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**Wounded by the Other:
Transcending Narcissism through the Experience of 'Exteriority,'
As Understood in Levinas, Jewish Mysticism & Dreams**

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Introduction

A man's encounter with tragedy, illness, trauma, or loss may deeply wound his narcissism and awaken him to revelations that will change his life forever. This encounter leads to an initiation into a greater story, a symbolic searing open of the narcissistic skin surface, a disruption of the illusion of calm, superficiality, and sameness that is prompted by the overwhelming need for control. Here we glimpse a hope for transcendence of the narcissistic currents within men.

This is the shattering encounter with the Other, and it may originate from the impact of an event, or a person, or the unconscious.

I will begin by introducing the concept of the Other in Levinas' philosophy, situating the Other's existence as prior to our coming into the world as well as exterior to our psychic processes. The problematic of the Other in Analytical Psychology is then developed by distinguishing Jung's psychological *self* from the concept of a transcendent *Self*, akin to the Other, that defies understanding. The psychological self is seen as an image of the core and the totality of the psyche, which is designated by a lower case "s." For the sake of this talk I will designate it as "small self." Whereas the contemporary revisioning of the infinite, unknowable, and transcendent *Self*, I designate with an Upper case "S." To be clear you can assume that when I use the term Self without qualifying it as "small self" that I am speaking about the transcendent Self with a capital S. The clarifying of each of these ideas—Other and Self--forms the basis for a unifying theory for the transcendence of narcissism.

Next, a case of infidelity will bring these ideas to life, as a man deeply insulated in narcissism sees his ego defenses shattered by his violent encounter with the Other. This comes about from the overwhelming shame he feels when he recognizes the destruction and harm he has done to his family. From the ensuing regressive process in analysis emerge primitive and enigmatic, unconscious affects and images followed by an archetypal dream. His dream associations lead us into exploration of Kabbalah—the mystical Jewish tradition. Its sages contend that Kabbalah's transcendent images are not "produced" by the inner psyche, but are

traces of the Infinite, originating exterior to our subjective being. One seeks to intuit these traces through an “embodied knowing” of something that is virtually unknowable. We come full circle, returning to the discussion of the shattering Other that decenters the narcissism and Sameness of the ego. From this encounter a humble subject emerges that is capable of deeper human relationship and responsibility.

Levinas and the Other

Levinas’s postmodern philosophy is essential to the understanding of this encounter with the Other and its capacity to decenter the ego’s narcissism. Levinas attempts to describe something that defies understanding or category. What he called his First Philosophy, informed by the Holocaust in which his entire family was murdered, centers upon the “relation of infinite responsibility to the other person.” (Critchley, 2002, p.6)

To Levinas, the Other is unknowable, ineffable, ungraspable, tormenting, enigmatic, irreducible, sacred. Its mere trace can only be glimpsed interpersonally or *intersubjectively*. The Other does not originate in the psyche. It is infinite, already there, before subject or object exists, and our subjective awareness of it comes through the primacy of its impact upon us. It transcends subjective being, defies our concepts or categories, and cannot be engulfed or appropriated by ego consciousness.

As Levinas would say, the trace of the Other is glimpsed in the irreducible “face of the human other,” who is revealed in (her) vulnerability, sacredness, and nakedness. (Peperzak, 1993, p. 89) In Levinas’s ethical view, one’s responsibility emerges from the trauma he feels for the useless suffering and destitution of the one now standing before him. He is taken hostage to the guilt of surviving when the other is stricken. He is even compelled to wish to substitute himself for the other, to put himself in (her) place—but it is too late. This is the torment of which Levinas speaks—the unavoidable responsibility to an-other invoked by the shattering and transcendent Other. It is impossible to evade this summons, which accuses one and even leads him to wonder just how much truth he can bear.

The gaze of the Other is enigmatic and violent to the ego and its syntonic complexes (that is, those complexes close to, or aligned with the ego orientation) because the gaze of the Other leads to the painful deflation of the complexes and to the collapse of the false self and its defenses. A terrible vulnerability, rarely felt before, may be sensed as inescapable. Some aspect of the Other is calling the tormented being to its responsibility. The outcome of the matter may remain in doubt, but in the more fortunate cases an immense grief and shame for past wrongdoings are followed by states of humility, acceptance of one’s human limitations, and a restored heart that places others before the subject. A gratitude for simple moments of grace and modest achievements then takes a privileged position in one’s life.

With the wounding that pierces the ego’s grandiosity, the suffering psyche—stricken, outraged— is loosened and released from its identity with the *Same*. Sameness refers to an ego

that requires certainty and attempts to appropriate those who are different from itself by reducing the other to the known. Sameness is observed, for example, when complexes and their habitual, repetitive patterns become reactivated. To Levinas, the egotistical need for the other to be the same is the origin of all violence. In the language of Levinas, “the psyche in the soul is the other in me.” (Levinas, 1998, pp. 68-69) The Same, now a psyche, decentered from its egocentricity and one that denies its own self-importance for the sake of the other, has entered into service to the other.

Jung and the Self

Jung may have had a similar idea of the Other in mind in his conception of the *Self* as an infinite mystery disclosing itself only gradually over time, one that is ineffable and different from the ego in a way that transcends even the psyche. In this context, Jung’s description of the ineffable, enigmatic Self borders on a religious or philosophical—rather than psychological—idea. Although Jung tends to qualify his “non-psychological,” theological discussions as merely personal speculation, he does write that the concept of the Self is “a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension. It might equally be called the ‘God within us.’” (Jung, 1970, p. 238) Yet even his consideration of such an inward, underlying “essence” and its indwelling nature as a “God *within*” restricts the larger possibility that what he is describing may also, in fact, *transcend* psyche.

While the Self cannot be known directly, its impact may be inferred through the shadow’s violent wounding of the psyche, as Lucy Huskinson describes. Its effects are not always benevolent nor do they always serve a higher purpose. Trauma and tragedy can evoke useless suffering and even shatter a fragile psyche that cannot bear it. Or, the impact of the Self may rend asunder the fixed orientation of the narcissistically bound ego, ushering a humble subjectivity into being. In the words of Simon Critchley (1999), the violence of the Self as an unknowable Other may bring trauma that “tears into my subjectivity like an explosion, like a bomb that detonates without warning, like a bullet that hits me in the dark, fired from an unseen guy and by an unknown assailant.” (p. 190)

Traces of the Self may emerge from primary, unconscious processes like dreams, or they may impact our lives through the traumas we suffer in the relational world. The destabilizing of the ego comes about through these enigmatic processes, accompanied by the feelings of grief and loss that follow. New and imaginative possibilities may then emerge—retranslations of the enigmatic experience that I feel are akin to what Jung would describe as the work of the transcendent function (Hinton, 2009), (that is, the ‘third’ that emerges from the conflict between the unconscious and conscious.) It awakens an emotional aliveness that transcends and is untethered by the repetitive malice of the complexes. Here the Other may lie outside the bounds of what we conceive to be our internal subjectivity. Laplanche corroborates this with his idea of the “decentered self.”(small self). Our subjective core develops only within and through a relationship to an “other,” like the earth around the sun, or a baby to its mother. (Hinton, p. 639)

Like the Other, Jung's Self, understood more deeply in this way, transcends the traditional, constructed dualism that views "inner" and "outer" as if something is either actually "inside one's head" or "outside only as another person" in some concrete sense. In a similar vein, there are places in Jung's writings where he describes psyche or "soul" that lives in everything and is not found simply "inside" of us. In his early thinking he intuited the idea of a non-dualistic relationship between psyche and "outer reality," and subject and object. His idea of the shared psychological field between analyst and patient was a precursor, I believe, to contemporary studies in intersubjectivity. His theory of synchronicity that he explored with the physicist Wolfgang Pauli attempted to explain the uncanny connectedness between inner and outer realities. His exploration of alchemy's arcane notion of the union of matter and spirit furthers the idea of psyche's interpenetration of the physical world.

The powerful impact of the Self may be felt "within" from the big dream or "outside" in the shattering human encounter or trauma. In my view, however, the Self transcends both psychic process and physical phenomena. Like the Other the Self is "exterior" to both inner and outer and should not be taken too literally, for it is not spatial nor can it be measured or represented. In this regard, Jung's concept of an enigmatic, unknowable Self bears a resemblance not only to Levinas's Other, but to the Torah's religious idea of the unspeakable name for God, (loosely translated 'I AM'), whose infiniteness can never be encompassed by any human concepts or understanding. (You can get the idea of a transcendent 'exteriority' in the Kabbalah, where God is considered beyond existence and is referred to as "no thing," "absolute nothing."—Very Buddhist. But it is also considered "without end, the absolute All." But God the transcendent has no attributes because they can only manifest within existence, and existence is finite.)

Levinas's existential phenomenology would view the (small) *self* ontologically, in line with the more limited, traditional definition—that is, as an inner essence or internal Being, that is at the core of the psyche's totality and not transcendent to it. Levinas would consider anathema any notion that a subject might be filled by "grand truths," when these are imparted by a self that places personal development above responsibility to others. The subject Levinas envisions is instead a humble one, and having witnessed cases where a person's humble being awakens, I recognize the importance of his idea, because in its achievement, narcissism is transcended.

It is Levinas's First Philosophy--our responsibility to the other--which will be crucial to the creation of a *unifying theory of the transcendence of narcissism*. It is my considered opinion that only something transcendent and utterly other than oneself can shatter a man's narcissism, forcing him out of what has enclosed him and out of what he has defined himself to be. It does not matter what name we give to this agent of change, whether we call it the Other, the Self, the Hand of God, or the trauma that crosses my path, but from its decentering of the ego, the nascent beginnings of a humble, resilient being may appear.

The initiation that wounds a man mired in narcissism does violence to his states of fusion, drivenness, and inflation—his alleged merging with totality. Contact with the enigmatic element

that shatters the ego gives rise to a deeply felt separation and a profound loss of grandiosity. The subject is decentered from his illusion of being at the hub of the world. Such loss evokes the human emotions of grief, shame, and dependency, as well as the distressing realization during this tumultuous process that the presence of another, often (but not only) the analyst, is of the deepest importance to him.

The narcissistic man appears to merge unencumbered with the free flow of life. To the observant eye, however, what seem to the narcissist to be grand and magical encounters are in fact a superficial skipping from object to object, an attempted compensation for the fear of staying in one place and being truly engaged in life. Like Prometheus, chained to the rock for years as punishment for stealing fire and giving it to humankind, the narcissist's freedom and autonomy are constricted when the trauma of the Other disrupts his splendor. His questionable endless freedom brings to mind Levinas's discourse on freedom. Levinas understands "freedom" as the living out of a spontaneous (unconscious) and independent life as "the center of a universe . . . defined . . . [only by one's] needs and satisfactions . . . a practice of the Same . . . a cynical behavior reducing all otherness . . ." In his freedom, the subject is not impacted or determined by anyone else. The other is turned into nothing more than an object that is appropriated to maintain the subject's freedom. In this sense Levinas sees a "moment of violence" as "inherent in every human individual's freedom." (Peperzak, 1993, p. 176) When such a man suffers the shattering of his boundless freedom and inflation he is humbled and his energies are curtailed. (Hinton, 2001) Yet from this suffering he may learn to relate to the other differently. Through bearing pain and difficulties his psyche may develop an emotional resilience permeable enough to bring forth what is within him and to affectively engage the core of his own being.

Clinical Vignette

Deep wounds resulting from infidelity are explored in the case described here. Viewed clinically and dispassionately, acts of this kind may inadvertently, at times, precipitate the incursion of a violent *third* that tears apart the false ties that keep a man tethered to the security of a relationship. The perpetuation of its hollow rituals suddenly comes to an end, as well as his tyranny over his objects. To the great misfortune of all, in the destruction of its false edifice the young innocents can often not escape the greatest suffering and harm. In the case of my patient, the "adulteration" of his twenty-year marriage with another woman was experienced by his wounded partner and children as a life-changing violation and an unbearable betrayal of the heart. The impact of this violence upon them penetrated his narcissism, precipitating the ego's unraveling in the endless challenges of the enigma, from which a deep sense of shame, loss, and grief ushered forth. These *enigmatic signifiers*, thrown up from the unconscious core of the patient, became the source for the emergence of new and creative possibilities. As primal fantasies enigmatic signifiers originate from the mother's unconscious affects that flood her helpless infant, whose only recourse is to repress them. As in the example of my patient, these repressed fantasies emerge throughout life from the gap between the unconscious core and consciousness, their enigmatic meaning disrupting and decentering the ego's fixed orientation.

For two decades my patient had lived a provisional life as a husband and a father of two, having never fully committed himself nor engaged in the raising of his children. An only child, he did well enough through his school years and achieved moderate success as a partner in an architectural firm. In our work he often mooned for the easier time in his life, before he became saddled with marriage, family, and work responsibilities. Over time, he came to devalue his wife, who in her younger years had embodied his image of the ideal woman. She was seven years his junior. As their sexual passion and intimacy dwindled and disappeared, he began to seek aesthetic escape in erotic and romantic fantasies like those of his youth. He would envision in a very precise way the perfect girl or woman who would desire him and arouse and enthrall him in ways that would temporarily restore his sense of himself. His perfectionism and his criticism of his wife's body, which had changed from childbirth and natural aging, gave him the alibi he used to justify his dissatisfaction with her. But this attitude, I believe, was merely a cover-up for a deeper terror of emotional intimacy originating in his early life.

Intimacy with his wife, my patient feared, represented submission to a maternal influence that would engulf and obliterate him. He would often experience the moments preceding intimate sexual encounters as too threatening and impinging. Such closeness evoked feelings of helplessness, infantile dependency in him, along with fears of being devoured—and then discarded—by a needy and controlling mother. To manage these unbearable feelings he found ways to distance himself from his wife. For instance, he would inject his poisonous criticisms into her in their most vulnerable moments, almost irreparably damaging her spirit and her sense of her own native sensuality. In those instances it was he who became like the obliterating mother, while his wife became the helpless and abjected child that he detested in himself and therefore projected onto her.

Although his mind increasingly turned toward fantasies of other women, he had never acted on any of these feelings for fear of exposing dark impulses that might tarnish his persona of goodness. But over time a dark abscess of resentment and hatred toward his wife grew in him, perhaps evoked by his internalization of his own mother's desire for the complete and total perfection of her son. This set the stage for a premeditated hunt for a woman who would give him freedom from the pain of a passionless, conflict-ridden relationship. When he found the woman, their sexual encounter lasted for several months before he broke it off, feeling that she wanted more than he wanted to give.

He entered psychotherapy shortly afterward, uncertain of whether he wanted to leave the marriage or stay in it. Would it be possible, he wondered, to hide the affair and simply go on as before, perhaps until another opportunity presented itself? Deeper questions soon surfaced: Would it even be possible to conceal such a terrible secret? For everything had, in fact, changed forever, both for him and his wife, regardless of whether she was conscious of it. Would the man that he had hoped one day to become have any possibility of emerging in his life if he buried the truth from his family or ran away from them? He had come to a moral and ethical crossroads where his integrity and authenticity as a man were at stake—qualities he knew relatively little

about. The crisis had brought something to light in him: a terrible, unsettling recognition of a lifelong cowardice and inability to love. And yet if he were to reveal the truth, a long and arduous process would stretch out before him, one that would shatter the false mask he showed to the world. It would be, (as Emily Dickinson would say) a “death blow” that would become, as we came to realize, a “life blow.”

The shattering of my patient’s false self began on the morning that he shared with his wife what he had done. Initially she was emotionally devastated and deeply hurt by his betrayal. Her continuing emotional avalanche seemed unending to him. It became “too much” and too exposing for him, prompting in turn his attempts to minimize and skirt the truth. The more he clung to mind-numbing denials over the days and weeks, the more her pain turned to blind rage, and then to emotional collapse. He was ill-prepared for the splintering of his wife’s fragile world, brought about by his betrayal. She became a vulnerable and frail being, standing naked before him. The dawning recognition of the violence he had perpetrated upon her over the course of their marriage demolished the illusions he had maintained of himself.

This was the “dropping down point,” the place of initiatory descent for our analytical work. My patient felt like he was falling apart. Over many months a steep regressive process ensued that we contained by meeting multiple times a week. Dreams, memories, and primal affects emerged that we could connect to early and deeply ambivalent childhood relations to his mother.

Our exploration led us to his mother’s traumatic origins as a Jewish refugee who emigrated with her family from Lithuania to escape persecution at the age of two. My patient and I came to recognize the subterranean wells of terror and instability within her that had permeated the world of mother and infant. The mother’s emotional needs—unmet by a husband whom she kept at a distance—may well have found expression in unconscious erotic and seductive communications with her baby boy. At times in his childhood my patient had felt intensely desired by his mother—as if he were the center of her world. But then, without warning, his mother’s black, depressive moods would descend. Then she would sometimes sear him with her rage and at other times turn away from him coldly, as if he were a base thing.

We came to understand the fantasies underlying my patient’s marriage difficulties as translations of these original configurations. For instance, when his wife grew irritated with his selfish behavior he projected the “rejecting mother who wanted nothing to do with him” onto her, whereas he envisioned the “other woman” as the “one who wanted and desired him.”

At the depth of his regressive process in analysis, he drew an enigmatic image that had emerged from an active imagination, the image of *a mother’s blood-red, gaping mouth with razor-sharp teeth*, in which, as his associations made clear, he conflated the vaginal and anal openings. It was an uncanny, enigmatic maw—a maternal container both horrific and erotically alluring that evoked in the infant-part of himself not only terror, helplessness, and rage, but also excitement. Similarly, Julia Kristeva (1982) speaks of the ambivalent desire in the infant’s

fantasies of reentering the body flesh of the mother as combining both terror *and* the longing to merge.

Laplanche's psychoanalytic theories provide considerable insight into my patient's strange image as it relates to the impact of the mother's normal fantasies upon the unformed psyche of the infant. In the course of breast-feeding, caressing the baby's naked body, and in soothing him vocally, erotic, alluring, stimulating, and even seductive feelings are evoked in the mother. While largely unconscious feelings, they fill the infant's unformed psyche with enigmatic affects.

These and other more penetrating and disturbing maternal affects that flood the baby at times will arouse its dread and deep anxiety. In the case of my patient, these were states of mind identical with those that besieged his depressed mother throughout her life. Such states require the infant's creation of narcissistic defenses that trigger its primal repression of the overwhelming affects. According to Laplanche (1989), it is this repression that is responsible for the creation of a "gap" between the self and the otherness within. As Ladson Hinton writes, "The impact of the enigma may create a kind of opening, a gap, a crack, a cleavage plane in the ordinary . . . process of things. If not for the enigma there would be no . . . dismantling of old patterns." (p. 643)

My patient's regressive process, set in motion by the drama unfolding in the relationship to his traumatized wife, was marked by an upwelling of these long-repressed, enigmatic signifiers—the image of the gaping mouth, for example—and they loosened the grip of his narcissistic defenses. Deep wells of primal rage found expression, rage that he related to a lifetime of placating and pretense—defenses through which he hoped to protect himself from his mother's unpredictable and devouring, penetrating affects. We were at sea for many months with these turbulent emotions that wore away his false self.

Gradually my patient became more porous and vulnerable. At times his resistance and defensiveness melted away, leaving in their place a deep sadness and receptivity. Often he would swing back and forth from fragmentation to an exposed vulnerability that became too much for his thin skin to bear. This would give way to brief but repetitive attempts to reassert and restore his defensive shell through emotional attacks on his wife or on me, but these were mostly short-lived episodes. Something was beginning to emerge from the breakdown of his ego orientation that he had never before touched in himself. Nor was it anything his wife had ever seen in him. Nonetheless, it helped him stay in the fire with her, bearing her rage and her anguish as she tried to return from her own nightmarish journey—her own shattering. The wounded couple were seeing the first glimpses of a humble man, resilient and *unconcealed*. Though it would entail many, many years of work before he would embody it, he had begun to comprehend what it would mean to live his life *for the other*, and to know a freedom that comes from responsibility.

In the enigmas of life we are endlessly trying to answer the question that the infant asks: "What did my mother really want?" Did she want my patient to be the abject creature, or the

good baby? Beneath the question is the infant's utter dependency upon the other. In the question lies the unrealistic hope that there can be an answer that will forever resolve the gap. The gap is in fact, the source of our freedom, because it can never be known. It is infinite, enigmatic, Other. The difficult process of analysis brings us to the conscious recognition that the *mystery* of life, the ultimate answers, can never be found.

Dream

Two years after the beginning of his treatment, my patient reported a dream of sublime quality. Given his porous emotional state, it might seem to have emerged prematurely, yet it appeared to speak to this endless, ineffable, and transcendent mystery.

I'm driving along near a military development. Fighter planes are lined up behind chain-link fences. I realize that I am about to witness an epic reckoning that is going to occur—like a meeting from Heaven, or an extraterrestrial materialization, or some great astronomical event is coming down to earth exactly on one place. The meeting will take place between two military bases, the site being over a great, ancient, rectangular Jewish temple.

In this vision my patient is witness to the anticipated encounter with an enigmatic Other, whose descent to earth would bring a great change to the world. Its mere trace dwarfed and humbled the illusion of his singular isolation in the world. During most of his adulthood my patient lived a secular life as a Jew. In this period of fragmentation, however, he turned back to his religious roots to try to achieve some sense of stability and comfort. Sometimes he would awaken in the middle of the night from nightmares or anxiety and find that the only means he had to quiet his racing thoughts were prayer and meditation. He began to observe Jewish holidays again and to attend synagogue. In particular, his first High Holy Day services for *Yom Kippur*—the Day of Atonement—had an unexpected, deeply emotional, and transcendent impact on him. For him they were truly Days of Awe, as they are traditionally referred to. He was drawn to explore the mystical traditions of Judaism through study of the *Torah* and *Kabbalah*, (Kaplan, 1982; Halevi, 1980). These were areas of interest not unfamiliar to me given our shared heritage and background as children of Eastern European Jews.

We began to elaborate on the dream's prominent images, amplifying them through associations. To give you a sense of the dream's richness, I have embroidered upon it through references to scholarly and religious texts.

Kabbalah

My patient's initial thoughts about the great cosmic event above the synagogue led to our shared associations to the Ruach Ha Kodesh—the Divine Spirit. This was known to the ancient Hebrews wandering in the wilderness as the Glory of God, hidden in the midst of a great wind or storm or fiery cloud. Here is a passage from Ezekiel's vision: "I saw, and behold a stormy wind

came from the north, a great and flashing fire, and a Glow round about and from its midst was the likes of the Speaking Silence, in the midst of the fire.”(Kaplan, 1990, p. 147) A “cloudy pillar” (Fisch, 1992, p. 104) was said to have descended upon the place where God spoke with Moses. This was the tent-- the inner sanctuary or Holy of Holies—that housed the Ark of the Covenant in which the Ten Commandments dwelt. The Temple of Jerusalem was built to house this same Holy of Holies that contained the Ark, and the Divine Feminine Presence that Kabbalah describes as the *Shekhinah* was said to have hovered over it. *This, my patient realized, was the great Temple that had appeared in his dream.*

In his study of Kabbalah, my patient had come to understand the *Shekhinah* as the Presence of the Divine in Matter, the Divine Lightning Flash that is brought to earth. Although God is infinite and unrepresentable and cannot possess form, (Halevi, 1980, p.5) some early mystic teachings ascribed form to “the Glory,” which they called the “body of the Divine presence.” (Scholem, 1974, p. 17) The “Divine Glory” of the *Shekhinah* is paradoxically described as the Glory *revealed* and *hidden* without form (p.40). Early Kabbalistic traditions surrounding the Sabbath concern the return of the Sabbath Bride and the meditations upon the Beloved in the Song of Songs, which viewed the *Shekhinah* in her aspect as God’s mystical bride (p. 195).

Levinas

Levinas, as well has spoken of the “Glory of the Infinite.” But his views are quite different from the mystical experience described in the previous paragraphs. He believed that these numinous experiences do a kind of violence to the Other by elevating the human subject and transporting him into some type of ecstatic inflation. He writes, “The numinous or the Sacred envelopes and transports man beyond his power and wishes, but a true liberty [responsibility to the other] takes offense at this uncontrollable surplus . . .” (Levinas, 1990, pp. 11-23). Throughout his writings Levinas privileges a *proximity* of relation to the human other, in which only a kernel of the Infinite is revealed, over a mystical oneness and ascent that result from the dissolution of the subject into the Object.

As an orthodox Jew he drew much of his philosophical thought—which he insisted was not religious but ethical—from universalized Judaic themes. He was from Lithuania (the same area as my patient’s mother’s family), an area of Jewish learning in Eastern Europe that prided itself on rigorous argument while eschewing the charismatic, mystical experience as instanced in Hassidism and Kabbalah.(Putnam, 2002, p. 46). Hassidism is a charismatic, mystical, orthodox sect, founded in the eighteenth century in Poland by the Ba’al Shem Tov, that worshipped God through contemplative prayer, storytelling, song, and dance. (In contrast to Levinas, Hassidism had a great influence on Martin Buber’s early thought and writings.)

The work of Levinas, like that of Laplanche, suggests that narcissism is transcended when something other than ourselves breaches our fixed ego state. In his dream, my patient bears witness to the Glory that is about to descend upon the Temple—an event that seems to transcend

psyche—yet this appears through the interiority of the dream image. In the *imaginal* process of dreams the Infinite, that cannot be represented, is nevertheless signified! How can this be?

Glory as a trace of the Infinite, Levinas contends, could become an indwelling presence when the ego has been “stripped by the trauma of persecution of its . . . imperialist subjectivity.” (Levinas, 1998, p.146) When this “transcendence” of our egotism occurs we “can receive a content from the dimension of height,” and bear witness as he says, to the “glory of the Infinite.” (Levinas, 1989, p.70)

The Kabbalah, Jungian analyst Steven Joseph explains, employs a rich array of symbolic content, and “uses the materials of the *imaginal* for a specifically *noetic* intent.” He defines “noetic” as “an immediate, experiential knowing, [an] embodied *gnosis*.” (Joseph, 2007, pp. 325-26) While the Kabbalists recognized the finiteness and inadequacy of their noetic insights into the endless and enigmatic mystery, they nevertheless found it possible to glimpse traces of the Infinite through their “*noetic* intuitions.” A passage from *The Zohar*, the classic thirteenth-century mystical text, intuits the presence of an unseen and ineffable Divine Being, impossible to reach or to know, that the mystic longs for nonetheless. “[F]or He is hidden, concealed, transcendent, beyond, beyond.” (Matt, 2004, p. 133)

To bring greater clarity to this, Joseph makes reference to a passage in Proverbs 31:23: “Her husband is known in the gates when he sits with the elders of the land.” (Rosenberg, 1003, p. 202) It is understood by the Kabbalists to be a hymn to the *Shekhinah*, God’s Beloved. (Matt, p. 202) *The Zohar*, comprised of commentaries by the great Kabbalistic minds living in Spain at that time, elaborates on this passage:

All beings above and below cannot grasp, till finally they declare: *Blessed be the glory of God from his place!* [Actually, they refer to God only indirectly through the four Hebrew letters YHVH because God’s name is utterly unspeakable, and the phrase implies that no one knows His place] . . . [The quote continues,] For He is unknowable, no one has ever been able to comprehend Him. Yet you say: *Her husband is known in the gates?*

But indeed, *Her husband is known in the gates*—the blessed Holy One, who is known and grasped to the degree that each one opens the gates of *imagination* [my italics], according to the capacity to attain the spirit of wisdom. As one fathoms in his mind, so [The Divine] is known in his mind. So He *is known in those gates*. But can He be known accurately? No one has ever been able to grasp and know Him.

Again, paradox. Despite the limits of knowing, Joseph (2007) adds, “the *Zohar* teaches [that] the *imaginal* experience is the gateway through which one enters to attain true knowledge/*gnosis* of God, the *noetic* reality.” (p. 325-26) In other words, the noetic reality can never be more than a glimpse of the Infinite which lies exterior to psychic processes. *Zohar* Commentator

Daniel Matt concludes that “Imagination enables the human mind to fathom God—though all imaginative representations fall short of true divine being.”

In my patient’s dream, the presence of the *Shekhinah*, a content of the Infinite, had come down from the heights to dwell upon the Temple. This could be conceived of as the lightning bolt from Her *Glorious Kingdom* that was “earthed” upon the Temple that houses the congregation of humanity. The descending Other in my patient’s dream conveys the idea that the Other is not a creation or construction of psyche but rather, that the psyche glimpses a “trace” of the Other, which it expresses through the imaginative process. The image in the dream is better described by Hilary Putnam who paraphrases Levinas: “my encounter with the other is an encounter with a *fissure*, with a being who breaks my categories. . . .a violator of [my] mind . . .” (Putnam, 2002, p. 42)

In a similar way, the shattering gaze of the Other had broken through my patient, who now stood unconcealed before his wife and children. He spoke again of his experience on the Day of Atonement, when he had become so overwhelmed by the weight of his acts. In those moments he felt his heart crack open from the profound revelations and the compassion he had begun to feel through his own suffering, shame, humiliation, and grief. He even sensed forgiveness. Nothing ecstatic or earth-shaking emerged from these meditations, simply deep reflection and a sense of gratitude for his life, for his second chance. As for the war planes that stood balanced at both ends of the Temple, they stirred opposite emotions in him. They reminded him on the one hand of the vigilance needed to face the continual presence of his violent narcissistic defenses against the shattering impact of the Other. On the other hand, these war birds, standing ready to defend the nation, embodied the symbol of the Father and protective guardian that he was trying to become. Both interpretations were true.

The experiences of wounding depicted in my patient’s story involve a painful excursion into pathos—suffering and compassion—enlarging the boundaries of what my patient imagined he could bear. Yet the same shattering revelations that broke him wide open led to a larger sense of what his life could become.

Concluding thoughts

The transforming encounter with the Other is a point where Jung, Levinas, and the Kabbalists all come together, despite their differences: This experience, Jung tells us, is the transcendent human achievement of anyone who has suffered the incursion into consciousness of what analytical psychology would call the Self. One comes away from the encounter, he writes, with “at least a scar if not an open wound. . . . The wholeness of his ego personality has been badly damaged, for it became obvious he was not alone; something which he did not control was in the same house with him.” With this wounding comes a “fatal blow to his own monarchy.” (Jung, 1989, p. 1233) Here Jung acknowledges that our omnipotence and egotism cannot exist in the same space with such a transcendent possibility as the Self. As this case has shown, our wounding may bring destruction to our “nation of one,” but in so doing it may open

us to something far greater than the achievement of self-satisfaction—a humble glance into the face of the Other, calling us to our responsibility.

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