

## Response to Sanford Drob

Wolfgang Giegerich<sup>1</sup>

“Jung’s Kabbalistic Visions” is well written. Its thesis becomes quite clear. The author is well informed and his paper has a rich substantial content.

The main problems with this paper are:

1) It approaches Jung rather dominantly with a moralistic question, an approach that gets in the way of the desirably scholarly and psychological character of a paper. Jung is, as it were, called before a moral court where he has to justify himself before us (or be excused by us). (What the crime is of which he is accused is in this context irrelevant.) The author uses phrases like “in Jung’s defense,” “mitigating contexts,” considers “more malignant causes,” time and again expresses his expectation, indeed demand, that Jung should have “publicly apologized” and made amends. Although he in the end “forgives” Jung, throughout his paper he nourishes the idea that “a full and satisfactory accounting” on the part of Jung would have been required—as if we had a personal claim on him in this regard. Are we Jung’s Daddy, teacher, king, God so that we would have a right to demand his accounting? Does Jung owe *us* anything? Does *he* have to be flawless for the sake of the gratification of *our* ideals or the soothing of *our* hurt feelings? Whether Jung was a good guy or not and whether he apologized or not is entirely his problem. Our problem is whether we slip or not, whether we are self-righteous or not. Who are we as psychologists to forgive or not forgive Jung? Do we need to “forgive” Newton for having been a rather unpleasant character? Could we have demanded of Picasso a public apology for his treatment of his women? Are Newton’s science and Picasso’s art discredited because of their personal behavior? This whole thinking in terms of accusation and forgiveness and demand of a public accounting is a sign of an ego trip. Instead of merely describing and analyzing what is to be found in Jung’s work and biography, regardless of whether it be good or bad, the author interjects his subjective wishes and demands, projecting *his* personal needs and emotions into the *object* of his study. In other words, his identification with Jung has not sufficiently been dissolved; Jung is not approached “objectively,” dispassionately (as a “fact,” a “phenomenon,” without one’s own agenda). But such a detachment from one’s object of study seems to me to be necessary for a *psychological* essay.

2) It did not become entirely clear to me whether this paper wants to make a contribution to Jung studies or whether it does not rather want to primarily *claim* Jung for Jewish mysticism, to promote which seems to be the writer’s main interest. The paper might be better placed in a journal devoted to the latter theme than in one on Jungian theory and practice.

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Wolfgang Giegerich, Ph.D., is a Jungian analyst in private practice near Munich, Germany. He has taught and lectured in many countries and published numerous books and articles in several languages.

3) The main thesis of this article is (a) that of “the Jewish sources of” Jung’s psychology, “(t)he Jewish mystical bases of his thought,” “the Jewish pedigree” of his psychology and (b) that Jung “had a powerful motive for denying or suppressing any of his own Jewish sources.” But it does not advance any substantial support for such far-reaching assertions. All it demonstrates as to (a) is that Jewish mystical motifs become more frequent in Jung’s late period and that there are “affinities” between his dream theory and those of the kabbalists. But there is a huge difference between parallels and pedigree and between the sources of particular images or theoretical formulations and the source of his psychological thinking as a whole. The fact that Jung once made “the offhand remark that ‘the Hasidic Rabbi Baer...anticipated [my] entire psychology in the eighteenth century’” is not a statement about Jung’s sources of inspiration; it is in keeping with many statements by him about other precursors of his psychology.

As the author knows, for Jung dreams and visions are an utterance of the unconscious or the Self, while for the *Zohar* and Alimoli dreams are a communication from God. For Jung, as is well known, the source of the images at least in “big” dreams are archetypes, not historical influences. If the author accepts these views, then the unconscious or God is the true source even of Jung’s kabbalistic vision of 1944, rather than the Kabbalah. And if he concurs with the view of the *Zohar* that the greatest significance of a dream or vision is not to be found through tracing its origins but rather by observing the impact and effects of the dream upon the dreamer, one wonders why he is interested in the question of sources and pedigree in the first place and reproaches Jung for having suppressed them. Be that as it may, this one single vision does not say anything about the sources of his entire psychology, unless one can bring in other convincing support for this thesis. Jung was a great eclectic and during his long life garbed his personal psychological experiences and intellectual views in images and concepts stemming from very diverse sources.

The author describes the 1944 vision of Jung’s that he concentrates on as Jung’s “kabbalistic vision.” But it is a threefold vision, and the author knows this. It has a kabbalistic, a Christian, and an ancient Greek part. He does not provide any support for his far-fetched idea that the kabbalistic part is authentic, the others not; he simply claims, just like that, that the latter two parts are “the ‘straw’ mixed with the true wheat of his kabbalistic vision” and that they appear merely on account of Jung’s efforts “to *avoid* any Jewish pedigree for his own psychology.” Again, how does this alleged ego wish on the part of Jung to *avoid* something go together with the idea that dreams and visions are natural products of the unconscious or the Self? By contrast, the author does not give any room to the idea, which would quite naturally suggest itself, that the three versions of this vision indicate that the particular “semantic” garb of the archetypal substance of the vision (the hieros gamos) that stays the same in all three can obviously be this as well as that; they are all three of equal standing and support each other rather than, as the author would have it, that the latter two (Christianity and Greece) are set up in opposition to the first (Judaism). The author follows here his own agenda that he projects on Jung.

I want to point to at least one instance where it becomes clear how the author’s obsession with the guilt idea leads him astray. At the same time this is an

example that shows that for Jung studies, as of course for any serious text studies, you cannot rely on translations. The author tells us, with reference to *MDR* (p. 295) and the context of the said vision, that Jung “relates that he remembers distinctly that he had asked the nurse (who had fed him kosher food) to ‘forgive [him] if she were harmed.’ While Jung does not dwell on the nature of this harm, I have interpreted it as an unconscious reference of the harm Jung felt he might have done to the Jewish people.” The German text for the cited passage reads: “sie möge entschuldigen, wenn sie beschädigt werden sollte.” *Sie möge entschuldigen* is first of all impersonal. It is a formulation that one might use towards an unexpected visitor with respect to the mess one’s house happens to be in. It is not an admittance of guilt, but rather an expression of consideration for the well-being and expectations of the other person. This is also true in Jung’s case. Far from betraying a (conscious or unconscious) guilt feeling and an urge to atone, Jung shows his serious concern for the nurse. What he apologizes for is an eventuality: he apologizes “should she get harmed” (my translation). So he is not speaking about a deed he committed in the past, let alone about something done to the Jewish people at large, but about a harm that (1) might possibly come to pass and (2) befall specifically *her* (only her) and (3) without his being able to prevent it. And it is also not true that Jung does not precisely explain the nature of this harm. What he stated after the semicolon that ends the quotation is: “There was a great sanctity in the room. This was dangerous and could be harmful to her” (my translation). Thus there is simply no idea of guilt or error in this text. All that there is is the fear of an objective danger. Jung merely takes responsibility for a (in this case “mystical”) peril that might come about *through* him (through the special other-worldly condition he feels to be in), for which, however, he is not responsible in a legal or moral sense because it is not his doing. It is, *mutatis mutandis*, like the apology of a sick person for the trouble he or she is causing those who have to nurse him or her.

Jung once, in 1934, felt the need to distinguish his psychology from Freud’s “Jewish psychology.” The author’s conclusion that therefore he “certainly had a powerful motive for denying or suppressing any of his own Jewish sources” makes no sense, especially since the “Jewishness” that Jung saw in Freud’s psychoanalysis is something totally different from the Jewishness of the kabbalistic tradition, with its rich archetypal symbolism, a tradition that Jung could easily embrace like so many other symbolic traditions—without, however, *basing* his psychology on that tradition. The author does not present the substantial evidence necessary to make convincing his attempt to graft Jung onto a Jewish intellectual pedigree. And he does not show why Jung’s own interpretation of his work and his explicit confession as to his own tradition (“the Christian middle ages and ultimately...Greek philosophy”) are not tenable; he simply devalues Jung’s different view (as well as his alleged lack of acknowledging the Jewish mystical tradition as “the source” of his work) as Jung’s denial or suppression.

So in this paper too few real data—singled out from the mass of all kinds of other information available on Jung and, as to their overall weight, blown up out of all proportion—are given the task of carrying a very large deviant interpretative edifice. While it gives interesting information on the kabbalistic tradition, its interpretation of Jung is too biased and idiosyncratic in its basic outlook to advance our understanding of Jung.

## Notes

1) This response from Dr. Giegerich was originally a peer review of Dr. Drob's article when the latter was first submitted for publication. It was sent to Dr. Giegerich without the name of the author. Though his response was not originally written with the idea of its being published, Dr. Giegerich has graciously permitted its publication here.