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Shimon ben Azzai speaks of traditions received from seventy-two elders, of offerings “slaughtered not for their sake” that remain fit but fail to satisfy the owner’s obligation. In my pain, I recognize a parallel truth: my body has become an offering I never intended to make.

Jung’s understanding of the wounded healer emphasizes that “a good half of every treatment that probes at all deeply consists in the doctor’s examining himself...it is his own hurt that gives a measure of his power to heal” [2]. The fall was not “for its sake”—not a deliberate act of devotion or conscious surrender. Yet here I am, forced into a posture of humility, my flesh bearing witness to forces beyond my control. Like ben Azzai’s expanded interpretation of acceptable offerings, perhaps this unintended sacrifice carries its own theological weight, even if it doesn’t fulfill my original “obligation” to move through the world unscathed.

This resonates with my understanding of divine concealment (*hester panim*) as explored in my work on post-Holocaust theology. Contemporary research on wounded healers demonstrates that 73.9% of counselors and psychotherapists have experienced one or more wounding experiences leading to career choice [3]. The fall represents a moment where the ordinary fabric of daily existence tears, revealing something previously hidden. In the tradition of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson’s teachings on divine concealment and redemption, this physical trauma becomes a site where the hidden presence of the sacred might be discovered precisely through its apparent absence.

### **Embodied Vulnerability and the Wounded Body**

At the most immediate level, my body screams its biological truth. The left scapula, that wing-like bone designed for reaching and embracing, now protests with each movement. The lumbar vertebrae, those foundational supports of upright dignity, remind me with each step that verticality is a privilege, not a right. The abrasions map a geography of impact, each scrape a coordinate marking where flesh met unforgiving surface.

Recent phenomenological studies of nurses who contracted COVID-19 reveal how healthcare professionals become “wounded healers”—surviving and recovering but remaining “wounded” by the experience, returning to caring for patients as “healers” with increased compassion and attention to basic needs [4]. Yet even this physical reality cannot be separated from its theological significance. In my framework of embodied medicine, which challenges the mechanistic reductionism of biomedical practice, the body is never merely a collection of symptoms and tissue damage. The body is the site where sacred and profane dialectics play out, where meaning emerges through corporeal experience.

The wounded healer archetype, rooted in the Greek myth of Chiron—the centaur who, despite his own incurable wound, became master of the healing arts—suggests that the transformational potential of suffering lies not in overcoming it but in developing a different relationship to it [5]. The left side—in both mystical tradition and

neurological understanding—carries particular significance. In Kabbalistic thought, the left represents *gevurah* (divine severity), while in my own poetry I’ve explored “the left side of the divine.” This injury has taken up residence precisely where receptivity and limitation converge, where the body’s vulnerability becomes a teacher rather than merely a problem to solve.

### **The Loneliness of Pain, Powerlessness, and the First Step**

Drawing from my poem “The Loneliness of Pain: Steps in Self-Recovery,” I recognize familiar territory in this fall. Pain creates its own exile, its own *hester panim* where connection feels impossible. Yet this exile has become the threshold to a profound spiritual encounter with powerlessness—that fundamental admission which begins the transformative journey of the twelve steps: “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.”

In the context of my fall, I must substitute a different object for that powerlessness. I am powerless over my body’s vulnerability, over gravity’s unforgiving laws, over the sudden collapse of ordinary assumptions about my ability to navigate my own home safely. As recovery literature emphasizes, “to be powerless means to be absolutely helpless...This, oddly enough, is the best disposition for the beginning of a spiritual journey”. The emotional dimension of this trauma extends beyond mere frustration at inconvenience; it touches the fundamental question I’ve explored throughout my work: how do we maintain presence to suffering that exceeds explanation?

### **Powerlessness as Spiritual Gateway**

Contemporary research on transformative powerlessness in trauma recovery reveals that “embracing powerlessness in its most extreme form empowers individuals to choose life,” representing a paradoxical dynamic where “once seen as a hindrance, powerlessness became a recovery tool that enabled participants to seek help while rejecting helplessness”. This resonates deeply with my experience on the floor of my home, acknowledging that I could not prevent what had already happened, could not control the trajectory of my body through space, could not manage the immediate consequences of impact.

Thomas Keating’s integration of twelve-step spirituality with contemplative practice illuminates how “the real spiritual journey depends on our acknowledging the unmanageability of our lives. The love of God or the Higher Power is what heals us”. Lying on those steps, feeling the sharp protest of my scapula and the deep ache in my lumbar region, I confronted the fundamental human condition that twelve-step programs address: the illusion of control over forces beyond our management.

The first step’s genius, as Richard Rohr notes, is that it situates “powerlessness and surrender right where they belong—at the beginning. They teach how sin or addiction are overcome not through willpower or by control, but much more by recognizing that we are powerless to overcome them”. While my fall was

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not addiction, it shares this structure of powerlessness—the recognition that despite all my theological knowledge, my embodied practices, my years of studying healing relationships, I remained fundamentally vulnerable to forces beyond my control.

### **Seeing God in the Pain: Steps Two and Three**

The progression from powerlessness to divine reliance becomes explicit in the second and third steps: “Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity” and “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him”. In the acute phase of my injury, I found myself instinctively moving through this progression—not as intellectual exercise but as embodied necessity.

Research on spirituality and pain management demonstrates that “positive religious and spiritual coping strategies...appear to play an important role in pain management and reduction of suffering,” while “individuals’ spirituality and spiritual forms may play an important role in coping with illness and pain”. But this was not mere coping mechanism; it was recognition of what I have termed in my theological work the “absent healer”—divine presence manifesting precisely through apparent absence.

The biopsychosocial-spiritual model of pain recognizes that spiritual variables may either increase or decrease pain sensitivity, noting that “negative spiritually based cognitions (e.g. God is abandoning me) is related to increased pain sensitivity” while positive spiritual engagement can enhance pain tolerance. In my case, the twelve-step framework provided a theological structure for transforming what could have been experienced as divine abandonment into divine invitation—an invitation to deeper surrender and trust.

Zerubavel and Wright’s comprehensive framework for understanding wounded healers in psychology emphasizes that therapists’ emotional wounds, if sufficiently worked through, can heighten therapeutic effectiveness by enhancing empathy, increasing patience when progress seems slow, and maintaining faith in the therapeutic process [6]. The fall has triggered what I understand as “dialectical presence”—the need to remain present to mystery without demanding immediate resolution. In my theological framework, authentic healing requires accepting the limits of understanding while maintaining full engagement with the experience.

### **The Spiritual Meaning of Physical Pain**

Contemporary clinical research identifies “spiritual pain” as “a self-identified experience of personal discomfort, or actual or potential harm, triggered by a threat to a person’s relationship with God or a higher power”. But my experience suggested an inverse dynamic—physical pain as potential deepening of divine relationship rather than threat to it. This aligns with broader theological understanding that “suffering, when lived in a Christian way, becomes a path of sanctification, redemption, and love” where “pain, illnesses, losses, and trials can be offered to God as an act of love and redemption”.

The twelve-step insight that “human nature being what it is, and the world being a hazardous place, we can’t count on the fulfillment of our instinctual needs” applies beyond addiction to the fundamental condition of embodied existence. My fall represented a collision with this reality—the hazardous nature of physical existence and the impossibility of maintaining perfect security through vigilance or skill.

Hadjiiosif’s narrative inquiry into the “nourished wounded healer” reveals how therapeutic practitioners who identify with this concept undergo complex processes of “entering a community of wounded healers,” “formulating the wounded healer,” and “deconstructing the wounded healer” [7]. There’s also the emotional confrontation with mortality that physical trauma brings. In my work on Rebbe Nachman’s paradoxical theology, particularly the parable of the mountain and the spring, I’ve explored how God’s absence allows for faith in ways that mystical union or intellectual reasoning cannot. This fall forces me into that Kafkaesque despair of yearning—not seeking to understand the trauma intellectually, but dwelling in the heart of its mystery.

### **The Paradox of Spiritual Powerlessness**

The emotional landscape of this experience embodies what twelve-step spirituality recognizes as the “spirituality of imperfection”—transformation that “has little to do with intelligence, willpower, or perfection. It has everything to do with honest humility, willingness, and surrender”. My embodied theology, with all its sophisticated integration of tzimtzum and therapeutic encounter, met its match in the simple physics of a misstep on stairs.

Research on powerlessness in twelve-step programs reveals that “accepting our powerlessness opens us up to the willingness for a Higher Power’s help. We then offer the problem over to a Higher Power. We let this Power remove the problem by practicing the rest of the steps as a way of life”. This process, while developed for addiction recovery, provides a framework for approaching any encounter with the limits of human control—including the fundamental vulnerability of embodied existence.

The emotional work of this fall, therefore, involves not just processing the trauma but recognizing it as what twelve-step spirituality calls a “spiritual awakening”—though not the dramatic kind often portrayed, but the slow recognition that occurs “over a period of time” as practitioners realize their fundamental dependence on forces beyond their individual will. In this context, my left-sided injuries become not just physical facts requiring medical attention, but embodied invitations to deeper spiritual surrender and recognition of divine presence operating through rather than despite apparent absence.

### **Shadow Integration and the Wounded Analyst**

From a psychological perspective informed by my study of archetypal medicine and Jungian approaches to healing, this fall demands shadow integration. The left side of the body, traditionally associated with the unconscious and the hidden aspects of self, has

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become the primary site of teaching. What am I being asked to acknowledge that I have been avoiding?

Jung's understanding of the wounded healer emphasizes that the analyst's wounds, although presumed to be relatively conscious after lengthy personal analysis, "live a shadowy existence" and "can always be reconstellated in particular situations, especially when working with someone whose wounds are similar" [8]. In my framework that integrates therapeutic spirituality with recognition of "divine sleep" and the "thoughtless" aspect of the Ein Sof, I must consider: Does this trauma emerge from divine absence or from the very structure of divine presence-in-concealment? The fall may represent an emergence from my own unconscious patterns, an embodied communication from aspects of self that could not reach me through gentler means.

Groesbeck's foundational work on the archetypal image of the wounded healer demonstrates how the therapeutic encounter becomes "a dialectical process in which the doctor, as a person, participates just as much as the patient" [9]. The psychological dimension also involves what I've termed "evidence distortion in clinical decision-making"—the recognition that all interpretation involves subjective elements. How do I read the text of this trauma without imposing meanings that serve my psychological comfort rather than truth? The hermeneutic approach I advocate in medical practice must be applied to my own experience: interpreting rather than merely explaining, remaining open to multiple valid readings.

### **Shekhinah in Exile and the Cultural Archetype**

At the deepest theological level, this fall represents what I have explored as the evolution of Shekhinah consciousness—divine presence manifesting in unexpected therapeutic encounters. But here, the therapeutic encounter is between my soul and my wounded body, with pain serving as the medium through which divine presence might be discovered.

Benziman, Kannai, and Ahmad's cross-cultural analysis of the wounded healer archetype demonstrates how this dynamic appears across African, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions, suggesting universal parallels between healing practices while acknowledging cultural diversity [10]. In my work on the "dark Shekhinah" in Jewish mystical thought and post-Holocaust theology, I've examined how divine presence often manifests precisely where we least expect it—in exile, in concealment, in suffering. This fall may represent a visitation of what I call the "absent healer," where the sacred appears through apparent abandonment.

The soul-level interpretation requires what I've described as "anti-theology"—the recognition that authentic spiritual experience often emerges through the collapse of our intellectual frameworks rather than their refinement. Like the dancers I observed in the synagogue, moving on sacred ground without theological consciousness, my body is teaching my soul through pure embodied experience, bypassing the mind's tendency to domesticate mystery through explanation.

Drawing from my exploration of tzimtzum (divine contraction), this fall may represent a necessary contraction in my own life—a pulling back that creates space for new forms of presence to emerge. The doctrine of tzimtzum suggests that limitation and withdrawal are not opposed to divine presence but are the very structure through which presence becomes possible.

Ben Azzai's addition of the burnt offering—"which is not eaten"—resonates deeply with the soul dimension of this trauma. This pain offers no nourishment in any conventional sense. It cannot be consumed, digested, or immediately transformed into wisdom. It simply burns, like the offerings that rise as smoke, present but intangible, real but beyond our ability to incorporate.

Research on wounded healers reveals the contradictory nature of this archetype—the Greek word *pharmakon* captures how the same experience can be both poison and cure [11]. In my understanding of therapeutic encounters as contemporary manifestations of divine indwelling, this fall becomes a site where the dynamics of concealment and revelation play out through embodied experience. The therapeutic space emerges wherever healing and transformation become possible through recognition of divine presence within darkness itself.

Hankir's autobiographical narrative research demonstrates how wounded healers increasingly use personal stories both as adjunctive therapy and as means to campaign against stigma, transforming private suffering into public healing resources [12]. This reframes my fall not merely as personal misfortune but as potential contribution to the broader discourse on how personal wounding can become a source of therapeutic wisdom.

### **Medical Practice and the Wounded Healer**

Contemporary research reveals significant implications for understanding healthcare professionals as wounded healers. Studies show that social workers and other helping professionals often enter their fields partly to heal their own past wounds, with both assets and liabilities resulting from this dynamic [13]. The concept extends beyond psychology to family medicine, where Daneault argues that acknowledging physicians as wounded healers could be "a turning point for our profession" [14].

This perspective challenges the traditional medical model that maintains strict boundaries between healer and patient. Instead, it recognizes what Cooper and Rosenthal describe as mutual influence in the healing process, where "both helper and client change...if the healing process succeeds" [15]. My fall forces me to confront these professional dimensions—how does acknowledging my own vulnerability and wounds inform my approach to therapeutic relationships?

### **The Continuing Conversation**

As I write this, my left scapula protests each keystroke, my lumbar region reminds me of gravity's stern teaching. The abrasions have begun their slow work of healing, but the theological questions

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remain fresh as open wounds. This is as it should be according to my framework of embodied theology, which recognizes that authentic healing emerges from dwelling with mystery rather than solving it.

The four-dimensional reading of this trauma—physical, emotional, psychological, and soul—reveals the inadequacy of any single interpretive framework while demonstrating the necessity of multiple perspectives. In the tradition of ben Azzai and the disagreeing Rabbis, I offer this reflection not as settled doctrine but as ongoing conversation between body and soul, between meaning and meaninglessness, between presence and absence.

Recent phenomenological research emphasizes the importance of “nourishing” the wounded healer through dedicated reflection, training programs that address the concept directly, and supervisory relationships that acknowledge both the gifts and vulnerabilities inherent in this archetype [7]. My embodied theology must be large enough to hold both sacred interpretation and simple biological fact. The body that breaks is also the body that heals, the body that questions, the body that continues to seek understanding even when—especially when—that understanding comes wrapped in pain.

## Conclusion

Yesterday I fell. Today I write. Tomorrow I will continue to inhabit this complex vessel of flesh and spirit, carrying both the wisdom of the elders and the fresh confusion of my own unintended offerings. The fall has become what I term an “absent healer”—a therapeutic encounter where healing emerges precisely through the apparent absence of conventional help.

This case study situates my personal experience within the broader academic discourse on wounded healers, demonstrating how individual trauma can be understood through multiple theoretical lenses while contributing to the ongoing conversation about the role of personal wounding in therapeutic practice. As research continues to explore the implications of the wounded healer archetype across various helping professions, my embodied experience of this fall offers both personal insight and professional reflection on the complex dynamics between suffering and healing.

In this continuing conversation between body and soul, perhaps the questions themselves are the most honest prayers we can offer. The left side of my body—bearer of divine severity, receptor of hidden teachings—continues its slow instruction in the art of receiving what we never asked for and finding, in that unwanted gift, a pathway toward deeper understanding of the sacred dimensions of embodied existence.

The fall was not for its sake, yet it has become, like ben Azzai’s expanded offerings, somehow fit—not satisfying any obligation I intended, but opening spaces where the sacred might dwell in the most ordinary and painful of circumstances. In this space between intention and accident, between meaning and chaos, the

absent healer continues to work, teaching through withdrawal, healing through concealment, revealing presence through the very structure of its hiddenness.

## The Loneliness of Pain: Steps in Self-Recovery [16]

*Alone in the pain, dis-connected from loved ones in anguish  
The limb the head the heart autonomous from my will  
Each beating its own rhythmic lashes  
On the most sensitive face of my soul  
This inscription of the soul’s hidden desire  
And the body as instrument of torture.  
What can this message be?  
I remain alone even in deciphering the code  
Some payment of a moral debt maybe  
A ritual infraction, a long forgotten hurt maybe?  
I rack my throbbing brain to think of something that will do  
justice to this interminable  
Suffering.  
Is it possible for a moment for there to be no meaning to it all?  
No ultimate design, no satisfaction by some accusing angel?  
No district attorney waiting his smile to break  
No judgement meted out by the gavel hitting the wooden  
desk? At the end of the day?  
Merely suffering for its own sake like the rows of bodies  
wrapped tightly in grimy blankets  
Along the sidewalk of Bombay streets as I speed to the  
airport to escape these teeming masses  
Each one surely in pain  
Each one desiring a better life  
Each one doing his or her own reckoning with the almighty  
as to the meaning of their circumstance and its justice.  
“Resist that at all cost, my mind interjects  
For is it not more important to suffer for a reason  
Can one at least bear it better?  
With dignity even  
But even this is too much for me as I situate myself once more  
In a post-Holocaust age of technology and indifference  
Suicide bombings of Pizza Huts in Jerusalem and Twin  
Towers burning, bodies falling, etched in the soul forever.  
No, for me meaning is a luxury I cannot afford and must  
rest with the brute force of the facts, the reality as-it-is,  
allowing it to work its devilish desire on my mind, yes I resist  
For the sake of their memory  
For the sake of my patients  
For the sake of those who’s suffering was pointless  
‘A mere act of nature’ they said  
‘The force of Revolution’ they said  
‘Social upheavals’ they said  
‘The price we must pay for progress’ they said.  
Even ‘what we must do to hasten the Messiah’ they said.  
For my mission is to remain in that space between the  
Twin Towers, where meaning is as yet unclear,  
I am the boatman who takes people across the river  
I am the doorman who allows my patients in to this next corridor  
With their baggage in hand  
Making that path a little easier.  
In this loneliness, of your pain  
I reach out to you  
I put my hand on your shoulder*

*I bless you to suffer well.  
 You are not alone  
 For in my soul I make space for you to enter  
 To feel my protection and care  
 To feel me feeling your anguish as real  
 I hold you close and wish you would feel more secure, so  
 that somehow you will take that leap into the abyss,  
 Knowing I'll be there for you,  
 Not letting go  
 That is my promise,  
 So you can fall well, into the abyss  
 Knowing I'll be there for you  
 Into the space of self-knowledge as prelude to a new awareness  
 Into the light of a new realization  
 That somehow in its typically uncanny way  
 Your soul knows  
 In some deep way  
 That this was meant to be  
 That this was not meaningless  
 That in some deep as yet impenetrable way  
 The travesty of this was appropriate  
 That there is a message to the pain  
 To the anguish  
 Yet to be unearthed  
 But present for you.  
 And that together we walk this path of pain  
 In this space I now hold you  
 Soothing your wounds along the way  
 Like a pregnant father sitting by the head of his wife in labor  
 Gently wiping her forehead with a wet cloth  
 And whispering loving words to ease her pain  
 To distract her spasms  
 Before the new life emerges.  
 In this space I know hold you  
 Soothing your wounds as best I can  
 But even more in the knowing  
 You and me  
 The wounded teaching the healer all along more than he  
 could ever learn alone  
 In that space between the Twin Towers  
 Between us  
 The divinity of presence  
 Between us  
 The sacred space of non-absurdity  
 Where we share the awareness of meaning and hold the  
 dignity of our suffering.*

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