

## Makom, Tzimtzum, and the Collapse of the Horse-and-Rider Parable/mashal Toward an Apophatic Acosmism of Divine Immanence in the Therapeutic Space

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### ABSTRACT

*This essay argues that the rabbinic designation of God as Makom—"He is the place of the world, but the world is not His place" (Bereishit Rabbah 68:9)—functions not as a tidy preservation of divine transcendence but as a controlled detonation of spatial metaphysics. Read alongside the Chabad polemic against a literal reading of tzimtzum and in conversation with Elliot R. Wolfson's apophatic phenomenology, the Midrash discloses a topology in which nothing stands outside divine being even while divine essence infinitely exceeds every manifestation. The familiar parable/mashal of horse and rider, deployed by the Midrash itself, presupposes precisely the dualism it is meant to instruct, and consequently collapses under its own weight. What emerges from this collapse is what I term, with Wolfson, an apophatic acosmism: an ontology of concealed immanence whose clinical analogue is the therapeutic space. Drawing on my earlier work on divine presence and concealment, sacred and profane space, and the patient as sacred text [1-6], We argue that the therapeutic encounter is not a neutral interpersonal zone hospitable to occasional religious experience, but a region ontologically suspended within Makom—a place where rupture itself becomes a mode of disclosure.*

*In the Addendum, we descend from this philosophical claim into the operational disciplines of clinical posture, sacred listening, the topology of the clinic, the figure of the wounded healer, and the formation rather than mere training of clinicians.*

### Keywords

Makom, Tzimtzum, Apophatic acosmism, Hester panim, Lurianic Kabbalah, Hermeneutic medicine, Therapeutic space, Patient as sacred text.

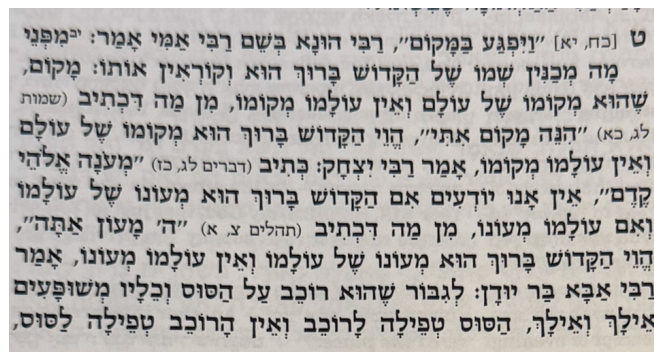
### The Stakes of Spatial Theology

Few theological problems are as deceptively simple as the question of where God is. The grammar of "where" forces an

answer in coordinates, but coordinates presuppose a container, and the moment one imagines a container for God one has already conceded that God is bounded by something prior. The rabbinic tradition felt this pressure acutely. When the patriarch Jacob, fleeing Esau, lays his head upon the stones of Beit El, the Torah does not say he encountered God; it says, with arresting indirection, that he "encountered the Place" (Gen 28:11):

יא וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיִּלֶן שָׁם. כִּי-בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ. וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם. וַיִּשָּׂם מִרְאֲשׁוֹתָיו: וַיִּשְׁכַּב. בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא.

11 And he lighted upon the place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep.



### vayifga ba-Makom—and he encountered the Place.

The Midrash that grows around this phrase, gathered in Bereishit Rabbah 68:9, is one of the most ontologically radical statements in classical rabbinic literature. Why, the Midrash asks, do we call the Holy One blessed be He by the name Makom? And it answers, with the brevity that always accompanies the most disorienting rabbinic moves:

### Hu mekomo shel olam ve-ein olamo mekomo. He is the place of the world, but the world is not His place.

At first hearing the formulation seems balanced, even reassuring. It appears to preserve transcendence by insisting that, although God supports and sustains the cosmos, God is never reducible to it. The God-of-the-philosophers, neither contained by His own creation nor identified with it, remains decorously aloof. But the Midrash does not stop there. It tightens the screw by offering a parable/mashal—a parable—of a rider on a horse, in which the rider is primary and the horse secondary, "for the rider is not subordinate to the horse". The parable/mashal is meant to ratify the asymmetry already announced. In practice, however, it imports precisely the dualism that the original formulation labours to dismantle. To say that God is the place of the world while the world is not God's place is to refuse two pictures at once: the picture in which God stands outside the world, and the picture in which the world stands outside of God. The horse-and-rider parable/mashal restores the first picture by smuggling in two discrete entities who happen to be travelling in the same direction.

My contention in what follows is that the collapse of the parable/mashal under the pressure of its own opening formulation is not a defect in the Midrash but its deepest teaching. The Midrash on Makom is performing, in the very arc of its argument, the dialectical movement that the Lurianic doctrine of tzimtzum would later attempt to articulate, that the Chabad masters would defend against literalism, and that Elliot R. Wolfson has retrieved as an apophatic phenomenology of divine concealment. Once one perceives the structure of the move, a great deal of my own clinical-theological work falls into place: the therapeutic space is the contemporary inheritor of Makom, and the patient is the

### The Midrash on Makom: A Closer Reading

The Midrash deploys three layers of language, each of which destabilizes the one beneath it. The first layer is the bare scriptural verb pagah, "to encounter", which in biblical Hebrew carries connotations of violent collision as well as supplicatory entreaty. Jacob does not merely arrive at a place; he is struck by it and equally strikes against it. The verb already refuses the placid spatial logic of "he was in a place". Space is not a neutral container that Jacob enters; it is an agent that meets him.

The second layer is the naming of God as Makom. By the rabbinic period this had become an honorific so familiar that its strangeness is easily missed. To name God by the noun "Place" is to perform exactly the rhetorical inversion that the Midrash will then thematise: the term that ordinarily designates a container is being applied to that which cannot be contained. The name itself enacts a category error and asks us to dwell within it.

The third layer is the formula that names God's placefulness while denying that the world is God's place. If we read this as a quasi-Aristotelian description—God as topos to the cosmos but not vice versa—it remains within the grammar of containment, only with the containment reversed. But this reading cannot hold. For the Midrash insists, immediately afterwards, that this is precisely what the rider-and-horse parable/mashal does not capture; the parable/mashal is given in order to be exceeded. The verse from Deuteronomy 33:27 (me'onah Elohei kedem—"the eternal God is a dwelling-place") is then layered on top, and the dwelling-place is the God who dwells. The result is a deliberate vertigo: God is the place; God dwells in the place; God is the dweller; the world is in God; God is not in the world; and the parable/mashal that promised to clarify the relation reveals, by its inadequacy, that no clarification is available within the grammar of in and out.

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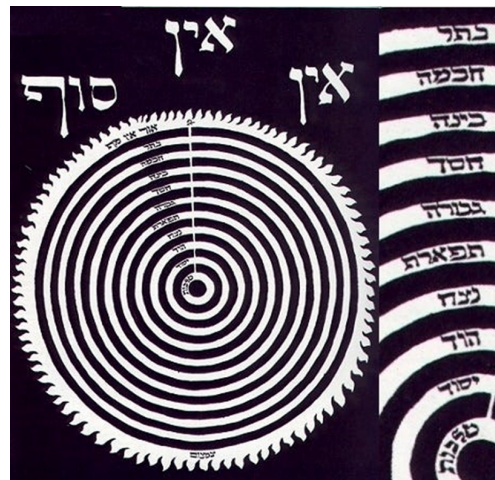
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For Maimonides, the divine name Makom denotes "the high degree of His existence", not a location [7]. But the Midrash itself is doing something more daring than Maimonidean dehomonymisation. It is not removing the spatial implication; it is forcing the spatial implication to break itself against an essence that cannot be spatialised. This is closer to what Wolfson, in his analyses of mystical paradox, calls "saying the unsayable through the inadequate"—the productive failure of metaphor as a vehicle of disclosure [8].



### Literal versus Non-Literal Tzimtzum

The Midrash's instability finds its most rigorous later articulation in the Lurianic doctrine of tzimtzum and the subsequent dispute, central to Hassidic thought, over whether to read it literally (kipshuto) or non-literally (lo kipshuto). In Etz Chaim, Rabbi Chaim Vital records the teaching of the Ari that, prior to creation, Ein Sof filled all reality; in order to create a finite cosmos God "contracted" or "withdrew" Himself from a central point, producing a chahal panui—a "vacated space"—within which the worlds could come into being. The doctrine answers the obvious metaphysical problem—how could there be a "where" for creation if God were all in all?—but it does so at the cost of a still graver problem: if God genuinely withdrew, then either the chahal is empty of God (impossible, since God is omnipresent) or the withdrawal was not genuine.

The latter horn of the dilemma is precisely the Chabad reading. Chabad thinkers have insisted that tzimtzum is to be read lo kipshuto—not literally. The withdrawal is phenomenological and epistemological, not ontological. From the perspective of created consciousness, divine infinity is concealed; from the perspective of divine being, nothing has withdrawn at all. The Alter Rebbe formulates the principle in Sha'ar HaYichud VeHaEmunah: from the standpoint of the upper unity (yichuda ila'ah), there is no creation at all, only the unbroken light of Ein Sof; from the standpoint of the lower unity (yichuda tata'ah), there appears to be a created world, but this appearance is itself a mode of divine self-concealment [9].

#### 1 "מקום"

א) קביעתו העיקרית של מונח זה היא למקום – מיוחד, וכללי.  
 ב) לאחר מכן הורחבה משמעותו בלשון והפך למונח לדרגת האדם ומעלתו, כלומר לשלמותו בנושא מסוים, כך שאומרים "פלוגי בַּמְקוֹם פְּלוֹנִי" בנושא פלוגי. יודע אתה כמה רבות משתמשים בכך דוברי השפה, בדבריהם "ממלא מקום אבותיו" (בבלי שבת נא, א ועוד) (=הגיע לדרגת אבותיו), "זהה ממלא מקום אבותיו בחכמה או ביראה" (בבלי כתובות קג, ב ועוד; וכן משנה תורה, מלכים א, ז), ובדבריהם "ועדיין מחלוקת במקומה עומדת" (משנה מקוות ד, א), כלומר במעמדה (=ולא נפתרה). על פי אופן השאלה הזה נאמר "קְרוּךְ קְבוֹד ה' מְקוֹמוֹ" (יחזקאל ג, יב), כלומר לפי דרגתו וגודל חלקו במציאות. וכן כל אזכור של "מקום" שנאמר לגבי ה' אין הכוונה בו אלא לדרגת מציאותו יתעלה, שאין שווה לה ולא דומה לה, כמו שיוכח בהמשך (א, נה; ב, א).

ORIGINALLY the Hebrew term makom (place) applied both to a particular spot and to space in general subsequently it received a wider signification and denoted "position," or "degree," as regards the perfection of man in certain things. We say, e.g., this man occupies a certain place in such and such a subject. In this sense this term, as is well known, is frequently used by authors, e.g., "He fills his ancestors' place (makom) in point of wisdom and piety"; "the dispute still remains in its place" (makom), i.e., in statu quo [ante]. In the verse, "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place" (mekomo) (Ezek. 3:12), makom has this figurative meaning, and the verse may be paraphrased "Blessed be the Lord according to the exalted nature of His existence," and wherever makom is applied to God, it expresses the same idea, namely, the distinguished position of His existence, to which nothing is equal or comparable, as will be shown below (chap. lvi.).

The polemical force of this position—against Hasidic opponents and against a populist literalism that hardened tzimtzum into something like deistic withdrawal—was that it preserved the radical immanentism of the kabbalistic tradition while refusing pantheist collapse. God has not gone anywhere. The *chahal panui* is empty only of the manifest light of *Ein Sof*; it remains saturated with concealed divinity. Creation is not God's absence but God's self-occluded presence. As I have argued elsewhere, (thanks to the work of Prof Elliot Wolfson) this is the framework one needs in order to take seriously a therapeutic theology in which absence is read as a mode of presence rather than its negation [1,2].

The Midrashic formulation that God is the place of the world while the world is not God's place is the same dialectic in different language. To say that God is the place of the world is to assert the radical immanentism: there is no outside. To say that the world is not God's place is to refuse the collapse: divine essence infinitely exceeds its own manifestation. The *chahal panui* is real, but it is real within God; the world is real, but it is real within *Makom*. Literal *tzimtzum*, by treating the withdrawal as a genuine ontological egress, abolishes the first half of the Midrashic formula. Pantheism, by collapsing divine essence into manifest creation, abolishes the second. The non-literal reading preserves both simultaneously, and it does so at the price of conceding that the relation between God and world cannot be spatialised.



### Wolfson and the Apophatic Acosmism of Divine Immanence

Elliot R. Wolfson's sustained engagement with Lurianic and Chabad sources, particularly in *Through a Speculum That Shines*, *Language, Eros, Being, Open Secret*, and *Heidegger and Kabbalah*, offers the most rigorous philosophical articulation of this paradox available in contemporary Jewish thought [8,10-12]. Wolfson's key move is to refuse the standard binaries—transcendence versus immanence, theism versus pantheism, presence versus absence—as imposing a metaphysical grammar that the kabbalistic sources do not share. In their place he develops what may be called an apophatic phenomenology of divine concealment, in which the divine essence is given as an "apophatic limit": a reality that can

never be positively grasped, yet whose ungraspability is the very mode of its disclosure.

What he calls apophatic acosmism is the cosmological extension of this insight. It asserts three theses jointly:

1. There is no outside to divine being. Nothing stands over against God in such a way as to constitute a genuinely external term of relation. The world is not next to God; it is within God's self-concealment.
2. Divine essence is not exhausted by its manifestation. To say that the world is in God is not to say that God is the world. Manifestation is partial, refracted, and constitutively inadequate to that which manifests.
3. Concealment is a mode of disclosure. The withdrawal of divine essence from positive knowability is not a privation but the very condition under which finite beings can encounter the infinite. What cannot be seen frontally can be encountered laterally; what cannot be possessed can be received.

Apophatic acosmism is therefore not pantheism dressed up in mystical language. Pantheism collapses (2) into (1) and ends with a god identical with the cosmos. Nor is it classical theism rebranded; classical theism preserves (2) but at the cost of (1) and so installs an external relation between God and world that requires further explanation. Apophatic acosmism holds (1), (2), and (3) together precisely by refusing to spatialise the divine-world relation at all. It is in this sense that the Midrashic *Makom* is the proto-text of an apophatic acosmism: it asserts (1) ("He is the place of the world"), (2) ("but the world is not His place"), and—through its self-deconstructing parable/*mashal*—(3) (the relation can be encountered but not pictured).

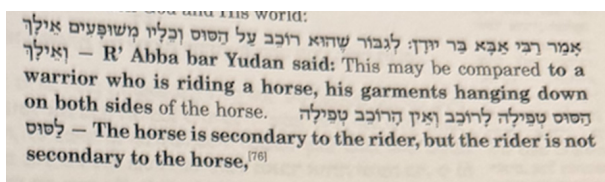
Wolfson is at pains to emphasise that the apophatic dimension is not merely epistemic. It is not that God in Himself is fully positive and we, alas, are too limited to see Him; it is that the very mode of divine being is self-withholding. The hidden God is not a hidden item; the hiddenness is constitutive. This is why the Hasidic doctrine of *hester panim*—the "hiding of the face"—is not a temporary lapse of divine attention but the structural condition of divine presence in a created cosmos. The face that hides itself is the same face whose hiding is the very form of its showing.



### The Collapse of the Horse-and-Rider Parable/Parable/mashal

We may now return to the parable that the Midrash itself offered and see why it collapses. The parable/mashal of horse and rider stipulates a relation of asymmetric dependence between two ontologically discrete entities. The rider is independent of the horse; the horse depends on the rider for direction; therefore the rider is primary, the horse secondary. Mapped onto God and world, the parable/mashal would teach that the world depends on God, that God does not depend on the world, and that the two are nonetheless separable.

Three features of the parable/mashal, however, become fatal under the pressure of the non-literal reading of tzimtzum and the apophatic acosmism that follows from it.



### The parable/mashal presupposes external relation

The rider is on the horse, not in the horse. There is a determinate boundary between rider and horse, and the boundary is precisely what allows the parable/mashal to function as an instructional analogy. But the Midrash's own opening formulation has already abolished such a boundary. If God is the place of the world, then the world is not next to God but within God. There is no external relation. The parable/mashal therefore depicts a spatial geometry that the Midrash has just renounced.

### The parable/mashal presupposes separability

The rider can dismount. The horse, having been ridden, can graze in the rider's absence. Each retains its identity apart from the relation. But the non-literal reading of tzimtzum denies precisely this. The world has no ontological standing apart from divine being; if for a single instant divine vivification were to be truly withdrawn, the world would not persist as a horse without its rider but would cease to be at all. The Alter Rebbe states this explicitly in Sha'ar HaYichud VeHaEmunah: God's ongoing creative speech—the asarah ma'amarot, the ten utterances of Genesis—is the moment-by-moment ground of the world's existence. The horse-and-rider parable/mashal cannot accommodate a horse whose entire being is the rider's ongoing utterance.

### The parable/mashal presupposes mutual exteriority

Even granting asymmetric dependence, the parable/mashal requires that rider and horse occupy adjacent regions of a shared space. Their relation is intelligible only against a prior space within which both are situated. But Makom is precisely the claim that there is no such prior space. There is no neutral ground within which God and world are co-located. God is the very condition for there being a "within which". The parable/mashal therefore presupposes a metaphysical neutral zone that the apophatic acosmism of the Midrash forecloses.

At the highest pitch of the analysis the parable/mashal does not merely fail to teach what the Midrash means; it teaches its opposite. To grasp the doctrine of Makom is to perceive that the very picture the parable/mashal invites must be set aside. This is, I would suggest, the pedagogical genius of the rabbinic text. The parable/mashal is offered not as a model to be retained but as a scaffold to be climbed and discarded—a Wittgensteinian ladder *avant la lettre*. The student who has truly received the teaching is the student who can no longer use the parable/mashal.

Wolfson's reading of kabbalistic parable/mashal in *Language, Eros, being* makes precisely this point in a different idiom. The mystical parable does not communicate by similitude but by the controlled failure of similitude. What is shown is not "X is like Y" but "the very gesture of likening breaks here, and in that breakage the unsayable is encountered [8]". The horse-and-rider parable/mashal of Bereishit Rabbah is a paradigm case. Its function is to fail in the right way.



### From Apophatic acosmism to the Therapeutic Space

The clinical relevance of this analysis is not decorative. For two decades my writing has attempted to develop what I have called a hermeneutic medicine, in which the patient is approached as a sacred text requiring interpretive wisdom rather than as an object of purely technical intervention [6]. The theological scaffolding of that project has often been taken to be metaphorical: as though the language of "sacred space", "divine concealment", and "therapeutic tzimtzum" were edifying figures of speech grafted onto an otherwise secular clinical encounter. The Midrash on Makom, read through the framework of non-literal tzimtzum and Wolfson's apophatic acosmism, requires the metaphor to be taken in a stronger sense. The therapeutic space is not merely figuratively sacred. It is ontologically suspended within concealed divine immanence.

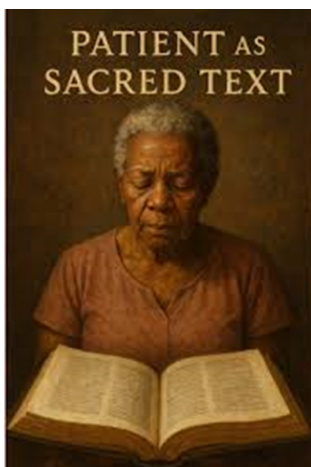
In *Divine Presence and Concealment in the Therapeutic Space*, I argued that the matrix between caregiver and patient is, depending on one's worldview, either an emptiness, an I-Thou presence, or a divine presence; and that to take the third option seriously is to develop a theoretical framework for the possibility of the divine within ordinary clinical interaction [1]. The Midrash on Makom now allows that framework to be formulated more precisely. It is not that God may sometimes show up in the consulting room when invited; it is that the consulting room is already within Makom.

The clinician is not bringing God into the room. The room is being disclosed as having never been empty.

This reframing has immediate consequences for several of my earlier theoretical claims. In *Epistemology versus Ontology in Therapeutic Practice*, I argued that the *tzimtzum* model demands a shift from epistemological postures (the clinician as knower of the patient) to ontological postures (the clinician as participant in a shared being) [5]. The apophatic acosmism developed here strengthens that argument considerably. If divine essence cannot be possessed even by divine cognition (in the sense that the *Ein Sof* is not an item amongst items even to itself), then a fortiori the patient cannot be possessed by clinical cognition. The patient resists epistemic mastery not because of a contingent limitation in our diagnostic instruments but because the patient is enfolded within an ontological structure whose deepest character is self-concealment.

In *Sacred and Profane Space in the Therapeutic Encounter*, I argued against rigid distinctions between sacred and secular domains, proposing instead an account of liminal interpenetration [4]. The framework of *Makom* shows why such interpenetration is not optional but structural. There is no purely profane region of a cosmos that is in God. The distinction between sacred and profane is a distinction between modes of disclosure within a single divine field, not a distinction between regions of the field and regions outside it. The consulting room can disclose itself as sacred or fail to do so, but it cannot, in principle, exit *Makom*.

And in *Primordial Silence and Therapeutic Presence*, I argued that the Talmudic moment in *Menachot 29b*, in which Moses witnesses the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva and receives the enigmatic divine response "Be silent, for such is My decree", provides a paradigm for clinical practice in the face of inexplicable suffering [3]. That argument now receives its proper ontological footing. The silence is not God's absence in the face of evil; it is God's presence in the mode of *hester panim*. The clinician who learns to sit within unredeemed suffering is not merely tolerating the absence of theological consolation; she is occupying the very position in which concealed presence becomes encounterable.



### **The Patient as Makom: Sacred Text and Hidden Immanence**

If apophatic acosmism transforms our understanding of the therapeutic space, it equally transforms our understanding of the patient. The hermeneutic-medical claim that the patient is a sacred text [6] can now be reformulated in stronger terms. The patient is not merely a text awaiting interpretation by a sufficiently sensitive clinician. The patient is, in the precise rabbinic sense, a locus of *Makom*: a place in which divine immanence is at once disclosed and concealed, a place which, like Jacob's stones at *Beit El*, is not where one expects to find the divine and is, for that very reason, where it is encountered.

This has at least three operational consequences.

#### **The patient is not coextensive with the diagnostic frame**

Just as the world is not God's place even while God is the world's place, the patient is not the clinician's place even while the clinician is, in some real sense, the patient's place during the encounter. The clinician offers a containing presence—an analogue, however attenuated, of divine *Makom*—but the patient is not contained by the diagnostic taxonomy. The patient exceeds it in the same way that the world exceeds the parable/*mashal* of horse and rider. To treat the patient as exhaustively specified by the diagnostic frame is to commit the same category mistake that the *Midrash* labours to undo.

#### **The patient's suffering is not extrinsic to divine presence**

In a framework of external relation, suffering and divine presence are in zero-sum relation: where suffering is, there God seems not to be. Apophatic acosmism dissolves the zero-sum structure. The very rupture of suffering is a site within *Makom*; the patient's pain is not the index of divine withdrawal but of divine concealment in the mode of *hester panim*. This is not *theodicy* in the ordinary sense—it does not justify suffering by reference to a higher good—but it refuses the inference from suffering to abandonment [17]. The clinician's task is not to explain the suffering theologically but to occupy it relationally, knowing that the occupation itself is the form in which concealed presence becomes phenomenally available.

#### **The patient's ungraspability is not a clinical defect**

Patients who resist diagnostic capture, who present with constellations of symptoms that do not resolve into the published syndromes, who refuse the narrative arcs of recovery medicine, are often experienced by clinicians as failures of the clinical project. Apophatic acosmism reframes such patients as paradigmatic rather than aberrant. The ungraspability of the patient is the local instantiation of the ungraspability of *Makom*. The clinician who can sit with this ungraspability without converting it into either premature diagnosis or therapeutic nihilism is the clinician who has internalised the lesson of the *Midrash*: that what cannot be contained may yet be encountered.

#### **Rupture as Disclosure: Clinical Implications**

It remains to draw out the most practically demanding implication of the framework. If the horse-and-rider parable/*mashal* collapses because it presupposes external relation, and if external relation is

precisely what apophatic acosmism denies, then the moments at which the therapeutic relation appears to rupture—the silences, the failures, the diagnostic dead-ends, the encounters with mortality that exceed every clinical resource—are not departures from the divine field but intensifications within it. Rupture is not absence; rupture is the form in which Makom discloses itself when smoother modes of disclosure are unavailable.

This is the deepest pastoral and clinical claim of hermeneutic medicine. The clinician who, in the face of a dying patient, can no longer offer the technical interventions of curative medicine is not thereby evacuated of clinical efficacy. She is thrust into the mode of presence that the framework calls *vayifga ba-Makom*: she has encountered the Place, in the rabbinic sense, precisely because the ordinary spatial logic of intervention has failed. The wounded healer of the rabbinic and Hasidic traditions—the *tzaddik* who heals because she has been wounded, the physician who attends because she has herself been ill—is not a sentimental archetype but the structural analogue of Makom: she is a place whose own porosity is the condition under which others can be received.

I have argued in several earlier essays that the architecture of healing spaces—not merely the metaphorical architecture but the literal architecture of clinic, hospital, and consulting room—ought to be reconsidered in light of these claims [4]. The Midrashic Makom suggests, more radically, that no architecture can guarantee what only ontology can provide. A consulting room well-designed for clinical efficiency may yet fail to disclose itself as Makom; a hospice corridor poorly lit and badly furnished may yet do so. The disclosure depends not upon the physical features but upon the relational stance of those who occupy the space. To stand within Makom is to recognise that one has always already been within it, and to inhabit that recognition without grasping at it.

This is not mysticism in any easy sense. It does not promise theophanies or transformative experiences. It promises, more austere, that the clinical encounter has more in it than the encounter itself can register, and that the wisest clinical posture is one of attentive receptivity to what cannot be encompassed by clinical categories. The horse-and-rider parable/mashal would have had us imagine ourselves as the rider, in confident control of a clinical mount. Makom asks us to imagine ourselves as already within a place whose name is one of the names of God.

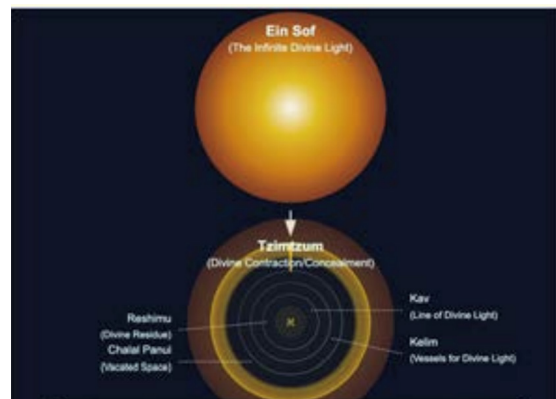
### **An Ontology of Concealed Presence**

The Midrash on Makom (Bereishit Rabbah 68:9) [14] is, in my reading, the textual seed of an apophatic acosmism whose later articulation is found in the non-literal reading of *tzimtzum* and whose contemporary philosophical voice is Elliot Wolfson's. The Midrash insists, with characteristic rabbinic terseness, that God is the place of the world while the world is not God's place; it then offers a parable/mashal of horse and rider that fails, with characteristic rabbinic pedagogical irony, to render the relation intelligible in spatial terms. The failure is the teaching. What can be spatialised is not Makom; what is Makom cannot be spatialised.

The clinical implications of this teaching are, for hermeneutic medicine, foundational rather than ornamental. The therapeutic space is not a neutral interpersonal zone in which religious meanings may or may not be invoked; it is a region ontologically suspended within concealed divine immanence. The patient is not an object of diagnostic mastery but a local instantiation of Makom—a place whose ungraspability is the very form of its sacred character. The clinician is not the rider over the horse of clinical practice but a fellow inhabitant of a place she did not create and cannot exit, whose deepest disclosure occurs precisely at the points where the ordinary instruments of clinical mastery fail.

To inhabit this framework is to relinquish a certain kind of confidence and to acquire a different kind. The confidence of the rider, surveying the terrain from the saddle, gives way to the confidence of the one who has encountered the Place—who knows that the Place has not gone anywhere, even when its face is hidden, and who therefore knows that no clinical encounter, however ruptured, is without the silent saturation of concealed presence. *Vayifga ba-Makom*: he encountered the Place. The verse is not merely Jacob's. It is, when properly heard, the verse of every clinical encounter in which the rider has dismounted and the place has begun to speak.

The operational consequences of this teaching for clinical posture, listening, the topology of the clinic, the figure of the wounded healer, and the formation of clinicians are the subject of Part II.



### **Operational Implications for the Therapeutic Space**

Above we argued that the rabbinic designation of God as Makom, read through the non-literal doctrine of *tzimtzum* and Wolfson's apophatic phenomenology, dissolves the spatial metaphysics on which the horse-and-rider parable/mashal silently relies; and that the therapeutic encounter, properly understood, is not a neutral interpersonal zone but a region ontologically suspended within concealed divine immanence. That argument was philosophical in register and consciously declined to descend into the texture of clinical life. The objection of the busy practitioner is therefore both predictable and legitimate: very well, but what is one to do on a Tuesday afternoon at 2:30, when the third patient of the day arrives in the consulting room?

Let us now attempt a partial answer. It does not provide a manual—there can be no manual for apophatic immanence—but it sketches the operational consequences of the framework for clinical posture, listening, the topology of the clinic, the figure of the wounded healer, the question of secular settings, and the formation rather than mere training of clinicians. The argument throughout is that the framework changes not what one does but the ground upon which one does it, and that this shift in ground has cumulative phenomenological effects on the encounter itself.

### The Clinician's Posture

If the therapeutic space is suspended within Makom, the first operational question is what posture the clinician adopts in relation to that suspension. The Lurianic doctrine of tzimtzum, in its non-literal reading, supplies the structural template. Just as Ein Sof self-conceals in order to make space for finite existence without genuinely withdrawing from it, the clinician self-contracts in order to make space for the patient's being without genuinely withdrawing from the encounter. I have elsewhere named this clinical analogue therapeutic tzimtzum [5] and the present framework allows its phenomenology to be specified more carefully.

Therapeutic tzimtzum is not modesty. It is not the disclaimer that the clinician does not know everything, nor the procedural humility that hedges every recommendation with qualifications. These are epistemic gestures and remain within the grammar of mastery; they merely concede that mastery is partial. Therapeutic tzimtzum is something more radical: a deliberate self-occlusion of the clinician's manifest cognitive presence in order to disclose the patient as Makom rather than as object. The clinician does not stop knowing; she stops manifesting her knowing in a way that fills the available space. The room thereby becomes, in the precise rabbinic sense, a chahal panui—a vacated space that is, in fact, saturated with concealed presence.

Operationally, this means several things. It means that the clinician learns to delay the diagnostic verb; not to refuse it, but to defer its arrival until the patient has had time to disclose what only the clinician's receded posture allows to be disclosed. It means that the clinician learns to inhabit pauses without filling them. It means that the clinician's gaze is softer than her training has trained it to be—a gaze that beholds rather than scans. And it means, crucially, that the clinician's own anxiety in the face of clinical ambiguity is borne by the clinician rather than discharged into premature interpretation. The framework offers no relief from this anxiety. It offers, instead, the recognition that bearing the anxiety is itself a participation in the apophatic structure of the encounter.

Apophatic receptivity is the obverse face of therapeutic tzimtzum. If the clinician self-contracts, what occupies the vacated space is not nothing; it is the patient's own emerging self-disclosure within a field of concealed presence. The clinician is receptive not in the modern psychotherapeutic sense of "active listening" understood as technique, but in the apophatic sense of being available to what cannot be schematized in advance. To listen apophatically is to listen for what one cannot predict, what one cannot taxonomise,

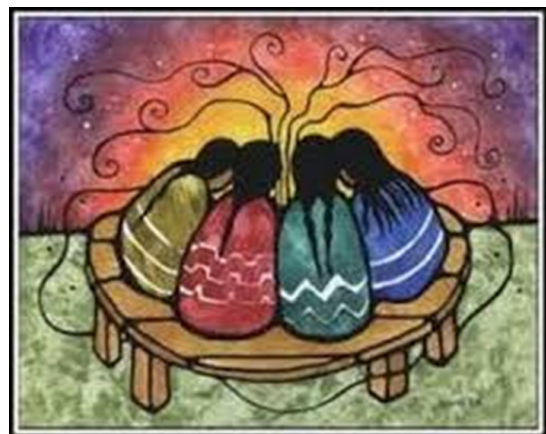
and what may not, in the end, be articulable in clinical language at all. The clinician's discipline is to remain available to such disclosure without converting it into something more manageable.

### Encounter as Collision

The biblical verb pagah, which Genesis 28:11 uses for Jacob's arrival at Beit El, carries within it the connotation of forcible meeting—of striking against. The Midrash plays upon this when it derives Makom from the verse: the encounter with the Place is not a sauntering arrival but a collision. This phenomenology is, I would argue, closer to the actual texture of meaningful clinical encounter than the urbane vocabulary of "consultation" suggests.

Three features of vayifga warrant operational attention. First, the encounter is initiated by the patient's arrival, but the place itself is agentive. Jacob does not simply enter a region; the Place meets him. In clinical analogue, the consulting room is not merely the venue of the encounter but a participant in it. The room's lighting, its proportions, its furniture, the orientation of chairs, the presence or absence of a desk between clinician and patient—all of these are not stage-set but co-agents in the disclosure that the encounter is or fails to be. The clinician who arranges the room as though it were neutral has misread the topology of Makom. There is no neutral room [18].

Second, the encounter is collisional rather than continuous. The smooth continuity of the appointment book conceals the discontinuity of each meeting. Each patient is a new vayifga, a new collision with a new Place. Clinicians who allow the rhythm of the appointment book to govern the phenomenology of the encounter—who walk from room to room as though each were a slightly varied iteration of the last—have abolished vayifga in favour of efficiency. The discipline here is not slowness for its own sake but the preservation of the discontinuous, the willingness to allow each encounter to be its own collision rather than its own iteration.



Third, the encounter is asymmetric in its phenomenology even though it must be reciprocal in its ethic. Jacob is the one who encounters; the Place is the one encountered. In clinical analogue, the patient encounters Makom in the room, and the clinician—if

she is doing her work well—is part of what the patient encounters. She does not encounter on the patient's terms; she becomes part of the place that the patient encounters. This is not to depersonalise her, but to relocate her within the topology. The clinician is not a fellow traveller in a shared neutral space; she is, for the duration of the encounter, one of the constituents of the place that the patient strikes against. This is, in part, what the Talmudic figure of the physician as shliach—as agent of healing—encodes [19].

### **Sacred Listening within Saturated Silence**

The most consequential operational implication of the framework concerns silence. In my earlier work on sacred listening I argued that the therapeutic discipline of listening differs from its merely procedural counterpart in being oriented to experiential encounter rather than to information extraction [16,20]. The framework of apophatic acosmism now permits a sharper formulation. Silence in the consulting room is not the absence of speech awaiting its arrival; it is the form in which the saturated immanence of Makom is most readily phenomenally available. To listen sacredly is to listen to silence as positively constituted rather than as a privation.

The Talmudic anecdote of Moses, Rabbi Akiva, and the divine instruction "Be silent, for such is My decree" (Menachot 29b)—which I have treated at length elsewhere [3]—offers the paradigm. The silence is not God's refusal to answer Moses; it is God's answer in the only mode appropriate to the question. Translated into the clinic, the principle becomes: when a patient asks the question to which there is no theological or medical answer—the why-me of the diagnosis, the what-now of the terminal prognosis, the where-is-God of intractable suffering—the clinician's silence is not failure of speech but disclosure of presence. The patient is not abandoned by the silence; the patient is, in that moment, given the form of presence that the question itself requires.

Operationally, this is among the hardest disciplines in clinical practice. The trained instinct of the modern physician is to fill silence with explanation, with reassurance, with the offering of further investigation. Each of these gestures, whatever their intention, converts the saturated silence back into a procedural medium and thereby reverses the disclosure. The clinician who can remain in the silence without filling it—who can let the silence be the answer—participates in what Wolfson has called the apophatic disclosure: the showing-through-not-showing whose deepest mode of presence is its refusal of premature manifestation.

This is not, I must emphasise, a counsel of clinical passivity. There is a register of silence that is mere awkwardness, a register that is avoidance, a register that is fatigue. None of these qualify. Saturated silence is silence consciously inhabited; it is the discipline of remaining attentively present to what cannot be said, while making the saying of it unnecessary. The patient learns, in such silence, that the absence of speech is not the absence of accompaniment. This learning is one of the most concretely therapeutic gifts that the framework makes available.



### **The Topology of the Clinic**

If the consulting room is one node within Makom, the topology of the clinic as a whole bears reconsideration. I have written elsewhere on the architecture of healing spaces and on a novel therapeutic clinic model integrating holistic principles [4,18]. The present framework allows the topology to be specified in terms drawn from the rabbinic and mystical traditions.

### **The threshold**

Jacob's encounter occurs at a liminal place—a stopping-point on a journey, neither point of origin nor destination. The clinic's threshold (the waiting room, the corridor, the reception desk) is its analogue. Most clinics treat the threshold as a vestibule whose only purpose is to deliver the patient to the consulting room. But the threshold is itself within Makom; it is the place at which the patient begins to be available for encounter. A threshold designed only for efficient delivery erases its own ritual function. A threshold designed for transition—with adequate quiet, with a softened lighting, with the absence of intrusive screens—performs a small but real consecration of the patient's arrival. This is not feng shui; it is the recognition that *vayifga* begins before the consulting room door opens.

### **The consulting room**

The consulting room is the densest node within the clinical topology, the place at which the encounter most fully discloses itself. Its design ought to honour, rather than obstruct, that disclosure. The relevant variables are not luxury but proportion: a room large enough that the patient is not pressed against the clinician's presence, small enough that the silence between them can be inhabited rather than dissipated. The desk, if present, ought not to function as a barrier; the chairs ought to be of comparable elevation so that no party gazes downward upon the other. These are practical translations of the principle that the patient is Makom and that the room is its disclosure.

### **The bedside**

In hospital practice the bedside is where the framework receives its most demanding test. The bedside is rarely designed; it is improvised against a backdrop of medical equipment, fluorescent lighting, and the perpetual incursion of monitoring. Yet it is at the bedside, more than in any consulting room, that *vayifga* most often occurs—the patient at the bedside is at a threshold not merely of

clinical assessment but of mortality, of identity, of being [21]. The clinician who has internalised the framework approaches the bedside not as a venue for the recitation of clinical data but as a place of encounter whose deepest disclosure occurs in the few unscripted moments at which the recitation pauses. The art of the bedside is the art of allowing those pauses.

### The corridor and the moment after

Finally, the framework asks that the clinician attend to the topology of the immediate aftermath. The minute or two after a difficult encounter—the corridor in which the clinician walks back to her office, the brief interval before the next chart is opened—is not a non-place. It is the place at which the encounter's significance either deposits itself in the clinician or is dissipated by the rhythm of the next task. Clinicians who learn to honour this brief liminal interval—who pause, however briefly, before opening the next door—gather the encounter rather than scatter it. This gathering is part of the clinician's own participation in Makom.

### The Wounded Healer

The clinician who inhabits this framework is not, and cannot be, a figure of consolidated mastery. She is, structurally, a wounded healer; and her woundedness is not a regrettable empirical fact about her biography but a participation in the deepest topology of the field. The image I have employed in earlier work is that of the fractured vav—the broken letter vav in certain liturgical and Torah-scribal traditions, which encodes a theology of sacred brokenness. The vav, the connecting letter par excellence, is broken precisely at the point of connection. The connection is not abolished by the fracture; the connection is constituted by it.

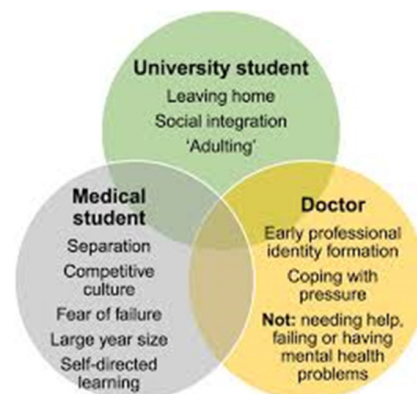
In the framework of apophatic acosmism, this is no longer a poetic image only. It is the structural claim that the clinician's capacity to be present to the patient's woundedness depends on her capacity to inhabit her own. The unbroken clinician—the clinician for whom the suffering of patients remains a problem to be solved rather than a place to be entered—has not yet become a participant in Makom. She has remained the rider, surveying the terrain from the saddle. The clinician who has been broken (by illness, by grief, by clinical failure, by the simple sustained exposure to mortality that any career in medicine entails) and who has refused either to deny the breakage or to be defined by it, has been inducted into the fractured vav. She has become, in her own modest way, a place at which connection is constituted through fracture.

There is a danger in this claim, which I will not minimise. The figure of the wounded healer can become a sentimental self-image that licences a clinician's own unresolved suffering to be displaced onto patients. The framework offers no warrant for such displacement. The clinician's woundedness becomes therapeutically operative only when it has been sufficiently digested to function as a place rather than as a leak. The criterion is not whether the clinician has been wounded but whether her woundedness has become hospitable. Hospitable woundedness is the clinical analogue of Makom: a place whose porosity allows the patient to be received [17,22].

### Limits, Objections, and the Question of Secular Settings

The framework I have articulated is, manifestly, Jewish and theological in its sources. Three objections naturally arise. First, it might be said that the framework presupposes a religious metaphysics that the majority of clinicians and patients do not share. To this the response is that the framework does not require that the clinician hold the metaphysics as a personal creed in order to inhabit the clinical posture it specifies. The disciplines of therapeutic *tzimtzum*, apophatic receptivity, saturated silence, and hospitable woundedness can be undertaken by a clinician who is theologically agnostic; what they require is not theological assent but the practical recognition that the encounter exceeds what clinical taxonomy can encompass. The framework provides the strongest available articulation of why these disciplines matter; it does not require that the clinician affirm its metaphysics in order to practise its phenomenology.

Second, it might be objected that the framework is parochial in a deeper sense—that even its phenomenology is shaped by Jewish mystical idioms that secular or differently-religious clinicians cannot enter without translation. This objection has more force, and I would not deny it entirely. But every clinical phenomenology arrives shaped by some tradition; the choice is not between situated and unsituated frameworks but between frameworks that disclose their situatedness and frameworks that conceal it. The framework I am proposing is candidly Jewish in idiom and structurally hospitable to its analogues in other traditions: The Christian apophatic tradition of Dionysius and the *via negativa*, the Sufi doctrines of *khalwa* and *fana*, the Buddhist phenomenologies of empty awareness. The structural insight that the therapeutic space is suspended within a field that exceeds positive characterization is not the exclusive property of Lurianic Kabbalah, even if Lurianic Kabbalah supplies its most articulated rabbinic version.



Third, it might be objected that the framework is operationally vague—that it tells the clinician how to be but not what to do. This objection mistakes the framework's deliberate scope. It is not a manual of intervention; it is an account of the ground upon which intervention occurs. The decision of whether to image a stroke, prescribe an antidepressant, or recommend hospice care is not made by the framework. The disposition with which one sits with the patient before, during, and after such decisions is what

the framework addresses. A clinician who has not attended to the ground will not be improved as a clinician by a sharper algorithm. A clinician who has attended to the ground will find her algorithms operating differently, even when their content is unchanged.

### **Formation Rather than Training: Implications for Medical Education**

The deepest operational implication of the framework concerns medical education. The disciplines I have described are not trainable in the technical sense; they are formable. The distinction is consequential. Training inculcates the use of an instrument; formation shapes the person who uses the instrument. Modern medical education excels at training and largely abdicates formation. The framework of apophatic acosmism implies that this abdication is not a regrettable supplement but a structural failure, since the disciplines without which the therapeutic space cannot be inhabited are precisely formational [23].

What might a curriculum of formation involve? Three threads suggest themselves. The first is the disciplined exposure of students to clinical encounters in which the algorithm has run out—dementia care, end-of-life care, intractable pain, undiagnosable illness—not as failures of the medical project but as exemplary occasions for the formation of the clinical self. The second is the patient and sustained reading of texts that articulate the phenomenology of the encounter rather than its technique: Buber, Levinas, Rita Charon, the rabbinic and Hasidic sources I have drawn upon, but also Tolstoy and Cassell and Kleinman. The third is the structured practice of reflective writing, in which students are required to attend, in language, to encounters that resist the language of the case presentation.

None of these threads is novel; each has been argued for, in different idioms, by the medical humanities movement of the past two decades. What the framework I am proposing adds is the metaphysical claim that supports them. The medical humanities are not optional embellishments to the technical curriculum; they are the substrate without which the technical curriculum produces clinicians unprepared for the topology in which their clinical lives must actually be conducted. Hospitable woundedness, saturated silence, and apophatic receptivity are not soft skills. They are the conditions under which the clinical encounter discloses itself as what it is.

### **From Theory to Vocation**

The framework I have sketched in Part I and developed operationally in Part II is not, in the final analysis, a theory of clinical practice. It is the rearticulation of clinical practice as a vocation in the strong sense: a calling into a topology that one did not design and cannot exit. Vocation here is not chosen career but received placement. The clinician who has been called into the therapeutic space has been placed within Makom; her work is to inhabit the placement with the disciplines its topology requires.

This rearticulation may sound, to ears trained in the procedural language of contemporary medicine, like a romanticization. I

would argue, on the contrary, that it is a sobering. To grasp that the consulting room is not one's own, that the silence one shares with a patient is not empty, that one's own woundedness is part of the topology rather than its impediment, is to be released from the illusion of clinical mastery into the more demanding reality of clinical participation. The clinician is not the rider over the horse of her practice. She is a fellow inhabitant of a place whose name is one of the names of God, and her ongoing question is not whether she has mastered the place but whether she has, on this Tuesday at 2:30, allowed it to disclose itself through her.

Vayifga ba-Makom: he encountered the Place. The verse is, as Part I argued, not merely Jacob's. It is the verse of every clinical encounter in which the rider has dismounted and the place has begun to speak. The operational task of the clinician—patient, ordinary, formed rather than merely trained—is to keep dismounting; to keep allowing the place to speak; and, when it has spoken, to remain in the silence that follows long enough for what was said to be heard.

### **Addendum**



### **The Cloak as Levush — A Difficulty Pressed by the Commentator**

Above, we argued that the horse-and-rider mashal of Bereishit Rabbah 68:9 collapses under the pressure of its own opening formulation: it presupposes external relation, separability, and mutual exteriority, all of which the doctrine of Makom abolishes. The reading there was, in effect, negative—the mashal teaches by failing in the right way. A closer encounter with the classical commentator Eshed HaNechalim on the same Midrash forces me to refine that judgement. The mashal does indeed fail on the literal reading; but the failure is the entrance to a deeper reading, on which the mashal redeems itself as a precise figure of the kabbalistic doctrine of divine garments (levushim). The present addendum sets out that deeper reading.

Eshed HaNechalim, glossing the Midrashic phrase shehu mekombo ("that He is its place"), presses a sequence of difficulties against the surface logic of the mashal. After explaining that just as a physical place bears and sustains what is established within it, so

the Holy One is the place of all worlds and their cause (sibatam), the commentator turns to the parable itself and raises three sharp questions:

**אשר הנחלים**  
לשאלה. שכתוב למד בחילתה אף שכתוב ה' בסופה. ומיישב שה' הוא במקום ה' הדיעה, כלומר למקום האחרון הרע שבכולם הנורע ברעוהו יותר מכולם וז"ל: [ט] שהוא מקומו בו. כמו שהמקום סובל ומחזיק את המהקומים בו, כן כביכול הוא מקום כל העולמות וסבתם. ואין עולמו מעונו. ח"ו שידומה כפשוטו שהוא צריך לעולמו ולמקום עד שיזכור להביא ראיה מהכתוב. גם לכאורה לפי המשל צריך על כל פנים לומר לרכוב עליו. גם מהו המשל בכליו שהם משופעים. וגם אחר שקראו אלהי קדם אף ידומה כי העולם מעונו, ולפנים איה היה מעונו. והנראה מזה המשל שהכוונה על אופן אשר לפי שיש מן המדמים שסודר הבריאה ומערכתה ואופן החכמה אשר בה היא כמחוייבת מפני שהשכל מבין מעט מסדר הבריאה על פי חכמה המיוסדת בשכל, וא"כ לפי זה מדמים סודר טבע העולם הוא נמצע השתנות והיא מחוייבת מצד עצמותה וטבעה, וא"כ לפי דעתם ה' כ"ה סבתו רק על דרך החיוב, באין לו ח"ו יכולת ורצון לשנותם, וא"כ אין הוא מעון העולם וסבתו,

**לשמה והמ מג. וילע בוכרל סוסל מינפ לכ לע צירצ לשמה יפל הרואכל מג בלועה יכ המודי היא מדק יהלא וארקש רחא מגו. מיעפושמ מהש וילכב ונועמ היה היא מינפלו, ונועמ**

Also, *prima facie*, according to the parable one would in any case require a horse to ride upon. And further: what is the parable conveying by its garments which drape over [keilav shehem meshufa'im]? And further still: after He has been called the God of Old (Elohei kedem), how could one suppose that the world is His dwelling—and previously, where would His dwelling have been?

The three questions tighten the screw of the difficulty progressively. The first is structural: any literal application of the parable would imply that God needs a "horse" upon which to ride—an intolerable conclusion. The second is the question I shall develop here at length: what does the *meshal* mean by the horse's *draping garments* (keilav shehem meshufa'im)? This image is not a casual ornament of the parable; if the *meshal* is doing real work, the draping garments must do real work too. The third is temporal: if the world is God's dwelling-place, then prior to the world's coming into being, where did God dwell? Each question, taken in isolation, can be deflected. Taken together, they make the surface logic of the *meshal* untenable.

Eshed HaNechalim's own resolution moves in an anti-deistic direction: the *meshal*, he argues, is meant to counter those who would make the order of creation a necessary structure, with God reduced to a compelled cause rather than a willing dwelling-place. That resolution is theologically powerful and not, in my reading, mistaken. But it does not answer the second question—what the draping garments contribute—and it is precisely there that the kabbalistic doctrine of *levushim* opens a further depth.

### Levushim in the Kabbalistic Tradition

The term *levush* ("garment"), in its kabbalistic deployment, names something quite specific: a mode of self-presentation in which a higher reality clothes itself in a lower in order to become encounterable, without thereby ceasing to be what it is. The garment is neither identical with the one who wears it nor separable from him during the wearing. It is the medium of disclosure precisely because it is the medium of concealment.

In the Lurianic system, the doctrine of *partzufim* and the cascade of *olamot* are saturated with this logic. Or Ein Sof, the infinite light, does not relate to creation in its naked essence (which would obliterate creation) but through successive *itlabshut*—self-garmentings—within the *kelim* of the *sefirot* and the configurations

of the *partzufim*. In the *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi articulates the same logic at the level of human soul-life: the soul possesses three garments—thought, speech, and action (*machshava*, *dibbur*, *ma'aseh*)—through which it expresses itself in the world [9]. The soul is not its garments, but it cannot act upon the world without them. The Or Ein Sof, by perfect analogy at the cosmological level, is not the worlds, but cannot constitute the worlds without garmenting itself in them.

What is decisive for the present argument is the structural feature of this doctrine: the garment *connects* precisely by appearing to separate. The *levush* makes it possible to speak of "the wearer and the worn" while simultaneously naming the relation between them as one of intimate self-extension rather than external juxtaposition. From within the garment's logic, there is no question of "two things"; there is one wearer whose presence reaches outward through the medium of garmentation. From outside the garment's logic, the appearance is dual: one sees rider and horse, soul and body, God and world. The art of mystical reading, on Wolfson's account, is to learn to see the dual appearance as the single wearing [8,10].

It is at this point that the Eshed HaNechalim's difficulty becomes a doorway. The commentator asks: what do the draping garments of the horse contribute to the parable? The answer that the kabbalistic tradition makes available is: the draping garments are not an incidental detail of the *meshal* but its theological centre.

### The Phenomenology of the Cloak

Consider what a horse-and-rider, fully appointed in the manner the *meshal* seems to invite, actually looks like at a distance. The rider sits in his saddle. From his shoulders falls a cloak that drapes over the saddle, over the flanks of the horse, sometimes nearly to the ground. The horse wears its own *caparison*—the trappings, the saddle-blanket, the bridle and reins—which are the rider's instruments of control but also visually continuous with the rider's own garments. At close range the eye distinguishes rider, horse, cloak, saddle, blanket, harness. From sufficient distance the eye distinguishes nothing of the kind. What one sees is a single moving figure: a rider in flowing robes, whose lower extent simply is the horse and its appointments. The horse has disappeared into the cloak.

This is, I would argue, the precise phenomenology that the Eshed HaNechalim's draping garments (keilav shehem meshufa'im) silently invoke. The *meshal* is not merely picturing a rider and a horse standing in adjacent regions of space, related by control. It is picturing a unified figure whose internal articulation into rider, horse, and garments is visible only at close range and dissolves into a single appearance at distance. The "horse-ness" of the horse is, from afar, indistinguishable from the cloak that drapes from the rider's shoulders.

Apply this phenomenology to the theological referent. From any conceivable distance—and "distance" here means ontological depth, not Cartesian extension—the world is the *levush* of the

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divine Rider. What we, located at the level of created perception, distinguish as God-and-world is, from the standpoint of ein od milvado, a single self-presentation of the divine in its draping garments. The world is the cloak; the cloak is not the rider, but neither is it a separate entity in the rider's vicinity. It is the rider extended through his own self-garmentation.

This is the meaning, I would suggest, of the Tanya's repeated insistence that "ein od milvado" is not a counterfactual claim about a future eschatological state but an immediately true description of the metaphysical present, hidden only by the operation of tzimtzum and its garments [9]. To see the world from the inside of created perception is to see horse and rider as two; to see the world from the standpoint of its own deepest truth is to see only the rider in his levushim. Both perceptions are veridical at their own level; the deeper perception subsumes the surface one without abolishing it.

### **The Mashal Redeemed: A Two-Stage Hermeneutics**

We may now revise the verdict of Part I. There I argued that the horse-and-rider mashal collapses because it presupposes external relation, separability, and mutual exteriority. That argument stands at the level at which it was made: the mashal does collapse on its literal reading. What I did not see clearly enough then is that the collapse is the first half of a two-stage pedagogy, and that the Eshed HaNechalim's pressing of the garments-question marks the transition to the second half.

On the first reading, the student is offered the mashal as a model: rider stands for God, horse stands for world, the rider's asymmetric priority stands for divine transcendence. The student who accepts the model has not yet learned the Midrash. On the second reading, the model is shown to break under three internal pressures (the three questions Eshed HaNechalim presses). The student who registers the breakage has begun to learn the Midrash but has not yet finished. On the third reading—the reading that the doctrine of levushim makes available—the mashal returns as figure rather than model. The rider, the horse, and the draping cloak are not three things in a relation but one unified self-presentation of the divine Wearer in his garments of world. The "horse" was never an independent entity to be related to the rider; it was always, from the standpoint of the deeper reading, the lower extent of the rider's own visible drape.

The structure is recognisably the same as the structure of the non-literal reading of tzimtzum itself. Tzimtzum kipshuto—the literal reading—posits an actual withdrawal, an actual vacated space, a real ontological outside. Tzimtzum lo kipshuto preserves the appearance of withdrawal while denying its ontological reality; the chahal panui is vacated only from the standpoint of created perception and remains saturated with concealed divinity from the standpoint of divine being. The mashal of horse and rider, on its surface reading, posits an actual horse, an actual rider, and an actual external relation. The mashal of horse and rider, on its levushim reading, preserves the appearance of horse-and-rider while denying its ontological reality; the "horse" is vacated only from the standpoint of created perception and remains, from the

standpoint of divine being, the draping garment of the unified Rider.

What the mashal therefore ultimately teaches—and what the Eshed HaNechalim's difficulty about the garments forces into view—is the doctrine of a single Presence appearing as manifold through its own levushim. The mashal does not point to two entities asymmetrically related. It points to one divine Wearer whose self-extension into the manifold of creation is the worldhood of the world. To say "He is the place of the world" is now to say: the world is His drape. To say "the world is not His place" is now to say: the drape is not the Wearer. To say that the rider is not subordinate to the horse is to say: the Wearer is not constituted by His garments, even while the garments are the visible mode of His presence.

This redemption of the mashal is, I want to emphasise, not a contradiction of the collapse argued in Part I. It is its completion. The mashal collapses on the literal reading precisely so that the levushim reading can come into view. As I noted in Part I, the rabbinic mashal does not communicate by similitude but by the controlled failure of similitude [8]. The Eshed HaNechalim's difficulties make the failure visible; the doctrine of levushim, available to the reader who has internalised the kabbalistic tradition, names what is shown through the failure.

### **Clinical Implications: The Therapeutic Encounter as Levush**

Part II of the unified essay developed the operational consequences of the framework for therapeutic posture, listening, and the topology of the clinic. The levushim reading sharpens those consequences in a specific way: it allows the apparent two-ness of the clinical encounter to be re-seen as the manifold appearance of a single field. The clinician sees, ordinarily, two persons in a room: herself and her patient. The framework of Part II already begins to displace this perception, by locating both within Makom. The levushim reading completes the displacement. What appears as two persons is the manifold disclosure of a single sacred topology in its draping garments.

Three further operational implications follow from this. First, the patient's body, history, and symptoms—the very objects upon which clinical attention ordinarily fastens—are not extrinsic to sacred presence but are themselves levushim within which sacred presence is encountered. The patient as sacred text [6] is, on this reading, the patient as draping garment of the divine Wearer who is, simultaneously, the deeper identity of the clinician's own encountering presence. The clinical apparatus—the instruments, the diagnostic frame, the recorded history, the room itself—is not a distraction from sacred encounter but the very fabric of the cloak through which the encounter is made phenomenally available.

Second, the discipline of therapeutic tzimtzum, which I have elsewhere named as the clinician's self-contraction to make space for the patient's being [5], must be understood in light of the levushim doctrine. The clinician's self-contraction is not a withdrawal of her presence from the room; it is a re-garmentation

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of her presence in a mode that allows the patient's own self-disclosure to occupy the perceptual foreground. The clinician does not vanish; she becomes part of the drape through which the unified field becomes visible. This is why the discipline cannot be reduced to technique: it is not a behaviour but a participation in the topology of garmentation itself.

Third, the figure of the wounded healer [17,22] receives, through the levushim reading, its deepest structural articulation. The clinician's woundedness is not a defect of the garment but its texture. A perfectly seamless garment would conceal the Wearer entirely; a garment whose tears and seams are visible reveals, through its imperfections, the deeper figure it adorns. The fractured vav, the broken letter at the point of connection, is the local visible imperfection of the clinical levush through which the Wearer is encountered. The clinician's hospitable woundedness is therefore not a regrettable feature of her clinical equipment to be minimised but the very point at which the garment becomes diaphanous.

### **Coda: The Cloak That Encompasses**

The Midrash on Makom asks why we call the Holy One blessed be He by the name "Place." Eshed HaNechalim, pressing the parable that the Midrash itself offered, asks what the draping garments of the horse contribute to the figure. The two questions, joined, yield a single answer. God is named Makom because the world is His drape: not other than Him, not identical with Him, but the visible extent of His unified self-presentation through levushim. The horse and rider, viewed from sufficient depth, are not two things asymmetrically related but one figure in flowing robes whose internal articulation is the difference between Wearer and worn.

Vayifga ba-Makom—he encountered the Place. The Place that Jacob encountered was not a region within which God happened to be present. The Place was the divine self-presentation in its draping garments; Jacob walked, unawares, into the very fabric of the Wearer's cloak. So too with every clinical encounter rightly inhabited. The patient is not in a room with a clinician; the clinician is not in a room with a patient; both are within the draping garments of a single Place, and the discipline of the work is to learn, slowly, to see the seam between them as the texture of the cloak rather than as the boundary between two separate beings. From far enough away, the mashal at last reveals: there is only the Rider, and the world is His robe.

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