Research Article ISSN 2639-8451

Addiction Research

# Powerlessness as Ontological Revelation: Reconciling Healing with Divine Theodicy

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**Received:** 03 Nov 2025; **Accepted:** 01 Dec 2025; **Published:** 11 Dec 2025

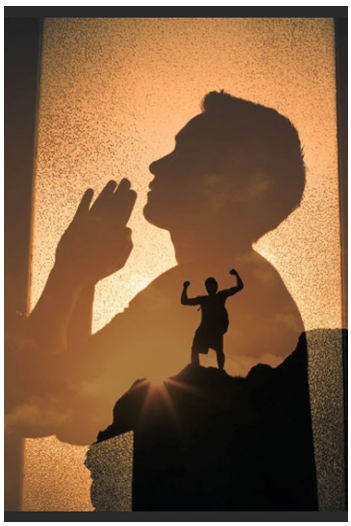
**Citation:** Julian Ungar-Sargon. Powerlessness as Ontological Revelation: Reconciling Healing with Divine Theodicy. Addict Res. 2025; 9(4): 1-10.

## ABSTRACT

*This article proposes a novel theological interpretation of Step One of the Twelve-Step recovery program—"We admitted we were powerless"—through the lens of Jewish mystical thought on being (yesh) and non-being (ayin). Drawing on the scholarship of Elliot Wolfson, Gershom Scholem, and the radical theology of Jonathan Eybeschütz, alongside the author's own clinical-theological work on divine concealment in therapeutic encounters, this essay argues that the admission of powerlessness constitutes not merely a psychological acknowledgment but an ontological revelation. The addict's encounter with powerlessness mirrors the kabbalistic understanding of ayin as the sacred ground from which authentic being emerges. This reframing resolves the apparent theodicy problem posed by addiction—namely, how a beneficent God permits such suffering—by relocating the question from explanatory theodicy to transformative encounter. The collapse of false selfhood in Step One becomes structurally identical to the mystical process of bitul (self-nullification), wherein non-being serves not as nihilistic void but as the generative matrix of spiritual rebirth.*

## Keywords

Ayin, Yesh, Theodicy, Twelve Steps, Powerlessness, Kabbalah, Divine concealment, Addiction, Bitul, Tzimtzum, Shadow, Jung.



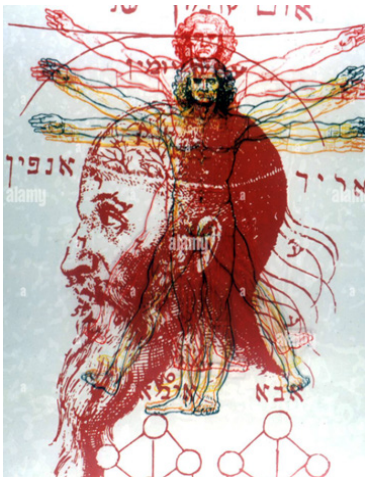

## Introduction: The Theodicy Problem in Addiction

The phenomenon of addiction poses one of modernity's most acute theodicy problems. If God is both omnipotent and benevolent, how does one account for the devastation wrought by compulsive substance use—the destruction of families, the erosion of human dignity, the death of millions? Traditional theodicies—whether appeal to free will, soul-making, or eschatological compensation—seem inadequate to the lived experience of addiction, where the

very capacity for choice appears compromised at its root [1]. The addict stands before us as a walking paradox: a being who wills what destroys them, who chooses what they do not want, whose agency has become the instrument of its own dissolution.

Yet it is precisely within this apparent collapse of human agency that the Twelve-Step program locates the possibility of transformation. The First Step—"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable" [2]—does not merely acknowledge a psychological deficit but initiates what I shall argue is an ontological encounter with non-being itself. This admission, far from representing defeat, opens a portal to what the Kabbalists call *ayin*—the sacred nothingness from which all authentic existence emerges.

This essay develops a depth theology of Step One by integrating three streams of thought: (1) the academic study of Jewish mysticism, particularly the work of Gershom Scholem on Lurianic Kabbalah and Elliot Wolfson on the phenomenology of divine concealment; (2) the radical mystical theology of Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz (1690-1764), whose formulation "*ve-avo hayom el ha-ayin*" ("and I shall come today to the Nothing") offers a daring articulation of nothingness as spiritual destination; and (3) the author's own clinical-theological work on the dialectic of being and non-being within *atzmut* (divine essence) and its implications for understanding the physician-patient encounter as a space of sacred transformation [3].



## The Kabbalistic Framework

The concepts of *ayin* (nothingness) and *yesh* (somethingness/being) constitute fundamental categories in Jewish mystical thought. As Daniel Matt observes in his seminal study, *ayin* functions in medieval Kabbalah as a theosophical symbol within the elaborate system of the *sefirot*, the stages of divine manifestation: "Everything emerges from the depths of *ayin* and eventually returns there" [4]. This is not mere metaphysical speculation but a description of the fundamental structure of reality itself.

Gershom Scholem, in his foundational *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, established the academic framework for understanding Lurianic Kabbalah's revolutionary cosmology. The Lurianic myth, Scholem explains, "is concentrated in three great symbols: the *tzimtzum*, or self-limitation of God; the *shevirah*, or breaking of the vessels; and the *tikkun*, or harmonious correction and mending of the flaw which came into the world through the *shevirah*" [5]. This triadic structure—contraction, catastrophe, repair—offers a profound template for understanding the spiritual dynamics of addiction and recovery.

The concept of *tzimtzum* is particularly relevant to our inquiry. According to Isaac Luria (1534-1572), creation required God to contract or withdraw the divine presence, creating a primordial void (*tehiru*) within which finite existence could emerge. Scholem identifies this as "one of the most amazing and far-reaching conceptions ever put forward in the whole history of Kabbalism" [6], for it suggests that absence and withdrawal are not merely incidental to reality but constitutive of it. Divine concealment becomes the very condition of creaturely existence.

Elliot Wolfson has extended this analysis through his phenomenological approach to Kabbalistic experience. In *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, Wolfson illuminates how Jewish mystical tradition engages concepts of being and nothingness in ways that anticipate and surpass Western philosophical formulations [7]. What Wolfson calls "the coincidence of opposites" in divine ontology—the coexistence of plenitude and negation within the Godhead—provides the theological foundation for understanding how non-being can function not as mere absence but as generative presence.

## Eybeschütz and the Radical Embrace of Nothingness

Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz represents one of the most daring and controversial voices in Jewish mystical theology. His enigmatic alleged formulation "*ve-avo hayom el ha-ayin*"—"and I shall come today to the Nothing"—suggests a spiritual itinerary in which nothingness serves not as the obstacle to be overcome but as the destination to be attained [8]. This represents a radical departure from conventional piety, which typically seeks divine presence, not divine absence.

Eybeschütz's theology hints at a divine essence that includes the ground of both good and evil, presence and absence, being and non-being. In his *Urim ve-Tumim* and related mystical writings, he develops an understanding of divine concealment not as the absence of God but as "the presence of absence"—a space pregnant with meaning rather than evacuated of it [9]. This paradoxical formulation proves crucial for understanding the theodicy of addiction: the apparent withdrawal of divine help in the depths of compulsion may itself constitute a mode of divine presence.

The theological radicalism of Eybeschütz's position lies in his suggestion that descent into nothingness is not merely permitted by God but may be divinely orchestrated as a necessary stage in spiritual development. As I have argued elsewhere, this framework transforms the meaning of addiction from pure moral failure to complex spiritual process, wherein the experience of powerlessness

becomes the very condition for encountering transcendent power [10].

## Atzmut and the Dialectic of Being and Non-Being

My own theological work has focused on the concept of *atzmut*—divine essence as articulated in Chabad Hasidism—and its implications for understanding the physician-patient encounter as a space of sacred transformation. Unlike conventional theological formulations that position God within the categories of existence, *atzmut* represents that which gives rise to both *yesh* (existence) and *ayin* (nothingness), remaining itself beyond these determinations [11].

This understanding proves essential for confronting the theodicy of addiction. If being and non-being coexist within *atzmut* itself—if, as I have argued, "creation involves divine self-wounding: the simultaneous assertion of being and the creation of space for non-being" [12]—then the addict's experience of powerlessness cannot simply be categorized as divine abandonment. Rather, the encounter with non-being in Step One mirrors the cosmic structure of creation itself, where withdrawal generates the possibility of new being.

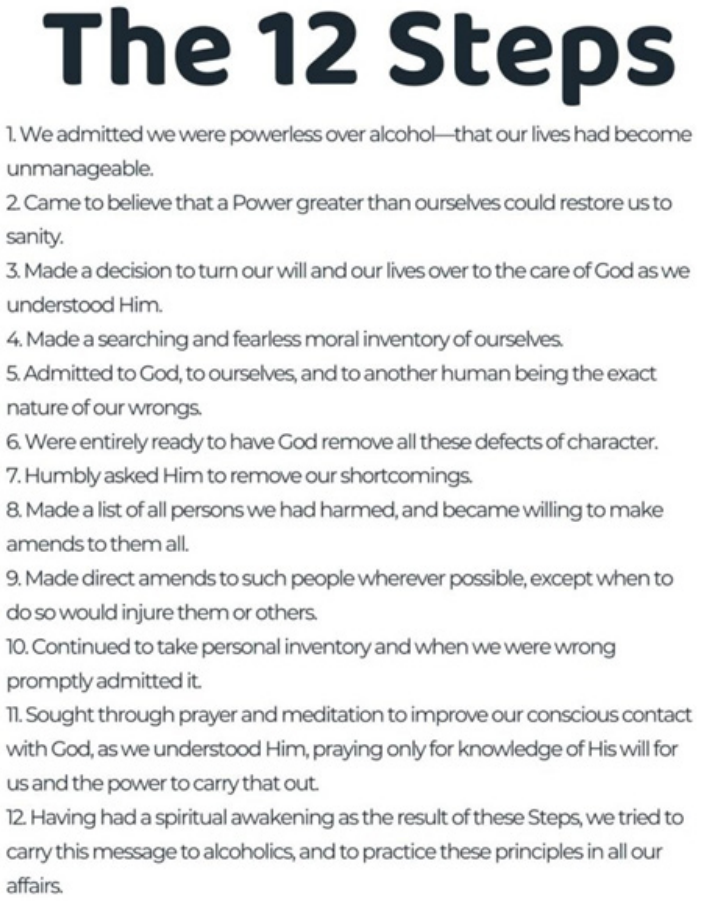
The Chabad understanding of *atzmut* thus provides resources for a theodicy that neither minimizes suffering nor abandons divine providence. Addiction becomes intelligible as an extreme instantiation of the ontological structure that makes finite existence possible: the necessary withdrawal that creates space for authentic emergence. This does not justify or valorize addiction but locates it within a theological framework capable of holding both its devastation and its potential for transformation [13].

## Step One as Ontological Encounter

### The Psychological Level

At the psychological level, Step One acknowledges the failure of willpower-based approaches to addiction. The addict has typically exhausted every strategy of self-control promises, resolutions, white-knuckling, controlled use, geographic cures. Each attempt has ended in failure, often spectacularly so. The admission of powerlessness names this reality without evasion: "I cannot manage this problem through my own resources" [14].

This admission is psychologically revolutionary because it contradicts the core illusion of the addictive self: that control remains possible, that "this time will be different," that sufficient will and intelligence can master the compulsion. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous describes alcoholism as "cunning, baffling, powerful" [15]—a force that defeats the addict's best intentions precisely because it operates below the level of conscious choice.




### The Ontological Level

Yet Step One operates at a deeper level than psychology alone. The admission of powerlessness constitutes what I am calling an ontological encounter—an experience of *ayin* that shatters the false selfhood constructed around the illusion of autonomous control. This shattering corresponds to the Kabbalistic concept of *shevirat ha-kelim*—the breaking of the vessels—which in Lurianic cosmology represents a necessary catastrophe that precedes authentic creation [16].

The Hasidic concept of *bitul* (self-nullification) illuminates this dynamic. In Hasidic thought, authentic spiritual development

requires the dissolution of the ego's false sense of independent existence—what the tradition calls *yeshut* ("somethingness" or self-assertion). As Rabbi Schatz-Uffenheimer demonstrates, the Hasidic masters understood that attachment to one's own existence (*yesh*) constitutes the fundamental obstacle to divine encounter [17]. Only through the nullification of this false selfhood can the soul become receptive to transcendent presence.

Step One effects precisely this *bitul*. The admission "I am powerless" is not merely a statement about addiction; it is a confession that the self I have constructed—the self that believed itself capable of managing life through will and intelligence—does not exist in the way I imagined. The collapse of this false self creates the void (*tehiru*) within which authentic selfhood can emerge—a selfhood grounded not in illusory autonomy but in relationship to transcendent power [18].

## The Undefined Higher Power as Apophatic Revelation

Step Two introduces "a Power greater than ourselves," and Step Three specifies surrender to "God *as we understood Him*". The deliberate vagueness of these formulations has attracted both criticism and praise. From a theological perspective, however, this imprecision mirrors the apophatic tradition in mystical theology—the recognition that the divine exceeds all conceptual determination and that authentic God-knowledge proceeds through negation rather than affirmation.

The undefined Higher Power of Twelve-Step spirituality corresponds structurally to what Wolfson describes as the mystical God who is present through concealment; revelation emerges when conceptual grasp fails. Wolfson's "phenomenology of concealment [19]" describes exactly this dynamic: the mystical God who is present as absence, encountered not through propositions but through the collapse of propositional certainty.

The Twelve-Step program thus embodies an implicit theology that resonates deeply with Kabbalistic understanding. AA's "Higher Power" is structurally identical to the mystical God who transcends conceptual determination—the *Ein Sof* (Infinite) that cannot be captured by finite categories but can be encountered through the dissolution of false certainty. Because the addict's collapse of self-certainty reopens the channel to transcendence, the undefined God is encountered as possibility rather than dogma. The mystery preserves God from becoming an idol of certainty.

This apophatic dimension explains why the Twelve Steps offer no theodicy in the conventional sense. AA does not explain why suffering occurs; it offers relationship-through-not-knowing, the very condition of mystical consciousness. The addict learns that God is not justified but encountered—and this encounter becomes possible precisely through the admission of powerlessness that constitutes Step One.


## The Wounded Healer and the Vav Ketia

My work on the *vav ketia*—the "broken vav" that appears in Numbers 25:12 within the word *shalom* (peace)—provides additional theological resources for understanding Step One [20]. This scribal anomaly suggests that peace itself is necessarily broken, incomplete, imperfect. Wholeness bears within itself the mark of wounding.

The *vav ketia* illuminates the recovery process because it suggests that healing does not erase brokenness but transforms it. The recovering addict does not return to some pre-addictive state of innocence but integrates the experience of powerlessness into a new narrative identity. This corresponds to the Lurianic concept of *tikkun*—repair that incorporates rather than eliminates the shattered vessels.

Jung's concept of the "wounded healer" [21] finds unexpected depth when understood through this Kabbalistic lens. The therapist or sponsor who has experienced their own shattering—whether through addiction, trauma, or existential crisis—gains access to dimensions of experience that remain inaccessible to those who maintain false invulnerability. The Shekhinah's exile—divine presence suffering alongside creation—mirrors this therapeutic reality: healing becomes possible through sharing in brokenness rather than maintaining transcendent distance.

The Twelfth Step—"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs" [22]—instantiates this wounded healer dynamic. Service becomes the ultimate theological response to suffering: not explanation but transformation, not theodicy but accompaniment.

## Beyond Theodicy to Transformative Encounter

The preceding sections have argued that Step One of the Twelve Steps—the admission of powerlessness—constitutes not merely a psychological acknowledgment but an ontological revelation that resonates with the deepest structures of Jewish mystical theology. The encounter with powerlessness mirrors the Kabbalistic understanding of *ayin* as the sacred ground from which authentic being emerges. The undefined Higher Power of AA corresponds to the apophatic God of mystical tradition, present precisely in the collapse of conceptual certainty. The process of recovery recapitulates the cosmic drama of *tzimtzum*, *shevirah*, and *tikkun*—contraction, shattering, and repair.

This theological reframing does not solve the theodicy problem in any conventional sense. It does not explain why addiction exists or why God permits such suffering. What it accomplishes is more radical: a shift from explanatory to transformative theodicy. The question "Why does God allow addiction?" gives way to "What transformation becomes possible through the encounter with powerlessness?" The addict who works the Steps does not receive an answer to theodicy; they *become* an answer—a living testimony that non-being can serve as the matrix of spiritual rebirth.

Yet this theological framework invites further elaboration. The references to Jung's wounded healer concept point toward a deeper integration of depth psychology with mystical theology. The following addendum develops this connection systematically, demonstrating how Jungian shadow work not only fits with but profoundly illuminates the Twelve Step program.

**Addendum**

**Jung, Shadow Work, and the Twelve Steps: Does Depth Psychology Fit the Recovery Framework?**

## The Jung-Wilson Correspondence

The relationship between Jungian psychology and Alcoholics Anonymous is not merely a matter of theoretical convergence but of direct historical transmission. In 1961, Bill Wilson wrote to Carl Jung acknowledging the Swiss psychiatrist's seminal role in the founding of AA. Wilson recounted how Rowland Hazard, a patient whom Jung had treated for alcoholism in the early 1930s, had been told by Jung that his condition was hopeless from a medical standpoint—that his only chance lay in a spiritual conversion, a *vital spiritual experience* [23]. Jung's response to Wilson's letter has become foundational to understanding the spiritual architecture of the Twelve Steps: "His craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God" [24].

Jung famously concluded with a Latin phrase that became a touchstone for recovery spirituality: *spiritus contra spiritum*—"spirit against spirits". The wordplay reveals Jung's understanding that addiction represents a misdirected spiritual longing, a search for transcendence through chemical means that can only be adequately addressed by authentic spiritual transformation [25]. This recognition places shadow work—Jung's methodology for integrating unconscious material—at the very heart of the recovery process.

## The Shadow and the Moral Inventory

Jung defined the shadow as "the thing a person has no wish to be"—those aspects of the personality that have been rejected, repressed, or denied conscious recognition [26]. The shadow contains not only morally objectionable contents but also undeveloped potentials, qualities judged unacceptable by family, society, or the ego's self-image. Jung insisted that the shadow is not merely negative but includes "gold in the dark"—valuable psychological resources that have been consigned to unconsciousness [27].

Step Four of the Twelve Steps—"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves"—constitutes precisely the kind of shadow exploration Jung advocated. The Big Book's instructions for this inventory reveal a sophisticated understanding of shadow dynamics: the inventory examines resentments, fears, and sexual conduct not to generate guilt but to identify patterns of self-deception and projection [28]. The alcoholic discovers, through rigorous self-examination, how much of what was blamed on others actually originated in unacknowledged aspects of the self.

The parallel to Jungian analysis is striking. Jung wrote: "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious" [29]. The Fourth Step inventory makes the darkness conscious through systematic self-examination—not the abstract introspection of philosophical self-reflection but the concrete enumeration of specific harms, fears, and resentments. This methodology reflects Jung's insistence that shadow work must be specific and personal rather than general and theoretical.

## Confession as Integration: Steps Four and Five

Step Five—"Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs"—transforms the written inventory into a spoken confession. The tripartite structure (God, self, another) reflects a sophisticated understanding of how shadow

material becomes integrated. Self-admission alone is insufficient; the shadow maintains its power through secrecy and isolation. Only by bringing unconscious material into relationship—with the transcendent, with oneself, and with another human being—does genuine integration become possible [30].

Jung emphasized that shadow integration requires a witness: "The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well" [31]. The Fifth Step provides this witnessing function through the presence of another person—traditionally a sponsor, spiritual director, or trusted friend—who receives the confession without judgment. This interpersonal dimension distinguishes Twelve Step methodology from purely introspective approaches to self-knowledge.

The therapeutic value of confession lies not in punishment or absolution but in the relief that comes from no longer maintaining a divided self. The Talmudic concept of *vidui* (confession) similarly emphasizes that wrongdoing creates a breach between the person and their authentic self; confession repairs this breach by bringing hidden actions into acknowledged relationship with one's identity [32]. The Fifth Step thus functions as what Jung called a *coniunctio*—a union of previously dissociated elements of the personality [33].

## Character Defects as Shadow Projections

Steps Six and Seven address "character defects" and "shortcomings"—language that might seem to conflict with Jung's more neutral understanding of shadow contents. However, the Twelve Step approach reveals a nuanced understanding that character defects are not simply bad qualities to be eliminated but distorted expressions of legitimate needs. The Big Book notes that "our troubles were basically of our own making"—not because addicts are morally inferior but because unconscious patterns have generated self-defeating behaviors [34].

This understanding converges with Jung's recognition that shadow contents often represent exaggerated or misdirected expressions of valuable traits. Stubbornness may reflect persistence applied inappropriately; selfishness may represent self-care taken to unhealthy extremes; anger may express a distorted sense of justice [35]. The goal of shadow work is not elimination but transformation—the recovery of the "gold in the dark" that lies hidden within apparently negative qualities.

The Kabbalistic framework developed in the preceding sections illuminates this process. Just as the Lurianic *shevirah* (shattering) releases divine sparks that become trapped in *kelipot* (shells), character defects represent valuable psychic energy trapped in distorted forms. The work of *tikkun*—whether in Kabbalistic cosmology, Jungian analysis, or Twelve Step recovery—involves liberating this trapped energy and restoring it to conscious integration.

## The Higher Power and the Self

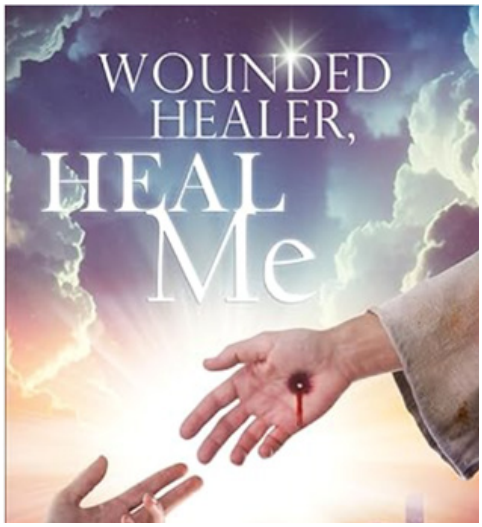
Jung's concept of the Self—the totality of the psyche including both conscious and unconscious elements—bears striking resemblance to the Twelve Steps' deliberately undefined "Higher Power." Both concepts point toward a center of psychological and spiritual gravity that transcends the ego without being entirely external to the person. Jung wrote: "The self is not only the center but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the center of this totality, just as the ego is the center of consciousness" [36].

This apophatic quality connects directly to the theological framework developed throughout this essay. Just as *atzmut* (divine essence) transcends both *yesh* (being) and *ayin* (non-being), the Higher Power of Twelve Step spirituality resists reduction to any particular theological formulation. The deliberate imprecision of "Higher Power" reflects not theological indifference but recognition that authentic spiritual encounter exceeds conceptual containment—precisely the insight that Wolfson identifies as central to Jewish mystical epistemology [37].

## The Unconscious Divine, and Addiction

Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz's radical theology, as analyzed by Wolfson, provides a unique lens for understanding the relationship between divine unconsciousness and human addiction. Eybeschütz proposed that evil originates in the "thoughtless" aspect of the *Ein Sof* (Infinite)—suggesting that the *kelipot* (husks or shells that contain evil) emerge from an uncontrolled emanation during a divine "sleep" or *tardema* [38]. This interpretation resonates deeply with Jung's understanding of how unconscious contents, when dissociated from consciousness, acquire autonomous destructive power.

Addiction might be understood, through this lens, as a human parallel to divine *tardema*—a state of diminished consciousness in which the ego loses its mediating function and instinctual energies operate autonomously. The addictive substance or behavior becomes a *kelipah*—a shell that traps spiritual energy in compulsive repetition. Recovery, then, requires awakening from this *tardema*, restoring consciousness to the dissociated complexes



that drive addictive behavior.

This framework illuminates the Twelve Step understanding of addiction as a "spiritual malady" rather than merely a medical condition or moral failing. The problem is not simply chemical dependency but a fundamental disorder of consciousness—a state in which the ego has been captured by unconscious forces and can no longer direct behavior toward authentic goals. The "spiritual awakening" promised by Step Twelve represents the restoration of conscious agency through integration of shadow material [39].

## The Wounded Healer Expanded

The concept of the wounded healer, introduced earlier in connection with the *vav ketia*, requires further elaboration in light of Jungian psychology. Jung argued that the analyst's effectiveness depends on having confronted their own wounds: "Only the wounded physician heals" [40]. This principle finds concrete expression in the Twelve Step tradition of sponsorship. Those who carry the message to other alcoholics do so not as experts who have transcended their condition but as fellow sufferers who remain, in the language of recovery, "one drink away from a drunk".

The theology of sacred brokenness developed through the *vav ketia* directly challenges the perfectionism that often characterizes both religious aspiration and addictive thinking. Jung recognized that the pursuit of perfection—the attempt to identify exclusively with the light while rejecting the shadow—generates the very splitting that makes neurosis inevitable [41]. The Twelve Steps similarly reject perfectionism in favor of "progress, not perfection," a formulation that acknowledges ongoing shadow work as a permanent feature of healthy psychological and spiritual life [42].

## Amends as Tikkun: Steps Eight and Nine

Steps Eight and Nine—making a list of persons harmed and making direct amends—translate shadow integration into ethical action. Jung emphasized that individuation is not a purely intrapsychic process but necessarily involves transformation of one's relationships and engagement with the world [43]. The recognition of harm done to others during active addiction represents not simply moral accounting but acknowledgment of how shadow projection damages relationships.

The Kabbalistic concept of *tikkun* (repair) illuminates the amends process. In Lurianic Kabbalah, *tikkun* involves gathering the scattered sparks of divine light trapped in the *kelipot* and restoring them to their proper place [44]. Making amends performs an analogous function: it gathers the relational damage scattered through years of addictive behavior and restores it to conscious ethical relationship. The amends process is not primarily about relieving guilt but about reconstituting the interpersonal field that addiction has shattered.

## Continued Inventory and the Ongoing Shadow

Step Ten—"Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it"—establishes shadow work as an ongoing practice rather than a completed achievement. Jung was emphatic that individuation is never finished; the unconscious continues to generate new contents requiring integration throughout life [45]. The Twelve Step program's insistence on continued inventory reflects this understanding: the shadow is not a discrete entity that can be finally conquered but a dynamic dimension of the psyche requiring perpetual attention.

The daily inventory functions as a practice of *zehirut* (watchfulness)—the quality that the Ramchal places at the foundation of the spiritual path in *Mesilat Yesharim* [46]. This watchfulness is not paranoid hypervigilance but attentive presence to one's inner life, noticing when shadow contents begin to activate and addressing them before they gain destructive momentum.


## The Sitra Achra and the Dark Side of Recovery

The Kabbalistic concept of the *sitra achra* (the "other side") provides a framework for understanding aspects of recovery that purely positive psychology cannot address. The *sitra achra* is not simply evil but represents the necessary darkness against which light becomes visible [47]. Similarly, addiction—while destructive—often serves as the crisis that catalyzes spiritual awakening. Many recovering alcoholics report that they would not trade their experience of addiction and recovery for a life in which they had never suffered, because the suffering itself became the path to transformation.

This paradox reflects Jung's recognition that the shadow contains "gold in the dark." The very qualities that fed addiction—intensity, persistence, the capacity for total commitment—become, when integrated and redirected, powerful resources for recovery and spiritual growth. The Twelve Step tradition speaks of the "gifts of the program," recognizing that the disciplined self-examination and spiritual practice required by recovery often produce character development that exceeds what might have been achieved without the crisis of addiction [48].

Rebbe Nachman's teaching on transforming sadness into joy through proper understanding illuminates this dynamic [49]. Rather than simple opposition between light and dark, Rebbe Nachman taught that darkness itself can become a vehicle for revelation when approached with wisdom. The "dark Shekhinah consciousness"

developed in my previous work suggests that divine presence includes its own concealment—that the Shekhinah's exile serves cosmic purposes that transcend immediate human understanding [50].

## Prayer, Meditation, and Active Imagination

Step Eleven—"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him"—establishes contemplative practice as essential to ongoing recovery. Jung's technique of active imagination provides a psychological parallel to this spiritual discipline. In active imagination, the ego engages in dialogue with unconscious contents, allowing images and figures from dreams or fantasy to unfold while maintaining conscious observation [51]. This technique enables ongoing integration of shadow material through direct engagement rather than analysis alone.

The Twelve Step emphasis on seeking "God's will" through prayer and meditation reflects Jung's understanding that the ego must learn to listen to communications from the Self—the larger psychic totality that includes but transcends consciousness. Jung wrote: "Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams, who looks inside, awakes" [52]. The awakening that recovery promises requires exactly this inward turn.

## Carrying the Message: Step Twelve and Individuation

Step Twelve—"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs"—completes the program by establishing service as essential to ongoing recovery. Jung understood that individuation is not a solitary achievement but necessarily involves contribution to the collective [53]. The person who has integrated shadow material becomes capable of facilitating others' integration—not through expertise but through the authenticity that comes from having done the work oneself.

The phrase "spiritual awakening" merits attention in this context. Jung distinguished between intellectual understanding and genuine transformation; information about the unconscious is not the same as integration of unconscious contents [54]. The "awakening" promised by the Twelve Steps is not primarily cognitive but existential—a fundamental reorientation of the personality resulting from encounter with transcendent reality.

## Conclusion: The Structural Homology

Does Jungian shadow work "fit" with the Twelve Steps? The historical evidence, theoretical convergences, and practical parallels examined in this essay suggest not merely fit but deep structural homology. Both frameworks understand human suffering as rooted in dissociation—the splitting of the personality into acknowledged and unacknowledged portions. Both propose integration rather than elimination as the path to healing. Both recognize that authentic transformation requires encounter with transcendent reality, however conceived. Both insist that healing is ongoing rather than terminal, a practice rather than an achievement.

The theological framework developed throughout this essay—drawing on Lurianic Kabbalah, Eybeschütz's radical theology, and Chabad's understanding of *atzmut*—provides additional resources for understanding this convergence. The *vav ketia*'s sacred brokenness suggests that wholeness includes rather than excludes fracture. Eybeschütz's theology of divine unconsciousness illuminates how awakening from *tardema* constitutes the fundamental movement of recovery. The Lurianic triad of *tzimtzum*, *shevirah*, and *tikkun* provides a cosmic template for the addict's journey from powerlessness through shattering to repair.

Perhaps most significantly, both Jung's analytical psychology and the Twelve Step program understand that the goal is not perfection but *tikkun*—the ongoing work of repair and integration that constitutes authentic human existence. The recovering alcoholic, like the analysand who has done sustained shadow work, does not emerge as a finished product but as someone equipped for the lifelong task of conscious living. In this sense, both traditions affirm the essential insight of mystical theology: that meaning emerges not from the elimination of contradiction but from its productive engagement.

In this light, the Twelve Steps emerge not as a secular therapeutic technique that happens to use spiritual language but as a practical mystical discipline that embodies the deepest insights of Jewish mystical theology and Jungian depth psychology. The addict's journey from powerlessness to service mirrors both the cosmic structure of creation—from *ayin* to *yesh*, from concealment to revelation—and the psychological journey from unconsciousness to integration. It is the story of the world, the soul, and God, enacted in the most unlikely of settings—the church basement, the hospital meeting room, the fellowship of those who have confronted their own dissolution and found, within it, a path to life.

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