

Moral Injury, and the Liminal Theology of Peace in Jewish Thought, Jungian Psychology, and the Therapeutic Imagination

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Abstract

This article examines a contemporary dream in which I (the dreamer) and a Palestinian interlocutor exchange wine at the border between Israel and Palestine, the dreamer subsequently entering the village and sharing the wine with its inhabitants. The dream invokes the rabbinic category of yayin nesech (forbidden libation wine), the obligation of Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the divine name), the contemporary clinical category of moral injury, the obsessional structure of halakhic anxiety, and the unsettling possibility that symbolic transgression might constitute a pathway toward peace rather than a betrayal of covenantal fidelity.

Through sustained engagement with classical Jewish theological sources, Hasidic and Kabbalistic mystical traditions, the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung, the ethical phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas, the post-Holocaust thought of Emil Fackenheim, the relational psychoanalysis of D. W. Winnicott, and contemporary clinical theories of moral injury, I argue that the dream dramatises a profoundly Jewish form of liminality in which holiness emerges not exclusively through separation from the Other but, more precariously, through dangerous relational encounter with the Other.

Drawing upon my prior writings concerning divine concealment, the compromised healer, therapeutic liminality, and the hermeneutic critique of medical reductionism, I propose that moral injury cannot be adequately theorised through modern psychological frameworks alone.

The dream reveals moral injury as rupture within sacred symbolic order itself rather than as a discrete violation of an internally coherent ethical schema.

We conclude that the dream preserves the tragic structure of religious consciousness — namely, that redemption within a fractured world may demand descent into ambiguity without abolishing moral seriousness, and that Kiddush Hashem under conditions of protracted violence may require the courage to remain human precisely where doctrinal certainty collapses.

Keywords

Yayin nesech, Kiddush Hashem, Moral injury, Jewish theology, Hasidism, Kabbalah, Levinas, Jung, Tzimtzum, Therapeutic encounter, Liminality, Post-Holocaust theology, Community mental health, Lifestyle psychiatry.

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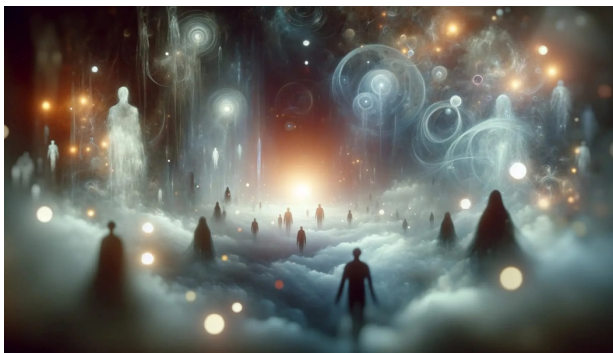
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Introduction

The border as theological category

Religious traditions survive through boundaries. The observation is at once sociological and theological. Judaism in particular structures holiness through a dense network of distinctions — between sacred and profane, Israel and the nations, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden, covenantal and idolatrous. Such distinctions are not cultic curiosities preserved by historical inertia. They have functioned, throughout millennia of exile, persecution, and dispersion, as the very scaffolding by which Jewish continuity has been preserved [1,2]. To dismantle them casually is to risk dissolution. To absolutise them, however, is to risk a different and equally serious form of spiritual collapse.

Jewish theology preserves, alongside its rigorously bounded structures, a destabilising countercurrent in which holiness emerges precisely within rupture, ambiguity, and descent into concealment. The prophetic tradition repeatedly subjects ritual separation detached from ethical responsiveness to scathing critique. Hosea's declaration that the divine desires mercy rather than sacrifice does not merely supplement the formal structures of holiness; it destabilises them, asserting that ritual fidelity uncoupled from compassion fails as religion [1]. Isaiah excoriates a sacrificial economy that proceeds while justice is denied to the orphan and the widow [2]. The mystical traditions in turn suggest, repeatedly and across centuries, that divine sparks remain hidden precisely within exile and fracture, requiring engagement rather than avoidance [3,4]. The implication is theologically vertiginous. The sacred cannot always be located by separating cleanly from the profane, because the sacred has, in some real sense, gone into the profane.



A recent dream in which my daughter Batya is present and to whom I write the following, — distills these tensions with symbolic concentration:

“I had a dream last night that you and I were in some border between Israel and Palestine. An Arab Palestinian came up to us offering me a glass of wine, and then I offered him a glass of wine. He said, ‘Come, come to my village,’ and I went. Everyone had from my wine, and then when we came back and you were waiting for

us, we both said, ‘You see, we can make peace over wine.’”

So I don't know what comes up for me other than yayin nesech — meaning I have to transgress in order to make peace.

You know how much I'm very mortified about the moral injury that's happened to Israeli soldiers. But also, if we're meant to be a “light unto the nations” (Or LaGoyim), how is it not possible that that would be a better Kiddush Hashem if we transgressed in order to make peace?”

The dream is densely overdetermined. It carries simultaneously the freight of contamination and forbidden intimacy, the texture of sacred shame, the bewilderment of moral injury and its theological grammar, the stricture of obsessional purity structures, and the audacity of imagining reconciliation through symbolic transgression. Few dream-texts I have encountered in the literature on religious psychology compress so much theological labour into so brief a narrative.

In what follows I argue that the dream dramatises what may be called a postmodern Jewish theology of liminality — one in which holiness emerges not exclusively through separation from the Other but through dangerous relational encounter with the Other. The argument is not antinomian. The dream does not abolish halakhah, nor does it propose the wholesale abandonment of the structures by which Jewish identity has been preserved across catastrophe. It reveals, rather, the tragic structure of religious consciousness itself: that redemption within a fractured world may require descent into ambiguity while preserving ethical trembling. The interpretive framework I shall employ draws significantly from my own theological-medical writings concerning divine concealment, the therapeutic encounter, sacred ambiguity, and what I have elsewhere termed the “compromised healer” [5-14]. Those writings argue, with increasing insistence over the past decade, that authentic healing requires vulnerability to contamination, relational exposure, and existential uncertainty. The dream, I shall propose, dramatises precisely this theology in the unconscious medium of sleep.



I proceed by way of seven interpretive movements. I begin by

analysing wine as a symbol of sacred contamination within Jewish tradition, with particular attention to the rabbinic category of *yayin nesech* and its sociological as well as theological functions. I then turn to the dream's setting — the border itself — as a Jungian and theological threshold-space, and argue that the appearance of the Palestinian as host destabilises the projective architecture of collective enmity. A third movement situates the dream within the conceptual territory of my prior writings on the therapeutic encounter and the compromised healer, drawing on D. W. Winnicott's account of relational vulnerability. The fourth and fifth movements explore the dream through the Kabbalistic doctrine of *tzimtzum* and the Hasidic theology of descent for the sake of redemption. I then consider the obsessional structure of halakhic anxiety as the dream itself names it, and the radical question it raises about *Kiddush Hashem* in conditions of protracted violence. A final substantive section reframes moral injury as theological rupture rather than psychological deviation. An addendum offers a sustained critique of Brett Litz's clinical formulation of moral injury through the resources of Jewish theology, Jungian psychology, and the philosophical category of tragedy.



Wine as sacred contamination

Wine occupies a profoundly unstable symbolic role within Jewish tradition. It sanctifies Shabbat and the festivals, it seals the marital covenant, and it serves as the liquid medium of messianic anticipation in eschatological imagery. Yet wine simultaneously threatens intoxication, erotic excess, idolatrous communion, and the dissolution of rational vigilance. The rabbinic adage encapsulates this ambivalence with characteristic concision: *Nichnas yayin yatza sod* — when wine enters, the secret emerges [15]. The aphorism does not merely warn against drunkenness. It registers the more profound recognition that wine destabilises the boundary between concealment and disclosure, between the carefully composed public self and what lies beneath it. That precisely such an unstable substance functions as the principal medium of liturgical sanctification is itself theologically suggestive. Holiness in the rabbinic imagination has never been wholly distant from danger.

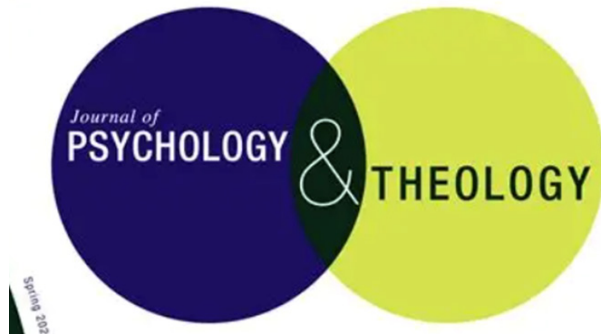
The dream intensifies this symbolic instability through its explicit invocation of *yayin nesech*. In rabbinic categorisation, *yayin nesech* refers, in the strictest sense, to wine that has been used in idolatrous libation; the prohibition was subsequently extended, by rabbinic decree, to wine merely handled or processed by non-Jews, the category of *stam yeinam* [16]. The historical functions of these prohibitions were not exclusively cultic. As Haym Soloveitchik has shown in his analysis of medieval Ashkenazic attitudes toward Gentiles, the prohibition operated sociologically, preserving communal distinction and discouraging the forms of intimacy through which assimilation tends to occur [17]. Wine prohibitions are, in this sense, technologies of identity preservation as much as theological propositions about idolatry. Their apparent stringency is inseparable from their function in maintaining the porous yet defended boundary between Jewish and non-Jewish life under conditions of dispersion.

Against this background, the dream's symbolic logic becomes more startling. The forbidden wine does not corrupt the dreamer; it reconciles. The Palestinian offers wine; the Jewish dreamer reciprocates; the dreamer enters the village and shares the wine he himself had brought; peace, in the dream's vocabulary, is consummated through what the dreamer himself recognises as mutual contamination. Read psychologically, this represents the collapse of rigid purity structures, and here the dreamer's own diagnostic gloss on his "obsessive-compulsive halachic stuff" is interpretively significant. The obsessive psyche seeks safety through impermeable distinction — between self and other, purity and contamination, covenant and danger. The dream proposes the terrifying possibility that peace itself requires symbolic vulnerability to contamination, that the obsessive structure cannot serve as the final architecture of a religiously serious life.

This symbolic inversion resonates with internal Jewish mystical traditions in ways that complicate any too-rapid dismissal. Gershom Scholem argued, in his analyses of Sabbatian and post-Sabbatian developments, that certain forms of Jewish mysticism preserve a dialectic in which descent into impurity paradoxically participates in redemption [3,18]. Moshe Idel has demonstrated that ecstatic and antinomian tensions periodically emerge whenever rigid legal structures appear spiritually insufficient to contain the religious imagination [4]. The dream therefore participates in a longstanding, if controversial, Jewish theological pattern: redemption through liminality, holiness through dangerous proximity rather than through fortified distance. To dismiss the dream as merely transgressive fantasy is to miss the seriousness of its theological lineage.

It is essential, however, to mark what the dream is not doing. The dream does not render the prohibition of *yayin nesech* obsolete, nor does it suggest that the rabbinic concern for boundaries was always already misguided. The dreamer trembles. He uses the word "mortified". He carries the prohibition with him into the encounter rather than abolishing it. What the dream stages is something more delicate than transgression as principle: it stages the question of

whether, under particular historical conditions of unresolved violence, the very faithfulness that the prohibition was instituted to preserve might require its momentary suspension. This is closer to the structure of *hora'at sha'ah*, the rabbinic category of an occasional ruling for the hour, than to any sustained antinomianism.



The border as psychic and theological threshold

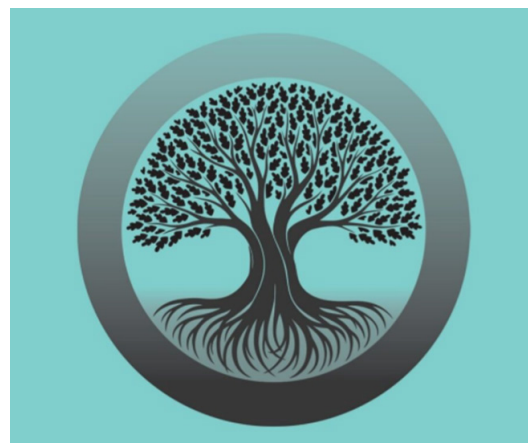
In Jungian analytical psychology, borders symbolise the liminal psychic territories where unconscious material emerges into the threshold of conscious awareness [19,20]. The dream's setting is therefore archetypally significant. The border between Israel and Palestine becomes, within the dream's symbolic economy, more than geopolitical terrain. It becomes the symbolic terrain that lies between identity and alterity, between holiness and contamination, between covenantal particularity and prophetic universalism, between traumatic memory and reconciliatory possibility. The geography of the dream is, so to speak, the geography of the soul under contemporary historical pressure.

The Palestinian figure functions archetypally as bearer of shadow material. Jung consistently argued that collectives preserve cohesion through projection of disowned dimensions of themselves onto external enemies; the enemy becomes the repository of feared humanity, of qualities the collective cannot tolerate within itself [21,22]. The Palestinian in the dream, however, appears not as monster but as host. He invites; he offers wine; he humanises the encounter through gesture rather than rhetoric. The dream therefore destabilises the projective mechanism itself rather than merely modifying its content. This is a more radical operation than mere reframing of the enemy. The dream reveals that the enemy was always also a host, and that the host was always also potentially an enemy, and that these two possibilities cannot be safely segregated within the moral imagination.

This parallels Jung's warnings, articulated with particular urgency in *The Undiscovered Self*, regarding the spiritual costs of collective enemy-formation [22]. Societies sustain ideological coherence through the projection of unwanted qualities onto external others; genuine encounter with the humanity of the projected Other threatens not merely a particular policy but the ideological architecture itself. The dream's anguish — its mortification, its trembling, its felt sense that something has gone wrong even

as something has gone right — emerges precisely from this destabilisation. My own writings on sacred ambiguity have repeatedly argued that authentic encounter requires tolerating destabilisation without prematurely retreating into ideological certainty [5-8]. The dream reflects this theological psychology with unusual clarity.

It is worth pausing on the ethical valence of the dream's reciprocity. The Palestinian offers wine, but the dreamer also offers wine. The exchange is not asymmetrical; neither figure is reduced to the role of supplicant or benefactor. This symmetry is itself theologically significant. Within Levinasian ethics, the face of the Other interrupts totalising systems and introduces an infinite responsibility that cannot be reciprocally measured [23,24]. Yet the dream's exchange is reciprocal — and this reciprocity, rather than diminishing the ethical force of the encounter, intensifies it. The dreamer is not merely obligated by the Other; he is hosted, included, drawn into a village he had been taught to fear. The infinite responsibility of which Levinas speaks here takes the form of accepted hospitality rather than unilateral obligation, which is perhaps closer to the structure of biblical covenant than to the structure of philanthropy.



The therapeutic space and the compromised healer

My theological-medical writings published over the past several years repeatedly return to the figure of the compromised healer [6]. Authentic healing, I have argued, requires descent into another's suffering rather than diagnostic distance from it. The clinician cannot remain emotionally sterile or existentially untouched. Healing contaminates. The healer is wounded by encounter, and the wound becomes part of the medicine.

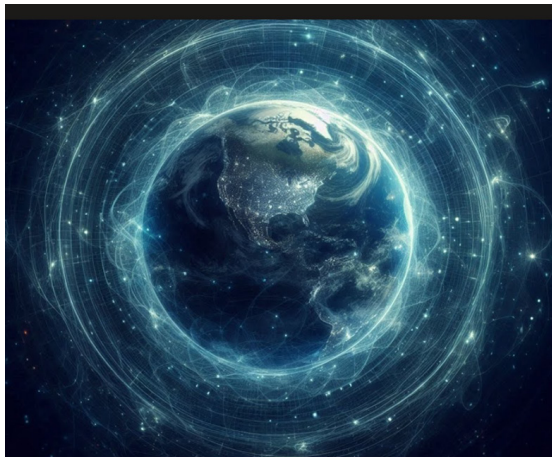
This insight strongly parallels D. W. Winnicott's conception of transitional and therapeutic space. Winnicott argued that authentic relational encounter occurs within vulnerable intermediate zones in which rigid distinctions between self and other soften without dissolving [25]. Such spaces are psychologically dangerous precisely because they destabilise the defensive certainties through which the patient (and the analyst) has previously survived. They are also where healing actually happens, because rigid certainties

are themselves often the structures within which suffering has become entrenched.

The dream reflects this structure with unusual clarity. The border becomes therapeutic space; the wine exchange becomes ritual encounter; peace emerges through vulnerable proximity. The dreamer's anguish is not a symptom of pathology but evidence that the encounter has been real. To remain unmoved by the Palestinian's hospitality would be the more pathological outcome.

Modern technocratic medicine frequently seeks sterility, detachment, and reductionistic objectivity in the name of professional clarity. My writings have repeatedly criticised such approaches as spiritually insufficient, not because the science is wrong but because human suffering exceeds the categories within which the science is conducted [9,10]. The therapeutic encounter is sacred precisely because it exposes healer and patient alike to ambiguity, grief, mortality, and emotional contamination [11,12]. The dream extends this theological-clinical insight into the political-religious domain. It suggests that religious consciousness detached from relational vulnerability risks becoming spiritually petrified, and that *halakhic* fidelity uncoupled from the capacity to be moved by the Other may, paradoxically, become a form of idolatry — the worship of one's own purity rather than of the Holy One.

The dreamer therefore resembles the compromised healer. He is unable to preserve absolute innocence while remaining open to the humanity of the Other; he is unable to remain absolutely open while preserving the categories that make him recognisable to himself. The dream stages this aporia without resolving it, which is precisely what dreams of theological seriousness do.



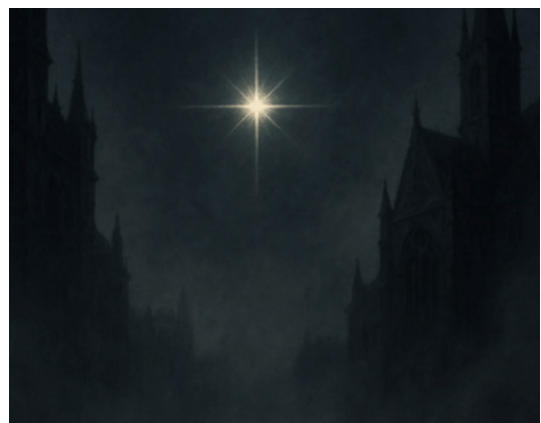
Divine concealment, and the contracted space of encounter

The dream may also be interpreted through the Lurianic doctrine of *tzimtzum*. According to Isaac Luria, the infinite divine performs an act of self-contraction in order to create existential space within which finite existence — and therefore relationship — becomes possible [26]. The doctrine has been read in multiple registers:

cosmologically, as an account of how creation occurs without pantheistic dissolution; mystically, as a statement about the dialectic of presence and absence within the divine life itself; and ethically, as a paradigm for the kind of self-restraint by which one being makes room for another. Later Hasidic traditions reinterpret *tzimtzum* psychologically and relationally, treating the divine self-contraction as the prototype of every act of love that withholds its own fullness in order that the beloved may exist in freedom [27-31].

My own writings repeatedly apply *tzimtzum* to the therapeutic and theological encounter [5]. God appears, on this reading, not through overwhelming certainty but through concealment, contraction, vulnerability, and relational openness. The most authentic forms of religious presence are not those that overwhelm the Other with the speaker's own conviction but those that hollow out a space within which the Other may speak. This framework transforms the dream profoundly. The border becomes concealed sacred space — a *tzimtzum*-territory within which two peoples might encounter one another precisely because the divine has, in some sense, contracted to make room for the encounter. The dreamer, on this reading, does not encounter God on his own side of the border alone; nor does he encounter God on the Palestinian's side alone. Holiness emerges within the dangerous encounter itself, in the contracted space between. The Palestinian offering wine becomes spiritually destabilising precisely because the dreamer encounters possible holiness where he had been taught to expect threat.

This resembles the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, who locates transcendence within the encounter with the irreducible face of the Other [23]. In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas further argues that ethical responsibility precedes conceptual certainty itself; the Other interrupts ideological totality before the totalising system has had time to assimilate the Other into its categories [24]. The dream therefore reveals not merely a political conflict but a theological crisis regarding the location of holiness itself. Where is Shekhinah in the territory of unresolved violence? The dream answers with unsettling theological courage: she may be in the village to which one had been forbidden to go.

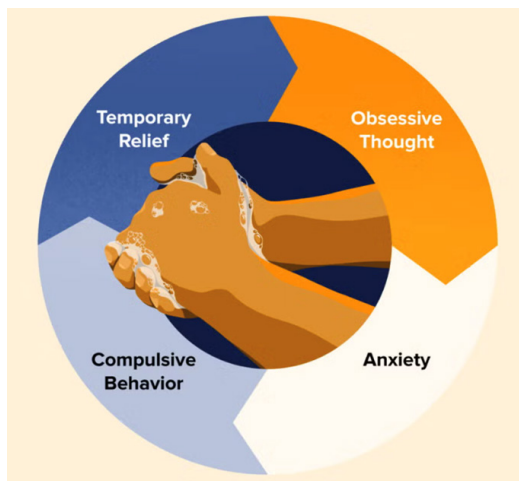


Hasidic descent and the retrieval of hidden sparks

Hasidic theology repeatedly portrays descent into darkness as prerequisite for redemption rather than as its negation. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov describes spiritual life as movement through concealment, fragmentation, and existential exile, insisting that hidden sparks remain trapped within brokenness itself and can be released only by those willing to enter the brokenness [27]. The structure is theologically counter-intuitive: redemption is not extracted from the world by transcending it but cultivated within the world by descending into it. The tzaddik who refuses descent forfeits, in the Breslov imagination, the possibility of authentic redemptive work.

Chabad thought, especially in Menachem Mendel Schneerson's Bati LeGani discourses, develops the doctrine of dirah betachtonim: the ultimate divine dwelling emerges specifically within the lowest realms, not despite their lowness but because of it [28]. The world itself becomes the site of redemption precisely because holiness has descended into concealment within it. The cosmological vision is one in which the divine has staked its own dwelling on the transformation of the lowest, most contested, most apparently profane spaces.

Shneur Zalman of Liadi, in the Tanya, portrays spiritual struggle not as the elimination of inner contradiction but as sanctification within conflict itself [31]. The beinoni, the intermediate religious type whom the Tanya canonises, is not the figure who has overcome temptation but the figure who lives faithfully within it. Holiness, on this reading, is not the absence of struggle but the dignified inhabitation of it.



The dream reflects these structures with notable precision. The border becomes exile-space; the forbidden wine becomes hidden spark; the enemy becomes bearer of concealed humanity. Peace therefore emerges not despite ambiguity but through engagement with ambiguity. My writings on divine concealment and therapeutic liminality similarly argue that healing frequently emerges not through transcendence of fracture but through inhabiting fracture

itself [5-8]. The dream restages, in the political register, what the clinical encounter restages in the therapeutic register: that wholeness is not the opposite of woundedness but its theological transfiguration.

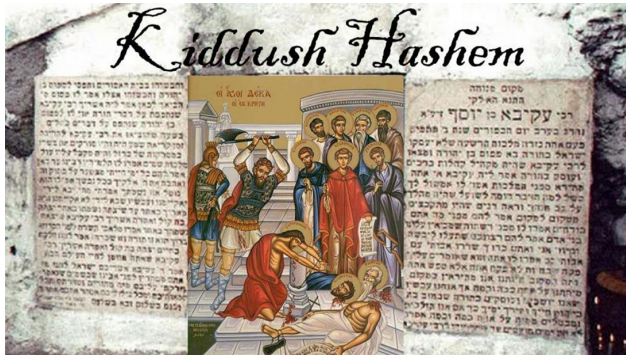
Obsessional halakhah and the anxieties of purity

The dream explicitly references the dreamer's "obsessive-compulsive halachic stuff". This phrase is psychologically revealing and theologically delicate, and it deserves careful handling. Sigmund Freud famously compared obsessional neurosis to ritual contamination anxiety, suggesting an underlying structural similarity between religious ritual and obsessional symptomatology [32]. The comparison has been variously taken up and rejected within psychoanalytic and religious-studies literature. Yet Jewish theology cannot simply dismiss the rabbinic emphasis on halakhic distinction as pathology, because halakhic structures genuinely preserve sacred identity and have demonstrably enabled Jewish survival under historical conditions that would otherwise have dissolved it. The relationship between religious ritual and obsessional structure is more dialectical than Freud's reductive analogy suggests.

The problem emerges when halakhic distinction becomes totalising. The dream suggests that excessive fixation on separation may itself obscure divine encounter, transforming the rabbinic boundary from a means by which the holy is preserved into an end behind which the holy can no longer be discerned. The dream does not abolish the boundary; it interrogates the cost of refusing to step across it under any circumstance whatever.

Importantly, the dream does not celebrate transgression casually. The dreamer remains ashamed and mortified. Shame, here, performs a critical theological function. It preserves moral seriousness and prevents simplistic antinomian interpretation. My writings have repeatedly portrayed shame not merely as pathology to be managed but as revelational rupture exposing incompleteness and vulnerability [6,7,12]. Shame destabilises fantasies of moral purity and mastery, and in so doing returns the religious subject to the actual conditions of his finitude.

This resembles prophetic critiques of ritualism divorced from ethical responsiveness. Isaiah condemns sacrifice without justice, while Hosea privileges mercy over ritual formalism [1,2]. Yet Judaism never abolishes ritual law entirely. The contradiction remains unresolved within the canonical tradition, and the rabbis preserved it rather than smoothing it away. The dream's refusal to resolve the contradiction is therefore traditional rather than aberrant. It inhabits the same territory the prophets and the rabbis themselves inhabited: a religious life in which ritual and ethics are both indispensable and mutually irreducible, in which the demand to keep the boundary and the demand to cross it under certain conditions are both authentically Jewish.



Kiddush Hashem and the sanctification of ambiguity

The dream's central theological question concerns Kiddush Hashem. Traditionally, sanctification of the divine name involves fidelity to Torah, willingness to face martyrdom rather than commit certain transgressions, and ethical conduct that generates admiration for Jewish holiness among the nations [33]. Maimonides explicitly defines Kiddush Hashem partly through ethical behaviour towards others that causes God's name to become beloved in the world [33]. The category is therefore not exhausted by martyrological readings; it includes the entire register of conduct by which Jewish life witnesses to the divine within history.

The dream radicalises this trajectory by raising a question that conventional theological vocabulary struggles to articulate: whether symbolic transgression undertaken for the sake of reconciliation might constitute a deeper sanctification than rigid adherence under conditions of unresolved violence. The question is dangerous. It threatens conventional religious structures because it destabilises the very boundaries on which Jewish continuity has rested. It cannot be answered glibly, and the dreamer himself does not answer it. He poses it, in the form of a dream, to the analytic relationship within which the dream is being held.

The Netziv — Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin — becomes highly significant in this connection. In his celebrated introduction to *Ha'amek Davar* on Genesis, the Netziv criticises religious absolutism detached from human relationality, arguing that the ideological zealotry of those who considered themselves *yashar* (upright) in their *halakhic* purity contributed to the destruction of the Second Temple by enabling the dehumanisation of those they regarded as insufficiently observant [20]. The argument is staggering: the Netziv suggests that *halakhic* rigour uncoupled from human warmth becomes a vehicle of catastrophe rather than of redemption. The dream, on this reading, becomes "Netzivian." It inhabits the liminal territory between Lithuanian *halakhic* structure and Hasidic relationality, holding both as indispensable while refusing to allow either to silence the other.

My writings have repeatedly argued that premature certainty often conceals rather than reveals holiness [5-10]. The certainty that one already knows where holiness is located — and where it is

not — tends to function as a defence against the more demanding work of discerning where holiness is actually being offered in the encounter at hand. The dream reflects precisely this theology of sacred ambiguity. It refuses the certainty that would have prevented the encounter altogether, and it equally refuses the certainty that would have abolished the prohibition retroactively. It holds both, mortified.



Moral injury beyond reductionism

The dream's reflection on Israeli soldiers introduces the modern clinical concept of moral injury. Jonathan Shay first emphasised, in his treatment of Vietnam veterans through the lens of the *Iliad*, that warfare wounds not merely the psyche but the moral and existential orientation of the combatant [34]. Brett Litz and colleagues subsequently defined moral injury more formally as the enduring psychological, spiritual and behavioural distress arising from perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs [35]. The category has been clinically generative; it has enabled veterans to articulate forms of suffering that the diagnostic apparatus of post-traumatic stress disorder did not adequately register.

Yet such frameworks remain, I want to suggest, ultimately insufficient to the depth of what the dream is registering. My writings have repeatedly criticised reductionistic approaches to human suffering [9,10]. Human beings inhabit symbolic and sacred worlds irreducible to neurobiology or cognition alone, and to treat moral injury as a primarily cognitive-behavioural phenomenon is to truncate its theological depth. The dream reveals precisely this limitation. The dreamer's anguish concerns not merely guilt over actions taken or omitted; it concerns the collapse of certainty regarding holiness itself. The injury is not located within an internally coherent moral schema that has been violated. It is located within the symbolic order through which moral life had been made intelligible at all. War contaminates symbolic order; violence wounds sacred identity; the enemy remains stubbornly human; and these three observations together disclose a wound that no merely cognitive intervention can suture.

Biblical tradition itself acknowledges this tragic structure with remarkable sobriety. Even justified warfare requires purification afterward; the warriors returning from the war against Midian are commanded to remain outside the camp for seven days and undergo purification before re-entering the community [36]. The

text does not say that the war was unjust, but it nevertheless insists that even just violence contaminates the warrior. The contamination is not a punishment but a recognition: those who have shed blood, even commanded blood, return to the community altered, and the community must mark the alteration. This is moral injury in a theological idiom that anticipates the modern clinical category by some three millennia.

Post-Holocaust thinkers extend this recognition into the contemporary register. Emil Fackenheim repeatedly argued that modern Jewish consciousness cannot return to naïve moral certainty after catastrophe; the event has imposed upon Jewish thought what he termed the 614th commandment — the obligation not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory — but it has equally imposed an irrevocable transformation of the conditions under which moral certainty itself can be asserted [37,38]. The dream reflects precisely such post-catastrophic consciousness. Jewish identity remains necessary; the covenantal and halakhic structures by which it is preserved remain indispensable; and yet the excessive certainty that any of these structures alone exhaust the demand of *Kiddush Hashem* has become spiritually dangerous.

The dreamer, in this sense, is not suffering from a clinical syndrome that requires symptomatic management. He is registering, in the medium of the unconscious, a theological insight that the conscious tradition has not yet fully metabolised: that the sanctification of the divine name in the aftermath of catastrophe and within the theatre of unresolved political violence may require a religious imagination capacious enough to hold both the prohibition and its momentary suspension, both the boundary and the encounter, both the sword and the wine.



Shame, mortality, and sacred fragility

The dream repeatedly emphasises mortification. The dreamer is “mortified”. He trembles before the question he has himself posed. This shame is spiritually significant and deserves theological rather than merely diagnostic attention. My prior writings on mortality awareness and therapeutic dread argue that confrontation with fragility frequently destabilises simplistic theological systems [11,12]. Human beings become fully human precisely where fantasies of mastery collapse, and religious life becomes fully serious precisely where it can no longer protect itself from the

recognition of its own finitude.

The dream’s shame therefore prevents nihilism. The dreamer does not celebrate transgression casually; he does not announce that halakhah has been overcome; he does not declare himself liberated from the structures within which he has lived his life. He trembles before ambiguity. This resembles certain Hasidic portrayals of descent undertaken with fear and trembling rather than with libertine abandonment. Sacred transgression preserves conscience; nihilistic transgression abolishes it; and the dream remains sacred precisely because guilt survives its own logic. The dreamer’s shame is the residue of moral seriousness that prevents the dream’s theological audacity from collapsing into self-justification.

Here a further theological observation is warranted. Within the rabbinic imagination, *bushah* — shame — is not exclusively negative; it is, at certain critical moments, the marker of authentic encounter with the holy. The rabbis suggest that one who is incapable of shame is one who has not yet stood before the divine [33]. The dreamer’s mortification, on this reading, is itself a form of religious knowledge. He has stood at a place where standing was difficult, and he has not pretended otherwise.

Conclusion Holiness within ambiguity

The dream examined in this article reveals one of the deepest unresolved tensions within Jewish theology: whether holiness is preserved primarily through separation from what it is not, or whether holiness is sometimes constituted through vulnerable encounter with what it is not. The dream does not resolve this contradiction. It preserves it. Wine becomes communion through contamination; the border becomes sacred space; the enemy becomes human; holiness appears concealed within ambiguity rather than displayed in clarity.

Interpreted through Jungian psychology, Hasidism, Levinasian ethics, post-Holocaust theology, and the theology of the compromised healer, the dream suggests that redemption within a fractured world may require descent into morally dangerous spaces without abandoning ethical trembling. The descent is not a renunciation of the boundaries; it is an acknowledgment that the boundaries, however indispensable, do not exhaust the territory of the holy. The trembling is not weakness; it is the affective signature of a religious imagination that has refused to substitute certainty for fidelity.

Perhaps this is the dream’s deepest theological insight: that *Kiddush Hashem* in an age of protracted violence may require not purity alone but the courage to remain human where certainty collapses. The dreamer, mortified at the border, sharing wine with those he had been taught to fear and being shared wine in return, has performed — in the unconscious medium of the dream — a religious act that the conscious tradition has not yet found a vocabulary for. It falls to theology, perhaps, to begin to find that vocabulary, not by inventing it but by listening, with the same trembling the dreamer

himself displayed, to the dreams in which the tradition continues to disclose itself.

Addendum



A theological critique of Litz's concept of moral injury The clinical category and its limits

The clinical category of moral injury, particularly as articulated by Brett Litz and his collaborators, has significantly shaped contemporary discussions of war trauma, guilt, and existential fragmentation [35]. Litz defines moral injury as the enduring psychological, spiritual, and behavioural harm resulting from perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations. The framework has expanded trauma discourse beyond fear-based PTSD models, opening a clinical space within which the moral and existential dimensions of combat suffering can be acknowledged rather than reduced to neurobiological dysregulation. For this opening, the field is in Litz's debt.

Yet the framework, I want to argue in this addendum, remains limited in several crucial respects when assessed against the resources of Jewish theology, Jungian analytical psychology, and the philosophical category of tragedy. It insufficiently addresses the tragic structure of morality itself; it inadequately theorises collective and sacred identity; and it ultimately retains a psychologically modern but theologically thin conception of guilt and repair. The dream explored in this paper exposes precisely these limitations.

Tragic morality and the limits of therapeutic coherence

Litz's model presupposes that moral injury results from violation of an internally coherent moral framework. The therapeutic implication follows naturally: if the injury consists in the violation of a coherent code, then healing consists in the acknowledgment, processing, and reintegration of the violating event within a restored coherence [35]. The clinician helps the veteran name what occurred, accept what was done or witnessed, and reconstruct a moral self-capable of living forward.

The dream, however, does not depict mere violation of moral norms. It dramatises a collision between competing sacred obligations that cannot be simultaneously resolved. The dreamer does not feel guilty for wrongdoing in any straightforward sense. He experiences anguish because reconciliation itself appears to require symbolic transgression — because faithfulness to *Or LaGoyim*, the prophetic vocation of being a light to the nations, may stand in tension with faithfulness to the halakhic structures that have preserved the very people who are to bear that light. This is a phenomenon that Litz's framework, oriented as it is toward the restoration of a presumptively coherent moral self, struggles to register.

The distinction is critical. Within Litz's framework, moral injury emerges when one violates one's ethical code; the therapeutic goal therefore tends toward acknowledgment, processing, forgiveness, reintegration, and the restoration of moral coherence [35]. Within Jewish theological traditions — particularly biblical, rabbinic, and Hasidic traditions — moral life is frequently presented not as coherent but as intrinsically tragic. Human beings may confront situations in which every available action incurs guilt of some kind, and in which the demand to act faithfully outstrips the capacity of any single faithful response to satisfy all the demands at once.

This tragic dimension appears repeatedly in Scripture. Abraham's binding of Isaac, Moses' destruction of the tablets, Pinchas' zealous violence, Saul's failures, David's wars, and Jeremiah's prophetic despair all reveal a religious universe within which covenantal fidelity and ethical clarity do not fully coincide [39-44]. The righteous figure is often wounded precisely through obedience rather than through disobedience. Abraham obeys and is changed; Moses obeys and is permanently scarred; Pinchas obeys (in one traditional reading) and is granted a covenant of peace that is itself, in another traditional reading, an oblique mark of the violence by which it was procured. Litz's paradigm struggles to accommodate such structures because it remains fundamentally therapeutic rather than tragic. It seeks repair where the religious imagination knows that some wounds testify to fidelity and should not be too quickly closed.

War and the contamination even of justified violence

The limitation becomes especially apparent in relation to warfare. Modern psychological models frequently imply that moral injury results primarily from deviation from an underlying humane moral baseline. Yet within Jewish thought, war itself destabilises morality at the structural level rather than merely at the level of particular acts. Even justified violence leaves residual impurity. The biblical warrior frequently requires purification rituals after battle, and these rituals are not framed as remedial responses to misconduct but as recognitions that violence contaminates even when necessary [36]. The problem is therefore not simply individual guilt over discrete actions but ontological rupture in the warrior's relation to the holy.

The dream captures this rupture exactly. The dreamer is mortified

not because he has committed clear evil but because peace itself appears to require contamination through *yayin nesech*. The anxiety concerns the impossibility of preserving purity while remaining ethically human towards the Other. This is not the kind of moral injury that admits of cognitive reframing, because the injury is not the violation of a clear norm but the discovery that the relevant norms, taken in isolation, may be insufficient to the situation in which one finds oneself.

Symbolic fragmentation: a Jungian deepening

Litz's framework also underestimates the symbolic and unconscious dimensions of moral injury that Jungian analytical psychology has emphasised. Jung insisted that psychic suffering frequently emerges not from isolated behaviours but from unresolved oppositions within the structure of the self [33]. Guilt may therefore represent confrontation with shadow material rather than merely violation of conscious ethical standards. The Palestinian figure in the dream functions archetypally as shadow-bearer; the dreamer's anguish emerges because the enemy appears human and hospitable. This destabilises rigid identity boundaries that wartime moral simplification depends upon, and the destabilisation cannot be reduced to cognitive dissonance or to schema violation in the cognitive-behavioural sense.

Such destabilisation represents symbolic fragmentation at the level of collective identity itself. Litz's model, rooted largely in cognitive-behavioural assumptions, often treats morality as explicit belief structure susceptible to verbal articulation and therefore to verbal renegotiation [35]. Jungian analysis suggests instead that moral injury may emerge from the collapse of symbolic containers through which collective meaning is sustained — containers that are largely unconscious, that resist articulation, and that cannot be repaired by reframing alone [21,22]. In this view, healing cannot occur merely through reframing or self-forgiveness because the injury concerns metaphysical orientation itself rather than belief about discrete events.

Hasidic descent and the cosmological register

Theological traditions deepen this critique further. In Hasidic and Kabbalistic thought, descent into ambiguity is sometimes intrinsic to redemption itself. The *tzaddik* descends into exile not because he fails morally but because fractured reality demands engagement with impurity for the sake of restoration [27-31]. This does not abolish morality; it reveals morality's tragic insufficiency within a broken world. Litz's framework lacks the conceptual vocabulary for this paradox because it remains implicitly modern and secular. It conceptualises morality psychologically but not cosmologically.

The dream, however, operates cosmologically. The border between Israel and Palestine is not merely geopolitical; it becomes metaphysical. The exchange of wine is not merely social; it becomes sacramental. The dreamer fears that the sanctification of the divine name itself may require contamination — that the very category of *Kiddush Hashem* may have within it a tragic structure unaccountable in modern psychological terms.

This tension resembles what Levinas described as the ethical destabilisation produced by encounter with the face of the Other [23,24]. Genuine encounter interrupts totalising systems and introduces an infinite responsibility that cannot be fully reconciled with political structures. The dream stages precisely such interruption. The Palestinian's face, in the form of his hospitality, interrupts the ideological totality within which the conflict had been held by both parties.

Collective trauma and covenantal identity

Litz's model also insufficiently addresses collective and historical trauma. Jewish consciousness after the Shoah and subsequent wars cannot be reduced to individualised moral cognition. Collective memory, covenantal identity, persecution history, and existential threat profoundly shape moral experience [37,38]. The dream's anxiety about *Or LaGoyim* and *Kiddush Hashem* emerges from covenantal consciousness rather than generic ethical reasoning. The dreamer is not a generic moral agent contemplating a generic moral question; he is a Jew, after the Holocaust, after October 7th, after a long century of catastrophes whose theological residue cannot be translated without remainder into the universalist categories of clinical psychology.

The dream therefore reveals moral injury not merely as guilt over action but as fracture within sacred identity itself — fracture that cannot be repaired by therapeutic reintegration alone because the identity in question is not exclusively psychological. It is covenantal, historical, and theological, and any genuine repair must address it in those registers as well as in the clinical one.

The refusal of closure and the fidelity of the wound

Finally, Litz's framework implicitly assumes that healing consists in reintegration into stable moral coherence. Jewish theology often resists such closure. Jacob limps after wrestling the angel and is renamed for the wound; Moses dies outside the Promised Land; Job receives no rational explanation for his suffering and is restored without ever being told why he suffered; the prophets remain wounded visionaries rather than fully healed selves [39-43]. The dream likewise refuses resolution; it preserves anguish.

That preservation may itself be psychologically and spiritually important. Certain forms of moral pain should perhaps not be entirely "resolved," because they testify to enduring ethical sensitivity. Excessive therapeutic closure risks transforming tragedy into symptom management. From this perspective, moral injury may sometimes represent not pathology but fidelity to human conscience within an irreparably fractured world. To medicate the wound away would be, in such cases, to amputate the ethical sensorium that produced the wound.

The dream therefore challenges modern clinical discourse by suggesting that the deepest wounds of war arise not only from violating morality but from discovering that morality itself may become internally contradictory under conditions of violence and survival. In such situations, the religious subject does not merely

seek forgiveness. He seeks a God who can still be encountered within ambiguity. This is a different therapeutic horizon from the one Litz envisages, and one that the clinical literature has yet adequately to acknowledge.

My contention, to be clear, is not that Litz's framework should be abandoned. It is that the framework requires theological and philosophical extension. Moral injury, properly understood, is not merely a clinical category but a theological symptom of a world in which sacred order itself has been ruptured by historical violence. Its repair, where repair is possible, will require resources that cognitive-behavioural therapy alone cannot supply. It will require, among other things, the kind of patient, mortified, ambiguous theological listening that the dreamer himself was performing when he awoke trembling and reached for a vocabulary capable of holding what he had seen.

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