The field of transpersonal psychology has been blessed, in recent years, with a plethora of new books on the interface of religion and psychotherapy. Among them is Estelle Frankel’s groundbreaking book, Sacred Therapy, which applies the spiritual insights of the Kabbalah to the practice of psychotherapy. Written by a seasoned psychotherapist who is also a respected scholar and teacher of Jewish mysticism, Sacred Therapy brings together a wealth of Jewish source materials with evocative case studies, personal anecdotes, and experiential exercises to create an inspirational guide to emotional healing and spiritual growth.

In the introduction, Frankel chronicles her own journey as a spiritual seeker and healer, and describes how she came to integrate her spiritual and psychotherapeutic practices. Frankel shares that for many years she “would often hear the words of ancient sacred texts echoing between the lines” (p. 1) of her clients’ narratives. Initially she was reluctant to share these personal musings with her clients, but over time, “as she gained confidence and a bit of chutzpah as a clinician” (p. 1) she began to selectively introduce Jewish teachings into her clinical work. Almost invariably she found that these occasions led to a deepening of personal insight and occasionally to therapeutic breakthroughs. At this point Frankel finds that “Jewish mysticism and psychology flow as two currents in a single stream, creating a synergistic healing power” (p. 5). Sacred Therapy “is an exploration of this synergy, showing how our lives and our healing journeys are illuminated through immersion in sacred story and spiritual practice” (p. 5).

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One Frankel uses the Kabbalah’s cosmology myth—the myth of the shattered vessels—as a healing paradigm. This myth, created by Rabbi Isaac Luria in the 16th century, describes creation as originating in a cosmic catastrophe. Frankel uses Luria’s three stages of divine unfolding as a healing paradigm, applying it to many of the situations for which people traditionally seek out therapy, including transitions, loss, depression, and illness. Luria’s model suggests that creation began with a disintegrative process or shattering (shevirah) followed by a process of healing and restoration (tikkun). According to Frankel this teaches us that brokenness is inescapable since it is woven into the very fabric of creation. Accepting this fact can lessen our suffering by helping us come to terms with life’s inevitable changes and losses. This central myth of the Kabbalah also shows us how we can restore a sense of coherence to our lives, even when things seem most broken and shattered. This basic optimism lies at the heart of Jewish mystical thought, which sees every person as a participant in the healing and restoration of this broken world.

In Part Two Frankel explores how identity is enlarged and transformed through spiritual practice. She uses the biblical myth of the exodus to illustrate the process of individuation, whereby one comes to identify with the larger God-Self. She also
explores the paradoxical nature of the self in Jewish thought, which includes the polarities of self and no-self. Frankel suggests that in order to be whole we must be able to hold both polarities. By nurturing the spiritual quality of humility, we learn to heal the narcissistically split self.

In Part Three Frankel explores the role of “paradox” in healing and describes how we come to achieve wholeness “by embracing and integrating the contradictory and often fragmented aspects of our being” (p. 6). This integration is, ultimately, facilitated by a nondual understanding of life—a willingness to accept life, in all its many mysteries, on its terms rather than our own. This acceptance allows us to live “wholeheartedly and mindfully, from the depth of our true being” (p. 7), rather than constantly battling with what is true.

_Sacred Therapy_ embodies a profundity and breadth of knowledge that encompasses not just Jewish wisdom teachings, but also elements of Eastern spiritual traditions, Sufism, and Jungian thought, and applies these insights to the complexities of contemporary life. The writing is engaging and compassionate, and Frankel succeeds in demonstrating the universal wisdom hidden in all these sources. This book will surely serve the reader, no matter what their spiritual orientation, as a guide that will be referenced repeatedly.

**The Author**

_Estelle Frankel_ is a practicing psychotherapist, spiritual advisor and teacher of Jewish mysticism. She was ordained as a Rabbinic Pastor (mashpiyah-maggidah) by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and has taught Jewish mysticism in Israel and throughout the United States for over thirty years. She is currently on the faculty of Chochmat Halev Center for Jewish Meditation in Berkeley, California. Estelle is the author of numerous essays on Kabbalah and psychology. _Sacred Therapy_ is her first book.

**Reviewer**

_Hedy Ganz_, LCSW, is a practicing psychotherapist in Scarsdale, New York and the Director of Clinical Social Work Services at Rehabilitation Associates in Fairfield, Connecticut.