

<div>The Experience of the Divine, according to Carl Gustav Jung and Marguerite Porete, a 14th century Mystic. Possible paths to peace? Francesca Stratta[°] [°] Corresponding author: Francesca Stratta, MD, PhD, IAAP and ARPA analyst, Rome, Italy, email: Fran.stratta@gmail.com</div>		
<p><i>In this paper</i>, the relatively unknown work of a great 14th century, Marguerite Porete, <i>The Mirror of Simple Souls</i> [1], will be presented, along with a comparison between it and the psychological dynamics of religious experience from a Jungian perspective.</p> <p>The three main symbolic themes inherent to medieval apophatic mysticism and directly drawn from Marguerite Porete's 14th-century text: the binary dynamics, the Soul and its journey, and the Union between annihilated Soul and the Deity, will be connected to three main Jungian themes: the integration of opposites, the individuation process, and the symbolic return to the primitive unity of the consciousness with the unconscious, as an experiential matrix for encountering the Divine (or the Self).</p> <p>It will illustrate how Porete's and Jung's perspectives have three points of convergence: a dynamic movement toward the integration of polarities, a progressive weakening of ego-centrality, the attainment of a moment of identity with the Divine/Self, in the formless void, devoid of any urgency toward transformation into form. Since the first two points of convergence between the two authors are immediately, if surprisingly, evident, the article will ultimately focus on the more challenging mystical concept of the <i>Nothing</i> or the <i>Annihilation of the Soul</i>, interpreting it through the lens of analytical psychology—yielding insights of considerable interest and contemporary relevance.</p> <p>Therefore, it will be illustrated, as a starting point for future reflections, how Porete's medieval mysticism path and the Jungian concept of the religious experience as the achieving of the Self, may serve as creative and compensatory responses to the divisive forces that permeate in a special way our contemporary historical moment, thus helping to mitigate conflict and contribute to a dimension of peace, both at the individual and collective level.</p>		
	<p>Marguerite Porete's work, <i>The Mirror of Simple Souls</i> [1], which ultimately led to her execution by burning for heresy, has been described as a profound masterpiece that influenced the thought of the eminent Dominican theologian Meister Eckhart, her contemporary. The text narrates the journey of the Soul through Love toward the ultimate goal of <i>Union with the Divine</i>. Regarding this Union, Porete writes: “All is one thing for the Soul, without why, and she is nothing in this One.”</p> <p>The discovery occurred between 1943 and 1944 in the Vatican Library, when it was established that the Latin manuscript entitled: “<i>Incipit speculum simplicium animarum in voluntate et desiderio morantium</i>”, was the work of Marguerite Porete. Prior to this, the book had circulated anonymously for centuries, copied into manuscripts in various languages and preserved in monasteries and libraries.</p>	
	<p>The Speculum recounts a journey—a gradual path of the soul's liberation through successive states of grace, which Porete refers to as “deaths.” These are deaths to specific aspects of the personal ego. The path involves a progressive detachment from psychological and spiritual structures—commandments, virtues, meritorious works, contemplation—culminating in the complete dissolution of the distinction between subject and object. The Soul thus regains its original condition, the state it possessed prior to creation: the Soul ceases to love as a subject because it becomes Love itself. This marks a pivotal moment in which the identity Love–God–Soul is fully realized: the soul becomes Love in Union with God.</p>	
<p>The narrative is constructed on allegorical framework involving three central figures: Love, the Soul, and Reason. Love and the Soul stand in pronounced conflict with Reason. Although Love and the Soul seek to persuade Reason, she is ultimately unable to withstand their dialectical challenge and thus “dies.” This symbolic death of Reason paves the way for a deeper, unmediated apprehension of the Divine. Simultaneously, the Soul renounces the Virtues and ascends beyond them into what Porete calls the “sovereign freedom of Love.” Marguerite Porete deliberately diminishes the role of Scripture. Scripture may serve as a point of departure, but it cannot contain the Divine, because God is not an Object. In the thirteenth-century Old French in which Porete writes, the noun Amour is grammatically feminine. Thus, Lady Love emerges as the true protagonist of the text, representing the innermost reality of every soul.</p>		
<p>Finally at the center of Marguerite Porete's vision stands the figure of God, whom she feels compelled to rename Loingprés—that is, <i>Far-Near</i>. The origin of this remarkable designation lies in the mystical fusion of opposites within the Soul at the exact moment it attains direct awareness of the Divine. The term <i>Loingprés</i> arises from the combination of two adjectives without a substantive noun, signifying that God is not to be conceived as an object, but rather as a relational reality—a synthesis of opposing attributes as Porete herself writes: “<i>And the Far is nearer, for the Soul recognizes more closely within herself that which is Far, and thus remains continuously in union with His will, without any anxiety for what may come to pass. For her, all is one.</i>”</p>		
<p>In the context of analytical psychology, mystical experience refers to a moment of identification with the Divine, occurring in a formless void that is devoid of any urgency to take form and to transform into form. As Jung writes: “<i>The unconscious, as a spiritual matrix, possesses creative qualities and is the birthplace of thought-forms. Since no definite form can be ascribed to the unconscious, the Eastern assumption that the universal spirit is formless—*arupaloka*—yet is the origin of all forms, is psychologically justified.</i>” (C. G. Jung, “Psychological Commentary on The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation,” in <i>Psychology and Religion</i>, CW 11, pp. 505–506)</p> <p>Mystical experiences, according to analytical psychology [2], are marked by the presence of an archetypally universal energy and imaginative function. This energy creates the religious experience itself and, in that very instant, generates a universal feeling that leads to an expansion of consciousness. Such experiences are characterized by one state in which the ego is entirely absorbed by the unconscious, entering a condition of stillness and suspension from all external activity; no volitional effort is required. From a Jungian perspective, mystics such as Marguerite Porete simply return—or regress—to an experiential state in which the unconscious is the source of consciousness. In such a state, they are able, for a moment, to identify with the archetypal energy that precedes the emergence of consciousness. This moment constitutes the only theatre in which archetypal energies realize themselves, in preparation for their ascension into consciousness. While, in classical Jungian theory, archetypes—though latent—represent a <i>facultas preformandi</i> whose nature leads them to manifest in an almost infinite variety of conscious forms (archetypal images), in the mystical states characterized by the Void (Nothingness), this compulsive aspect of archetypal activity is absent. Rather, mystics appear to describe a condition in which the loss and dissolution of the self into nothingness occurs without any urgency to express or actualize the self beyond itself, nor any inclination toward activity of any kind.</p> <p>In identifying the mystical experience with a pre-archetypal one, Jung effectively links the dynamics of mystical experience with the very foundations of psychic life. He writes: “<i>Therefore all those who do not wish to renounce the great values buried in the collective psyche tend to preserve, in some way, the acquired connection with the primordial foundations of life. Identification seems to be the most obvious means for this purpose, for the absorption of the Persona into the collective psyche formally invites one to embrace this abyss and dissolve into it without memory. This mysticism is innate in every person, just as the 'nostalgia for the Mother' is inherent in all, a look back to the source from which one has sprung.</i>” (C. G. Jung, “The Ego and the Unconscious”, in <i>Two Essays on Analytical Psychology</i>, p. 79). Moreover, this experience of the void is neither final nor annihilating.</p> <p>As Dourley observes, mystics remain deeply embedded in relationship with the society of their time, to which they attempt, in every possible way, to communicate the essence of their experiences. Thus, the void and its lack of urgency constitute not a terminal state, but a moment of profound intensification—one that ultimately enhances their capacity for action upon returning to the realm of civilization.</p> <p>In conclusion, this paper suggests that both authors delineate inner paths that respond to a fundamental human longing for Unity—a longing which, when acknowledged as essential inner need and embodied as lived experience, may give rise to psychological dynamics that may be conducive to both individual and collective peace.</p>		