

**The Heart Cannot Reach the Spring: A Normative Case for an Irreducible Ayin and Yesh**

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**Abstract**

*Deveikut cannot be defended descriptively. Moshe Idel's correction of Gershom Scholem established that genuinely unitive and absorptive strands are well attested across Jewish mysticism, which means that any account of deveikut as communion-without-annihilation cannot be presented as a simple report of what Jewish mystics sought or attained. This essay accepts Idel's finding and draws the consequence: a deveikut that preserves the finite self must be argued for normatively, as a claim about what covenant requires, made in full awareness that the tradition contains the alternative. The argument proceeds in three stages. First, the descriptive route is closed. Second, three normative warrants are advanced for the persistence of the yesh — the conditions of accountability, the structure of ethical summons following Levinas, and the requirement of anti-theodicy after catastrophe — none of which apophysis alone can supply. Third, the resulting model is given a mechanism rather than merely a definition: covenantal asymptoticity, in which distance functions as the medium of relation rather than its deficit, exemplified in Rebbe Nachman's parable/mashal of the Heart and the Spring. The essay engages Wolfson's demonstration that Chabad's own apophatic grammar resists metaphysical closure and concedes the point while identifying what it leaves unaddressed: apophysis destabilizes predication without generating any demand that the finite self-remain finite. An addendum applies the model to the Higher Power of Alcoholics Anonymous, reading Kurtz's not-Godness as the practical form of the same normative claim.*

**Keywords:** Deveikut, ayin and yesh, Idel, Scholem, apophasis, Levinas, Bratslav Hasidism, anti-theodicy, Twelve-Step spirituality.

## Introduction

I have argued across a series of recent papers that the relation between divine transcendence and finite existence is structured by an antinomy that resists resolution. I have made this argument in the register of recovery theology, holding that the tension between personal address and impersonal ground is irreducible rather than penultimate (Ungar-Sargon, 2026); in the register of relational theology, holding that a workable account of the divine must refuse both objectification and dissolution into an impersonal abyss (Ungar-Sargon, 2026); in dialogue with Rami Shapiro's recovery theology and the dialectic of being and non-being (Ungar-Sargon, 2026); and in the register of the dialectical divine, where the transcendence-immanence tension bears on the spirituality of the Twelve Steps (Ungar-Sargon, 2025). I have traced the Chabad account of *tzimtzum* as theological rupture rather than pedagogical illusion (Ungar-Sargon, 2025; Ungar-Sargon, 2025), and examined the collapse of the horse-and-rider parable/*mashal* as a case study in what may be termed, following Wolfson, apophatic acosmism (Ungar-Sargon, 2026).

The structural claim — two poles, neither collapsible into the other, fidelity maintained in the interval between them — is therefore not new to my work. What is new here is threefold, and each item is narrower than the structural claim.

First, the argument is brought into contact with *deveykut* as a technical term, and therefore into a scholarly conversation it has not previously entered: the dispute between Scholem and Idel over whether Jewish mysticism preserves or annihilates the individual in mystical attachment. This is not a change of vocabulary. It changes what kind of claim is being made and what would count against it.

Second, and consequently, the argument changes its logical status. Once Idel's correction of Scholem is accepted, the persistence of the self in *deveykut* can no longer be asserted as a description of Jewish mystical experience. It must be defended as a normative claim — an argument about what *deveykut* ought to mean, advanced in the knowledge that the sources also contain absorptive union. My earlier papers did not face this constraint, because they were not making claims about what the tradition contains. This one is.

Third, the essay supplies a mechanism rather than a definition. To say that *deveykut* consists in dwelling within unresolved tension is to name a state, and named states are not arguments. What follows proposes instead covenantal asymptoticity: the claim that distance functions as the medium through which relation is sustained rather than as the deficit relation seeks to overcome, with Rebbe Nachman's Heart and Spring as the tradition's own demonstration that this is a live possibility within Hasidism and not an imposition upon it.

The reader who knows the prior work will recognize the skeleton. The contribution lies in the joints.

## The Descriptive Route Is Closed

Gershom Scholem identified *deveykut* as a central feature of Hasidic spirituality while insisting on a distinction between communion and the complete annihilation of personality (Scholem, 1961). The insistence was polemical, and its polemical context matters. Scholem was writing against a comparative literature eager to assimilate Jewish mysticism to unitive traditions, and the persistence of the individual in *deveykut* served him as the mark of difference. Jewish mystics, on this account, drew near without dissolving.

Moshe Idel subjected the claim to sustained criticism. Across *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* and subsequent work, Idel demonstrated that Scholem's picture underestimates the presence of genuinely unitive and ecstatic strands within Jewish mysticism, and that the diversity of mystical techniques and aims resists reduction to any single model (Idel, 1988; Idel, 1995). Ecstatic Kabbalah furnishes material Scholem's framework does not accommodate. Idel's methodological point is broader than any individual counterexample: a tradition of this scale does not speak with one voice, and the historian who finds it doing so has usually selected the voice in advance.

The consequence for the present argument is severe, and it should be stated without softening. If Idel is right, then a *deveykut* that preserves the finite self cannot be defended as a description of what Jewish mystics in fact sought or attained. The sources will not sustain the generalization. Anyone who wishes to maintain that *deveykut* leaves the worshipper intact must either dispute Idel's reading of the material — which the present essay does not attempt — or else concede that the claim is doing something other than reporting.

I concede it. The claim advanced here is normative. This is a weaker claim in one respect and a stronger one in another. It is weaker because it forfeits the authority of description: I am not entitled to say that this is what *deveykut* is, only what it ought to be taken to mean and why. It is stronger because normative claims can be argued, and arguments can be assessed, whereas a contested description can only be adjudicated by counting sources. Idel's pluralism, far from obstructing the constructive theologian, clears ground for one. Since the tradition contains more than one possibility, a theology that selects among them owes reasons rather than citations.

The remainder of this essay supplies the reasons.



### Three Normative Warrants for the Persistence of the Yesh

The question is why a deveyikut that dissolves the self should be judged inadequate, given that the tradition demonstrably contains it. Three warrants are offered. None is a claim about frequency in the sources. Each is a claim about what covenant requires.

#### The Conditions of Accountability

Mystical traditions distrust the ego for intelligible reasons. The self seeks recognition, domination, certainty, and immortality, and a spirituality that leaves those appetites untouched has failed at something basic. Yet the destruction of the self is not automatically their remedy. It may instead destroy the locus at which any remedy could register.

The ethical person must be able to say: I harmed. I remember. I am obligated. I will resist. I stand before you. Each statement presupposes an enduring. A dissolved self cannot confess, because confession requires an agent who persists long enough to accept what is confessed. It cannot promise, because a promise binds a future self to a present undertaking. It cannot testify, because testimony requires a voice that was there and is here.

This is not an abstraction. I have argued in clinical contexts that ego dissolution — whether pursued therapeutically, pharmacologically, or contemplatively — requires ethical containment precisely because the dissolved self cannot be held accountable for what occurs during its dissolution, and that the containment must be supplied by someone who has not dissolved (Ungar-Sargon, 2025). The structure of the problem is identical at the level of theology. Absorption removes the addressee.

Rosenzweig saw this with unusual clarity. Against the totalizing ambitions of German idealism, he insisted that the singular human being, facing death, cannot be absorbed into the All, and that revelation addresses this irreducible individual

as thou, by name, in the present tense (Rosenzweig, 2005). On Rosenzweig's account the recovery of the is not a concession made to human frailty after the metaphysics has been settled. It is where revelation happens.

#### The Structure of Summons

The second warrant is Levinasian, and it supplies what the first leaves implicit.

For Levinas, subjectivity is not self-positing. The self is constituted in the accusative: called into being by the face of the other, summoned to a responsibility it did not choose, cannot delegate, and cannot discharge (Levinas, 1969). Totality, in his sense, names the condition in which the other has been comprehended and is therefore no longer other. Infinity names the relation that cannot be totalized, in which the other perpetually exceeds whatever concept the self-forms of it.

The bearing on deveyikut is direct. A self-absorbed into unity cannot be summoned, because summons presupposes exteriority — there must be someone outside to do the calling and someone inside to be called. If the distinction between worshipper and God becomes spiritually irrelevant, then so does the command, since a command addressed to no one is not a command. The persistence of the finite self is thus not an obstacle that ethics must tolerate. It is ethics' condition of possibility.

This warrant does work the first cannot. Accountability establishes that someone must remain; Levinas establishes why the relation itself requires it. The self does not persist despite the encounter with the infinite. It is produced by it.

#### The Requirement of Anti-Theodicy

The third warrant is historical, and it is the one I regard as decisive.

Any claim that suffering is reconciled at a higher divine level risks aestheticizing the anguish of victims. The proposition that all contradiction disappears in the divine essence may be contemplatively consoling; deployed as an explanation of radical evil, it becomes something else. I have argued at length that the Shoah demands an anti-theodicy rather than a theodicy: not an account that redeems the suffering by locating it within a larger harmony, but a refusal of such accounts as the form that fidelity to the sufferers takes (Ungar-Sargon, 2026). The dark Shekhinah and the dialectic of midas ha-din and midas ha-rachamim mark the same refusal in a different idiom (Ungar-Sargon, 2025; Ungar-Sargon, 2025)

A deveyikut of absorption cannot sustain that refusal. If the finite standpoint is finally illusory, then the victim's standpoint is finally illusory, and the objection to theodicy loses its ground — one cannot protest from a position one has declared unreal. Only a yesh that persists can accuse.

Biblical Israel clings to God by arguing with God. Abraham challenges the Judge of all the earth; Moses resists divine

wrath; Job refuses the explanations of his companions; the psalmist asks why God hides. These are not lapses from deveyikut. On the normative account defended here they are among its highest instances, because the protestor occupies the only position from which protest is coherent: close enough to God to accuse, distinct enough from God to preserve the judgment being made.

### What Apophasis Cannot Supply

The most serious objection to the foregoing comes from Elliot Wolfson, and it must be engaged rather than invoked.

Wolfson has demonstrated that Chabad's apophasis is not a stage en route to kataphatic resolution but a genuinely dialectical structure in which concealment and disclosure, negation and embodiment, absence and presence mutually condition one another (Wolfson, 2009). On his reading, the divine essence does not function as a resting place at all: it is precisely what cannot be occupied, the coincidentia oppositorum that undoes every attempt to make it a vantage point. Wolfson's Schneerson is not a thinker who dissolves difference into unity but one for whom the overcoming of difference is endlessly deferred — a post messianic messianism in which the arrival is always the arrival of what does not arrive.

If this is right, the objection presses hard. The refusal of closure would not be an alternative to Chabad but a description of it, and the present essay would be announcing as a discovery what the tradition it criticizes already knows.

I concede more than may be expected. Wolfson has shown that the resources for resisting closure exist within Chabad's own apophatic grammar, and I have argued elsewhere that Chabad's account of divine withdrawal is considerably more ruptural than its domesticated reception suggests (Ungar-Sargon, 2025). The disagreement is not about whether Chabad resists closure. It does.

The disagreement is narrower, and it is this. Apophasis operates at the level of the saying. It destabilizes predication; it ensures that no determination of the divine survives scrutiny; it keeps the discourse open. What it does not do — what, by its own logic, it cannot do — is generate an ethical demand that the finite self-remain finite. An apophasis that undoes all determination undoes the determination of the responsible agent along with everything else. Negation is indiscriminate. It cannot protect the very thing whose protection the three warrants above require, because protecting something means affirming it, and affirmation is what apophasis exists to suspend.

This is why §3 is not decorative. The warrants are positive claims: accountability requires an enduring particular; summons requires exteriority; anti-theodicy requires a standpoint from which protest is coherent. None can be derived from the refusal of predication. They must be argued for on ethical and covenantal grounds, and it is precisely this argument that the apophatic route, however rigorously executed, leaves unmade.

The conclusion is not that Atzmus should be denied. It is that Atzmus cannot be used — that whatever obtains from a perspective no human being occupies, the human covenantal condition remains one of irreducible tension, and no appeal to a vantage point beyond that condition may be permitted to neutralize it. Atzmus marks the limit of thought, not the elimination of tension. This is the discipline I have elsewhere called the sacred epistemology of not-knowing: an apophasis that humbles the knower without dissolving the knower's obligations (Ungar-Sargon, 2026).



### The Mechanism: Covenantal Asymptoticity

To this point the argument has been negative in form: absorption is inadequate for reasons the tradition's own apophasis cannot supply. What remains is to say what the alternative consists in — and to say it as a mechanism rather than a state, since a state can only be named, whereas a mechanism can be shown to work.

### The Heart and the Spring

Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav supplies the demonstration and supplies it from within Hasidism.

In the tale of the Seven Beggars, in the story told by the beggar without a heart, the Heart of the World stands at one end of the world and longs for a Spring located upon a mountain at the other. The Heart cannot approach the Spring. Were it to move toward it, the mountain's peak would drop from view; ceasing to see the Spring, the Heart would die, and the world with it. The Heart therefore remains turned toward the Spring in an existence sustained by longing, distance, song, and the continual gift of time (Nahman of Bratslav, 1816; Green, 1979).

The parable/mashal does not depict separation. Heart and Spring belong to one another through a distance that cannot be abolished without destroying what the distance sustains. The Heart lives from the Spring and cannot possess it. Its yearning is not a deficiency awaiting remedy; it is the form in which relation and life persist.

Shaul Magid's work establishes the theological seriousness of this structure. Magid reads Bratslav as unusually attentive to the seeker's struggle for presence within absence, arguing

that the *chalal ha-panui* — the vacated space — is not a stage to be transcended but a permanent condition of religious consciousness (Magid, 1995; Magid, 2002). Where more acosmic Hasidism construes absence as illusion overcome through communion, Rebbe Nachman locates religious struggle within the void itself. The seeker does not leave absence behind; the seeker learns to hear, within absence, a different mode of address.

Arthur Green's biographical study reinforces the point from another direction. Rebbe Nachman's torment was not an obstacle to his theology but its generative condition, and the tales encode a religious life in which arrival is structurally unavailable (Green, 1979). Green's Nachman does not fail to achieve *deveykut*. He redefines what achieving it could mean.

### Distance as Medium

Generalizing from the parable/*mashal* yields the mechanism.

**Covenantal asymptoticity** is the claim that in the divine-human relation, distance functions as the medium through which relation is sustained rather than as the deficit relation seeks to overcome. Proximity increases without becoming possession. Consummation is not deferred because it has not yet been achieved; it is structurally excluded, because achieving it would terminate the longing that constitutes the relation.

Three features distinguish this from mere unfulfilled desire. It is generative: the distance produces something — song, time, the world's continuance — rather than merely marking a lack. It is reciprocal: the Spring is never reduced to the Heart's experience of it, and the Heart is not extinguished in the Spring; both terms are preserved by the interval. And it is ethical, which is where the present proposal extends beyond Bratslav. The interval between *ayin* and *yesh* is not only erotic or contemplative. It is the space in which one must approach *ayin* without abandoning *yesh*, empty the ego without dissolving responsibility, and return to embodiment without idolizing it.

The Heart does not achieve *deveykut* by reaching the Spring. It achieves *deveykut* by remaining turned toward the Spring without ceasing to be the Heart.

### Ratzo Va-Shov without Final Rest

The mechanism has a traditional name for its rhythm. *Ratzo va-shov*, running and returning, describes a consciousness that moves toward transcendence and returns to embodied life: ascent checked by descent, ecstasy interrupted by obligation.

Conventionally the alternation is grounded in a deeper unity — running and returning as two expressions of one divine purpose, their opposition resolved in the divine will. The present account declines that grounding. There is no resting place beyond *ratzo va-shov*. The alternation is not pedagogical, a device for training a consciousness that will eventually not need it. It is the permanent form of religious existence.

In *ratzo* the self-moves toward *ayin*, releasing control, identity, certainty, possessiveness; it encounters the inadequacy of every concept of God. In *shov* the self-returns as *yesh*, reassuming name, history, body, family, community, task; it accepts that one cannot serve God by vanishing.

The danger of *ratzo* is intoxication: the wish to escape finitude. The danger of *shov* is domestication: the reduction of God to habit, convention, or institutional authority. Each pole corrects the other, and neither correction is ever completed.



### Dispossession and Reconstitution

Two movements compose the rhythm.

#### Dispossession

The first movement is surrender, not acquisition. God is not possessed as idea, experience, revelation, or guarantee. This is the work of *ayin*: it empties theology of triumphalism, exposes every image of God as partial, and interrupts the claim that one's community or doctrine or contemplative attainment exhausts divine truth. Simone Weil's account of attention is apposite — genuine attention suspends the grasping ego so the other may appear without immediate assimilation to the self's purposes (Weil, 1952). Her *décréation* is best read not as the destruction of personhood but as the renunciation of imaginary centrality, a reading I have developed in relation to clinical practice, where the clinician's self-emptying must stop precisely short of the abdication that would leave no one present to attend (Ungar-Sargon, 2026).

#### Reconstitution

Dispossession cannot be terminal, or humility becomes disappearance and surrender becomes abdication. The self-returns as a chastened *yesh*: existing without claiming to be self-grounded, acting, choosing, speaking, remembering, protesting, loving. Finitude ceases to be a defect awaiting correction and becomes the condition of responsibility.

Buber's grammar clarifies what the returned self is for. In the I-Thou relation the other is not reduced to an object of possession or analysis, yet relation does not eliminate distinction; I and Thou remain irreducibly present to one another, and the relation depends on their difference (Buber, 1970). Buber made this the interpretive key to Hasidism itself, finding there not acosmism but the hallowing of the everyday — a spirituality in which the world is met rather than dissolved (Buber, 1966). Scholem's objection to that reading is well known and Idel's work complicates both positions; but whatever its adequacy as historiography, Buber names a live theological possibility, and it is the one pursued here.

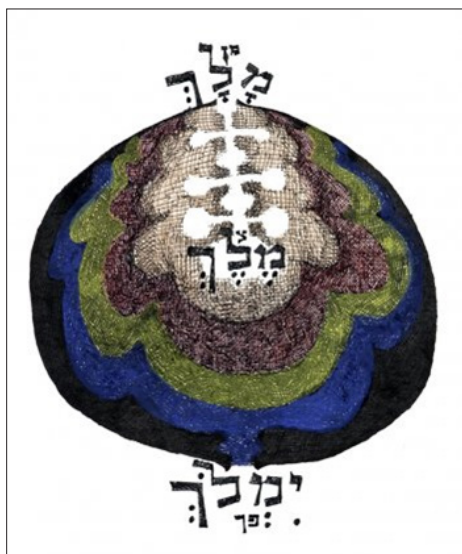
Intimacy with God therefore need not culminate in identity with God. Transcendence is not merely an obstacle to communion; it is what makes communion possible. One clings to God not by crossing the distance but by inhabiting it as sacred.

### Fidelity without Synthesis

Kierkegaard rejected systems that dissolve existential contradiction into abstract synthesis. Faith does not begin once paradox has been rationally overcome; it subsists in a passionate relation to what cannot be conceptually mastered (Kierkegaard, 1983). A Jewish theology of this shape need not adopt Kierkegaard's Christology to appropriate his insistence that faith is not the intellectual cancellation of contradiction — an appropriation I have attempted elsewhere regarding the provisional character of theological and neuroscientific knowledge alike (Ungar-Sargon, 2025).

The faithful person remains suspended between divine hiddenness and divine command, between the absence of certainty and the presence of obligation, and acts without possessing a final synthesis.

The question shifts accordingly. Not "How close do I feel to God?" but "What must I relinquish, and to what am I being summoned?" Ayin asks whether the ego has colonized the divine. Yesh asks whether self-negation has become an excuse not to act. The discipline consists in hearing both questions at once.



### God in the Interval

The implication is that God is encountered at neither pole. Not simply as ayin, infinite nothingness beyond form. Not simply as yesh, manifest presence within creation. Nor as the metaphysical unity in which the two are reconciled — that unity being, on the argument of §4, precisely what may not be used.

God is encountered in the interval: in the movement by which each pole opens toward the other without absorbing it.

The interval is the space of prayer, which speaks while knowing its words fail. Of revelation, which discloses without exhausting its source. Of commandment, which addresses the finite self from beyond that self's comprehension. Of covenant, in which God and Israel are bound without becoming identical.

Covenant is the operative term. It requires at least two parties; its intimacy does not abolish their difference; and the abolition of difference would abolish the covenant along with it. Deveykut understood covenantally is not the return of the many into the One but the ongoing commitment of the finite to the Infinite and, mysteriously, of the Infinite to the finite. Each remains other to the other. Neither remains untouched.

Divine presence, on this account, is not the termination of tension. It is the deepening of tension into relationship. Like the Heart turned toward the Spring, the self-lives from what it cannot possess.

### Conclusion

The claim of this essay is narrow and should be stated narrowly.

It is not that Jewish mysticism never dissolved the self. Idel has shown that it did, and the descriptive route is closed. It is not that Chabad naively resolves contradiction in the divine essence. Wolfson has shown that it does not, and the apophatic route is more sophisticated than its critics allow.

The claim is that a deveyikut which dissolves the self-forfeits three things covenant cannot do without: an agent who can be held accountable, an exteriority from which summons can issue, and a standpoint from which catastrophe can be protested rather than explained. None of these is supplied by apophasis, because negation is indiscriminate and cannot protect what it must equally undo. They must be argued for, and the argument is normative: this is what deveyikut ought to mean, given what covenant requires, in full knowledge that the sources permit otherwise.

The mechanism by which such a deveyikut operates is covenantal asymptoticity — distance as the medium of relation rather than its deficit. Rebbe Nachman's Heart does not cease to be a heart to receive life from the Spring. Its distance is neither indifference nor failure. It is the living form of relation, and the tradition's own witness that non-arrival can be a mode of fidelity rather than its defeat.

What follows is not a mystical achievement but a form of covenantal courage: to remain near God without possessing God, to retain the self without worshipping it, to accept responsibility without the security of final knowledge, and to hear address even within absence.

Holiness is not found beyond tension. Holiness is the way tension is inhabited.

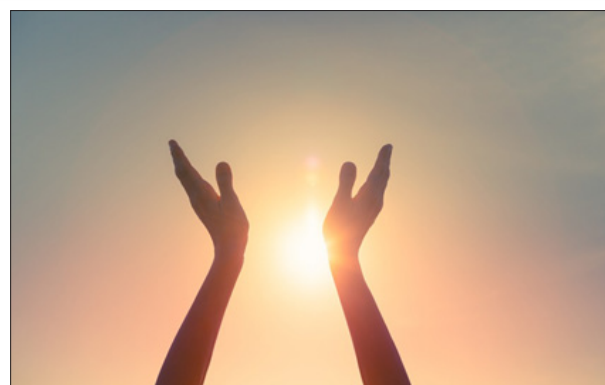


#### **Addendum: Not-God-ness as Normative Claim — The Higher Power Between Presence and Mystery**

The preceding essay argued that a *deveikut* preserving the finite self must be defended normatively rather than descriptively and proposed covenantal asymptoticity as its mechanism. This addendum applies the model to a single question in Twelve-Step spirituality: the theological status of the Higher Power.

The scope is deliberately narrow. A full treatment of the Steps through this lens would require separate examination of Step Two, Step Three, the inventory and amends sequence of Steps Four through Nine, Step Eleven, and Step Twelve. Portions of that work exist elsewhere in my corpus — on Step Two and the epistemology of coming to believe (Ungar-Sargon, 2025), on the integration of the Steps with Ramchal's *Mesilat Yesarim* (Ungar-Sargon, 2025), on Breslov *tikkun ha-brit* and Twelve-Step recovery (Ungar-Sargon, 2026), and on the comparison of recovery and medical models (Ungar-Sargon, 2025). What follows treats the Higher Power alone, as the point at which the normative argument bears most directly.

A qualification is required. The purpose is not historical. It is not suggested that Bill Wilson, Dr. Bob Smith, or the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous employed Jewish mystical categories or constructed a Hasidic theology of recovery. Their acknowledged roots lie in the Oxford Group, the writings of William James, and Protestant evangelical spirituality (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001; Alcoholics Anonymous, 1953; James, 1902). Ernest Kurtz's history remains the indispensable account, and his central thesis bears directly on what follows: the founding insight of Alcoholics Anonymous is the recognition that the alcoholic is not God — that the movement's spirituality is fundamentally about the acceptance of limitation, of essential human incompleteness (Kurtz, 1979).



#### **Addiction as Absolutized Yesh**

If addiction is read as the absolutization of *yesh* — the conviction that the autonomous self can secure its own fulfillment — then recovery begins with the rediscovery of *ayin*. Self-sufficiency collapses. Powerlessness is acknowledged. Control is relinquished. The ego ceases to function as the ultimate source of meaning.

Yet recovery does not culminate in self-erasure, and the Steps are conspicuous in refusing to let it. The recovering person is called back into the world: to confess, repair, accept responsibility, serve, work, rebuild families, cultivate honesty. The ego returns — no longer sovereign but not destroyed. A chastened *yesh*.

The movement does not terminate. Each day requires renewed surrender; each day requires renewed responsibility. The program's insistence on daily reprieve is not a concession to human weakness but a structural feature: arrival would end it.

The three warrants of §3 are visible here in practical form. Amends require an agent who persists to make them — accountability. Sponsorship and service require an exteriority from which one is called — summons. And the refusal to explain the addict's suffering as secretly purposeful, the program's characteristic reticence before the question why me, is anti-theodicy enacted by people who have no interest in the term.

#### **The Higher Power: Neither Object nor Abyss**

The most striking theological feature of Alcoholics Anonymous is its refusal to define God.

"God as we understood Him" has often been criticized as theologically evasive. The evasion may be the movement's principal contribution. The Higher Power is protected from reduction to any single doctrinal formulation, remaining available across traditions while resisting confinement within anyone.

The normative argument illuminates why these matters. The Higher Power must initially be encountered as *yesh*: the addict requires a reality more durable than the fragmented ego, something that exists and can restore sanity when the self has become incapable of governing itself. At this stage transcendence functions as presence, stability, trustworthy

authority.

The Steps refuse to leave God there. As recovery matures the Higher Power increasingly assumes the character of ayin: it cannot be possessed, and it exceeds every image constructed of it. Prayer becomes less petition than relinquishment. Faith becomes less certainty than availability.

The movement is therefore neither from atheism to belief nor from distance to union. It is oscillation — repeatedly discovering God as yesh to survive and repeatedly surrendering that certainty into ayin lest God become one more object the ego possesses.

This is what I have elsewhere described as the requirement that relational theology be neither object nor abyss (Ungar-Sargon, 2026). A Higher Power reduced to an object becomes an instrument of the ego's project; a Higher Power dissolved into an impersonal abyss can neither address nor be addressed. The antinomy between personal address and impersonal ground is not a defect in recovery theology awaiting philosophical repair. It is constitutive (Ungar-Sargon, 2026). Only the oscillation protects recovery from its two characteristic failures: despair on one side, spiritual triumphalism on the other.

The Eleventh Step is revealing on precisely this point. Members seek, through prayer and meditation, to improve conscious contact — not to attain union, complete understanding, or final certainty. Contact admits of improvement indefinitely because the relation is structurally unfinished. Prayer does not eliminate transcendence; it trains the person to remain in conversation with it.

The structure is the Heart and the Spring. The recovering person lives from a source that cannot be reached without ceasing to be the one who needs it. Non-arrival is not the program's limitation. It is its mechanism.

Kurtz's not-God-ness receives, on this reading, a normative amplification.

Not-God-ness is not merely the recognition of limitation, as though the alcoholic had made a factual error about his own metaphysical status and recovery consisted in correcting it. It is the discipline of remaining a limited self in relation to what exceeds the self — refusing the grandiosity that would make the ego god and the dissolution that would make the ego nothing. The second refusal is as necessary as the first, and it is the one more easily lost, since it wears the appearance of humility.

That discipline has a name in the Jewish mystical vocabulary. It is *deveykut*, on the account defended here: the sustained fidelity of a Heart that cannot reach its Spring, and lives.

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