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Review Article

Divine Names, Human Psyche, and the Emergence of Process Theology: A Study in the Evolution of Theological Consciousness

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Abstract

This study examines the theological, psychological, and mystical dimensions of Exodus 6:3, wherein God declares to Moses: "I appeared to your ancestors as El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH I was not known to them". Far from a simple historical marker distinguishing patriarchal from Mosaic religion, this verse emerges as a hinge text that anticipates what modern theology would term "process thought"-the understanding that divine-human relationship unfolds dynamically through history. Drawing upon biblical scholarship, classical midrash, Kabbalistic hermeneutics, modern process theology, and post-Holocaust thought, this essay argues that divine names function not as static descriptors of an unchanging divine essence but as relational disclosures calibrated to the evolving psychological and spiritual capacity of humanity. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH charts a movement from divine containment to divine exposure, from promise to presence, from assurance to encounter with rupture and ethical demand. This trajectory, already implicit in biblical and rabbinic sources, reaches full articulation in the work of post-Holocaust theologians who understand God as suffering history's catastrophes alongside humanity. The essay integrates the hermeneutical insights of Michael Fishbane, the historical scholarship of Moshe Idel, the philosophical analyses of Elliot Wolfson, the mystical interpretations of Shaul Magid, the Hasidic scholarship of Joseph Weiss, and the theological synthesis of Louis Jacobs.

Keywords: *Divine Names; El Shaddai; YHWH; Tetragrammaton; Process Theology; Kabbalah; Tzimtzum; Shekhinah; Post-Holocaust Theology; Hermeneutic Medicine*

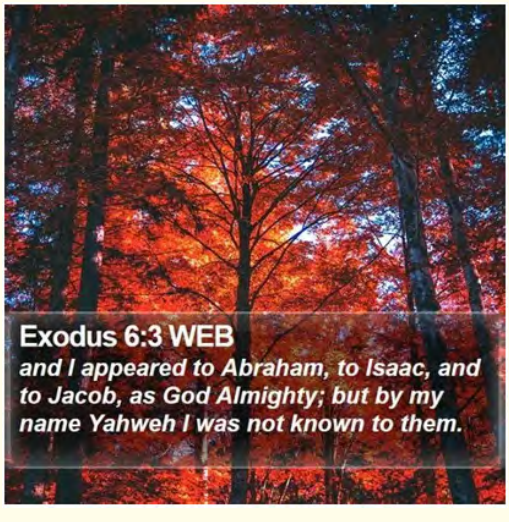

Figure 1

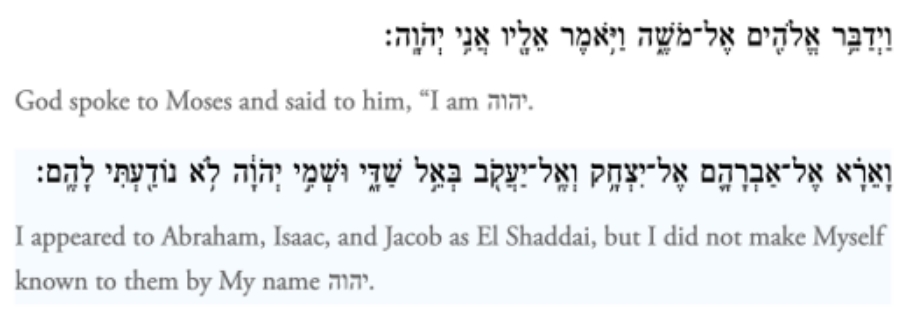

Figure 2

Introduction: The Verse as Theological Axis

"I appeared to your ancestors as El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH I was not known to them" (Exodus 6:3). This declaration, placed at the threshold of the Exodus narrative, has generated interpretive perplexity across millennia of Jewish and Christian exegesis. The plain sense of the verse suggests a discontinuity in divine self-revelation: the patriarchs knew God under one name, while Moses and his generation would encounter God under another. Yet this surface reading immediately encounters the textual difficulty that the Tetragrammaton appears frequently in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, raising the question of whether the verse speaks of nominal designation or experiential knowledge [1,2].

Modern biblical scholarship has addressed this tension through source-critical analysis, attributing the divine names to different documentary traditions. The Priestly source (P), in which Exodus 6:3 is typically located, presents a theology wherein YHWH was first revealed to Moses, while the earlier Jahwist (J) source used the Tetragrammaton from the beginning of creation. While this historical-critical approach resolves certain textual difficulties, it does not exhaust the theological significance of the verse [3]. Indeed, as Michael Fishbane has demonstrated, the biblical text itself engages in a process of inner-biblical exegesis wherein later traditions reinterpret earlier formulations, generating layers of meaning that exceed any single historical context [4].

This essay proposes that Exodus 6:3 functions as what Fishbane terms a "traditum" that generates ongoing "traditio"-a foundational text whose interpretation across traditions reveals an evolving understanding of the divine-human relationship [5]. More specifically, the verse articulates what modern theology would call a "process" understanding of God: the divine is not static and immutable but enters into genuine relationship with creation, affected by history even as history is drawn toward divine possibility. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH does not mark a change in the divine essence but a deepening of human capacity to encounter the divine in its fuller dimensions.

The theological stakes of this reading are considerable. If divine names are modes of encounter calibrated to human capacity, then theology itself becomes a developmental discipline-not the static contemplation of eternal verities but the ongoing exploration of how finite consciousness can apprehend infinite reality. The patriarchs, the Mosaic generation, the medieval mystics, and post-Holocaust theologians all encountered the same God, but through different modal configurations appropriate to their historical and existential situations. This insight, we shall argue, has significant implications not only for academic theology but for contemporary spiritual practice and even for clinical encounter.

Biblical theology: El Shaddai and the psychology of promise

The patriarchal narratives present a distinctive theological world. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob encounter God primarily in the context of promise: the promise of land, descendants, and blessing. Yet these promises remain conspicuously unfulfilled throughout Genesis. Abraham dies as a stranger in the land promised to his descendants; Isaac lives his entire life without seeing the fulfillment of the blessing; Jacob's family descends into Egypt, landless and vulnerable. The patriarchal faith is thus characterized by trust in divine assurance without empirical confirmation-what the Epistle to the Hebrews would later characterize as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

Within this theological framework, El Shaddai functions as the appropriate divine name. The etymology of Shaddai remains debated among scholars. Traditional interpretation, reflected in the Septuagint's translation as "Pantokrator" (Almighty), understands the name as expressing divine power and sovereignty. Modern scholarship has proposed alternative etymologies: connections to Akkadian "shadu" (mountain), suggesting the God of the cosmic mountain; or Hebrew "shad" (breast), suggesting connotations of nurture and sustenance; or the Hebrew particle "she" combined with "dai" (sufficient), yielding "the one who is sufficient" [6]. Regardless of etymology, the name's function in the patriarchal narratives is clear: El Shaddai is the God of blessing, fertility, and continuity.

The key texts confirm this function. "I am El Shaddai", God declares to Abraham, "walk before me and be blameless... I will make you exceedingly fruitful" (Genesis 17:1-6). Similarly, Isaac blesses Jacob with the words: "May El Shaddai bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples" (Genesis 28:3). And Jacob, blessing Joseph's sons, invokes "El Shaddai who has blessed me, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil" (Genesis 48:15-16). In each case, the name El Shaddai appears in contexts of blessing, fertility, and the promise of future flourishing.

Psychologically, El Shaddai corresponds to what might be termed a posture of containment and reassurance. The patriarchs inhabit an uncertain world-nomadic, vulnerable, dependent on the goodwill of surrounding peoples. Their faith requires a God who guarantees future flourishing even when present circumstances offer no evidence of such guarantee. El Shaddai functions as what psychoanalytic theory might call a "holding environment"-a divine presence that stabilizes anxiety rather than intensifying it [7]. The patriarchs can venture into unknown territories and face uncertain futures precisely because El Shaddai has promised that their seed will endure.

Louis Jacobs, in his comprehensive study of Jewish theology, observes that the patriarchal religion represents a distinct phase in the evolution of Israelite consciousness. The patriarchs experience God primarily through theophany and promise; they do not yet encounter God as redeemer, lawgiver, or covenantal partner in the full sense that emerges at Sinai [8]. Jacobs notes that this is not a deficiency in patriarchal religion but rather a stage appropriate to its historical and psychological context. The patriarchs needed a God of promise because they lived in a world where fulfillment remained eschatological rather than historical.

The psychological dimension of this theology deserves emphasis. To know God as El Shaddai is to know God as the guarantor of future flourishing, not yet as the one who enters into history to transform it. The patriarchs trust God but do not yet know God as the one who hears the cry of the oppressed, descends to deliver, and establishes covenant through historical action. This knowledge awaits the Exodus-a knowledge not merely nominal but experiential, inscribed in the collective memory of a people who have witnessed divine power overcoming the greatest empire of the ancient world.

Classical midrash: Fidelity without fulfillment

The rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 6:3 represents a hermeneutical tour de force. Faced with the apparent contradiction between the verse's claim that YHWH was not known to the patriarchs and the frequent appearance of the Tetragrammaton in Genesis, the rabbis develop an interpretation that transforms the theological meaning of the text while preserving its textual integrity. Rather than dismissing

the difficulty or resorting to emendation, the midrash finds in the apparent contradiction a profound teaching about the nature of faith and knowledge.

The key move appears in the Mekhilta and is elaborated in subsequent midrashic collections. The midrash reads Exodus 6:3 not as a historical statement about divine names but as a rebuke to Moses [9]. God says, in effect: "The patriarchs trusted me even when my promises remained unfulfilled. Abraham was promised the land, yet he had to purchase a burial plot for Sarah. Isaac was promised blessing, yet he was driven from place to place by famine. Jacob was promised protection, yet he fled from Esau and labored for Laban. They did not demand to know my attribute of faithful fulfillment (the meaning the rabbis associate with YHWH). But you, Moses, after I promised deliverance, immediately complained when Pharaoh increased the burden on Israel".

This interpretation hinges on a crucial distinction between nominal and experiential knowledge. The patriarchs "knew" the name YHWH in the sense of hearing it pronounced-the text of Genesis itself records God speaking to them using the Tetragrammaton. But they did not "know" YHWH in the sense of experiencing God's attribute of faithfulness in action. They lived and died trusting in promises that remained unrealized. Their knowledge of God was thus some knowledge through faith rather than through historical demonstration.

Fishbane's analysis of inner-biblical exegesis illuminates the hermeneutical dynamics at work here. The midrash does not simply impose meaning upon the text but draws out implications latent in the biblical language itself [10]. The Hebrew word for "know" (yada) carries connotations of intimate, experiential acquaintance, not merely intellectual apprehension. When Genesis states that "Adam knew (yada) Eve his wife" (Genesis 4:1), the knowledge in question is obviously not nominal. The midrash extends this semantic range to argue that "knowing" a divine name means encountering the divine attribute that name represents.

Joseph Weiss, in his groundbreaking studies of Hasidic thought, demonstrates how this midrashic distinction between nominal and experiential knowledge became foundational for later mystical interpretation [11]. The Hasidic masters would elaborate this distinction into a comprehensive epistemology wherein knowledge of God is never merely propositional but always involves the transformation of the knower. To "know" YHWH is to participate in the divine attribute of faithful presence; it is not merely to utter the name or understand its referent.

The midrashic interpretation also carries profound implications for understanding the relationship between faith and history. The patriarchs are praised precisely for their willingness to trust God without historical confirmation. Their faith is, in Kierkegaardian terms, a "leap" that finds no support in empirical evidence. Moses, by contrast, is gently rebuked for demanding immediate results. Yet the text also suggests that the Mosaic generation will receive what the patriarchs only trusted: they will "know" YHWH through the concrete experience of deliverance from Egypt.

This dialectic between faith and history anticipates central concerns of modern theology. The patriarchs represent what Paul Tillich would call "ultimate concern" directed toward the future; Moses represents the demand for historical manifestation [12]. The midrash suggests that both postures are necessary: faith that trusts without evidence, and expectation that demands divine action in history. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH encompasses both moments-the divine name expanding to include not only promise but fulfillment, not only assurance but redemption.

Kabbalistic hermeneutics: Names as modes of contraction and disclosure

The Kabbalistic interpretation of divine names represents perhaps the most sophisticated theological development of the themes implicit in Exodus 6:3. Within the Kabbalistic framework, divine names are not merely designations but actual modes of divine presence-channels through which the infinite light of Ein Sof becomes accessible to created consciousness. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH thus represents not a change in naming convention but a fundamental shift in the modality of divine self-disclosure.

Moshe Idel's comprehensive studies of Kabbalah provide essential framework for understanding this development. Idel distinguishes between what he terms "theosophical" and "ecstatic" Kabbalah-the former focused on the inner dynamics of the divine realm, the latter on techniques for achieving mystical union [13]. In theosophical Kabbalah, particularly as developed in the Zohar, divine names correspond to the sefirot-the ten aspects or attributes through which Ein Sof manifests in creation. El Shaddai is associated with Yesod, the sefirah of foundation and generativity, while YHWH in its fullness encompasses the entire sefirotic structure, particularly the central sefirah of Tiferet.

The Zohar's interpretation of Exodus 6:3 develops this association with characteristic subtlety. The patriarchs knew God through the lower sefirot-the modes of divine presence most accessible to human consciousness in its ordinary state. YHWH, by contrast, represents a fuller disclosure of divine being, accessible only through the transformative experience of redemption [14]. The Zohar thus reads the verse as describing a progression in humanity's capacity to receive divine light, not a change in the divine itself. The vessel expands to receive more light; the light itself remains infinite.

Elliot Wolfson's analysis of Kabbalistic hermeneutics illuminates the epistemological dimensions of this interpretation. Wolfson argues that for the Kabbalists, language-particularly the Hebrew language of Scripture-is not merely a vehicle for communication but a medium of divine presence [15]. Divine names are not arbitrary signs but actual concentrations of divine energy. To pronounce a divine name is to invoke the divine attribute it embodies; to "know" a divine name is to participate in its reality. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH is thus not merely a change in vocabulary but a transformation in the mode of human participation in divine life.

Central to Kabbalistic interpretation is the concept of tzimtzum-divine self-contraction or withdrawal. As elaborated by Isaac Luria and his school, tzimtzum describes the primordial act whereby Ein Sof contracted its infinite light to create a "space" for finite creation [16]. This concept provides a framework for understanding divine names as modes of contraction. El Shaddai, on this reading, represents a more contracted mode of divine presence-God as "sufficient" (dai) or "setting limits" (shaddai). YHWH represents a more expanded disclosure, though still infinitely contracted relative to the infinite light of Ein Sof.

Idel traces the development of these ideas through medieval and early modern Kabbalah, demonstrating how different schools elaborated the relationship between divine names and sefirotic dynamics [17]. The Cordoverian system developed elaborate correspondences between divine names and sefirotic configurations, while Lurianic Kabbalah emphasized the dynamic, developmental character of divine self-disclosure. What emerges from Idel's historical analysis is a tradition that consistently understood divine names as relational and developmental rather than static and essential.

Shaul Magid's work on Hasidic thought demonstrates how these Kabbalistic ideas were transformed in the Hasidic movement of the eighteenth century [18]. The Hasidic masters, while drawing on Kabbalistic terminology, shifted emphasis from theosophical speculation to psychological and devotional application. Divine names became understood not merely as aspects of the divine realm but as modes of human consciousness. To encounter El Shaddai is to experience God through the psychological posture of trust and containment; to encounter YHWH is to experience God through the posture of presence and redemption.

The Maggid of Mezritch, the primary disciple of the Baal Shem Tov and architect of Hasidic theology, developed this psychological reading with particular sophistication. As Weiss has demonstrated, the Maggid understood all religious language as fundamentally describing states of consciousness [19]. Divine names are not descriptions of an external deity but modes of encountering the divine presence that pervades all reality. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH describes not a change in God but a transformation in human capacity to perceive divine presence.

Wolfson extends this analysis to argue that Kabbalistic hermeneutics anticipates certain insights of post-modern thought. The Kabbalistic understanding of language as constitutive rather than merely representative-as actually embodying divine presence rather

than simply pointing to it-challenges the representationalist assumptions of modern Western philosophy [20]. Divine names do not represent a transcendent deity; they are modes of divine immanence. This insight, Wolfson suggests, aligns Kabbalah with post-modern critiques of metaphysical presence while preserving a robust understanding of divine reality.

Process theology: God as becoming-with

Modern process theology, developing from the philosophical work of Alfred North Whitehead and the theological elaborations of Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb, and others, provides a framework for understanding the theological implications of Exodus 6:3 in contemporary terms. Process theology rejects the classical theistic conception of God as absolute, immutable, and unaffected by creation. Instead, it proposes a God who is genuinely relational-who affects and is affected by the world, who experiences the world's joys and sufferings, and whose own being is in some sense constituted through relationship with creation.

The fundamental insight of process theology is that reality is constituted by relationships rather than by static substances. Every actual entity, in Whitehead's terminology, is a "process of becoming" that synthesizes its relationships with other entities into a novel unity [21]. God, within this framework, is not an exception to metaphysical principles but their chief exemplification. God is supremely relational-present to every entity, experiencing every entity's experience, and offering to every entity possibilities for its becoming. God has what Whitehead calls a "primordial nature" (the eternal vision of possibilities) and a "consequent nature" (the reception and integration of all worldly experience).

This relational understanding of God resonates remarkably with the theology implicit in Exodus 6:3. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH, read through a process lens, describes not a change in the divine essence but a deepening of divine-human relationship. God's self-disclosure is calibrated to human capacity and need. The patriarchs, in their situation of promise without fulfillment, encountered God as El Shaddai-the God who guarantees future flourishing. Moses and Israel, in their situation of oppression and imminent deliverance, would encounter God as YHWH-the God who acts in history to redeem.

Louis Jacobs, while not himself a process theologian, recognizes the affinity between process thought and certain strands of Jewish theology [22]. Jacobs notes that the rabbinic tradition consistently resisted the philosophical tendency toward divine immutability. The God of rabbinic Judaism is a God who responds to prayer, who experiences joy and sorrow, who celebrates Israel's triumphs and mourns Israel's failures. This is not, Jacobs argues, mere anthropomorphism; it reflects a genuine intuition that God's relationship with creation involves real responsiveness.

The Kabbalistic tradition, as Idel and Wolfson have demonstrated, pushes this relational understanding even further. The doctrine of shevirat ha-kelim (the breaking of the vessels) and the corresponding imperative of tikkun (repair) suggest that God's own being is in some sense fragmented and that human action participates in divine restoration [23,24]. This is a remarkably process-like conception: God is not complete without creation; divine wholeness is achieved through the relationship between God and world.

Exodus 6:3 thus reads as a proto-process text. God is not newly named but newly encountered as human need deepens. The patriarchs needed a God of promise; Israel in Egypt needed a God of presence and deliverance. God's self-disclosure is responsive to human situation-not because God changes in essence but because God "prehends" the world in its concrete actuality and responds with appropriate possibilities for redemption.

Post-modern theology: Naming as projection and disclosure

Post-modern theology complicates any straightforward account of divine naming. Following Feuerbach's critique of religion as projection and Nietzsche's analysis of theological language as an expression of will-to-power, post-modern thought questions whether any human language about God can be more than self-referential. When we name God, are we disclosing something about divine reality, or merely projecting our own needs and desires onto an empty transcendence?

Wolfson engages this question with particular sophistication, drawing on both Kabbalistic sources and post-modern philosophy [25]. Wolfson argues that the dichotomy between projection and disclosure is itself inadequate. Human language about God is indeed projective-it arises from human consciousness and bears the marks of human limitation. But this does not preclude genuine disclosure. The Kabbalistic tradition understood that all language about the divine is simultaneously human construction and divine revelation. The divine light can be received only in vessels shaped by human consciousness; yet the light that fills those vessels is genuinely divine.

This dialectic of projection and disclosure illuminates Exodus 6:3. El Shaddai reflects a psyche seeking stability in an uncertain world-a name that projects human need for assurance onto the divine. YHWH reflects a psyche confronting rupture and injustice-a name that projects human demand for redemption. Yet these projections are not mere illusions. They are the forms through which genuine divine reality becomes accessible to human consciousness.

Magid's analysis of post-modern Hasidism provides contemporary application of these insights [26]. Magid argues that Hasidic thought deconstructs the opposition between divine transcendence and human immanence. The Hasidic masters taught that God is fully present in all reality-"there is no place devoid of Him"-yet this presence is known only through human consciousness. Divine names are thus both human constructions and windows onto divine reality.

Post-holocaust theology: The wounded name

The Holocaust (Shoah) represents an event of such magnitude that it challenges every previous formulation of Jewish-and indeed all-theology. The systematic murder of six million Jews, including one and a half million children, constitutes not merely a historical catastrophe but a theological rupture. Every affirmation about God's relationship to Israel and to history must now pass through the crucible of Auschwitz. Can the God who redeemed Israel from Egypt still be invoked after Auschwitz? These questions are sharpened by the recent atrocities on October 7th.

For the theology of divine names, the Holocaust poses particular challenges. YHWH, the God who heard Israel's cry in Egypt and descended to deliver, was apparently silent in the face of unprecedented destruction. The divine name that was revealed in redemption from slavery now echoes in the silence of the crematoria. Can the name YHWH still function as it did before? Can God still be invoked as redeemer when redemption failed to come?

Post-Holocaust theologians have responded to these questions in various ways. For some, like Richard Rubenstein, the Holocaust marks the death of the traditional God of history; what remains is an impersonal "Holy Nothing" that cannot be addressed by any traditional name [27]. For others, like Emil Fackenheim, the Holocaust represents a rupture in which God issued a new commandment through Auschwitz itself-the command to survive, to remember, and to deny Hitler posthumous victories [28]. For still others, like Irving Greenberg, the Holocaust reveals a God who is present in "moment faiths"-fleeting experiences of divine presence that persist even in the kingdom of night [29].

What unites these diverse responses is the recognition that the Holocaust has transformed the conditions of divine address. YHWH can no longer function triumphantly. The God who delivered Israel from Pharaoh did not deliver Israel from Hitler. The divine name persists, but as what might be called a "wounded name"-a name that has been through the fire and bears the marks.

Jacobs addresses the theological implications of the Holocaust with characteristic sobriety. He rejects both facile theodicies that would explain away the horror and complete abandonment of faith that would deny any divine presence [30]. What remains is a "modest faith"-a faith that affirms God's reality and love without claiming to understand how that love coheres with the Holocaust.

Wolfson's analysis of post-Holocaust Jewish thought illuminates the linguistic and hermeneutical dimensions of this transformation [31]. Wolfson argues that the Holocaust did not create new theological problems but revealed, with unprecedented clarity, problems that were always latent in monotheistic faith. The God who is genuinely related to history is vulnerable to history's catastrophes.

Magid extends this analysis through engagement with contemporary Jewish thinkers who attempt to speak of God after the Holocaust [32]. What emerges from Magid's work is not a single "post-Holocaust theology" but a range of voices struggling to maintain faith while honoring the magnitude of the catastrophe.

Therapeutic tzimtzum and hermeneutic medicine: Divine names in healing encounter

The trajectory traced in this essay-from biblical theology through Kabbalah to post-Holocaust thought-finds contemporary application in our theological framework which extends these classical insights into the realm of clinical practice. Our work on "therapeutic tzimtzum" and "hermeneutic medicine" demonstrates that divine names function not merely as abstract theological categories but as modes of sacred encounter in the healing relationship between physician and patient [33,34].

Central to this framework is the concept of "therapeutic tzimtzum"-the application of the Lurianic doctrine of divine self-contraction to clinical practice. Just as the infinite Ein Sof contracted to create space for finite creation, so the physician must practice a form of self-contraction that creates space for the patient's being to emerge [35]. This is not merely a psychological technique but a theological act: the physician's tzimtzum recapitulates the divine pattern, making possible the encounter between healer and sufferer that constitutes authentic medicine.

This insight is enhanced through engagement with the Lubavitcher Rebbe's teachings on divine concealment (hester panim) and redemption (geulah), arguing that these concepts provide a viable framework for post-Holocaust theology as applied to clinical encounter [36]. The physician who practices therapeutic tzimtzum embodies what we term "Shekhinah consciousness"-an awareness of divine presence that persists even within apparent absence. The therapeutic space becomes a contemporary locus of divine indwelling, where the dynamics of tzimtzum, tikkun, and dirah betachtonim converge in the physician-patient encounter [37].

This framework has profound implications for understanding the theology of divine names. If El Shaddai represents God as guarantor and YHWH represents God as redemptive presence, then the clinical encounter becomes a site where these divine modes manifest in human relationship. The patient in crisis encounters the physician as a representative of divine holding (El Shaddai); the patient who experiences healing encounters the physician as a channel of redemptive presence (YHWH). Divine names thus become not merely categories of theological speculation but lived realities in the healing relationship.

Our concept of "hermeneutic medicine" extends this analysis by proposing that the patient be understood as a "sacred text" requiring interpretive engagement rather than merely diagnostic intervention [38,39]. Drawing on Fishbane's hermeneutical insights, we argue that the suffering body presents itself as a text demanding the same interpretive wisdom that Jewish tradition brought to Scripture. The physician becomes not merely a technician who applies standardized protocols but a reader who attends to the particular configuration of symptoms, history, and meaning that each patient presents [40].

This hermeneutical approach aligns with the Kabbalistic understanding of divine names as modes of presence rather than mere designations. Just as the Kabbalists understood that to pronounce a divine name is to invoke the divine attribute it embodies, so we argue that to truly "read" the patient is to encounter the sacred dimension of human suffering. The clinical encounter becomes a site of theophany-a moment when the divine becomes manifest through the meeting of healer and sufferer.

Our work on "the pain of the Shekhinah" provides particular illumination for post-Holocaust theology of divine names [41]. Drawing on Zoharic imagery and Lurianic concepts, we argues that the Shekhinah-the feminine aspect of divine presence-suffers exile alongside Israel and indeed alongside all who suffer. The therapeutic encounter becomes a site where this divine suffering is acknowledged and, in some measure, redeemed.

The concept of the "broken vav" (vav ketia), which we develop through engagement with the Zohar and contemporary scholarship, provides further illumination [42]. In the Torah scroll, certain letters appear broken or truncated, bearing the marks of cosmic rupture. We read these broken letters as embodiments of the wounded divine name-traces of the primordial tzimtzum that persist within sacred text. The physician who practices hermeneutic medicine learns to read such breaks and wounds as sacred communications.

The critique of Cartesian dualism provides methodological foundation for this approach [43]. Modern biomedicine, inheriting the mind-body split of Cartesian philosophy, treats the body as mechanism and illness as malfunction. Hermeneutic medicine, by contrast, understands the patient as embodied subject whose suffering carries meaning beyond the merely physical. This approach resonates with the rabbinic anthropology that located wisdom in the kidneys and moral discernment in the heart-an embodied epistemology that modern medicine has largely forgotten [44].

The integration of our framework with the trajectory traced in this essay suggests that the evolution of divine names has not ceased but continues in contemporary contexts. El Shaddai and YHWH found their original meaning in specific historical and existential situations; therapeutic tzimtzum and Shekhinah consciousness extend this pattern into the contemporary clinical encounter [45,46]. Divine self-disclosure remains responsive to human need; the names by which we encounter the divine remain calibrated to our capacity and situation.

Synthesis: Divine names as a map of human becoming

The trajectory traced in this essay-from biblical theology through midrash and Kabbalah to process, post-Holocaust, and embodied therapeutic thought-reveals a consistent pattern. Divine names are not static descriptors of an unchanging divine essence but relational disclosures calibrated to human capacity and historical circumstance. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH, far from being a mere historical marker, articulates a fundamental truth about the divine-human relationship: as human capacity deepens, the mode of divine encounter transforms.

Fishbane's concept of inner-biblical exegesis illuminates this pattern. The biblical text itself does not present divine names as arbitrary designations but as significant disclosures [47]. The choice of name in any given context reflects the mode of divine-human encounter appropriate to that context. Later traditions-midrashic, Kabbalistic, philosophical, and mystical-extend this pattern, interpreting divine names as keys to understanding both divine reality and human spiritual development.

Idel's historical scholarship demonstrates that this interpretive trajectory was not merely theoretical speculation but shaped actual religious practice [48]. The meditation on divine names became central to Jewish mystical practice. Practitioners understood themselves to be invoking divine presences, ascending through levels of divine disclosure, participating in the dynamic life of the sefirot.

Wolfson's philosophical analysis reveals the deeper implications of this tradition. If divine names are modes of divine presence rather than mere labels, then language itself becomes a medium of theophany [49]. The biblical text is not simply a record of past revelation but an ongoing site of divine self-disclosure.

Weiss's studies of Hasidism demonstrate how these ideas were internalized and democratized in the modern period [50]. The Hasidic masters taught that every Jew could access the divine through proper devotion. This democratization represents a culmination of the trajectory that began with Exodus 6:3.

Magid's engagement with contemporary Jewish thought extends this trajectory into the post-modern and post-Holocaust context [51]. Contemporary Jews who speak the divine names do so with awareness of the critiques and catastrophes that those names have passed through.

Jacobs's theological synthesis provides a framework for holding these diverse perspectives together [52]. Jacobs argues for "a dynamic view of revelation"-divine truth is disclosed progressively through history and human understanding of God legitimately develops over time.

Our work on therapeutic tzimtzum and hermeneutic medicine extends this trajectory into the embodied encounter of healer and sufferer [53]. The physician who practices sacred attention participates in the ongoing dynamic of divine self-disclosure, encountering the divine through the suffering patient as the patriarchs encountered the divine through promise.

Conclusion

"I appeared to your ancestors as El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH I was not known to them". This verse, examined through the lenses of biblical theology, classical midrash, Kabbalistic hermeneutics, modern process thought, post-Holocaust theology, and embodied therapeutic practice, emerges as a hinge text of Jewish and indeed all Western theology. It articulates the fundamental insight that God's self-disclosure is relational and developmental, calibrated to human capacity and historical circumstance.

The patriarchs knew El Shaddai-the God of promise, blessing, and containment-because their situation required such knowledge. Moses and Israel came to know YHWH-the God of presence, redemption, and historical action-because their situation made such knowledge possible and necessary. Subsequent generations, through the lens of midrash and Kabbalah, process theology and post-Holocaust thought, have continued to elaborate the implications of this verse, tracing the evolution of divine names as a map of human becoming.

This is not merely historical or antiquarian interest. The question of how to address God remains urgent for contemporary believers. The recovery of the dynamic understanding of divine names-pioneered by the biblical text, elaborated by the interpretive traditions, confirmed by modern process thought, and extended into clinical practice by contemporary theologians-offers resources for a spirituality that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to contemporary experience. God is not renamed but re-known as each generation brings its needs, its questions, and its wounds to the encounter with divine presence.

In the end, Exodus 6:3 is a text about theological growth-about the maturation of human capacity to encounter the divine. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH charts humanity's growing ability to confront rupture, responsibility, and ethical demand without losing faith. It traces the evolution from a God of promise to a God of presence, from a God who guarantees the future to a God who suffers the present. This trajectory continues through every generation that reads the text and struggles to understand how the infinite divine reality can be addressed by finite human consciousness. The names we speak shape our encounter with God; the encounters we have reshape the names we speak. This is the endless dynamism of divine-human relationship that Exodus 6:3 inaugurates.

Addendum: The God-image and Jung-implications for depth psychology

The trajectory traced in this essay-from El Shaddai through YHWH to the wounded name and therapeutic presence-has significant implications for Jungian depth psychology, particularly for Jung's concept of the God-image (Gottesbild). Jung argued throughout his work that the God-image is not identical with God per se but constitutes an autonomous psychic factor, an archetype of the collective unconscious that manifests differently across cultures and historical epochs [54]. This essay's argument that divine names function as relational disclosures calibrated to evolving human capacity both confirms and radically extends Jung's insight.

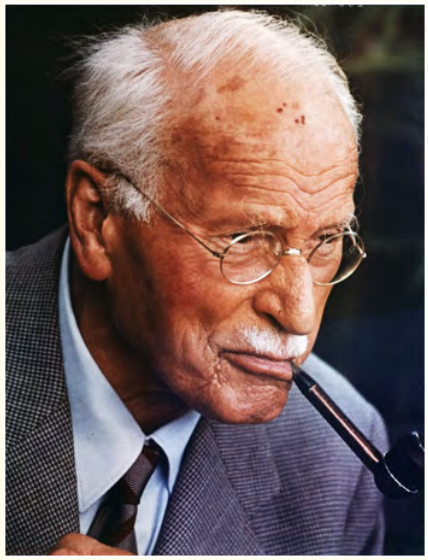

Figure 3

In his controversial work "Answer to Job", Jung traced what he termed the "development" of the God-image from the morally ambiguous Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible to the differentiated trinitarian God of Christianity [55]. Jung argued that the God-image undergoes transformation as human consciousness evolves-that the archetype remains constant while its manifestations change. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH, read through this Jungian lens, represents precisely such a transformation: not a change in the archetypal ground but an evolution in the ego's capacity to receive and integrate numinous experience.

Yet this essay's argument presses beyond Jung in crucial respects. Jung maintained a studied agnosticism about metaphysical claims, bracketing the question of whether the God-image corresponds to any transcendent reality. The theological traditions examined here-midrashic, Kabbalistic, and contemporary-insist that divine names disclose genuine divine reality, not merely psychological projections. The synthesis proposed in this essay suggests a third position: divine names are simultaneously psychological realities (modes of human consciousness) and theological realities (modes of divine self-disclosure). The vessel shapes the light it receives, but the light is genuinely divine.

Our integration of Jungian and Kabbalistic frameworks illuminates this synthesis. In his work on shadow integration in therapeutic practice, We argue that Jung's concept of the shadow-the repressed and rejected aspects of psyche-finds parallel in the Kabbalistic concept of the sitra achra (the "other side") and the kelipot (shells or husks that conceal divine light) [56]. Both traditions recognize that wholeness requires integration of darkness, not merely affirmation of light. The God-image, on this reading, must include what Jung called the "dark side of God"-the aspects of divine reality that resist easy assimilation to human moral categories.

This insight transforms how we understand the transition from El Shaddai to YHWH. El Shaddai, as guarantor of blessing and fertility, represents what might be called a "partial" God-image-a manifestation of divine reality that emphasizes providence and protection while leaving in shadow the divine dimensions that permit suffering and demand ethical response. YHWH, by contrast, encompasses both redemption and judgment, both presence and terrifying absence. The Mosaic encounter with YHWH includes the revelation that "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19)-a formulation that acknowledges divine sovereignty beyond human comprehension or control.

Our engagement with James Hillman's archetypal psychology and Sanford Drob's Kabbalistic readings of Jung extends this analysis into the therapeutic encounter [57]. Hillman argued that depth psychology must "see through" literal symptoms to the archetypal images they embody; Drob demonstrated the structural parallels between Jungian individuation and Lurianic tikkun. We attempt to synthesize these insights to propose that the therapeutic encounter itself becomes a site where the God-image undergoes transformation-where patient and healer together participate in the evolution of consciousness that this essay has traced from patriarchal to Mosaic to contemporary modalities.

The post-Holocaust dimension of this essay carries particular weight for Jungian reflection. Jung himself was criticized for insufficient attention to the Holocaust's implications for depth psychology. If the God-image evolves through history, what happens to that image after Auschwitz? The "wounded name" discussed in Section VII represents precisely this question posed in theological terms. The God-image after the Holocaust cannot be the triumphant redeemer of the Exodus; it must somehow incorporate the divine absence experienced in the camps. This is not, as some critics of Jung feared, a capitulation to nihilism; it is rather the extension of Jung's own logic to its necessary historical conclusion.

Our concept of therapeutic tzimtzum offers a path forward. If the God-image must now include divine self-contraction and apparent absence, then the healer who practices tzimtzum-who creates space for the patient's being to emerge rather than imposing interpretive frameworks-embodies a post-Holocaust God-image [58]. The therapist becomes, in Jungian terms, a carrier of the Self archetype in its contemporary manifestation: not the Self as omnipotent wholeness but the Self as wounded healer, as presence-in-absence, as the one who accompanies suffering without eliminating it.

This reframing has implications for clinical practice. Jung famously stated that the patient's neurosis is often a "failed religious experience"-that psychological symptoms frequently mask spiritual hunger [59]. The framework developed in this essay suggests that the God-image operative in any given patient's psyche can be located along the trajectory from El Shaddai to YHWH to wounded name. Some patients relate to the divine (consciously or unconsciously) as guarantor of security and blessing; when this God-image fails-as it inevitably must-crisis ensues. Other patients have already undergone the transition to a more complex God-image that includes rupture and ethical demand. The therapeutic task, on this reading, is not to impose any particular God-image but to facilitate the patient's own evolution toward greater integration.

Our work on archetypal and embodied approaches to medical practice provides methodological grounding for this clinical application [60]. Drawing on both Jungian archetypal psychology and phenomenological philosophy, we claim that the body itself carries the God-image-that symptoms are not merely biological malfunctions but symbolic communications from the deeper psyche. The patient's suffering body becomes a text in which the God-image is inscribed, awaiting interpretation by a healer who has cultivated the hermeneutical wisdom to read it.

The essay's central argument-that divine names are relational disclosures calibrated to human capacity-thus transforms Jungian psychology in several ways. First, it historicizes the God-image more radically than Jung himself attempted, tracing specific transformations through biblical, rabbinic, Kabbalistic, and contemporary sources. Second, it bridges the gap between psychological and theological discourse by proposing that the God-image is simultaneously a psychic reality and a mode of genuine divine self-disclosure. Third, it extends the God-image's evolution into contemporary clinical practice, suggesting that the healer who practices therapeutic tzimtzum embodies the God-image appropriate to post-Holocaust, post-modern consciousness.

Finally, this framework addresses a persistent critique of Jungian psychology: that it remains too individualistic, insufficiently attentive to social and historical context. The evolution of divine names traced in this essay is not merely an individual psychological development but a collective, historical process. The transition from El Shaddai to YHWH occurred not in a single psyche but in a people's consciousness

over generations. The wounded name emerges not from individual trauma alone but from collective catastrophe. The therapeutic encounter, on this reading, participates in a larger historical and even cosmic process-the ongoing tikkun through which fragmented divine sparks are gathered and restored.

Jung intuited that the God-image was evolving; this essay provides the theological resources to understand that evolution as genuine divine self-disclosure calibrated to humanity's developing capacity to receive it. The names change not because God changes but because we change-and in changing, we become capable of encountering dimensions of divine reality that were always present but previously inaccessible. This is the profound truth that Exodus 6:3 articulates and that the interpretive traditions have elaborated: the infinite God meets finite consciousness through names, and the names expand as consciousness deepens. Depth psychology, properly understood, participates in this expansion-not replacing theology but providing psychological depth to theological insight, and receiving in return theological grounding for psychological practice.

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