and every moment.

Like the prototypical Adam, whose situation in the Garden is a metaphor for the archetypal human dilemma, as well as for all subsequent human decisions, each one of us stands at a fork in the road—a place of great opportunity—between the paths of Tikkun (and life) on the one hand, and feeding the kelipots and evil (and death) on the other.xxiv Adam’s sin was catastrophic precisely because it was an act of free choice, and for this reason it strengthened the kelipots and the power of the “Other Side.” Similarly, whenever any of us is “unconsciously” taken over by evil in the form of compulsive, addictive behaviors (as compared to “acting out” our compulsions as the medium through which we become conscious of them), we are unwittingly investing in the grip of the kelipots over our soul. When we are able to choose differently, however, and redirect our psychic energy so as to “re-turn” (a word which, etymologically, has to do with the word “repentance”) to the true spiritual home within ourselves, the energy that was bound up in the compulsive re-creation of our habitual patterns becomes freed up and available for the expression of love and creativity (which, in religious language, would be to serve God). To “turn away” from the “self and/or other” destructive evil impulse within ourselves and to “turn towards” and reorient ourselves towards the good is to genuinely “repent.” Repentance is the highest expression of humanity’s capacity to choose freely
– it is a manifestation of the divine in humanity. Repentance is a living manifestation of the power within us to extricate ourselves from the binding power of the kelipots, from the chains of endless causality that otherwise compel us to follow a path of “no return.” As Jung points out, “The sin to be repented, of course, is unconsciousness.” From the Kabbalah’s point of view, a “sinner” who “repents” is on a higher level than the saint who has never sinned.

The moment of “metanoia,” of a shift in our attitude, a change in our mind and a softening of our heart, is a moment in which we are participating in the birth of consciousness. Individuation is Incarnation. In this moment of awareness, the energy that was bound up in the recreation of the kelipots and their seeming power over us is instantaneously liberated. The holy sparks imprisoned by the kelipots, like iron filings drawn to a magnet, fly back to their divine source, where they can then assist and inspire the process of a universe-wide Tikkun even further. The kelipots, which had been parasitic on this sacred light are then deprived of their vitality and vanish as though they had never existed, as if a dream that had seemed real vaporizes into the light of awakening consciousness, getting reabsorbed into the very divine light from which it arose.

We, by our very choices, are actively participating in creating (in my language, “dreaming up”) the archetypal process of either feeding the kelipots and their resultant evil or denying them their food in each and every moment by feeding awareness instead. Once we cultivate the compassion that is at the root of this process, the evil impulse—“yetzer hara”—within us is not, like in the psychological process of sublimation, merely redirected while the underlying drive is left essentially unchanged; rather, the redirection implied by this process elevates and alchemically transforms the evil urge into “yetzer ha-tov,” the impulse for good. It is the creative tension between these two primordial urges within us that supplies the energy for humanity to potentially connect with our true power and exercise the divine gift of genuine freedom. For the Kabbalists, the good that we are capable of in our personal life issues forth, and is functionally related to the evil inclination within us; which is to say that the energy that is animating the evil impulse can potentially be channeled to inspire the good. The greater our evil impulse, the greater our potential for good.

At this point, I am left practically speechless, in awe and appreciation for the divine creative imagination as it imagines itself through the Kabbalistic cosmology. My life truly feels enriched after finding the gold of the Kabbalah. The Kabbalist’s vision of the cosmos and the Native American idea of wetiko mutually illuminate and shed light on each other, expanding our vision of who we are in the process. As I become more familiar with the Kabbalah, I am realizing that I have been a “closet Kabbalist,” and that my inner Kabbalistic nature was a secret, hidden and unknown even to myself.

For the Kabbalah, the act of creation itself is an introduction, a mere opening act, a preparation for the process of Tikkun. The Kabbalistic myth of Tikkun, at least in my imagination, is a satisfying myth, as the ‘mystic’ Tikkun is the true coming of the Messiah, which psychologically speaking, is the birth of the Self through humanity. Kabbalistically speaking, the savior does not come to unite humanity with God, but to unite humanity with itself; individuation means becoming who one is. The process of Tikkun involves seeing through and transcending the illusion of the imaginary “separate” self and recognizing our true self, which is
a “self” that is interconnected and interdependent with all beings. This is an insight that is not limited to the merely inner domain within our own minds, but requires us to embody its realization and carry its compassion into the world at large. Tikkun doesn’t have to do with leaving the world behind and entering our own personal nirvana, nor does it have to do with transcending the world. The vehicle for Tikkun’s realization is our world.

When we truly become a living representative for the process of Tikkun, we realize the synchronistic dialectic between the outer world and the inner landscape of our mind, which is to say that the outer and inner worlds, just like a dream, are recognized to be reflections of each other. This is to recognize that the outer world is the medium through which our inner realization is made manifest and given form, which is to say that one very powerful way to “work on ourselves” and deepen our inner realization is to engage with, fully participate in and be of service in and to the world. The psychological redemption that is at the heart of Tikkun involves a simultaneous turning inward and outward. As practitioners of Tikkun we seek to discover the core of divinity that resides within ourselves as well as within the world at large. From the perspective of the Kabbalah, it is incumbent upon humanity to discover, recognize, bring out and sanctify the sacramental value of the material world. The world becomes alchemically transfigured in the moment of recognizing that it is, and always has been a pure spiritual realm. We ourselves become transformed in the process. The process of Tikkun will only be complete when the last spark has been raised and the universe, suffused with the inviolable primordial radiance of the divine, reveals itself to be the dream that it is. As we collectively connect with each other in the profound process of Tikkun, we can refresh and restore the world to a state of harmony undreamed of previously.

A pioneer in the field of spiritual emergence, Paul Levy is a wounded healer in private practice, assisting others who are also awakening to the dreamlike nature of reality. He is the author of Dispelling Wetiko: Breaking the Curse of Evil (North Atlantic Books). He is also the author of The Madness of George W. Bush: A Reflection of Our Collective Psychosis. An artist, he is deeply steeped in the work of C. G. Jung, and has been a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner for over thirty years. Feel free to pass this article along to a friend if you feel so inspired. Please visit Paul’s website www.awakeninthedream.com. You can contact Paul at paul@awakeninthedream.com; he looks forward to your reflections. Though he reads every email, he regrets that he is not able to personally respond to all of them. © Copyright 2013.

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i It was particularly Sanford L. Drob’s brilliant writings on the Kabbalah that opened my eyes to how the Kabbalah was, through its own divinely inspired creative imagination, describing wetiko in its own unique way.

ii For consistency’s sake, I have chosen to use the masculine gender when referring to God, as this is the gender used in referring to God in the Kabbalah, as well as by Jung.

iii Jung, CW 11, Psychology and Religion: West and East, par. 380.


v Drob, Sanford, Symbols of the Kabbalah, p. 329.


* a Christian Gnostic sect

Elenchos, V, 19, 7 (Legge, I, p. 162).

Jung, CW 8, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, par. 432.


Jung, CW 9ii, Aion, par. 92.

Jung, Visions 1, p. 162.


Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, CW 12, par. 259.

Jung, CW 9i, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, par. 179.

Jung, CW 10, Civilization in Transition, par. 293.

“...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may have life.” (Deutorotony 30:19).

Jung, CW 9ii, Aion, par. 299.