

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Dialectical Divine: Tzimtzum and the Parabolic Theology of Human Suffering a Synthesis of Classical Mysticism, and Contemporary Therapeutic Spirituality

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Abstract

This paper examines the theological origins of evil and human suffering through the lens of the kabbalistic doctrine of *tzimtzum* (divine contraction), drawing upon Elliot Wolfson's dialectical analysis of Jewish mysticism, Jonathan Eybeschutz's radical theology of divine unconsciousness, and Julian Ungar-Sargon's contemporary applications to therapeutic spirituality. We argue that suffering emerges not from divine absence but from the very structure of divine presence-in-concealment, including what Eybeschutz terms the "thoughtless" aspect of the *Ein Sof* that gives rise to evil through divine sleep. This framework creates spaces where healing and transformation become possible through the recognition of God's hidden presence within darkness itself, providing theological foundation for therapeutic approaches that integrate rather than eliminate shadow material.

1. Introduction: The Paradox

The problem of evil has plagued theological discourse since Job's cry from the ash heap. The term theodicy is derived from the ancient Greek words for 'god' and 'justice'. A theodicy thus aims to justify God morally, to provide an adequate moral justification for why God would allow or inflict suffering (1). Yet traditional theodicies often fail to account for the phenomenological reality of suffering—the lived experience of those who endure pain while seeking divine presence.

This paper proposes a theology of suffering grounded in the kabbalistic understanding of *tzimtzum*, interpreted through Elliot Wolfson's dialectical hermeneutics (2,3). Rather than viewing evil as privation or punishment, we explore how suffering emerges from the very structure of divine self-concealment that enables finite existence, while simultaneously containing within itself the seeds of redemption and healing.

1.1 Wolfson's Dialectical Reading: Beyond the Opposition of Good and Evil

Wolfson is capable of holding in his mind's eye what other thinkers would resist or unconsciously ignore as incompatible opposites. Medieval Judaism and American modernity; the "tradition" of kabbalah and postmodern philosophy; the sexual body and the human spirit; ontological truth and the religious imagination; revelation and occultation; good and evil; left and right - none of these are true opposites for Wolfson (4).

Wolfson's scholarship reveals that classical Kabbalah does not operate with simple binary oppositions between good and evil (5). Rabbi Isaac Luria himself, and his closest disciples, traced the origins of evil back further to the very act of Divine *tzimtzum*, self-contraction, which took place when nothing existed but God and which was necessary for the creation of the world, but through which the forces of *din* became concentrated and more potent (6).

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This Lurianic insight suggests that evil does not emerge as God's opposite but as an inevitable consequence of the divine act that enables finite existence. The act of tzimtzum creates what the Ari calls a "vacant space" (chalal hapanui), but this emptiness is not truly empty—it contains the residue (reshimu) of divine light that enables both creation and the possibility of its corruption (7).

1.2 The Structural Necessity of Concealment

For the genius to communicate with the child's mind, it is necessary that he put to the side all the theories and complexities of advanced mathematics and to focus on basic addition. In time, the child he is teaching may progress to study mathematics in high school, college, and then university (8). This Chabad analogy illuminates how tzimtzum functions not as divine limitation but as divine pedagogy—God conceals infinite light not out of incapacity but to create a space where finite beings can encounter the divine gradually.

Yet this concealment carries risk. The shattering of the vessels of Tohu allows for the possibility of evil, and gives man the opportunity to choose between good (for which he gains reward) and evil (for which he is punished) (9). The broken vessels (shevirat hakelim) scatter divine sparks throughout creation, some becoming trapped in shells of impurity (kelipot), manifesting as suffering, illness, and moral evil.

2. Eybeschutz's Radical Theology

Jonathan Eybeschutz (1690-1764) offers a crucial bridge between theoretical kabbalah and lived spiritual crisis, but more significantly, his work "Va-Avo Hayom el ha-Ayin" presents perhaps the most radical interpretation of tzimtzum in Jewish mystical literature (10). Eybeschutz's theology provides unprecedented support for understanding evil as originating not in opposition to divine reality but from within the very structure of the Ein Sof itself.

In "Va-Avo Hayom el ha-Ayin," Eybeschutz proposes that the Ein Sof comprises both "thoughtful" and "thoughtless" aspects, with the thoughtless dimension lacking intentionality and inadvertently giving rise to evil (36). This represents a revolutionary departure from traditional Lurianic Kabbalah. Rather than evil emerging from the breaking of vessels or divine withdrawal, Eybeschutz traces evil's origin to an unintentional emanation from the Infinite itself—a divine unconscious that operates without deliberate purpose.

This concept fundamentally challenges conventional theological frameworks. Evil is not an external force opposing the divine, nor is it merely the absence of divine light, but rather an authentic expression of divine reality in its unthinking, unconscious mode. As Wolfson's analysis demonstrates, this portrays the divine as including elements of ambiguity and paradox, challenging conventional notions of divine perfection and benevolence (37).

2.1 Tzimtzum as Divine Sleep

Eybeschutz reimagines the process of tzimtzum as a divine "sleep" or loss of consciousness (tardema), during which uncontained divine energy is released (36). This represents perhaps the most radical reinterpretation of the Lurianic creation myth in Jewish mystical literature. Unlike the traditional view where tzimtzum is a deliberate act to create space for finite existence, Eybeschutz portrays it as an involuntary lapse in divine consciousness.

During this divine sleep, uncontrolled emanation leads to the formation of kelipot (husks or shells), which become the vessels of evil. This interpretation emphasizes the inherent potential for chaos within the divine process of creation itself. The implications are profound: if evil emerges from divine unconsciousness rather than conscious intention, then healing and redemption must involve awakening rather than simply restoring or revealing hidden divine light.

2.2 Integration Versus Transformation

Eybeschutz's theology extends to practical implications for spiritual healing that differ markedly from traditional approaches. Rather than seeking to transform evil through revelation of concealed divine light (as in Chabad theology), Eybeschutz advocates confronting and integrating the aspects of evil within oneself as a path to spiritual growth (36). This approach suggests that engaging with the darker aspects of existence is not only necessary but also redemptive.

This integration model anticipates contemporary therapeutic approaches that work with shadow material rather than seeking to eliminate it. Eybeschutz's insight that descent into darkness is prerequisite for spiritual ascent provides historical precedent for therapeutic modalities that embrace psychological shadow work as essential to healing.

2.3 Crisis as Spiritual Opportunity

Eybeschutz's practical response to crisis during his rabbinate takes on new significance when understood

against this theological background. His distribution of protective amulets during periods of increased mortality was not merely practical intervention but reflected his deep understanding that moments of greatest vulnerability represent spiritual opportunities for encountering the unconscious divine (11). His willingness to risk controversy by engaging with potentially heterodox sources suggests he understood that healing sometimes requires accessing aspects of divinity that conventional theology cannot acknowledge.

The controversy surrounding his amulets—whether they contained Sabbatean elements—reflects the broader challenge his theology posed to orthodox frameworks (12). If evil originates from the thoughtless divine rather than opposing it, then the boundaries between orthodox and heterodox, sacred and profane, become more complex. Healing may require accessing divine energies that exist outside conventional theological categories.

2.4 Implications for Contemporary Therapeutic Practice

Eybeschutz's radical theology provides unprecedented theological foundation for therapeutic approaches that work with unconscious material. If divine reality itself includes thoughtless, unconscious dimensions that give rise to suffering, then therapeutic work becomes a form of divine service—participating in the awakening of divine consciousness through integration of shadow material.

This framework suggests that psychological symptoms may represent not merely personal pathology but participation in cosmic processes of divine awakening. Depression, anxiety, and trauma could be understood as manifestations of divine sleep that contain within themselves the possibility of divine awakening through conscious integration.

I must surrender even my scientific bias when encountering the mystery of the space between healer and patient, precisely because in the anguish of their suffering I must access these deeper layers of consciousness.

2.5 The Paradox of Hidden Light

Eybeschutz's theological method reflects what we might call “liminal intervention”—working at the threshold between the hidden and revealed aspects of divinity. His amulets functioned as textual spaces where divine names and formulas could be concentrated to provide protection during life-threatening situations.

This practice assumes that suffering represents not divine absence but divine presence in its most hidden form.

3. The Therapeutic Implications

Julian Ungar-Sargon's work bridges classical Jewish mysticism with contemporary therapeutic practice, offering insights crucial for understanding suffering's theological significance (14). Ungar-Sargon's concept of “dark Shekhinah” provides a framework for understanding how divine presence manifests precisely within experiences of abandonment and suffering (15). This work suggests that therapeutic encounters can become spaces of theological encounter, where the recognition of divine hiddenness becomes the pathway to healing (16).

My application of tzimtzum to medical practice suggests that healing relationships require a form of “therapeutic contraction”—the practitioner must withdraw their ego-driven need to fix or control, creating space for the patient's own healing capacity to emerge (17).

Similarly, in the face of suffering, God's apparent withdrawal (tzimtzum) creates space for human agency and growth, while remaining present in hidden form. This paradox—presence through absence—becomes the foundation for both therapeutic healing and spiritual transformation.

4. A New Theology of Suffering

Drawing together these insights, we propose understanding suffering not as theological problem requiring solution but as theological reality requiring recognition. The dialectical nature of divine presence means that God is most present precisely when appearing most absent.

Eybeschutz's radical insight that evil originates from the thoughtless aspect of Ein Sof provides crucial support for this understanding (36). If divine unconsciousness gives rise to suffering through the mechanism of divine sleep (tardema), then healing involves participating in the awakening of divine consciousness rather than simply eliminating pathology. This theological framework transforms our understanding of therapeutic practice from symptom management to cosmic participation.

The meshalim in Tanya are not isolated teaching tools. Rather, they form a dynamic architecture of spiritual pedagogy that is continuously expanded and re-interpreted in Likkutei Torah and Torah Ohr (18).

Similarly, suffering functions as a parable written in flesh—a text that conceals divine presence within apparent abandonment.

The Alter Rebbe’s parable of “Two Kings Fighting Over a City” becomes paradigmatic for understanding suffering’s role in human existence (19). In Likkutei Torah (Tazria, 22c), this metaphor expands into a meditation on teshuvah and the transformation of impurity into sanctity. The battle becomes not only about moral choice but also about cosmic repair (tikkun), suggesting that the physical world itself is a contested territory yearning for divine conquest (20).

Human suffering represents the most intense form of this cosmic battle, where divine and demonic forces contest for sovereignty over finite existence. Yet the very intensity of the struggle indicates the presence of hidden divine sparks awaiting liberation.

4.1 Beyond Theodicy

Rather than justifying God’s permission of evil (theodicy), our approach seeks to discern God’s presence within evil (theotherapy). This shift has profound implications:

Suffering as Sacred Text: Each experience of pain becomes a encrypted message about divine presence, requiring careful hermeneutical attention rather than hasty explanation (2).

Healing as Hermeneutics: Recovery involves learning to read the signs of divine hiddenness, developing what Wolfson calls “imaginal” capacity to perceive the luminous darkness within suffering (3).

Community as Interpretive Practice: Others’ capacity to witness and hold space for suffering becomes a form of collective interpretation, revealing meaning that individuals cannot discern alone.

The kabbalistic teaching that the Shekhinah (divine presence) goes into exile with the Jewish people provides the key metaphor for understanding suffering’s theological significance (31,32). God’s presence doesn’t abandon those who suffer but becomes exiled with them, experiencing displacement from within.

This means that encounters with human suffering become potential encounters with divine presence in its most vulnerable form. Healthcare workers, therapists, and pastoral caregivers are not simply addressing human need but potentially ministering to God’s own exile and pain.

5. Clinical Applications

The therapeutic relationship mirrors the divine tzimtzum when practitioners learn to be fully present while maintaining appropriate boundaries, creating space for clients to discover their own inner resources (21).

Rather than rushing to eliminate suffering, theologically-informed therapy learns to hold paradox—pain and healing, despair and hope, abandonment and presence—allowing transformation to emerge from within the tension itself.

Medical encounters become sacred when practitioners recognize their role as witnesses to divine presence within human vulnerability, transforming clinical spaces into potential sites of revelation (22).

5.1 The Dark Shekhinah

The Shoah represents the ultimate test case for any theology of suffering. Traditional theodicies collapse under the weight of industrial genocide, yet the dialectical approach we propose offers different resources (33).

Rather than explaining why God “permitted” the Holocaust, we might ask: How did God suffer within it? The kabbalistic insight that divine presence accompanies human exile suggests that God experienced the death camps from within, not as external observer but as fellow victim (34).

This doesn’t minimize human responsibility or divine mystery, but it relocates the theological question from “Where was God?” to “How did God suffer with us?” Survivors who maintained faith often testified not to God’s protection but to divine presence within abandonment—a presence that couldn’t prevent suffering but could companion it.

My work on “Shekhinah Consciousness” provides a framework for understanding how bearing witness to suffering becomes a form of messianic activity—helping to restore the Shekhinah from exile by refusing to let suffering remain meaningless or invisible (23).

Therapeutic work with trauma survivors continues this redemptive witnessing, creating spaces where hidden sparks of divine presence can be gradually recognized and released from their shells of pain.

6. Toward a Mystical Psychology of Suffering

The integration of these theological insights suggests directions for developing what we might call a

“mystical psychology”—an approach to mental health that recognizes spiritual dimensions without abandoning clinical rigor.

Psychological symptoms might be read as encrypted messages about spiritual dislocation, invitations to explore how divine presence has become exiled within the psyche (14,15). Following Eybeschütz’s framework, symptoms could represent manifestations of divine sleep—unconscious divine energy seeking conscious integration rather than elimination (36). Depression could indicate not merely neurochemical imbalance but soul’s participation in cosmic processes of divine unconsciousness. Anxiety might reflect the soul’s intuition of uncontained divine energy requiring conscious direction.

Healing becomes a form of cosmic repair (*tikkun olam*), where personal transformation contributes to broader restoration of divine consciousness in the world (24). Unlike approaches that seek to eliminate shadow material, Eybeschütz’s integration model suggests that recovery involves conscious engagement with unconscious divine energies rather than their suppression (36).

Wolfson’s insight that apparent opposites form dialectical unities suggests that psychological health involves integration rather than elimination of difficult emotions (25). Eybeschütz’s radical theology provides theological foundation for this approach: if evil originates from divine unconsciousness, then shadow material doesn’t need to be destroyed but can be recognized as containing unconscious divine energy requiring conscious integration (37).

7. Conclusion

Our investigation reveals that suffering, properly understood, does not represent God’s absence but God’s presence in its most hidden and intimate form. The doctrine of *tzimtzum* teaches that divine love manifests through concealment, creating space for genuine relationship while remaining present as hidden support (7).

As Wolfson demonstrates, a deeply dialectical thinker holds seemingly paradoxical tenets in tandem: Medieval Judaism and American modernity; the ‘tradition’ of Kabbalah and postmodern philosophy; sexual body and human spirit; ontological truth and religious imagination; revelation and occultation; good and evil; left and right - none of these are diametrically opposite (4).

This dialectical vision offers resources for confronting suffering without either denying its reality or abandoning faith in divine goodness. God’s love doesn’t eliminate suffering but accompanies it, working from within to transform pain into possibility, exile into return, darkness into luminous depth.

The practical implications extend beyond academic theology into clinical practice, pastoral care, and personal spiritual life. Recognizing divine presence within suffering doesn’t eliminate the need for medical intervention, psychological therapy, or social justice work. Rather, it provides these activities with deeper meaning and sustainable motivation.

Healthcare becomes ministry to divine presence in exile. Therapy becomes a form of hermeneutical practice, helping people read the hidden messages within their pain. Social justice work becomes participation in cosmic repair, working to restore divine presence to its proper place in human community.

7.1 The Eternal Question

The question is not “Why does God permit suffering?” but “How can we learn to recognize God’s presence within suffering?” This shift in question transforms us from theological prosecutors demanding divine justification into spiritual students seeking to develop the “imaginal” capacity necessary for perceiving luminous darkness.

Such vision doesn’t come easily. It requires what the Zohar calls “beautiful maiden without eyes”—the capacity to see beyond surface appearances into hidden depths (31). Yet this vision, once developed, reveals that we are never truly alone in our suffering. Divine presence accompanies every tear, inhabits every moment of despair, and works constantly—though hiddenly—to transform pain into pathway, exile into return, darkness into the most intimate form of light.

The theology of suffering we propose thus becomes not a justification of divine ways but an invitation to deeper sight—the recognition that God’s love is most present precisely where it appears most absent, working from within the very structures of limitation and loss to create possibilities for healing, growth, and ultimate restoration. Eybeschütz’s radical insight that evil originates from divine unconsciousness rather than divine opposition provides unprecedented theological foundation for therapeutic approaches that work with rather than against shadow material (36,37).

In the end, we discover that suffering is not the opposite of divine love but its most radical expression—love willing to share exile, to experience limitation, to enter darkness and even unconsciousness in order to companion those who dwell there, gradually leading them home through paths only love could discern. The divine sleep that gives rise to evil also contains within itself the possibility of divine awakening through conscious integration.

7.2 Appendix: The Dialectical Evolution of Parabolic Theology in Chabad Thought

7.2.1 The Mashal as Metaphysical Bridge

When Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe, composed his foundational work *Tanya* in the late 18th century, he was confronting a profound theological crisis that would only intensify with the advent of modernity. The kabbalistic doctrine of *tzimtzum*—divine self-contraction—had introduced what Eli Rubin terms “the rupture of modernity” centuries before modernity itself arrived (27). How could infinite divine reality communicate with finite human consciousness without overwhelming it? How could the hidden God remain accessible to those who desperately needed divine presence?

The Alter Rebbe’s solution was revolutionary in its simplicity: the *mashal*, or parable, would function not merely as pedagogical illustration but as what we might call a “metaphysical bridge.” Just as *tzimtzum* conceals infinite light within finite vessels, the parable conceals infinite truth within finite narrative (19). This is why the Alter Rebbe’s *meshalim* in *Tanya* are not decorative additions to abstract theology but the very scaffolding upon which his entire mystical pedagogy depends.

Consider the famous parable of “Two Kings Fighting Over a City” from *Tanya* Chapter 9 (19). On its surface, this *mashal* drawn from Ecclesiastes 9:14 appears to be a straightforward allegory for the psychological struggle between higher and lower impulses. The divine soul (*nefesh Elokit*) and animal soul (*nefesh habehemit*) wage war for control over the “small city” of the human body. Yet when this same parable reappears in the Alter Rebbe’s later homiletical work *Likkutei Torah* (Parashat Tazria, 22c), it undergoes a remarkable transformation (18). The battle is no longer merely about individual moral psychology but about cosmic repair (*tikkun*). The battlefield itself—the physical world—becomes sanctified when the divine soul asserts dominion. What began as personal

spiritual struggle evolves into a mystical blueprint for universal redemption.

This evolutionary quality reveals something crucial about the Alter Rebbe’s parabolic method. The *meshalim* are designed to grow with their interpreters, revealing deeper layers of meaning as spiritual understanding develops. They mirror the structure of divine revelation itself, which the *Zohar* describes as progressively unveiling its secrets to those prepared to receive them.

7.2.2 The Mittlerer Rebbe’s Analytical Turn

When Rabbi Dovber Schneuri, the Mittlerer Rebbe, inherited his father’s intellectual legacy, he brought to it a distinctly analytical temperament that would profoundly influence how Chabad engaged with the challenges of emerging modernity (27). Where the Alter Rebbe had established the foundational framework, the Mittlerer Rebbe developed what we might call a “hermeneutics of depth”—an approach that subjected each inherited parable to increasingly sophisticated psychological and philosophical analysis.

The Mittlerer Rebbe’s discourses reveal a fascinating tension between fidelity to tradition and intellectual innovation (18). He does not simply repeat his father’s *meshalim* but rather excavates their hidden implications, particularly their psychological dimensions. This reflects his acute awareness that the modern world was demanding new forms of spiritual discourse—approaches that could engage both heart and mind with equal sophistication.

Rubin’s analysis helps us understand that the Mittlerer Rebbe’s elaborate expositions of inherited parables represent more than scholarly exercise (27). They constitute a theological strategy for addressing what he intuited would become modernity’s central spiritual crisis: the increasing sense of distance between divine reality and human experience. By providing ever-deeper layers of interpretation, the Mittlerer Rebbe was creating intellectual resources that could sustain faith through periods of profound cultural transformation.

This analytical turn had profound implications for how later Chabad thought would develop. It established the principle that authentic tradition must be dynamically interpreted, not merely preserved. Each generation would need to discover how eternal truths could speak to contemporary challenges through the medium of inherited wisdom.

7.2.3 *The Tzemach Tzedek's Synthetic Vision*

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the Tzemach Tzedek, faced the full force of 19th-century modernity's challenge to traditional Jewish life. The Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) was questioning the relevance of mystical discourse, while political emancipation was creating unprecedented opportunities and temptations for Jewish assimilation. In this context, the Tzemach Tzedek developed what we might call a "synthetic theology"—an approach that demonstrated how ancient wisdom could illuminate contemporary experience.

The Tzemach Tzedek's distinctive contribution to Chabad parabolic theology lies in his ability to show how the same meshalim that addressed timeless spiritual concerns could also provide guidance for navigating modern social and intellectual complexities. His works reveal a master interpreter who could take the Alter Rebbe's parable of the "King's Garments"—mitzvot as divine clothing that allows the soul to embrace God—and show how this same insight could guide decisions about secular education, economic activity, and political engagement.

This synthetic approach reflects a profound theological confidence: if divine truth is truly universal, then authentic interpretation should reveal its relevance to every human situation. The Tzemach Tzedek's reinterpretations of inherited parables thus become demonstrations of theology's explanatory power across diverse domains of experience.

7.2.4 *The Rebbe Maharash's Transcendent Activism*

Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn, the Rebbe Maharash, introduced a revolutionary principle that would transform not only Chabad theology but also its practical approach to spiritual life: "Lechatchila Ariber"—from the outset, transcend. This principle reflected his conviction that rather than gradually working through obstacles, one should begin from a place of spiritual transcendence and transform challenges from above.

The Rebbe Maharash's application of this principle to parabolic interpretation produced a distinctive hermeneutical approach. Where previous generations had emphasized the gradual revelation of deeper meanings within inherited meshalim, the Rebbe Maharash sought to access their most transcendent significance immediately. His extensive use of serialized discourses (hemshechim) allowed for

sustained exploration of how parables could inspire immediate spiritual transformation rather than merely conveying information about spiritual realities.

This approach had profound implications for understanding the relationship between divine transcendence and human agency. The Rebbe Maharash's parabolic interpretations consistently emphasize human capacity to access the highest spiritual levels through proper intention and understanding. This represents a significant development from earlier Chabad thought, which had focused more on the gradual process of spiritual elevation.

The Rebbe Maharash's transcendent activism also anticipated later developments in Chabad outreach philosophy. If individuals could access transcendent spiritual levels immediately through proper understanding, then the same principle could apply to bringing divine consciousness into the broader world.

7.2.5 *The Rebbe Rashab's Systematic Philosophy*

Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, the Rebbe Rashab, brought to Chabad thought a systematic philosophical rigor that would establish its intellectual credentials for the modern era. His extensive discourses, particularly the famous Hemshech Ayin Beis, represent the culmination of Chabad's evolution from mystical insight to comprehensive theological system.

The Rebbe Rashab's approach to parabolic interpretation reflects this systematic orientation. Rather than treating meshalim as isolated teaching tools, he developed a comprehensive framework showing how different parables illuminate various aspects of a unified theological vision. His work demonstrates how the Alter Rebbe's individual insights about divine immanence and transcendence, human psychology, and cosmic structure form an integrated understanding of reality.

This systematic approach proved crucial for Chabad's ability to engage with modern philosophical and scientific thought. By showing how parabolic wisdom cohered into a comprehensive worldview, the Rebbe Rashab established Chabad as a serious intellectual tradition capable of dialogue with secular learning while maintaining its mystical foundations.

The Rebbe Rashab's systematic philosophy also provided essential resources for what would become Chabad's distinctive approach to modernity: rather than retreating from contemporary intellectual challenges,

Chabad would engage them through demonstrating how mystical wisdom could illuminate dimensions of reality that secular thought overlooked.

7.2.6 The Rebbe Rayatz's Resilient Narrative

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, the Rebbe Rayatz, faced challenges that would have destroyed lesser traditions: Soviet persecution, World War II, and the near-complete destruction of European Jewish life. In this context, his emphasis on the narrative power of parables takes on profound significance. Stories became vehicles not merely for conveying information but for preserving and transmitting the essential spirit of a tradition under mortal threat.

The Rebbe Rayatz's approach to meshalim reveals deep insight into how spiritual traditions survive catastrophic disruption. Rather than focusing primarily on intellectual analysis or systematic exposition, he emphasized how parables function as containers for lived spiritual experience. His stories often focus on how previous generations maintained faith under difficult circumstances, providing contemporary models for spiritual resilience.

This narrative approach proved prophetic in its anticipation of how Jewish tradition would need to function in the post-Holocaust world. With the destruction of traditional European Jewish society, the preservation of spiritual wisdom would depend increasingly on its ability to inspire personal transformation rather than merely conveying doctrinal content.

The Rebbe Rayatz's emphasis on moral and ethical lessons drawn from parabolic wisdom also anticipated the therapeutic applications that would become central to contemporary spiritual practice. His stories consistently demonstrate how ancient wisdom can provide guidance for navigating extreme psychological and social stress.

7.2.7 The Lubavitcher Rebbe's Universal Application

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, brought the evolution of Chabad parabolic theology to its culmination through his revolutionary insight that mystical wisdom could and should be made accessible to all humanity. His reinterpretation of traditional meshalim for contemporary audiences represents more than pedagogical adaptation; it reflects a fundamental theological conviction about the universal relevance of divine truth.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's approach to parable interpretation reveals sophisticated understanding of how ancient wisdom must be translated for contemporary consciousness without losing its essential power. His public talks demonstrate remarkable ability to take the Alter Rebbe's complex metaphors about divine light and vessels, cosmic repair, and soul psychology and show their relevance to modern concerns about purpose, meaning, and social responsibility.

This universal application reflects the Lubavitcher Rebbe's conviction that the "rupture of modernity" identified by Rubin could be healed through demonstrating divine presence within contemporary experience. Rather than treating modernity as obstacle to spiritual life, the Lubavitcher Rebbe showed how modern global interconnection, technological capability, and social consciousness could become vehicles for unprecedented spiritual transformation.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's emphasis on personal responsibility and global outreach through parabolic teaching also represents the culmination of Chabad's evolution from inward-focused mystical community to catalyst for worldwide spiritual awakening. His interpretation of inherited meshalim consistently emphasizes how individual spiritual work contributes to cosmic repair and universal redemption.

7.2.8 The Therapeutic Implications

This genealogy of parabolic interpretation within Chabad thought provides essential background for understanding how Jewish mystical wisdom anticipates and supports contemporary therapeutic approaches to spiritual healing (35). Each generation's contribution adds crucial elements to what we might call a "theology of presence within absence"—the recognition that divine healing power operates precisely within experiences of abandonment, confusion, and suffering.

The Alter Rebbe's insight that parables function as bridges between infinite and finite consciousness provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how therapeutic relationships can become spaces of divine encounter (19). The Mittlerer Rebbe's psychological depth offers resources for understanding how spiritual healing engages both conscious and unconscious dimensions of human experience (18). The Tzemach Tzedek's synthetic approach demonstrates how mystical insight can illuminate diverse domains of human concern.

The Rebbe Maharash's transcendent activism provides crucial understanding of how healing transformation can occur through accessing higher spiritual perspectives rather than merely working through problems at their own level. The Rebbe Rashab's systematic philosophy offers the intellectual framework necessary for integrating spiritual insight with clinical practice. The Rebbe Rayatz's narrative resilience demonstrates how stories can preserve and transmit healing wisdom across cultural disruption.

Finally, the Lubavitcher Rebbe's universal application shows how ancient wisdom can address contemporary psychological and social challenges while maintaining its essential transformative power. His approach anticipates precisely the kind of integration between mystical insight and therapeutic practice that contemporary pioneers like Julian Ungar-Sargon are developing.

7.2.9 Rubin's Framework and Contemporary Relevance

Eli Rubin's analysis of how each generation of Chabad leadership responded to the "rupture of modernity" through parabolic theology provides crucial insight into why this tradition offers such rich resources for contemporary therapeutic spirituality (27). Each Rebbe's adaptation of inherited meshalim represents a form of "rupture repair"—demonstrating how ancient wisdom can bridge the gap between transcendent truth and immediate human need.

This ongoing process of interpretation and application reflects what we might call the "dialectical structure" of divine revelation itself (2,3). Just as *tzimtzum* creates space for finite existence while maintaining hidden divine presence, effective parabolic interpretation creates space for contemporary understanding while preserving essential spiritual truth. The therapeutic implications are profound: healing relationships require similar balance between professional boundaries and genuine spiritual presence (17).

The seven-generation evolution of Chabad parabolic theology thus provides both theoretical framework and practical methodology for developing what our main paper terms "theotherapy"—the recognition of divine presence within apparent absence that enables authentic healing transformation. Rather than treating suffering as problem requiring solution, this tradition offers resources for recognizing suffering as space where hidden divine presence can be encountered and healing can emerge from within darkness itself.

This theological genealogy demonstrates that the integration of mystical wisdom with contemporary healing practice is not modern innovation but rather the culmination of a centuries-long process of interpreting eternal truth for contemporary need. The Chabad tradition's evolution provides both validation and guidance for those seeking to develop spiritually-informed approaches to mental health, pastoral care, and social healing.

Notably, this tradition contrasts with more radical approaches like that of Jonathan Eybeschutz, who in "Va-Avo Hayom el ha-Ayin" argues that evil originates from the thoughtless aspect of Ein Sof itself (36,37). While Chabad emphasizes transformation of evil through revelation of concealed divine light, Eybeschutz advocates direct integration of shadow material as containing unconscious divine energy. Both approaches, however, support the contemporary development of theologically-informed therapeutic practice that recognizes divine presence within apparent absence.

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