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What's in a Name?
The Meaning and Function of *El* and *El* Compounds
Allison R. Henteloff

Names, in general, are utilized to create an identity for a person, often by attributing a quality or character to that person. The plethora of names our tradition has attributed to God over time could therefore be understood as creating an identity for that which is unknowable and indescribable. This idea, however, is problematic: How can we, with our limited human knowledge, identify God? Yet, in the naming of God, our ancestors deepened their understanding of the Divine. Our tradition recognized this irony and explained the numerous names of God in a variety of ways, the most common of which was that the names represent Divine attributes. For me, this, too, is problematic. For, in order to identify Divine attributes, one must describe the indescribable. Rather, in accordance with Buber and Heschel, I propose that, as human beings, we are only able to understand God through our relationships with God. Both Buber and Heschel described an I-Thou experience or a moment of radical amazement, but they did not label God with a particular name, nor describe God through attributes. Rather, they understood, experienced and explained their notions of God through their relationship with God. Thus, the different names used for God describe not God's attributes, but the way in which the author of the text perceives Divine-human relationships in a given context. For example, when you call your parent by his/her first name when you are angry with him/her then the name you use does not describe an attribute of your parent at that moment, but rather, how you are relating to your parent at that moment. Thus, I have chosen to take this relational approach as I examine the meanings and functions of *El* and *Shaddai* in our sacred texts.

This thesis will explore how Jewish tradition has understood the different meanings and functions of *El* and *El* compounds at different points in history by examining how the Bible, Mishna, Talmud, and various medieval Jewish philosophic works have utilized these names. My hypothesis, as mentioned above, is that the different names used for God describe Divine-human relationships as understood by the authors of these primary Jewish texts. The thesis is introduced with a discussion of the concept of naming in general and evolves into the meaning and functions of the names of God in the Jewish tradition. The thesis is divided into three main parts corresponding with the biblical, rabbinic, and medieval philosophic literature. In each one of these sections, I first examine the raw data (i.e., when and where the names appear). I then discuss the possible historical influences of the time which might have affected the data in any way. Following, I evaluate the literary context of the data in terms of what is being discussed when the name appears, to what the name is being compared, and how the name affects the larger literary unit. During this process, we learn how *El* and the *El* compounds compare to other names of God used in that particular text. At the end of each chapter, I test my hypothesis against the data in terms of what these names might reveal about Divine-human relationships. Finally, the thesis concludes with a cross-examination of the three different areas of text where discuss any consistencies or inconsistencies of ideas, meanings, or functions of the names throughout the texts and the possible reasons for these findings.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Meaning and Function of El and El-Compounds

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

The idea for this thesis emerged during my second year at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. As I became aware of the etymologies of various biblical names, I began to question the etymologies of Divine names. The following year, I was exposed to both Medieval and Modern Jewish thought where I learned about the nature of God and how perceptions of God influenced perceptions of Divine-human relationships. It was at that point that I decided to explore the connection between the names of God and Divine-human relationships.

Thus, it is no surprise that the three professors who guided me through this thesis were the three professors who initially inspired me to write on this topic. I would like to thank both of my advisors, Dr. Leonard Kravitz and Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz for their assistance during the various stages of my thesis. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Dr. S. David Sperling for his constructive feedback and guidance on the biblical section of this thesis.

Throughout this process my parents have been a continuous source of love and support. Each, in their own way, have brought me to this point by encouraging me to follow my heart and seek that which I question.

Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge my friend, my chevruta, my lifetime partner, Bryan Conyer. His unyielding patience, support, encouragement, and belief in me provided me with the strength to succeed. I thank him for challenging me to question, learn, and grow along side him.

Introduction

The basis of Jewish theology is knowing God. For centuries, Jews have been fascinated with understanding and relating to the Divine. They have written stories, observed laws, performed rituals, prayed, and studied in order to grasp that which is unknowable and indescribable. The Tanakh, itself, asks how can one understand the deeper aspects of a God[1] who hides[2] in secret shadows.[3] Yet, despite the mystery, it has been said that:

> "...the questioning spirit strives to draw near to [God], to behold [God's] graciousness and to perceive something of [the Divine's] relation to [humanity] and to the world. The whole endeavor of religion may be said to consist in bridging the gap between the finite and the infinite and thus to endow human life with sanctity and spiritual purpose."[4]

With such a lofty religious purpose, the question still remains: How can we know God? Sigmund Mowinckel (1961) proposed that "...to know a particular god, first of all, means to know his name. If you don't know the name of a god, how can you 'call upon him?' By only crying 'Oh God,' how can you be sure that the right god hears and answers?..."[5] According to the Midrash, there are seventy different names for God.[6] I do not think the Rabbis were suggesting that there were seventy different Gods for the Jews. In that case, we are again forced to question: If the name of God does not designate who/what God is, how can the names of God help us to know God? In other words, what is the meaning and function of Divine names?

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[1] Job 11:7. "Can you find out the deep things of God [*Elohah*]? Can you find out the purpose of the Almighty [*Shaddai*]?"
[2] Isa. 45:15. "Truly you are a God [*El*] who hides yourself..."
[3] Ps. 91:1. "He who dwells in the secret place of the most High [*Elyon*], who abides under the shadow of the Almighty [*Shaddai*]."
[4] Samuel S. Cohon, "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology." (*HUCa, XXIII,* 1950-51), p. 581.
[5] Sigmund Mowinckel, "The Name of the God of Moses," (HUCa, *XXXII,* 1961), pp. 122-23.
[6] Num. Rabb. 14:12.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In order to understand the meaning and function of Divine names, we must first discuss how our tradition understands the concept of naming in general.

Names as Organizing Principles

The first reference to naming in our tradition is found in the Creation story.

> And out of the ground the *YHWH Elohim* formed every beast of the field, and every bird of the air; and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them; and whatever Adam called every living creature, that was its name.[7]

According to this citation, a name is what something is called to help identify that thing. It is given by someone other than that which is being named. In so doing, the act of naming actually helps the one who is giving the name relate to that which is being named. From the context of this verse, we learn that the act of giving a name is related to the original act of creation. "It is the means by which all life is ordered, subdivided, and defined into recognizable quantities."[8] In other words, names are the organizing principle by which we relate to and understand the world around us.

Names Determined by Context

It follows that many names are attributed to different things based on their contextual relationship to something else. For example, the Genesis story provides a contextual reason for calling a woman "*isha*": "...she shall be called Woman (*isha*),

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[7] Gen. 2:19.

[8] Tryggve Mettinger cites S.D. McBride, "The Deuteronomic Name Theology," (PhD. Diss. Harvard, 1969, p. 73) in *In Search of God.* Frederich H. Cryer, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 7.

because she was taken out of Man (*ish*)."[9] The name for woman directly relates to the context from which she was born.[10]

Proper names are slightly more complicated, yet still derive their meaning from the context in which they originate. Throughout Jewish texts, there are examples of proper names given or changed because of the surrounding circumstances. Isaac, the Torah teaches, was call *Yitzhak* because Sarah laughed (from the verb, *l'tzahek*) when she heard she was going to have a child;[11] Moses (*moshe*) received his name because he was "drawn out" (from the verb, "*limshot*") from the water.[12] Similarly, the Talmud teaches that Palti, Michal's second husband, changed his name to Paltiel because God saved him ("*she palto El"*) from sin.[13]

Names Determined by Action

The Jewish tradition teaches that every person has three names: the one their parents give them, the one others call them, and the one they acquire themselves based on their actions in life.[14] According to the folk etymology in the Torah, Jacob (*Ya'akov*) received his name because he held the heal (*akev*) of his twin brother as he was coming out of Rebecca's womb.[15] However, some scholars say that Isaac and Rebecca gave Jacob his name, meaning "May God protect" or "may God preserve," as a wish for his

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[9] Gen. 2:23.

[10] This explanation does not contradict the first Genesis story which states that God created male and female at the same time (Gen. 1:27). Rather, it points out that "woman" was not given a name until the second story. Many biblical scholars believe that the stories were written by two different authors at different times. The first story talked about the creation and the second story talked about the naming of that creation.

[11] Gen. 21:6.

[12] Ex. 2:10.

[13] San. 19b.

[14] Eccl. Rabb. 7:3.

[15] Gen. 25:26.

future.[16] Ironically (or possibly intentionally), the Semitic root of the word, *y-a-k-v,* means "to deceive," thus naming Jacob according to his most prominent characteristic. Jacob actively deceived his brother and his father for his own interests. Later in his life, Jacob encountered and struggled with God. Through this action, Jacob earned a new name for himself. One which he received specifically because of his actions. He went from being the deceiver (*Ya'akov*) to being the one who struggled with God (*Yisrael*).

Names and Personality

Names also often reflect or represent one's personality.[17] In the first book of Samuel, we read about a Calebite shepherd, Nabal, who rejected David's offer of ten young men to help him. After Nabal's rejection, the intelligent and beautiful Abigail, Nabal's wife, implored David:

> Let not my lord, I beg you, regard this worthless man, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I your maidservant saw not the young men of my lord, whom you sent.[18]

Abigail used both nuances of the name "Nabal" to describe her husband's personality. He was both "noble" and "foolish," and acted according to his name.

NAMES OF GOD

Names, in general, are utilized to create an identity for a person, often by attributing a quality or character to that person based on his/her actions or personality. The plethora of names our tradition has attributed to God over time could therefore be understood as creating an identity for that which is beyond our comprehension. This idea,

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[16] Mettinger cites de Vaux (1978 vol. 1) and Thompson (1974) in *In Search of God.*, p. 7.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

however, is problematic: How can we, with our limited human knowledge, identify God? Yet, in the naming of God, our ancestors deepened their understanding of the Divine. "A man who really knows the 'real' deeper meaning of the name of a god, really 'knows the god' in question."[19] As we read in the Torah, when Moses first encountered God at the burning bush, Moses asked for a deeper knowledge of God; He asked for God's name:

> Behold, when I come to the people of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me, What is his name, what shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, "*Ehiyeh asher Ehiyeh* ("I am that I am"), and [God] said, Thus shall you say to the people of Israel, *Ehiyeh* ("I am") has sent me to you.[20]

Moses needed a way to identify that with which he was communicating. Some biblical scholars believed that *Ehiyeh* was related to the tetragrammaton in that they were both derived from the verb, *l'hiyot* ("to be").[21] Thus, for all intensive purposes, God identified Godself as "existence." Some of the rabbinic commentators and medieval Jewish philosophers suggested that God's name was already known, but Moses learned the meaning of the Divine appellation and thus established a more intimate connection with God.

The tension between the Jewish belief that God could not be named or identified as people or objects are named and the conviction that knowing God's name would in some way create a deeper knowledge of the Divine is found in Jewish texts throughout history. Our tradition has attempted to resolve this tension by explaining the numerous names of God in a variety of ways. The most common explanation is that Divine appellations represent Divine attributes or actions. According to the Tanhuma, God's first

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[18] I Sam. 25:25.
[19] Mowinckel, p. 125.
[20] Ex. 3:13-14.
[21] Mettinger, pp. 30-36.

message to Moses, *"Ehiyeh asher Ehiyeh"* means "I am named according to my acts."[22] Further proof of this assertion is found in the appellations used for God, such as king, judge, father, healer, and redeemer. These names reveal more about what God does than who God is.

> Rabbi Abba bar Memel, who belonged to the first generation of the Palestinian Amoraim [said]: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: What do you seek to know? *I am called according to my acts.* Sometimes I am called, *El Shadday* [God Almighty], or *Sevaot* [Hosts], or *Elohim* [God], or *YHWH* [Lord]. When I judge mankind, I am called *Elohim;* when I make war against the wicked I am called *Sevaot;* when I suspend man's sins I am called *El Shadday,* and when I have compassion upon My world I am called *YHWH,*' for the Tetragrammaton signifies none other than the quality of mercy...[23]

Name and Presence

Divine appellations also reveal the tension between transcendence and immanence, the distance and proximity between God and humanity. An old man with a beard full of compassion is an image which brings us closer to God; just as a Judge exercising Divine justice brings us into contact with God. In contrast, a Creator who sits back and watches His creation, or a faithful King who sits on a throne are images which distance us from God.[24] Yet, everywhere God pronounces God's name, the Divine presence is made manifest.

> And *YHWH* descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of *YHWH.* And *YHWH* passed by before him, and proclaimed, *YHWH, YHWH,* merciful and gracious God, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth...[25]

Names and Relationship

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[22] Tanhuma Shemot 20.
[23] Ephraim E. Urbach cites Ex. Rabb. 3:6 in *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs.* Israel Abrahams, trans. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1979), p. 37.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[25] Ex. 34:5-6.

> "Divine names embody the conception of God of a particular religion. Coming down from a distant past their meanings often are obscure. The personal name of a deity thus represents an epithet, the meaning of which has been forgotten. The epithet is generally derived from a function or characteristic or relation of the deity to a particular tribe, its members or surroundings...For ordinary relations new epithets are created denoting the relation of the deity to the life and destiny of the people and to nature. These newer appellations, expressed in more transparent language, in turn become terms which later the deity is invoked, sometimes in combination with the original personal name. The formation of new epithets for the deity constitute milestone in the progress of religion."[26]

The multitude of names our tradition attributes to God represents an historical perspective of the perceived relationship between God, humanity, and the world. The Jewish tradition has called God different names based on how Jews have related to God at different moments. For example:

> ...While the angels were unable to find names of animals, beasts and birds, "the man gave names to all the cattle and fowl of the air and to every beast of the field.' [He called himself] Adam because his origin was of the earth (*adamah*). 'And what is my name?' The Holy One asked him. 'It is fitting to call you *YHWH* because you are the lord (*Adon*) of all your creatures' Adam replied. Rabbi Aha adds: 'The Holy One said, I am *YHWH*; that is my name; that is the name which Adam gave me; that is the name which I specified for myself; that is the name which I agreed upon with the ministering angels.[27]

This midrash credits Adam for naming God based on how Adam related to God in the Garden. Just as names of people often related to the context in which they were born, names of God often relate to the context in which people experience God.

Buber and Heschel both asserted that we are only able to understand God through our relationships with God. Whether Buber described an "I-Thou" experience or Heschel, a moment of "radical amazement," neither of them labeled God with a particular name, nor described God through attributes. Rather, they understood, experienced and explained their notions of God through their relationship with God. Thus, the different names used for God describe not God's attributes, but the way in which the author of the

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[26] Cohon, p. 579.

text perceives Divine-human relationships in a given context. For example, if you call your parent by his/her first name when you are angry with him/her then the name you use does not describe an attribute of your parent at that moment, but rather, how you are relating to your parent at that moment.

> The relationship between the name and its bearer is difficult to define. On the one hand, names seem to have served as symbolic attributes of their tradents. On the other, the connection between a name and its bearer is so intimate that it is hard to speak of a name as a quantity that can be clearly separated from the individual who bears it. A person's name tends to be her or his alter ego and reflects her or his nature, power, and reality.[28]

Thus, I have chosen to take this relational approach as I examine the meanings and functions of Divine names in our sacred texts. Being that there are so many names and so many uses for the names in the various texts, I have chosen to closely follow the use of the oldest names for God in our tradition, *El* and *El* compound names (*Shaddai, Elyon, Olam*).

This thesis will explore how Jewish tradition has understood the different meanings and functions of *El* and *El* compounds at different points in history by examining how the Bible, Mishna, Talmud, and various medieval Jewish philosophic works have utilized these names. My hypothesis, as mentioned above, is that the different names used for God describe Divine-human relationships as understood by the authors of these primary Jewish texts. In each one of the sacred texts, I will first examine the raw data (i.e., when and where the names appear). I will then discuss the possible historical influences of the time which might have affected the data in any way. Next, I will evaluate the literary context of the data in terms of what is being discussed when the name appears, to what the name is being compared, and how the name affects the larger literary unit. During this process, *El* and the *El* compounds will be compared and

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[27] Cohon, p. 599 citing *Pesikta Rabba* on I Kings 5:11.

contrasted to other names of God used in that particular text. At the end of each chapter, I will test my hypothesis against the data in terms of what these names might reveal about Divine-human relationships. Finally, the thesis will conclude with a cross-examination of biblical, rabbinic, and medieval material. I will discuss any consistencies or inconsistencies of ideas, meanings, or functions of the names throughout the texts and the possible reasons for these findings.

[28] Mettinger, p. 11.

El and *El* Compounds in the Tanakh

The term "*El*" occurs over 230 times in the Tanakh. As one of the oldest names of God, the meaning and the function of *El* (and the *El*-compounds)[29] are not always so apparent. Layers of redaction illustrate the decline of *El,* and the growing popularity of *YHWH*, as the Divine designation for the Israelite God toward the beginning of the Common Era. As a result, scholars have found the original meaning and function of *El* difficult to ascertain. Both an historical and literary analysis are needed to best understand the use of *El* in the Tanakh. From an historical perspective, many scholars believe that the Ancient Near Eastern myths containing deities with names and characters similar to *El* have had a strong influence on the ancient Israelite religion. This influence, has ultimately made its way to the Tanakh through the appearance of *El* and the *El* compounds.

From a literary perspective, the meaning and function of *El* is derived from its relationship to the larger literary unit. In addition to the narrative in which *El* is being employed, its placement in prose or poetry, narrative or dialogue provides tremendous insight into the biblical authors' perception of the Divine appellation. Primarily located in ancient biblical poetry, the book of Psalms, and the book of Job, *El* also has a prominent place in the Patriarchal narratives in the book of Genesis and the Balaam Oracles in the book of Numbers. In each location, the function of the name is best understood through its literary context.

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[29] e.g., *El Shaddai, El Elyon, El Olam, El Ro'i, El Elohai Yisrael.*

The deity "*El*" appears both as a generic term denoting a divinity[30] and as a proper name for God.[31] The God to whom *El* is referring is, at times, a foreign deity,[32] and, at times, the God of Israel.[33] Since this Divine appellation is primarily found in early biblical poetry, *El* is often contrasted with other names or epithets of God, such as *Tzur*,[34] *Elyon*,[35] *Shaddai*,[36] *Elohim*,[37] and *YHWH*.[38] In addition, *El* has been compared to a king[39] and man.[40] In its descriptive role, *El* is often used to depict *YHWH*, as a merciful and compassionate,[41] mighty and awesome,[42] and jealous God.[43]

Though *El,* as a name and as a deity, can stand alone, *El* is often accompanied by another Divine epithet or appellation. *El* appears in Genesis as the God of the Patriarchs (i.e., *El Shaddai*).[44] The relationship between *El* and the Patriarchs lays the foundation for the relationship between *YHWH,* Moses and the future Israelites. Accompanying, *El*

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[30] e.g., Ex. 20:5; 34:13; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; 7:21; Josh, 24:19; Nah. 1:2; Jonah 4:2; Ps. 36:6; 95:3; Neh. 1:5; 9:31, 32.

[31] e.g., Isa. 45:22. "*...Ani El, v'ein od*" (I am *El,* there is none else).

[32] e.g., Ex. 34:14 (*El acher*); Deut. 32:12; 3:24; Mic. 7; Lam. 3:41 (*El Nekhar*); Ex.15:11 (*Elim*); Mal. 2:11; Ps. 44:21; 81:10 (*El* Zar); Second Isaiah has a number of references to pagan gods including: Isa. 44:10, 15; 46:6; 44:17; 45:20; 15, 22; 46:9.

[33] e.g., Gen. 33:20 (*El Elohai Yisrael*); Deut. 7:9 (*ha'El ha'ne'eman shomer ha brit v'ha'chesed l'avotav...*)

[34] e.g., Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; II Sam. 23:3; Ps. 18:3;18:46; 89:27.

[35] e.g., Num. 24:16; Ps. 78:17-18; Ps. 107:11.

[36] e.g., Num. 24:4; Job 13:3; 15:25; 22:17; 27:2; 34:10.

[37] e.g., Isa. 45:15; 46:9; Ps. 7:12; 42:3; Ps. 52; 63; 73; 82.

[38] e.g., Ps. 19; 29; 94; Isa. 45:21; 5:6; Ex. 20:5; Jonah 4:2; Num. 23:8-9; II Sam. 22:32.

[39] e.g., Ps. 68:25; 22:2; 102:25.

[40] e.g., Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9; Ezek. 28:9; Isa. 31:3.

[41] Ps. 86:15; Neh. 9:31.

[42] e.g., Deut. 7:21; 10:17;

[43] Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Josh. 24:19; Nah. 1:2.

[44] Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; Ex. 6:3 (not in the Patriarchal narratives, yet referring to them).

Shaddai as the most significant appellations in conjunction with *El* are: *El Olam*,[45] *El Elyon*,[46] and *El Ro'i*.[47].

In addition to *El* as a proper name of a deity or a generic appellation describing God or God's actions, *El* and *El* compounds are also used as a literary device to archaize the poem and evoke sentimental feelings of old. This use of *El* is particularly prominent in the book of Psalms where God is called upon to act in a way which was helpful to the ancestors of their past.[48]

As this chapter explores the historical context concerning the emergence of the name "*El*," and analyzes the literary context concerning the placement and use of the name in the Tanakh, the meaning and function of these Divine appellations will become apparent. This chapter will examine the etymology of the term "*El*," as well as the Ancient Near Eastern uses of the name, focusing particularly on the Canaanite supreme God, *El*. The characteristics and legends surrounding this Canaanite mythic figure-head will be of great significance in terms of its influence on the ancient Israelite people, and ultimately the *El* of the Tanakh. Next, the chapter will look at the origins, influences, and functions of the major *El* compounds (*El-Shaddai, El-Olam, El-Elyon, and El Ro'i*) and question whether or not they are indeed compounds, combining separate names of God, or merely epithets, complementing the appellation, *El*. Concluding the historical analysis, this chapter will discuss the theories of biblical authorship and how they affect our

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[45] Gen. 21:33. After making a covenant with Abimelech, Abraham plants a tamarisk at Beer-Sheba and calls upon *El Olam*.

[46] Gen. 14:18, 19, 22. Blessings were offered to *El Elyon, the Creator of Heaven and Earth* after Abram returned from Sodom with his nephew Lot.

[47] Gen. 16:13. Hagar named the God who heard her cries, *El Ro'i*.

[48] e.g., Ps. 55:20. "God, who is enthroned from old, shall hear, and afflict them. Selah."
Ps. 74:12. "For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the Earth."

understanding of the use of *El* in the Tanakh. The second section of this chapter will explore the literary uses of *El,* focusing primarily on the Patriarchal narratives, the Balaam Oracles, the Psalms, and Job. The final section of this chapter will test the author's hypothesis that the use of Divine names reflect Divine-human relationships.

I. Historical Analysis

ETYMOLOGY

The etymology of the term *El* is obscure. In fact, some say that it is impossible to determine the etymology of the name since the original meaning has long been forgotten.[49] However, *El,* in its present form, conforms to the pattern of the stative participle of the weak Semitic root *a-y-l* or *a-w-l*, meaning "to be powerful," "to be strong," or "to be preeminent."[50] In support of this derivation, *El* is employed in different places in the Tanakh both as a noun and an adjective completely unrelated to the concept of a deity. As a noun, *El* is understood as "strength" or "power"[51] as in the expression, "*yesh/ein le'el yadi*" (it is/is not within my power).[52] As an adjective, *El* is translated as "strong" or "mighty," as in "*arzei El*" (strong cedars)[53] or "*harei El*" (the fortified mountains)[54]

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[49] William Foxwell Albright, "The Names *Shaddai* and *Abram,*" (*JBL, LIV,* Dec. 1935), p. 180.

[50] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), s.v. "*El,*" p. 522. Other translations include: "to be in front, to dominate." *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* vol. 1, p. 244.

[51] e.g., Gen. 31:29; Deut. 28:32; Mic. 2:1.

[52] e.g., Gen. 31:29; Deut. 28:32; Mic. 2:1; Prov. 3:27; Neh. 5:5.

[53] Ps. 80:11.

[54] Ps. 36:7. These expressions have been translated as "mighty, high, lofty" in other translations of the Bible.

An alternate explanation for the term is to understand the verbal root as denominative from a primitive noun such as: *em* (mother) and *shem* (name). Thus *El,* as a primitive noun, could have referred to the chief, leader, or head of a family or clan, which in turn, became understood as "the mighty one" or "the strong one."[55] *El* is now most commonly translated as "G/god."

El is oldest known Semitic term for God. Semitic dialects, such as Phoenician, Aramaic, Punic, and Neo-Punic, have used "*il*" as an appellation for "God or Godhead," or as an adjective meaning Godly.[56] *Il/El* corresponds to the Akkadian "*ilu(m)*" unit, the Arabic "*El*" and the Canaanite "*il,*" as a name for God.[57] Though all of these Semitic languages influenced the Israelite dialects, Ugaritic (or North Canaanite) is most closely related to proto-Hebrew, the dialect from which biblical Hebrew is directly descended.[58]

El was used as both a proper and common noun. In Phoenician inscriptions, *El* was known as, "*El*-Creator-of-the-Earth;" in Punic inscriptions *El* was the chief of other gods.[59] As a common noun, *El* was the most widely used term in ancient near east.[60] Some scholars attribute *El* appellations to local *numina,* "local deities tied to Palestinian shrines or localities."[61] The term *El* was used to introduce the god associated with a particular location.

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[55] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 1, p. 244.
[56] Much in the same way we use the word "Divine" in English.
[57] Herrmann, p. 523.
[58] Albright (Dec. 1935), p. 175.
[59] Herrmann, p. 526-7.
[60] Jack Miles, God*: A Biography.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 61.
[61] Frank Moore Cross Jr. refers to Gunkel, Gressman, and Alt in "Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs," *HTR, LV* (1962), p. 226.

EL IN CANAANITE MYTHOLOGY

El was regarded as "the Patriarch among the gods."[62] According to the Pantheon lists found at Ugarit, *El* was the "Divine chief executive"[63] who possessed ultimate authority. He was otherwise known as the "sky God "or "high God."[64] Though recognized as the "Father of man and gods," *El* rarely played an active role in Canaanite mythology. [65] He lived on a remote mountain to the North at "the source of two rivers, the fountain of the two deeps,"[66] and rarely communicated with other gods or humans except through occasional visits or visions.[67] He was believed to have control over nature and societies at large, but little direct contact with individual human beings. According to the legends, *El* spent most of his time presiding over the council of gods and chasing women.[68] Seeking the guidance and judgment of *El,* the gods were thought to have traveled great distances. Apparently, the trek was worth it, for *El* received the reputation of being a wise and merciful God whose his authority was final.[69] He was depicted as an "...aged father figure with an air of mild and generous wisdom."[70] *El* was most commonly depicted in his legendary quarrels with *Baal*, the Storm God. In contrast to *Baal*, the young, tumultuous warrior, *El* was depicted as the wise, old monarch. *Baal* battled for power and caused chaos; whereas *El* had power and governed justly.[71] As head of the

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[62] Mettinger, p. 67.
[63] Miles, p. 61.
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, p. 104.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] Marvin H. Pope, "The Status of *El* at Ugarit," (*Ugarit-Forschungen, 19,* 1987), p. 221.
[69] Mettinger, p. 80.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[71] *Ibid.*, pp. 75-81.

epic pantheon, *El* declined in prominence during the second half of the third and the first half of the second millennium.[72]

Characteristics of the Supreme God, El

In addition to his strong, just, wise, and fatherly persona, *El* was a stern and compassionate leader. In the Ugaritic poems *El* was described in three groupings of epithets: 1) "Father" and "Creator;" 2) "the Ancient One" and "King, Father of Years;" 3) "the Just and Merciful Judge." As Father and Creator, *El* was most often credited for his supreme power over the other gods and all creations. [73] Marvin H. Pope (1987) provided five common scenarios of *El* as Creator. The first was the most basic means of creation, that of heterosexual copulation. Sometimes, this Creator role did not paint the most gentle picture of the deity. There were times when *El* was portrayed as a lusty old man asserting his role as Creator and Patriarch.[74] The second function of creation asserted by *El* was that of "the word," that is, by speaking. Pope presented the example

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[72] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, p. 104. This is based on evaluation of theophorous names of Semitic origin from the late 26th century.

[73] Pope (1987), p. 223.

[74] *Ibid.*, pp. 225-6. Citing F.M. Cross Jr., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic. Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel.* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1973).

...El's power is great like Sea's
El's power is like that of Flood
Long is El's member like that of Sea's
El's member like that of Flood...
El indeed seduced his wives
Lo the two women cried:
O husband! Husband! stretched your bowstave,
Drawn is your mighty shaft...
He reclines, he kisses their lips
Lo their lips are sweet as grapes
As they kiss, they conceive
As they embrace they are made pregnant
The two travail and give birth

of *El* commanding some handmaids to become pregnant. The next account in the story revealed that the handmaids became pregnant and that their babies were the means by which *Baal* is punished. The third example of *El's* creative abilities was what Pope termed "name-power," the ability to invoke the Divine name to raise, restore and revive the dead. The fourth example of *El's* creative power was that of modeling from clay that which *El* wanted to be in life. There was a story about a king who was ill and asked *El* for help. *El* created a clay model of the king and removed the illness from the body, ultimately curing the king.[75] The final area of *El* as Creator related to the question of the cosmos. Though Pope found evidence that *El* created humanity, there was no evidence that he was the cosmic creator of the Earth. Some scholars have interpreted *El's* abode, the meeting point of two floods, as evidence that *El* separated the cosmic waters.[76] This idea hearkens back to the second day of creation in the Genesis motif.[77] Pope suggested that the primordial *tehom* might be *El's* eternal abode.[78]

The second group of epithets described *El* as an old man with a gray beard and infinite wisdom. "Your decree, O *El*, is wise, Your wisdom eternal, a life of fortune your decree."[79] Accompanying this age and wisdom is majestic power; thus *El* was called "the Eternal King"[80] and "King, Father of Years."[81] *El* used his age and his knowledge well to act as a compassionate ruler.

To the Gods *Dawn and dusk.*

[75] Pope (1987), pp. 221-222.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

[77] Gen. 1:6-7. "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so."

[78] Pope (1987), p. 228.

[79] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 1, p. 245.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 246

El is enthroned with Attart (f the field)

Finally, *El* was personified as the "Judge in the council of the league of tribes."[82] *El* was thought to be righteous, merciful and benign in judgment as he sat on the mountain in the council of the gods. In latter poems, *El* developed the reputation of being the Divine warrior. Yet, in actuality, *El* "played" the warrior as he sent others out to wage the battles while he remained at home to seduce the Goddesses. The only battles he would fight were those set up by the heads of families among the gods.[83] His bellicose style was more diplomatic and less destructive that that of *Baal,* the violent, unruly warrior God. "If *El*, lord of all gods and men, were to become actively warlike, this is just how we might expect him to do it: to send one nation against another, to manipulate the pieces on a kind of world chessboard, rather than engage himself."[84]

Influence of the Canaanite El in the Tanakh

1. DIVINE ABODE

El sits as judge with Haddu the Shepherd,
Who sings and plays on the lyre.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 250.

Then he set his face
Toward Lutpan El, the Compassionate
Toward the mountain...
He came to the domed tent of El
He entered the Tabernacle of King, Father of Years...

[82] *Ibid.*

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 251.

[84] Miles, p. 189.

The Canaanite deity was said to have dwelled both in between two rivers[85] and on a northern mountain.[86] Various references in the Tanakh have placed the Divine abode in both of these locations. The biblical authors depict God dwelling in the midst of the waters. In the book of Ezekiel, God speaks to the prophet telling him to speak to the prince of Tyre on God's behalf. God identifies Himself as being the God who dwells at the sea. "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says *YHWH* God: Because your heart is raised, and you have said, I am *El*, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas..."[87] "And it shall come to pass on that day, that the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streams of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall issue from the house of *YHWH*, and shall water the valley of Shittim."[88]

The *El* in the Tanakh is also placed atop the great cosmic mountain toward the North. "For you have said in your heart, I will ascend to Heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of *El*; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the farthest north."[89] In addition to the northern mountain, Isaiah refers to the God sitting at the mountain amidst the congregation. The references to *edat El* (the congregation of *El*)

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[85] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* vol. 1, p. 249.

Then she set her face
Toward El at sources of two rivers
In the midst of the fountains of he double deep.
She came to the domed tent of El and entered
The Tabernacle of King, Father of Years...

[86] *Ibid.*

Then they set their faces
Toward the mountain of El
Toward the gathered council.
Indeed the Gods *were sitting at a table...*

[87] Ezek. 28:2.

[88] Joel 4:18. cf. Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 14:8; Isa. 33:20-22.

[89] Isa. 14:13.

hearken back to the council of the gods lead by the Canaanite *El*. "...God stands in the congregation of *El*; he judges among the judges."[90] Just as the Canaanite deity acted as counselor, arbitrator, and judge in the council of the gods, The Israelite God acts as counselor, arbitrator, and judge in the congregation of *El*.

2. DIVINE QUALITIES/CHARACTERISTICS

The name *El* in the Tanakh is often accompanied by adjectives describing God's actions or behavior. The biblical *El,* like the Canaanite deity is merciful and compassionate, wise and understanding. For it is written: "And *YHWH* passed by before him, and proclaimed, *YHWH*, *YHWH* merciful and gracious God, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."[91] "Wisdom is with the aged; and length of days brings understanding. With him is wisdom and strength, he has counsel and understanding."[92]

More descriptive of the Canaanite Goddess Anat[93] than the just and compassionate Canaanite *El*, the expression "*El kanna/kano*" (a jealous god) is often used to describe *YHWH*.[94] The term "jealous god" is used as a caveat against worshipping other gods. God created, redeemed, and made a covenant with the people. If they turned away from God, God would be enraged, consumed with fire, for God was a jealous God.

Through Pope's analysis of the Canaanite *El*, we learned that *El* was not overtly responsible for cosmic creation, though he was credited for fathering humanity. In contrast, the biblical *El* cannot be credited for creating human life, yet is tangentially

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[90] e.g., Ps. 82:1.
[91] Ex. 34:6. cf. *El rahum v'hanun/ hanun v' rahum* (Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh. 9:17).
[92] Job 12:12-13.
[93] Herrmann, p. 531.
[94] Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Josh. 24:19; Nah. 1:2.

associated to the creation of the world in latter biblical sources. These later sources refer to *El* as being the Creator of Heaven and Earth.[95] Despite these references, *El* is in no way connected to the initial creation story in Genesis. W. Herrmann posited the idea that the Canaanite population of Palestine adopted the view of a Creator-*El* from the Phoenicians and later applied it to *YHWH*.[96] The view that *YHWH* was the Creator-God was also a late development, traced back to 7th century BCE. [97] *YHWH*, like *El*, as we know, also cannot be traced back to creation.

The last characteristic, and common epithet for the biblical *El,* is the concept of the living God, *El chai.* This idea is taken directly from a Canaanite myth found at Ugarit. The story tells of the Storm God, *Baal*, who goes into battle with the Death God, *Mot*. A summer drought ensues and *Baal* is forced to surrender and enter the kingdom of death. Reports came back to *El* that *Baal* was dead. Upon hearing the news, the Goddess Anat set out to retrieve the deceased *Baal* from *Mot*. As the legend had it, the Goddess subjected *Mot* to a variety of torturous acts, during which time *Baal* rose from the underworld and ultimately defeated *Mot*. *Baal* was then known as the dying and rising God.[98] The dying and rising of *Baal*, according to the Canaanite myth, directly related to the agricultural seasons. The death God, *Mot*, was associated with summer drought and *Baal* was associated with winter rain and lightening. Thus when *Baal* died, the harvest died with him; when Anat and *Baal* returned home, the harvest resumed. [99]

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[95] e.g., Gen. 14:18, 19, 22; Isa. 40:18-22; 42:5.
[96] Gen. 2:7; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 4:22; 32:6; Isa. 29:16; Hos. 8:4; Prov. 14:21; 29:13.
[97] Herrmann, p. 532.
[98] Mettinger, pp. 76-77.
[99] *Ibid.*, pp. 82-84.

The term "*El chai*" or "*Elohim chayyim*" is interpreted by some scholars as being a direct response to this legend.[100] *YHWH*, the God of Israel, is a living God who never died. During the time of the prophets, the Israelites were still referring to the two gods, *Mot* and *Baal*, when considering the affect of the seasons during the harvest. *YHWH*, the living God, combined the activities the Canaanites attributed to two different gods and, thus, was responsible for all seasons.

Later in the Tanakh, the concept of the living God is altered. *YHWH, El chai* refers to the god of salvation.[101] In the book of Joshua, "*El chai*" is paralleled to *adon kol ha aretz* (Lord of the Earth).[102] Joshua promised the people that *YHWH* was on their side and would save them from their enemies and *Baal* would overlook their troubles. Joshua was preparing the people for final drama of exodus where *El chai* would lead them into the Promised Land.

> And Joshua said, Hereby you shall know that <u>*El chai*</u> is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the Ark of the Covenant of <u>Lord of all the Earth</u> passes over before you to the Jordan.[103]

Another example of the living God's powers of salvation is when Goliath insulted the armies of the living God (*Elohim chayyim*). David agreed to fight the Philistine and had faith that the living God, who saved him previously, would save him again.

> Your servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God. And David said, *YHWH* who saved me from the paw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, he will save me from the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Go, and *YHWH* be with you.[104]

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[100] The term "living God" appears 13 times in Tanakh, only three of which refer to *El chai* (Josh. 3:10; Hos. 2:1; Ps. 84:3). The remaining occurrences refer to *Elohim hayyim* (Deut. 5:26; I Sam. 17:26, 36; II Kings 19:4, 16; Isa. 37:4, 17; Jer. 10:10, 23:36; Ps. 42:3,; Dan. 6:20, 26).

[101] Mettinger, pp. 85-86.

[102] "*YHWH* of the Earth" is another epithet for the Canaanite deity *Baal*.

[103] Josh. 3:10-11.

[104] I Sam. 17:36-37.

3. GOD OF THE FATHERS

It was common practice in the Ancient Near East for a person to worship one particular god, usually a paternal or ancestral god, *theoi patrooi,* Gods of the Fathers. These gods were originally believed to be distinct deities who guarded one person.[105] As time progressed and new generations were born, the offspring began to adopt the God of their father. There were also situations where each member of the family had a different God, and as time moved on, "the God of X," "the God of Y," and "the God of Z," were eventually brought together into a single family God. Such was the theory of Frank M. Cross Jr. Cross boldly suggested that originally, "the God of Abraham" (*Elohai Avraham*), "the fear of Isaac" (*Yirat Yitzhak*), and "the mighty one of Jacob" (*Avir Ya'akov*) later became the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob "by the artificial genealogical linkage of the Fathers, and at the same time assimilated to Yahweh."[106]

Cross also suggested that as families and clans wandered through different areas, they integrated the local *numen* (gods affiliated with a particular location) with their ancestral God. These *numina* sometimes functioned as intermediaries between the individuals and the national/city gods. Cross believed that the God of the Patriarchs was *Shaddai*. When the Patriarchs immigrated to Canaan, they adopted the Canaanite *El* God along with their own family God, thus creating, "*El Shaddai.*" Cross discussed the theories of other scholars who claimed that *El Shaddai* (not just *Shaddai*) was indeed a family God brought into Palestine by the Patriarchs. In Palestine, they met the Canaanite

[105] Similar to the concept of a guardian angel.
[106] Cross (1962), p. 226.

national deity, *El Elyon*. Abraham adapted to his new surroundings and served the new God as well as his own.[107] However, present evidence demonstrates that such Patriarchal immigration was most unlikely.

Albrecht Alt critiqued Cross's theory on the basis that the God of the Patriarchs did not fit the characteristics of local *numina*.[108] Though Alt had no doubt that *El Shaddai* was connected with foreign, social gods, he noted that the Patriarchal gods were imported from the wanderings of the Patriarchs and were not attached to a particular location. Rather, they were designated by the name of the Patriarch, the founder of the cult. Alt described the God of the patriarchs as:

> not a local deity but the patron of the clan, the social group. He may be described as an 'historical' God, i.e., one who enters into a kinship or covenantal relationship with a clan, and who guides the social group in its peregrinations, its wars, in short through historical vicissitudes to its destiny.[109]

Alt suggested the theory that The God of X became the God of the fathers who borrowed the name *El Shaddai* from a local Canaanite cult. Only later did the Patriarchs identify that God as *YHWH*.[110] However his theory was called into question because of an inscription of a business transaction found in an Old Assyrian text. The text referred to the national/social God and to an individual's patron deity by "God of your/our father." For example, it was natural for Assur, the Assyrian chief God, to appear with the personal, family, or city God, as in the case, "May Assur and Ilabrat, the God of our

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[107] *Ibid.*, pp. 228-9. He refers to scholar Julius Lewy who showed that Old Assyrian texts used the expressions "the God of your father" and "the God of our fathers" interchangeably, illustrating that the Amorites adopted the high God of the Assyrians, as well as their ancestral God.

[108] *Ibid.* cites Beitrage zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament III, 12 (1929). Republished in A. Alt, Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israrl I (Munchen, 1953), in "Yahweh and the Patriarchs," p. 226-7.

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 228.

[110] Lloyd, R. Baily, "Israelite *El* Sadday and Amorite Bel Sade," *JBL LXXXVII* (Dec. 1968), p. 434.

father, bear witness."[111] Some scholars have therefore concluded that *El Shaddai* reveals the same formula as "Assur and Ilabrat," understanding *El* as the national chief God and *Shaddai* as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.[112]

The Ancient Israelites worshipped the supreme God by various appellations, as well as minor deities, who protected individuals, families, and clans. These minor deities, like the *numina* acted as a direct liaison between themselves and the high God, *El*.[113] We learned from Canaanite mythology that *El* did not have direct contact with humanity, thus an intermediary God (such as *Shaddai*, *Elyon*, or *Olam*),[114] was necessary. This theory, however, does not stand up to the numerous references in the Tanakh when *El* speaks and is referred to alone. For example: "I will not execute the fierceness of my anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am *El*, and not man; the Holy One in your midst; and I will not enter into the city."[115] Despite the obvious Canaanite influence, direct or indirect, the number of times *El* was used in the Tanakh illustrates that the name was deeply rooted in the early Israelite tradition.

In the Tanakh, Abraham is depicted as combining features of the Canaanite *El* (overseer of society and nature) and the Mesopotamian personal God (for each individual) to create new religious concept. Jack Miles introduced the concept that through this naming process, Abraham went from being the servant of God to creating a relationship

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[111] *Ibid.*
[112] Albright (1935), p. 190.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 191.
[114] The possibility of these terms referring to additional deities or epithets for *El* will be discussed further later in the thesis.
[115] Hos. 11:9. cf. Gen. 31:13; Isa. 31:3; Ps. 146:5.

where God was responsible to Abraham. By calling *El Shaddai*, or *YHWH*, the God of Abraham, that God is responsible for acting solely on his behalf.[116]

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF *EL* AND *YHWH*

Despite Cross's theory regarding the God of the Patriarchs, there has been evidence that the Israelites of the first millennium BCE worshipped *El* as a God distinct from *YHWH*.[117] It has been speculated that "the Patriarchal religion had a kind of '*El*-monotheism' which recognized *El* as the Supreme Being..."[118] Within the Tanakh, there are various references to *El* worship. Early in Genesis, *El* is referred to as "*El, Elohai Yisrael*" (the God of Israel)[119] and *"El, Elohai avicha"* (*El*, the God of your father).[120] The first reference occurs just after Jacob and Esau are reunited. They journeyed their separate ways and Jacob built an altar in the field he purchased in the city of Shalem. He called the altar, *El, Elohai Yisrael.* This might suggest that Jacob was marking his territory and bringing the practice of *El* worship with him. In contrast to this early verse in the Tanakh, later books accredit *YHWH* with the title "God of Israel." For example: "Then Joshua built an altar to the *YHWH*, God of Israel, in Mount Ebal."[121]

The second reference occurs when God speaks to Jacob in a dream and identifies Himself as *El, Elohai avicha.* We learned that the Canaanite *El* only interacts with

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[116] Miles, pp. 63-64.
[117] Herrmann, p. 528.
[118] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, p. 164.
[119] Gen. 33:20.
[120] Gen. 46:3.
[121] Josh. 8:30. cf. e.g., Ex. 5:1; 32:27; Josh. 10:40; 13:33; Jud. 5:5; I Sam. 23:11; II Sam. 12:7; I Kings 11:31; Isa. 17:6; Jer. 32:36; Ps. 106:48; I Chron. 28:4.

humanity through dreams or visions,[122] thus many scholars interpret these biblical references as evidence of the Canaanite *El* as the God of Israel. In all probability Gen. 33:20 represents an old tradition, showing that *El* was worshipped by at least some of the Israelites. This view is supported by Isa. 14:4-20 where the text tells of a tyrant who went to Heaven in order to set his throne above *kochavei El,* the stars of *El*, and settle himself on the Divine mountain in an attempt to have dominion over the universe, (traditionally reserved for the Canaanite *El*).[123]

The evidence that the *El* of the Tanakh has been influenced by the Canaanite *El* is undeniable. The claim that the name *El* used in the Tanakh actually refers to the Canaanite figurehead is questionable. We have seen that *El* is used in its generic form to denote a foreign God,[124] but scholars find no clear evidence that *El* is used as the proper name of a non-Israelite God. The single verse which is somewhat controversial is Ezek. 28:2 which blatantly carries images from Canaanite mythology.[125]

EL: PROPER NOUN OR GENERIC APPELLATION OF A DEITY

We have already seen that *El* is used as a proper name for the Canaanite deity. Likewise, the term "*Il*" is unquestionably a proper name for God in some of the earliest Akkadian sources.[126] References to *Il Milk* (Il, the King) and *Rasp Milk* (Rasp, the King) have appeared in some Ugaritic texts. *Il* clearly denotes the name of the deity and *Milk*

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[122] Unless there is an intermediary God (such as *Shaddai*, who could appear directly before Abraham and speak on behalf of both Gods saying, "*Ani El Shaddai*" (Gen. 17:1).

[123] Herrmann, p. 529.

[124] e.g., Ex. 34:14 (*El acher*); Deut. 32:12; Mic. 7; Mal. 2:11 (*El Nekhar*); Ps. 44:21; 81:10 (*El* Zar); Ex. 15:11 (*Elim*); Isa. 44:10, 15; 46:6; 44:17; 45:20; 15, 22; 46:9 (references to pagan Gods).

[125] Ezek. 28:2. "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says *YHWH* God: Because your heart is raised, and you have said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas..."

acts as the epithet to the Divine name. There is, however, one example in these Ugaritic texts where "*il*" acts as a generic appellation for God. In the case of "*il Haddu*" (the God Haddu), "Haddu" is clearly the name of the deity and *il* functions as the general term for God.[127]

Whereas *il/El* in Ancient Near Eastern mythology refers more often than not to a specific deity, *El* in the Tanakh is more commonly used as a generic term for God. In addition to being the term to connote a pagan deity,[128] *El* is often used in describing the actions or qualities of another God. For example, X is the God (*El*) who..., or X is the God (*El*) of... In describing *YHWH*, *El* is often accompanied by an adjective. "For *YHWH*, your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God (*El*)."[129] "But you, *YHWH*, are a God (*El*) full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and bountiful in loving kindness and truth."[130] "...O great and mighty *El*, *YHWH Zevaot*, is his name."[131]

Though *El* refers to a generic appellation for god, there are a few exceptions when *El* appears as a proper noun. In situations where *El* is followed by another term for God, it is logical to read *El* as the proper noun. For example: "And they fell upon their faces, and said, *El*, the God (*Elohai)* of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?"[132] In this case, *El* plays the reverse role as in the previous examples when *El* was used to describe *YHWH*. In this verse, "*Elohim*" is used as the generic "God" term and *El* is the proper name. At other points, *El* also introduces

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[126] Such as "*ilum-bani*" (God/*El* is my creator.) or "*Ilum qurad*"(God/*El* is a warrior). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 1, p. 243.
[127] Cross (1962), p. 235.
[128] SEE footnote # 124.
[129] Deut. 4:24.
[130] Ps. 86:15.
[131] Jer. 32:18.
[132] Num. 16:22.

Himself by name, "*ani El*"(I am *El*).[133] The only other times when *El* is questionably a proper name is in conjunction with the *El* compounds. *El* is either introducing the name of the God, as in "il Haddu," or the first part of a two part proper name, as in "Lisa-Marie," or the proper name and the construct is an epithet for *El*.

EL COMPOUNDS

According to Cross's theory of the God of the Patriarchs, both *El* and its compounds are proper names for two separate deities which later fused into the single name *YHWH*. In light of the evidence in the Tanakh itself, however, we have seen that *El* is most commonly used as a generic term for God. Thus one would expect the Tanakh to interpret the *El*-compounds as: the God X (the construct being the proper name of the God). To complicate matters further, we have evidence, in both Ancient Near Eastern mythology and the Tanakh, of Divine epithets which describe the god, *El*. As we examine some of the most significant *El*-compounds in the Tanakh, we will attempt to determine whether they fit into one, all, or any of these three categories.

There are seven different *El* compounds in the Tanakh.[134] "*El Shaddai*," "*El Olam*," and "*El Elyon*" are the three major compounds which carry more than one philological interpretation.[135] "*El Bethel*" and "*El, Elohai Yisrael*," along with most of the *El*-compounds, are connected in some way to a particular site.[136] "*El Shaddai*" is the only construct which does not appear to be tied to a location. As we learned earlier, some

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[133] Gen. 31:13; Isa. 45:22; Hos. 11:9; Ps. 55:17; ("*ani El Shaddai*" Gen. 17:1; 35:11; Job 13:3).
[134] *El Shaddai, El Olam, El Elyon, El Roi, El Bethel, El Elohai Yisrael, El Brit.*
[135] Cross (1962), p. 233.

scholars say the nomadic, Patriarchal groups brought the name *El Shaddai* with them to Canaan. If this was indeed the case, the pre-existence of the name would imply that *El Shaddai* is the oldest name in the Tanakh.[137] All the other names were attributed to God as they were called upon or blessed at a particular site. The following is a chart illustrating the connection of name to the site and their reference in the Tanakh.[138]

El Elyon	Salem	Gen. 14:18-22
El Ro'i	Ber Lehai *Ro'i*	Gen. 16:13
El Olam	Beer-Sheba	Gen. 21:33
El Bethel	*Beth-El*	Gen. 31:13; 35:7
El Elohai Yisrael	Shechem	Gen. 33:18-20
[*El Brit*	Shechem	Jud. 9:46][139]

The connection of a deity to a location would suggest that the names were in some way related to local *numina*. Thus, *El* would be treated as a generic appellation of the local deity *Elyon* in Salem, or *Olam* in Beer-Sheba, for example.

Another noteworthy theory claims that the Patriarchal names for the deity were based around the descriptive element. Some scholars believe that *El Olam*, *El Elyon*, *El Shaddai* are comparable in form to *El Qanna* (jealous god) and *El Rahum v'Hannun* (merciful and gracious god). Though they could be (and have been) translated as "the eternal God," "the supreme God," and "the almighty God" respectively, they are regarded by some scholars as a mixture of sources, or an artificial construction of the poetic or formulaic *YHWH-El* meaning "God creates."[140] Having cited these theories, we will now

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[136] *Ibid.*, p. 244. cf. Mettinger, pp. 65-66.
[137] Mettinger, p. 71.
[138] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[139] This reference not included in Mettinger's chart.
[140] Freedman, p. 156.

examine each of the *El*-compounds individually in terms of their origins in the Tanakh, relationships to other Ancient Near Eastern mythology and their status as separate names or Divine epithets.

1. El Shaddai

Though *Shaddai* is often understood as the abbreviated form of the *El*-construct, *El-Shaddai*, the term *Shaddai* has its own derivation. Like *El, Shaddai* is one of the oldest terms for God in the Tanakh. There are three possible Hebraic etymologies for the name. The first is derived from the Hebrew root "*sh-d-d,*" signifying violence, destruction, or devastation.[141] The biblical phrase, "*shad m'Shaddai*"(destruction from *Shaddai*),[142] supports this interpretation. Thus, W.F. Albright translated the name *Shaddai* as "the One furnished with violent power."[143] It is believed that this interpretation of the name influenced the use of *Shaddai* in Psalm 91:1 and Ruth.[144] Other scholars, however, disagree with this derivation of *Shaddai* and claim that "*shad m'Shaddai*" is probably a pun on the words rather than a "linguistic-historical derivation."[145]

The second possible Hebraic etymology for the name is derived from the Hebrew term, *sadeh,* meaning uncultivated field. Thus *El Shaddai* could refer to the God of the

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[141] Similarly, the Arabic word "*sadid,*" meaning "strong, severe," is determined by a double-lettered root. Albright (1935), p. 181.

[142] Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15.

[143] Albright (1935), p. 181.

[144] Ruth 1:20-21. "And she said to them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for *Shaddai* has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and *YHWH* has brought me back empty; why then do you call me Naomi, seeing *YHWH* has testified against me, and *Shaddai* has afflicted me?"

[145] Mettinger, p. 70.

uncultivated field, or more commonly translated, "the God of the Wilderness."[146] In Canaanite mythology, "earthly mountains were considered terrestrial counterparts of the celestial abode,"[147] thus rendering *El Shaddai*, "God of the Mountains."

The third Hebraic possibility for the term *Shaddai* is interpreting *Shaddai* as "He who is Sufficient,"[148] from a combination of "*she*" (who/that) and "*dai*" (sufficient). In some places in the LXX, *Shaddai* has been translated into Greek as "*hikanos,*" meaning "the Sufficient One." One critique of this interpretation is that "*she*" is not used in biblical Hebrew; rather, the biblical authors would use "*asher*" to mean "that" or "who."

Other interpretations of the name *Shaddai* are found in additional Greek and English translations of *El Shaddai.* Where the LXX does not translate *El Shaddai* as "*hikanos,*" the Greek translation appears as "*pantokrator,*" meaning "ruler of all." This interpretation of the name does not appear to be a linguistic interpretation or translation, but rather a "conventional rendering" of the name.[149] Modern English translations of *Shaddai* as "Almighty" often reflects a similar convention, rather than a legitimate etymological translation.

The word *Shaddai* has many different possible Ancient Near Eastern influences. In Arabic, the word "*sayyid*" originally meant "*YHWH*" and later denoted a demon. This *YHWH*/supernatural creature could have evolved into the Hebrew "*sedim,*" denoting pagan deities.[150] It is believed by some scholars that later efforts to combine *Shaddai* with

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[146] This concept is further developed by the Akkadian *sadu* and Arabic *tadyu* meaning mountain which will be discussed in the next section of the chapter.
[147] Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan, p. 105.
[148] SEE Part III of this thesis for more detail on this translation.
[149] Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan, p. 105.
[150] Deut. 32:17.

a pagan deities evolved from this interpretation. [151] Others believed the term *Shaddai* was a combination of West Semitic and East Semitic influence.[152] In Arabic and Aramaic, the root "*tdw/tdy*" relates to elevations, mounds, hills, mountains, and breasts. Similarly, the East Semitic Akkadian word *sadu,* meaning "mountain," was commonly used in the Divine epithet "*sadu rabu*" (great mountain).[153]

S. David Sperling, in contrast, was dubious about connecting *Shaddai* with the Akkadian *sadu* (mountain). Sperling pointed out that the Hebrew religion was "antithetical to some elements of Near Eastern mountain mythology." [154] In the development of the Israelite religion, the idea that Israel would worship any God other than *YHWH* was considered blasphemous and subject to the most severe penalty. That being clearly stated, the ancient Israelites had no trouble borrowing the rock or mountain imagery from the surrounding religions and applying it to *YHWH.* [155] Throughout the Tanakh, there is evidence of special activities occurring on sacred mountains such as *har moed* (mount of assembly),[156] Bashan,[157] Gerizim,[158] Horeb,[159] Sinai and Zion.[160]

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[151] Albright (1935), p. 181.

[152] Cross (1962), pp. 245-6.

[153] Albright (1935), p. 182. The Akkadian formulation *Saddai-u* (from *sadu*) could be a Divine appellation meaning "the High One." Considering these Semitic influences on ancient Hebrew, the Biblical *Shaddai* could be interpreted as "the Exalted *YHWH.*"

[154] *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* Supplementary Volume. Nashville: Abingdon, (1976), s.v., "Mount, Mountain," by David S. Sperling, p. 608-9.

[155] Michael P. Knowles, "'The Rock, His Work is Perfect': Unusual Imagry For God in Deuteronomy XXXII," (*VT, XXXIX,* 1989), pp. 321.

[156] Isa. 14:13.

[157] Ps. 68:15-17. "When *Shaddai* scattered kings in it, snow fell in Zalmon. O mighty mountain! O Mountain of Bashan! O many peaked mountain! O Mountain of Bashan! Why do look with envy, O many peaked mountain, at the mountain which God desired for his abode? Truly *YHWH* will dwell there forever."

[158] The mountain blessed by *YHWH*, whereby the leaders of the Israelites stood to bless or give messages to the people from God. (Deut. 11:29; 27:12; Josh. 8:33; Jud. 9:29).

[159] Ex. 3:1. "And Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock far away into the desert, and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb."

[160] Sperling, p. 609.

Mountain imagery plays a crucial role in the ancient Israelite religion which unites the Sinaitic Covenant with the Israelite's Mountain God. Exodus 6:3 clarifies any possible confusion between pagan "mountain gods" and Israelite worship of *El Shaddai*, the God of the Mountain. "And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, by the name of *El Shaddai*, but by my name *YHWH*, I was not known to them." With this interpretation, *El Shaddai* is merely an epithet for the name *YHWH*. Both appellations refer to the same God worshipped by the Patriarchs, Moses, and the Israelites. "Clearly, mountains could not be deified without infringing on Yahweh's right to Israel's exclusive worship." [161]

Lloyd R. Bailey (1968) noted the similarity between the Israelite *El Shaddai* and the Amorite God, *Bel Sade* (Lord of the Mountains). *Bel Sade,* God of the Amurru land, was identified as the epithet for the lunar deity, *Sin.* According to an Old Babylonian text, the major sanctuary for *Sin* was located in the Balih-Harran region from the middle Bronze period to the late middle ages. It is quite possible that the Patriarchs were part of the Amorite migration to the Balih-Harran region and brought the name of the local deity with them as they moved to Canaan. In Canaan, they could have assimilated the *El* God (for reasons discussed earlier) to the God they carried with them, namely, *Bel Sade,* and thus created the name *El Shaddai.* Despite the linguistic parallel between *Bel Sade* and *El Shaddai,* objections have been raised as to the authenticity of this claim. The first of which, Baily pointed out, was the fact that many deities dwelled upon the sacred mountain in Canaan, thus "Lord of the Mountain" could be a generic term relating to any of the gods in the Canaanite pantheon, rather than a name or epithet for a specific God. The second objection Bailey raised was that unlike *Bel Sade,* a name which functioned as

[161] *Ibid.*, p. 608-9.

a single unit, each element of *El Shaddai* could stand alone. Moreover, it is commonly thought that both names originated around the same time (during the "Patriarchal age," 21-18th century BCE) in the same area (Balih-Haran region) [162]

The interpretation of *El Shaddai* as a single name for God (the God X), a combination of two names for God, or a Divine name (*El*) with an epithet (*Shaddai*) are clearly reflected in the different biblical translations. "God *Shaddai*,"[163] the least popular of the translations, implies that *Shaddai* is the name of God and *El* is the generic appellation. "God Almighty,"[164] the most popular translation, could be understood one of two ways. The first, as a combined proper name like Lisa-Marie. The second, as an epithet, such as "God, the Almighty."[165] "The Almighty God"[166] appears to be interpreting the entire construct as a Divine epithet, reading *Shaddai* as the adjective, "almighty," and *El* as the generic appellation for God. The most accurate translation, in the author's opinion, is "*El Shaddai*."[167] Considering the varying interpretations of the meaning of *El Shaddai*, and the antiquity of the appellation, I believe that it is impossible to accurately translate the name with any sort of authentic meaning. Thus, retaining the biblical Hebrew both conveys the fact that *El Shaddai* is some form of Divine indication, either a name or epithet, and preserves the mystery of the ancient expression.

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[162] Bailey, pp. 436-38.

[163] *The Five Books of Moses*. Everett Fox, trans. New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1995.

[164] *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, Revised Standard Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965; *The New English Bible*, Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1970; J.H. Hertz, ed. *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, Second Edition, London: Soncino Press, 1960.

[165] *The Holy Bible*, Third Edition. USA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1955; *The New American Bible*. New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1970.

[166] *The Jerusalem Bible*, Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 1992.

[167] *A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985; *New Jerusalem Bible*, Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985; W. Gunther Plaut, ed. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981.

2. El-Olam

The expression "*El Olam*" is used only once in the entire Tanakh at conclusion of Abraham's encounter with king Abimelech in Beer-Sheba.[168] After Abraham makes the covenant with Abimelech he plants a tamarisk and invokes the name, *El Olam*. The Hebrew, "*Vayita eyshel bi've'er sheva, va'yikra sham, b'shem YHWH El-Olam*," [169] could indicate one of three possibilities. The first is that Abraham called "*El-Olam*" in the name of *YHWH*: "And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-Sheba, and called *El-Olam* there in the name of *YHWH* (or by way of *YHWH*)." *El Olam*, like most *El*-compounds in the Patriarchal narratives, was the relic of pre-Israelite divinities, "or at the very lest, pre-Yahwistic stratum of the history of biblical religion."[170] In addition, Ex. 6:3 informs us that the name *YHWH* was not know to Abraham.[171] This contradiction is resolved by some who believe that this verse was added by a later redactor. This later addition could suggest that the redactor used the tetragrammaton because *YHWH* was the popular name for the God of the Jews during the time of the redactor. Another possibility is that the redactor intended to associate the *El* deities with *YHWH*. For it is believed by most scholars that *El*-worship was "primitive Yahwism."[172]

The second possible interpretation of this verse is that the construct, *El-Olam* is an epithet for *YHWH*: "And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-Sheba, and called there on the name of *YHWH*, the Eternal God." The epithet "eternal God" is derived from other uses

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[168] Gen. 21:20-34.
[169] Gen. 21:33.
[170] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, s.v. "*El-Olam*," by A. de Pury, p. 550.
[171] This premise will be debated later in the thesis.
[172] de Pury, "*El-Olam*," p. 550, 552.

of "*Olam*" in the Tanakh. "The God of Old is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms..."[173] This verse draws a parallel between *Elohai kedem* (God of old) and *zero'ot Olam* (eternal arms), thus interpreting *Olam* as old, ancient, or eternal. Another example illustrating the use of *Olam* as an epithet for God can be found in Jeremiah 10:10. "And *YHWH* is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king (*melech Olam*)..." In addition, *El Olam* could also be referring to the Ugaritic portrayal of the gray-haired *El* known as the "father of gods" or "the father of man" or "the father of years" found in Canaanite myth and liturgies.[174]

The third possible interpretation of this verse is that there are two proper names of God employed in this verse modified by either *El* or *Olam.* "And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-Sheba, and called there on the name of *YHWH*, *El,* the Eternal One/the god *Olam.*" Cross posits that *El* refers to the Divine name, and *Olam*, the epithet ("*El,* the Eternal One") just as "*rsp mlk*" refers to "Resheph, the King." Likewise, it is possible that *Olam* could apply to a deity alone, that *El Olam* would refer to "the God, *Olam.*"[175] Outside of the Tanakh, *Olam* has been seen as a place-name and an appellation of a Canaanite deity in an Ugaritic text (late 8th century BCE) listing various deities. [176] A third possibility is a compound of two Divine names, such as the Canaanite *El*, and the local *numen* of Beer Sheva, *Olam.* [177] However, this reference in Gen. 21:33 does not

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[173] Deut. 33:27.
[174] Cross (1962), pp. 240-41.
[175] de Pury cites Van Den Branden (1990), p. 36 and Dahood (1966), p. xxxvii, in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, s.v. "*El-Olam,*" p. 551.
[176] Cross (1962), pp. 236-37.
[177] de Pury, "*El-Olam,*" p. 551-2.

provide enough evidence to presuppose the existence of a separate cult located in Beer-Sheba specifically dedicated to *El Olam.*[178]

It is important to note that the name used for God in the previous verses of this particular narrative was "*Elohim.*" The tetragrammaton and *El Olam* were only introduced at the very end as a means to seal the covenant. It is quite possible that since *YHWH, El Olam* was uttered aloud, that this expression was a part of a blessing incantation representing a liturgical formula of the time.[179] In the late 1950's there was a discovery of a proto-Canaanite inscription from the 15th century BCE which read "*il du Olami*" which is now believed to be the original source from where the Hebrew *El Olam* has derived. There has been more evidence that the formula "*il du X*" was a widespread liturgical epithet during that period.[180]

3. El-Elyon

The expression "*El Elyon*" appears five times in the Tanakh,[181] four of which are in the same sequence.

> And Melchizedek king of Shalem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of *El Elyon.* And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of *El Elyon*, Creator of Heaven and Earth; And blessed be *El Elyon*, who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And he gave him a tenth of all. And the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand to *YHWH, El Elyon*, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.[182]

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[178] *Ibid.*, p. 553.
[179] *El Shaddai* and *El Elyon* are thought to be used as liturgical epithets because they also appear in blessing formulas in the Tanakh.
[180] Cross (1962), pp. 238-240, 244.
[181] Gen. 14:18, 19, 20, 22; Ps 78:35
[182] Gen. 14:18-22.

To begin with, *El Elyon* is clearly being used in a blessing and can thus be understood as a liturgical formula for God.[183] Secondly, being that Melchizedek is both the king of Shalem and the priest of *El Elyon*, one could infer that *El Elyon* is in some way associated with Shalem.[184] Finally, the unique aspect of this particular *El*-construct is the epithet which follows it, namely, "*koneh shamayim va'aretz.*" (Creator of Heaven and Earth).[185] This seems to imply that *Elyon* is to be understood as an epithet relating directly to creation, possession, or governance of Heaven and Earth.

The first occurrence of the expression *El*-the-Owner-of-the-Earth outside the Tanakh was discovered in a Phoenician inscription at the end of the 8th century and is mentioned in a curse formula between the *Baal Samen* (Lord of the Heaven) and *Baal Olam* (Lord of Eternity).[186] Later, scholars discovered a mythological text, thought to be Canaanite in origin, which tells the story of the Goddess Asherah who lived in a tent at the source of the river Mala (i.e., Euphrates). Asherah tried to seduce the Storm God, *Baal*, and was rejected. Outraged, the Goddess approached the great God "*El Qoneh*" (understood to be *El*, Creator of Heaven and Earth) and complained about *Baal's* treatment of her.[187] From this early Canaanite myth, we learn that *El* was associated with the possession of Heaven and Earth. Some scholars, thus, suggest a Canaanite influence on the biblical *El Elyon, koneh shamayim va'aretz.* Either *El Elyon* is referring to the

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[183] Cross (1962), p. 244.
[184] Mettinger, pp. 65-66.
[185] A similar epithet is expressed with the tetragrammaton in the book of Psalms: "That men may know that you alone, whose name is *YHWH, Elyon al kol ha'aretz.*" (Ps. 83:19. cf. Ps. 97:9).
[186] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible.* s.v. "*El* Berith - *Baal* Berith," by J. Reiling, p. 533.
[187] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, pp. 106-7.

Canaanite deity (which is unlikely, as we've discussed earlier), or the epithet affiliated with *El Elyon*, has borrowed an idea originally found in Canaanite mythology.[188]

There are additional references illustrating the use of *Elyon* as a Divine epithet (for varying names of God) without the connection to Heaven and Earth. For example: "I will praise *YHWH* according to his righteousness; and will sing praise to the name of *YHWH*, *Elyon*."[189] "Yet they tempted and rebelled against the *Elohim Elyon*, and did not keep his testimonies."[190]

Some scholars suggested that *Elyon* was an early epithet of *El* which later split off and became a separate deity. Cross suggested that *El* and *Elyon* were cosmicly paired, just like Heaven/Earth and day/night. "The pair *El* and *Elyon* comes after the main tutelary gods, immediately before the great natural pairs summarizing the powers of the cosmos."[191] *El* and *Elyon* are constantly contrasted in the Tanakh, particularly in the Psalms. For example: "And they sinned yet more against him, rebelling against *Elyon* in the wilderness. And they tempted *El* in their heart by asking food for their craving."[192] These literary parallels raise the question: are *El* and *Elyon* truly separate deities appearing in contrast to one another, or are they so intimately associated that they cannot be distinguished from each other? The answer to this question lies in the biblical text. *Elyon* appears outside of the *El*-construct 27 times, the majority of which *Elyon* is used as a synonym for God or as a Divine epithet.[193] As we recently discovered, *Elyon* is used as

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[188] The expression "*El Brit*" (Jud. 9:46) is also thought to be a reference to the God, Creator of Heaven and Earth. (Reiling, "*El* Berith - *Baal* Berith,") pp. 534-35.

[189] Ps. 7:18

[190] Ps. 78:56.

[191] Cross (1962), p. 242.

[192] Ps. 78:17-18.

[193] Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8; Ps. 7:18; 9:3; 21:8; 46:5; 47:3; 57:3; 77:11; 78:17; 78:56; 83:19; 87:5; 91:1; 91:9; 92:2; 97:9; 107:11; Lam. 3:35, 38.

an epithet for other names of God and appears in contrast to other names of God. In parallel to *YHWH*, we read: "For the king trusts in *YHWH*, and through the loving kindness of *Elyon* he shall not be moved."[194] In parallel to *Elohim*: "There is a river, whose streams make glad the city of God (*Elohim*), the holiest dwelling place of *Elyon*."[195] In parallel to *Shaddai*: "He who dwells in the secret place of *Elyon*, who abides under the shadow of *Shaddai*"[196]

There are a few instances where *Elyon* is specifically referred to as a name of God. "I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O you, *Elyon*."[197] "It is a good thing to give thanks to *YHWH*, and to sing praises to your name, *Elyon*!"[198] Some biblical scholars believed that *El Elyon* is probably a more formal designation stating "the God, *Elyon*."[199]

The English translation for *Elyon*, "the most high," comes from the root "*a-l-h*," meaning high. The word, *Elyon* is used seven times in the Tanakh to refer to the distance, size, or quality of things or people being the most high.[200] Interpreting *Elyon* as an Divine epithet, one would expect the Israelite God *El*, who later became known as *YHWH*, to be the most high above other gods. The author agrees with the interpretation of *Elyon* as a Divine epithet. At times, an epithet is used in place of the proper name to communicate the idea of the proper name. Thus, when the Psalter wrote about calling

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[194] Ps. 21:8.
[195] Ps. 46:5.
[196] Ps. 91:1.
[197] Ps. 9:3
[198] Ps. 92:2.
[199] Similarly, *El Shaddai* refers to the God, *Shaddai*. (Albright, 1935), p. 180.
[200] Deut. 26:19; 28:1; Josh. 16:5; I Kings 9:8; Ps. 89:28; II Chron. 7:21.

praises to the name *Elyon,* the author would suggest that the Psalter is, in actuality, calling praises to the one who is Most High (i.e., the Israelite God, *YHWH-El*).

4. El-Ro'i

The single reference to the term "*El Ro'i*" is found during the "Hagar Narrative."[201] When Hagar fled Abram and Sarai because of Sarai's harsh treatment of her, an angel of *YHWH* found her and told her to return to the couple. Afterwards, she would be rewarded with a son. She was instructed to name her son, Ishamel, a theophoric name meaning "God hears," for God had heard her affliction. So moved by the angel, Hagar cried out "*El Ro'i*" (God sees me)[202] to the God who saw her affliction. At that time, the well where Hagar was sitting when the angel approached her was also named "*Beer l'chai Ro'i*" (well of the life that sees me). The naming process, according to the literary context, was directly related to the news received by Hagar. A "God who sees" was related to the concept of a God who fulfills prayer, which was an activity commonly attributed to gods in the Semitic world.[203]

It is interesting to note that the name of the God who "heard her affliction" and "saw her" was *YHWH.* Yet when Hagar called out to God, she referred to *El.* This verse is quite possibly an example of remnants of *El* worship in a society which had primarily moved on to *YHWH* worship. The angel did not identify itself as the angel of *YHWH,* however, the angel did tell Hagar to name her son Ishmael because *YHWH* heard her

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[201] The author is taking the liberty of entitling the section Gen.16:6b-15 the "Hagar Narrative," since the story focuses on Hagar.

[202] Gen. 16:13.

[203] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible,* s.v. "*El-Ro'i*" by A. de Pury, p. 557.

affliction. "*Yishma - el*" translates, however, as *El* will hear. Possibly, Hagar heard the name of her future child more clearly than the name of the God who would give it to her. Thus, she showed her gratitude to the god, *El*, who had heard her and would give her a son, rather than the name of the God of the messenger.

In light of the fact that "*Ro'i*" never appeared as an epithet for God in any other Ancient Near Eastern text, some biblical scholars claim that *El-Ro'i* is "a pseudo-archaic Divine name inserted by a later redactor." [204] Others interpret this construct along with other *El* compounds as distant reminders of the great God *El* who, according to their theories was worshipped by the Patriarchs. *El-Ro'i* was seen as the particular form of *El* venerated by the clan of Abraham. [205]

BIBLICAL AUTHORSHIP

Most of the references of *El* and *El*-compounds are thought to be the work of the earliest biblical tradition (J), dating from the 10th-9th century BCE, yet incorporating material from a much earlier time. These texts were often intermingled with the Elohist (E) author (late 9th-8th century BCE) whose work often paralleled or supplemented the writing of the Yahwist (J) author. The Elohistic tradition claimed to bridge the religion of the Patriarchs to the Yahwistic faith of Moses and Israel.[206] The oldest occurrences of *El*

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[204] *Ibid.*, p. 556. Citing van Seters (1975) and Koenen (1988).
[205] Cross, (1973), pp. 46-60; de Pury, "*El-Ro'i*," p. 556.
[206] Ex. 3:15. "And God said moreover to Moses, Thus shall you say to the people of Israel, *YHWH*, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you; this is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations."

are found ancient poetry, such as the Song and Blessing of Moses,[207] dating back to the middle of the 11th century BCE. The Song of Deborah[208] and the Blessing of Jacob[209] are dated back to the late 11th century BCE, containing material which is thought to be much older. The next oldest occurrences of *El,* found in Isaiah and Joel, are thought to be from the late 8th/early 7th century BCE.[210]

The Balaam Oracles[211] are credited to the Elohist strand of the Tanakh. There has been some question as to whether these pre-Mosaic authors (J and E) could be responsible for these texts since the tetragrammaton also appears along side the ancient Divine appellations, *El* and *Shaddai.* However, there is evidence that the pre-Mosaic Israelites already knew and worshipped *YHWH.*[212] The Tanakh itself lends proof to this claim by stating clearly that the name, *YHWH*, was already known by third generation of humankind.[213]

The next group of occurrences are believed to have originated from Priestly (P) Document (6th-5th century BCE.) which formulated a theory about salvation history (God's role in the Tanakh is to save the Jews).[214] For example:

> Your servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God. And David said, *YHWH*

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[207] Deut. 32:4, 21. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice; *El* of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he... They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not *El*..."
Deut. 33:26. "There is none like *El* of Jeshurun, who rides upon the Heaven in your help, and in his excellency on the sky."

[208] Jud. 4:5. "And she lived under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and *Beth-El* in Mount Ephraim; and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment."

[209] Gen. 49:25. "By the *El Avicha* (God of your father), who shall help you; and by *Shaddai*, who shall bless you with blessings of Heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb."

[210] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, p. 30.

[211] Num. 23-24.

[212] Mowinckel, p. 121.

[213] Gen. 4:26. "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enosh; then began men to call upon *YHWH* by name."

[214] *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, s.v. "Shadday," by E.A. Knauf, p. 1418.

> who saved me from the paw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, he will save me from the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said to David, Go, and *YHWH* be with you.[215]

These references to *El* and *El* compounds reappear archaically in late books and later redactions of the Tanakh, yet incorporate material from much earlier. Like the Elohist, the Priestly tradition also recognized the connection between ancient times and the Yahwistic era by stating that the ultimate God of the Patriarchs was *YHWH*.[216] The names *El, Tzur, Elyon* and *Shaddai* are all considered "authentic Hebrew appellations of Yahweh/*Elohim*."[217] *El* was used both as a proper name of the God of Israel and as a general appellation in personal names until the first temple period where *YHWH* replaced *El* as the proper name for the God of Israel and *Elohim* replaced *El* as the generic term for God.[218] During the Babylonian exile, there was a resurgence of old liturgical forms and general trend to archaize the literature.[219] As a result, there was a revival of the term *El* as a proper name of the God of Israel which can be seen clearly in Second Isaiah[220] and Job.[221]

The name *Shaddai* is probably older than *El Shaddai* because it is found in ancient Hebrew poetry. Inscriptions of old Semitic divinities and Egyptian deities dating back to the 15th-16th century BCE showed the figure of *Shaddai* to be dominant.[222] *El Shaddai,* however, is mainly employed in the Priestly strand of Pentateuch;[223] whereas *Shaddai* on

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[215] I Sam. 17:36-37.
[216] Cross (1962), p. 227. "And God spoke to Moses, and said to him, I am *YHWH*; And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, by the name of *El Shaddai*, but by my name *YHWH* I was not known to them." (Ex. 6:2-3).
[217] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, p. 30.
[218] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30; *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 1, p. 259.
[219] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* vol. 1, p. 259.
[220] e.g., Isa. 40:18; 43:10, 12; 45:14.
[221] e.g., Job 8:5; 9:2; 13:3; 22:13; 36:5; 40:9.
[222] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, p. 134.
[223] Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; Ex. 6:3; Ezek. 10:5 (which appears only as *Shaddai* in the LXX translation), Albright, p. 180.

its own appears most often in ancient poetry or in Job, a late book set in ancient times.

The Priestly tradition aimed to connect J/E's *El*-gods with *El Shaddai* to facilitate identification with gods worshipped in post-exilic Palestine, namely *YHWH*.[224] Overall, most references to *El* and *Shaddai* in the Tanakh can be attributed to the earliest strand of biblical authorship, with the exception of the references in Job and some Psalms; whereas all the references to the *El* compounds are believed to be an addition of the latest strand of biblical authorship in an effort to archaize later material.

[224] Knauf, p. 1419.

II. Contextual Analysis

EL IN THE PATRIARCHAL NARRATIVES

El appears in the Patriarchal narrative 20 times. The majority of these references occur in the form of *Beth-El.* The remainder of these references appear as *El* compounds, the most common of which is *El Shaddai. El* is never used on its own.[225] The first occurrence of the term appears in the midst of Abraham's journey to a land that *YHWH* would soon show him between *Ha-Ai* and as *Beth-El.*.

El: God of Journeying

> And *YHWH* appeared to Abram, and said, To your seed will I give this land; and there he built an altar to *YHWH*, who appeared to him. And he moved from there to a mountain in the east of *Beth-El*, and pitched his tent, having *Beth-El* on the west, and *Ha-Ai* on the east; and there he built an altar to *YHWH*, and called upon the name of *YHWH*.[226]

From the context, the reader could assume that *Beth-El* was a pre-existing location by the time of Abraham. It was not until later that *Beth-El* was identified as the city of Luz, in the land of Canaan.[227] In the larger narrative, Abram was told by *YHWH* to go to a particular site and *YHWH* would ensure him many offspring, bless him and all those who bless him, curse all those who curse him.[228] After uprooting his nephew and wife, he arrived at a particular place where *YHWH* spoke with him again. And again, he was

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[225] With one possible exception in Gen. 19:8 which will be discussed later.

[226] Gen. 12:7-8. cf. Gen. 13:3-4. Reference to Abraham journeying back to the place where he built the altar between *Ha-Ai* and *Beth-El* and he called upon the name *YHWH*.

told of his good fortune to inherit all the land he saw in front of him. Upon hearing the news, Abraham knew "instinctively" to build an altar to *YHWH*, somewhere between *Beth-El* and *Ha-Ai*. The "*El*" has little significance in this narrative other than to designate coordinates for the first altar built to *YHWH*.

Later in the Patriarchal narratives, however, we read of a similar situation with Jacob. After Jacob left his home in Beer-Sheba, he set out for Haran. The narrative tells of a "certain place" where Jacob rested for the night. In a dream, *YHWH* spoke to Jacob and, as with Abraham, relayed a message of blessing and inheritance. With Jacob, however, *YHWH* adds, "I am with you, and will protect you in all the places where you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you, until I have done that about which I have spoken to you."[229] When Jacob awoke, he realized that *YHWH* was with him.

> And Jacob awoke from his sleep, and he said, Surely *YHWH* is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How awesome is this place! This is no other than the house of *Elohim*, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon its top. And he called the name of that place *Beth-El*; but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If *Elohim* will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and garment to put on, So that I come back to my father's house in peace; then shall *YHWH* be my *Elohim*; And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be house of *Elohim*; and of all that you shall give me I will surely give the tenth to you.[230]

In this narrative, "*Beth-El*" has a very distinct and intentional meaning. After "hearing" from *YHWH*, Jacob's reaction, like Abraham, was to honor God. Using the rock, the symbolic transmitter of his dream, Jacob sanctified the spot of his initial contact with

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[227] Gen. 28:19. cf. Gen. 35:6 (in the time of Jacob). This ahistorical situation is evidence of different authorship and/or later redaction of the text.

[228] Gen. 12:1-3.

[229] Gen. 28:15.

YHWH, and called it "*Beth-El,*" the house of God. Jacob's dream, however, referred to *YHWH*, the God of his Fathers, and *Elohim,* who would be with him to provide for him and protect him, and to whom Jacob pledged the his loyalty and servitude. *YHWH* appeared to be the name of the god which was being transferred from generation to generation; and *Elohim* appeared to be the actor - the protector and provider. Yet, the function of *Beth-El* was still unclear...until Jacob's next encounter with the *El* of *Beth-El.*

Again Jacob had a dream. This time, the angel of *Elohim* spoke to him and said: "I am *El* of *Beth-El*, where you anointed the pillar, and where you vowed a vow to me; now arise, get out from this land, and return to the land of your family."[231] Finally, *El* emerged from his house and identified his role - the messenger. *El* of *Beth-El* related to Jacob through dreams. From the text, we know that *YHWH* and *Elohim* spoke to the Patriarchs,[232] and the Patriarchs called on *YHWH* and *Elohim*;[233] yet, the place of the encounter between the human and Divine was named *Beth-El.*

> And *Elohim* went up from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. And Jacob called the name of the place where *Elohim* spoke with him, *Beth-El.*[234]

Whether an altar with Abraham or an anointed stone with Jacob, *Beth-El* was the place to honor the God who appeared to them. *El* of *Beth-El* brought the message of their future

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[230] Gen. 28:16-22. cf. Gen. 31:13 in a dream God told him to take his family and return to the land of his family.
[231] Gen. 31:13.
[232] e.g., Gen. 12:7; 28:13; 31:13.
[233] e.g., Gen. 13:4; Gen. 32:10.
[234] Gen. 35:13-15.

fortune and directed them on their paths. While *Elohim* protected them from anyone who tried to cross their path, *El* of *Beth-El* spiritually drove them from land to land.[235]

> So, Isaac sent for Jacob and blessed him. He instructed him saying:...Up, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of *Bethuel*...He came across a certain place...and named that site *Beth-El*...I am *El* of *Beth-El*...now, arise and get out from this land, and return to the land of your family... Arise and go to *Beth-El* and live there...*Elohim* appeared again to Jacob on his arrival from Paddan-aram, and blessed him... Jacob gave the site where *Elohim* had spoken to him the name of *Beth-El*.[236]

Jacob's physical journey was framed by the blessing from his father, as he began his journey to Paddan-aram, and the blessing from *Elohim,* as he arrived from Paddan-aram. Similarly, Jacob's spiritual journey was framed by the pun on the names *Bethuel* and *Beth-El.* Jacob set out to find his uncle, *Bethuel*, and, instead, found the place which ultimately determined his destiny, *Beth-El.* From that point forward, Isaac died and Jacob's children began their journeys. Though Jacob traveled back and forth many times, his spiritual growth and revelatory moments all occurred at the same place - *Beth-El.*[237] This was the place where God appeared to and communicated with Jacob. And the name of the God who made all of that possible was *El* of *Beth-El.*[238]

El: Human-Given Name

In addition to *El* of *Beth-El*, the Patriarchal narratives include most of the *El* compounds.[239] One factor which was not mentioned in the historical analysis of *El* and the *El* compounds was the relationship between the *El*-compound and the other Divine

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[235] The spiritual journey of the Patriarchs relates to their encounters with God and insight regarding their future.

[236] Gen. 28:1-2, 10, 19; 31:13; 35:1, 9, 15.

[237] This was also the place where *El* appeared to Jacob after his reunion with Esau. (Gen. 35:1. cf. 35:3, 7).

[238] In fact, when Jacob built an altar for *El* outside the city of Shechem just after his reunion with Esau, Jacob claimed the God, *El,* as his own by calling it "*El, Elohai Yisra*el." (Gen. 33:20).

[239] With the exception of *El* Brit (Jud. 9).

appellations in the narrative. Previously, we discussed the use of *El-Ro'i* in the "Hagar Narrative,"[240] and "*El Olam*" at Beer-Sheba.[241] As with *El* of *Beth-El, YHWH* and *Elohim* surrounded the narrative; yet, Hagar and Abraham both called out to God in a form of *El.* Hagar called out to *El Ro'i,* who saw her suffering, and Abraham referred to *El Olam,* who was witness to the everlasting covenant between Abimelech and himself. In addition to using an *El* compound to call God, both situations, as with *El* of *Beth-El,* described an action which permanently marked the experience. The well where the angel of *YHWH* addressed Hagar was named "*Beer-lahai-roi*" (well of the one-who-sees-me). This permanent monument was named as witness to the encounter between the human and the Divine. Similarly, Abraham planted a tamarisk, nature's (God's) permanent recognition of the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech.[242] From these examples, we confirm that *El* is directly related to a Divine-human encounter at a particular place, and, at times, attributed by human beings.

El: God of Blessing

The historical analysis taught us that *El Elyon* is related to blessing and thanksgiving. After Abram heard the news that his nephew Lot had been taken captive by Kedorlaomer the king of Elam, Tidal king of nations, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, he armed his servants, gathered some men, and defeated the rival kings by night.[243] When he returned to Shalem with his nephew, Melchizedek, king of

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[240] Gen. 16:13.
[241] Gen. 21:33.
[242] The author recognizes the slight discrepancy between these situations. Both Abraham and Jacob took and active role in creating the monument and naming the site after *El;* whereas Hagar neither built nor named the fountain. She merely called out to *El.*
[243] Gen. 14:9-17.

Shalem, priest of *El Elyon* brought forth bread and wine and celebrated. They toasted to *El Elyon,* who delivered the enemies into Abram's hand.[244] This is the only situation in the Patriarchal narratives where there is no reference to any other name of God. The good guy (Abraham) rescued the prisoner (Lot) from the bad guys (the rival kings) and God (*El Elyon*) received the credit. There is no confusion here. *El Elyon* was perceived as the Savior; and for this, he is praised.

The use of *El Elyon* in this narrative followed by the use of *El Shaddai* shortly thereafter, leads the reader from blessing to blessing. The only references to the epithet "Creator of Heaven and Earth" in the Patriarchal narratives suggest that *El Elyon, koneh shamayim va'aretz* functioned as an ancient liturgical formula for a blessing. [245] In this case, God was directly blessed by a human being. In the narrative immediately following this blessing, *YHWH* ensured Abram that his reward would be great. Abram responded to *YHWH* with a question. "Lord, *YHWH*, what will you give me, seeing as I go childless..."[246] This simple question indirectly led to *El Shaddai's* blessing of Abraham and his fruitful future.

> And when Abram was ninety nine years old, *YHWH* appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am *El Shaddai*; walk before me, and be perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face; and *Elohim* talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be *Elohim* to you, and to your seed after you. And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land where you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their *Elohim*.[247]

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[244] Gen. 14:18-22.
[245] For more detail SEE the discussion regarding "*El Elyon*" in the previous section.
[246] Gen. 15:2.
[247] Gen. 17:1-8.

Later in the narratives, Jacob received a similar message from the two important sources in his life who framed his journeys, Isaac and *Elohim.*

> And *El Shaddai* bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, that you may be a multitude of people; And give the blessing of Abraham to you, and to your seed with you; that you may inherit the land where you are a stranger, which *Elohim* gave to Abraham... And *Elohim* said to him, I am *El Shaddai*; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of you, and kings shall come from your loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you will I give the land. [248]

El Shaddai introduced himself personally to both Abraham and Jacob. In addition, Isaac blessed Jacob using the name *El Shaddai;* and Jacob shared this message with his favorite son and grandchildren. Near the end of his life, Jacob gathered his strength to speak with Joseph and recount the family legend.

> And Jacob said to Joseph, *El Shaddai* appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, And said to me, Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people; and will give this land to your seed after you for an everlasting possession. And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you to Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. And your issue, born to you after them, shall be yours, and shall be called after the name of their brothers in their inheritance... And Israel said to Joseph, I had not thought to see your face; and, lo, *Elohim* has shown me also your seed.[249]

The only additional reference to *El Shaddai* in the Patriarchal narratives occurs when Jacob asked for *El Shaddai's* help in ensuring that his offspring will be brought back safely from Egypt. [250] All of these references are in some way related to blessings of progeny and land. Both Abraham and Jacob were told they would be blessed with numerous offspring, from which nations and kings would come forth. They were both told to "be fruitful and multiply" and pass this message and blessing on to their children. Jacob's conversation with *El Shaddai* included a blessing to inherit the land which

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[248] Gen. 28:3-4; 35:11-12.
[249] Gen. 48:3-6.
[250] Gen. 43:14. "May *El Shaddai* give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, then I am bereaved."

Abraham received much earlier.[251] Thus, the connection between *El Shaddai* and the Patriarchs is through blessing.

Similar to the previous references to *El Beth-El, El Ro'i,* and *El Olam,* Abraham was asked to create an symbol of permanent recognition of this encounter with God. *Brit milah* (circumcision) is the eternal sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and Abraham's descendants. The difference between the previous situations and the one with Abraham is threefold. First, Abraham did not create a monument as a reflection of his encounter with *El Shaddai* for all to see; rather, Abraham was asked to circumcise himself, an intimate and personal reminder of his covenant with the Divine. Secondly, Abraham did not name God, rather *El Shaddai* introduced himself. Thirdly, the name *El Shaddai* was not mentioned in connection with any particular place. The emphasis is on the God's blessing to Abraham and the eternal covenant between the two. This covenantal ritual of circumcision was directly related to *El Shaddai's* blessing of procreation. Thus, in addition to blessings, *El Shaddai's* relationship to the Patriarchs was specifically related to progeny.

El: Divine Introductions and Human Changes

The significance of naming is not limited to marking a Divine-human encounter at a particular place or through a blessing. The Divine appellations make their mark through the naming and re-naming of human beings as well. Specifically, the introduction of *El Shaddai* is directly related to the re-naming of both Abram and Jacob.

[251] Gen. 12:7.

> ...*YHWH* appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am *El Shaddai*; walk before me, and be perfect... As for me, behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. Neither shall your name any more be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you.[252]
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> And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day... And he said, I will not let you go, except you bless me. And he said to him, What is your name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince you have power with *Elohim* and with men, and have prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I beg you, your name. And he said, Why is it that you ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel; for I have seen *Elohim* face to face, and my life is preserved...[253]
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> And *Elohim* appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. And *Elohim* said to him, Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name; and he called his name Israel. And *Elohim* said to him, I am *El Shaddai*; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of you, and kings shall come from your loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to you I will give it, and to your seed after you will I give the land.[254]

The situations with both Abraham and Jacob involve a name change and an identification with *El Shaddai.*[255] The new identities of both God and the Patriarchs are significant on two accounts. First, Abraham's encounter and Jacob's second naming story involve the changing of both Divine and human names. In Gen. 17, *YHWH* introduced himself by a new name, *El Shaddai*, then changed Abram's name to Abraham. As they established a covenant, both parties entered with new names. Similarly, after Jacob wrestled with the angel, he was renamed *Yisrael,* for he struggled with *Elohim* and prevailed.[256] In Jacob's second naming story, he was named directly by *Elohim,* then identified himself as *El Shaddai.* The change in the human name and association of Divine name suggests that both parties underwent a change in the relationship. The human party acted in such a way

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[252] Gen 17:1, 4-5.
[253] Gen. 32:25, 28-31.
[254] Gen. 35: 9-12.
[255] Or just *El,* in Jacob's first naming story.
[256] Here is another example of a Divine-human encounter followed by the naming of the place X-*El*, in this case, *Peniel.* Also, both the name *Yisrael* and *Peniel* were named after an encounter with *Elohim.*

that the Divine became a permanent part of his identity.[257] *YHWH/Elohim* took on the role and responsibility of *El Shaddai,* that is, to bless and ensure the continuation of many offspring.

Secondly, the change in names symbolize the covenantal partnership between God and the Patriarchs. As *El Shaddai* promised to make Abraham the father of many nations, Abraham was required to undergo circumcision. Thus, every time a new child issues forth from a Jewish man's loins (i.e., a descendent of Abraham), he is reminded both physically (because of *brit milah*) and spiritually (because of *El Shaddai's* blessing) of the Divine-human partnership. *El Shaddai* can thus be interpreted as the name we use to recall the blessing of future generations and our obligation of the covenantal rite of circumcision.

In the first narrative with Abraham, *YHWH* appeared, introduced himself as *El Shaddai* and, as *Elohim,* established an everlasting covenant (*brit olam*)[258] with Abraham. From the Patriarchal narratives, *Elohim* adopted the role of Protectorate; thus it was logical that Abraham would establish a covenant with the God who would protect him. *YHWH* was the one who would reward him; and *El* was the one who Abraham addressed or accredited for all that *YHWH* and *Elohim* did. Though not exclusively, *YHWH* and *Elohim* tended to play a larger part in the narrative than did *El* (or any of the *El* compounds). *El* was inclined to identify himself directly, and be called by the Patriarchs more often than the other two.

Thus the use of *El* is such these names implies an abbreviated form of *Elohim,* rather than a connection with the appellation, *El.*

[257] The "*hey*" in Abraham and the "*El*" of Israel.

[258] A parallel between *brit olam* and *El Olam* could be drawn here. Both relate to a covenant and both relate to God.

Anashei-El

An odd phenomenon in Gen. 19:8 tells the story of the men from Sodom seeking the two angels who came to Lot's house. Lot offered his two virgin daughters in lieu of these *anashim ha'el.* Most translations follow Rashi's interpretation of "*El*" as "*eleh,*" meaning "these," interpreting the verse as: "Behold now, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me, I beg you, bring them out to you, and do to them as is good in your eyes; only to *these men* do nothing; seeing that they have come under the shadow of my roof." The author notes the parallel of *malachim* (angels) in Gen. 19:1 with *anashim ha'el* (men of *El*) in Gen. 19:8. There is no question that the *anashim* requested by the people of Sodom were the same two *malachim* who approached Lot at the city-gate. Since, the angels were not previously identified as being the angels of *YHWH* or *Elohim*, which is most common in the Patriarchal narratives, the author attributes the *malachim* to *El.* This is the only place in the entire Tanakh where angels are attributed to *El.* However, given the earlier discussion, *El,* Himself, acts as the messenger. Just as an angel is affiliated with a particular action, [259] *El* is affiliated with a particular place. This interpretation suggests that *El* functions similar to an angel.

EL IN THE BALAAM ORACLES

The well-known story about Balak and Balaam tells of an evil king (Balak) who hired a sorcerer (Balaam) to curse a growing and threatening people (the Israelites).

[259] Baba Metzia 86b. cf. Gen. Rabb. 50:2. It was taught that a single angel is only responsible for a single function.

Throughout the story, Balaam interacted with two Divine appellations, *Elohim* and *YHWH*. Initially, Balaam was advised by *Elohim* not to curse the Israelites. However, persuaded by a house filled with silver and gold rather than the words of *YHWH* (who is identified as his God),[260] Balaam set out to curse the Israelites. After beating his donkey three times, he finally saw the angel of *YHWH* who told him to continue on his path, saying nothing to the other men who escorted him. Later, *Elohim* encountered Balaam, and *YHWH* put words into Balaam's mouth to say to Balak. Thus far, we see that *Elohim* and Balaam were in direct communication; whereas *YHWH* acted upon him. First *YHWH* opened the mouth of his donkey to speak with him,[261] then opened the mouth of Balaam to deliver a message to Balak. *YHWH* and *Elohim* maintained these roles throughout the narrative. A third name, *El*, was introduced and employed only during Balaam's four oracles. These oracles resemble many of the Psalms in their poetic composition and archaic language. The first of the four oracles questions Balak's decision to curse the Israelites.

> And he took up his discourse, and said,
> Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram,
> from the mountains of the east, saying,
> Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, defy Israel.
> How shall I curse, he whom *El* has not cursed?
> or how shall I defy, he whom *YHWH* has not defied?... [262]

In this oracle, the names of God are in intentionally composed in parallel structure with Jacob and Israel.

> Come, curse Jacob (A) and come defy Israel (B)
> How shall I curse, he whom *El* has not cursed? (A)
> How shall I defy, he whom *YHWH* has not defied? (B)

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[260] Num. 22:18.
[261] Num. 22:28.
[262] Num. 23:7-8.

This structure provides two possible interpretations. The first possibility (ABAB) is the relationship between Jacob's *El* and Israel's *YHWH*. The names Jacob and *El* are used in juxtaposition to same verb, "curse;" just as Israel and *YHWH* are used in juxtaposition to same verb, "defy." The Divine-human pairs are also historically connected. *El* was known as Jacob's God and *YHWH,* as Israel's God. The second possibility (AABB) is the use of poetic repetition to emphasize a particular message. In the previous section, we learned that Jacob changed his name to Israel, and is often referred to by both names interchangeably. Interpreting Jacob and Israel synonymously, *El* and *YHWH* could also be understood synonymously, as interchangeable Divine appellations. Thus, the repetition of Jacob/Israel and *El/YHWH* emphasizes the meaning that the Israelites are a people who are neither cursed nor defied by God.

The use of *El* in this oracle could then be understood in one of two ways. The first, as hearkening back to times of Old, back to *El,* the God of Jacob, the God of blessing and protection. Balaam was confronted with cursing a relationship that had been blessed for so long. The second understanding is that *El* has no particular significance in its name or function. *El* is merely a poetic repetition of a Divine appellation, emphasizing the message that God did not curse or defy the Israelites.

The second oracle responded to Balak's pleas for Balaam to proceed with the cursing. Again *YHWH* put words into Balaam's mouth and he said:

> Rise up, Balak, and hear;
> listen to me, you son of Zippor;
> *El* is not a man, that he should lie;
> nor the son of man, that he should repent.
> Has he said, and shall he not do it?
> or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?
> Behold, I have received a command to bless;
> and he has blessed; and I cannot reverse it.

He has not seen iniquity in Jacob,
nor has he seen perverseness in Israel;
YHWH Elohav[his *Elohim*] is with him,
and the trumpet blast of a king is among them.
El brought them out of Egypt;
he has, as it were, the strength of a wild ox.
Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob,
nor is there any divination against Israel;
according to this time it shall be said of Jacob
and of Israel what *El* has done... [263]

The poem begins by contrasting *El* to man, divinity to humanity. Balak essentially asked Balaam "Can't you get God to change his mind?" Balaam argued that *El* does not do what is natural to humanity - lie or not fulfill a promise. *El* blessed Jacob and promised to protect him. He would not go back on his word at this point. *YHWH Elohav* is with him.[264] The poem continues by crediting *El* for bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and passing on the message of all *El* has done for them. It appears that the use of the two Divine appellations in this oracle distinguishes between past and present. The name *El* reflects Jacob's past; whereas *YHWH* is presently with them.[265] The next oracle further exemplifies the connection between the Divine appellations and the time of the relationship.

The third oracle came from the *ruach Elohim* (the spirit of God) who first addressed Balaam himself, then offered a blessing on behalf of the Israelites.

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[263] Num. 23:18b-23.

[264] This is an ambiguous expression, appearing to attribute *YHWH* as the God of *El*. However, with the author's interpretation of the use of *El* in v. 19, it is only logical to interpret "*YHWH Elohav*" as the God of Jacob. NOTE: The JPS translation of Num. 23:21 ("...[*YHWH*] their God is with them, and their King's acclaim in their midst") eliminates the ambiguous pronoun altogether.

[265] The author believes that the JPS translation provides a more accurate representation of the meaning of the text than does the literal translation. *YHWH* is with them, the Israelites, not him, Jacob of the past.

The speech of Balaam, the son of Beor;
the speech of a man whose eyes are open;
The speech of him who heard the words of *El*,
who saw the vision of the *Shaddai*,
falling down, but having his eyes open;
How goodly are your tents, O Jacob,
And your tabernacles, O Israel!
Like winding brooks, like gardens by the river's side,
as aloes which *YHWH* has planted,
and like cedar trees beside the waters.
He shall pour the water out of his buckets,
and his seed shall be in many waters,
and his king shall be higher than Agag,
and his kingdom shall be exalted.
El brought him out of Egypt ...[266]

Consistent with the previous oracles, the name *El* carries the images of the past. The poem begins with Balaam hearing the words of *El* and seeing the vision of *Shaddai*. Balaam was being called to give a blessing to the Israelites, thus he had to know, by hearing and seeing, the God of Israel's past. The idea of seeing recalls the use of *El Shaddai* in the Patriarchal narratives, where *El Shaddai* would appear (or be seen) in a vision or dream. The *El* compound is divided in Balaam's oracle to convey both meanings: the *El* who spoke to the Patriarchs and (*El*) *Shaddai* who appeared to them. In this oracle, *El* was specifically referred to as the God who brought "him" (Jacob)[267] out of Egypt, an act for which *El* was not originally responsible. Yet the use of this particular name is an intentional act to separate *El* from *YHWH*. *El* was the Divine name associated with all events from the past; whereas *YHWH* was related to the situation at present. The use of *YHWH* in this poem is related to nature. The beauty which surrounded the Israelites was planted by *YHWH*, who was presently with them.[268]

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[266] Num. 24:3b-8a.
[267] Referring to the Israelites.
[268] A reference to the previous oracle, "*YHWH Elohav* is with them" (23:21).

Along with the words of Balaam and the vision of *Shaddai*, the final oracle began with same opening formula as the previous one, yet added the "knowledge of *Elyon*." This knowledge carried the news of the destruction of Moab.

> The speech of Balaam, the son Beor,
> and the speech of a man whose eyes are open;
> The speech of one who heard the words of *El*,
> And knew the knowledge of *Elyon*,
> who saw the vision of the *Shaddai*,
> falling down, but having his eyes open.
> I shall see him, but not now;
> I shall behold him, but not near;
> there shall come a star out of Jacob,
> and a scepter shall rise out of Israel,
> and shall strike the corners of Moab,
> and destroy all the sons of Seth.
> And Edom shall be a possession,
> Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession;
> and Israel shall do bravely.
> Out of Jacob shall come a ruler,
> and shall destroy he who remains of the city.[269]

Balaam continued, revealing the fate of Amalek, and concluded with the words: "...Alas, who shall live when *El* wills this!" [270] This last sentiment of the poem disclosed the message of the Balaam Oracles. *El*, the God of the past, the God of the Patriarchs, the God who hears and sees (the plight of the Israelites),[271] and the God who knows what the future will bring, the God, *El,* had already blessed the Israelites. This *El* had already delivered the Israelites from Egypt and other peoples and kingdoms who had tried to destroy them. *El* wished to bless the people Israel and destroy their enemies. It had been proven in the past that whatever *El* wished to be would be; and it was known that *YHWH* was with them at that time.

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[269] Num. 24:15-19.
[270] Num. 24:23b.
[271] Reminiscent of "*El* Ro'i" (Gen. 16:13).

EL IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

El appears in the Psalms 72 times. Only two of those occurrences refer to *El* as a foreign god,[272] and two as an adjective meaning "mighty."[273] In its generic sense, *El* is employed to describe both *YHWH*[274] and *Elohim.*[275] More often than not, however, *El* is paralleled with other names of God, such as: *YHWH,*[276] *Elohim,*[277] both[278] *Tzur*[279] and *Elyon,*[280] and once with *Yah.*[281] As in the Patriarchal narratives, *El* never appears as the only name of God.

Given that *El,* as a generic appellation, functions as an aide to describe other names for God, and provides no information about the character of *El* as a proper noun, this section will focus on the *El* occurrences which parallel other Divine appellations. In general, the Psalters rarely employed *El* as an exclamatory expression, "O God."[282] Rather, *El* was portrayed as an active character often associated with salvation[283] and the days of old.[284]

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[272] "*El zar*" (strange god contrasted with *Elohainu,* our god) Ps. 44:21; "*El zechar*" (strange god), 81:10.
[273] "*harei El*" (great mountains), Ps. 36:7; "*arzei-El*" (mighty cedars), Ps. 80:11.
[274] Ps. 5:5, 10:11-12; 31:6; 68:20; 85:9; 86:15; 89:8; 94:1; 95:3; 118:27; 140:7.
[275] Ps. 42:3; 57:3; 77:14-15; 63:1.
[276] Ps. 16:1, 17:6; 18:3; 19:2; 22:2, 3, 11, 20; 29:3; 84:3; 90:2, 13-17; 102:25; 104:16, 21; 139:17, 23; 149:6.
[277] Ps. 7:12; 43:4; 52:3-7, 8-11; 68:21, 36; 74:8, 11; 78:7-8, 18-19, 34-35, 41; 82:1; 83:2.
[278] Ps. 55:20, 23-24; 99:8; 77:8, 10, 14; 106: 14, 16, 21; 118:27-28; 136:26; 146:5, 8-10.
[279] Ps. 18:3; 32; 42:9-10; 89:27.
[280] Ps. 73:11, 14, 17; 78:17-18; 107:11.
[281] Ps. 150:1, 6.
[282] With three exceptions: Ps. 22:2; 102:25; 139:17.
[283] Ps. 17:6; 18:36; 89:27; 68:20-22; 77:15; 78:35.
[284] Ps. 55:20; 77:10, 14; 78:7-8, 41; 106:14, 21; 107:11; 146:5.

El as the Savior God of Old

El is clearly identified as Israel's Savior and the active God in the most significant events of Israel's history. *El* promised to protect the people and save them from their enemies if Israel remained faithful to God. The following is an example which describes *El's* saving power through the Torah:

> ...You are my father, my *El*, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. I will keep my truth with him forever more, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also I will make to endure for ever, and his throne like the days of heaven. If his children forsake my Torah, and do not walk in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and do not keep my commandments; Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with strokes. Nevertheless my loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, nor altar the word which was issued from my lips.[285]

The author of Ps. 106 used both *YHWH* and *El* as he described the God, who brought the people out of Egypt and lead them through the desert.

> Remember me, O *YHWH*, when you show favor to your people. O visit me with your salvation!... Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not understand your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of your deeds of loving kindness; and they rebelled against you at the sea, the Red Sea. But he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power... Then they believed his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel; But they had wanton cravings in the wilderness, and put *El* to the test in the desert. And he gave them what they asked; but sent leanness into their soul. And they envied Moses in the camp, and Aaron the holy one of *YHWH*. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked. They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory for the likeness of an ox that eats grass! They forgot *El* who had saved them, who had done great things in Egypt; Wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome things by the Red Sea.[286]

Both *YHWH* and *El* were directly connected to the events in the desert during the time of Moses. Just as the Israelites rebelled against *YHWH*; the Israelites tested *El*. Just as *YHWH* showed kindness to the people and saved them, *El* was accredited for the miracles and marvels in the desert. With parallel images of God's salvation, *YHWH* and *El* were

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[285] Ps. 89:27-35.
[286] Ps. 106:4, 7-8, 12-22.

equated to one another. In this example, *El* adopted a meaning and function from *YHWH* rather than exemplified a position of its own.

In comparison to the parity between *YHWH* and *El* as Israel's Savior, Ps. 68 distinguishes between three different names of God, each corresponding with a different function. *YHWH* was accredited for dealing with the daily problems, *El* for salvation of Israel (in difficult times throughout history) and *Elohim* was down in the trenches smiting the enemy.

> Blessed be *YHWH*, who daily bears our burden, *El* of our salvation. Selah. He who is our *El* is the god (*El*) of salvation; and to the lord, *YHWH,* belong the issues of death. But *Elohim* will strike the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of him who still goes on in his trespasses.[287]

In contrast, Ps. 74 presents *Elohim* as the God of the past; whereas *El* is associated with "the dwelling places of your name"[288] which have been destroyed by the enemies.

> They have burned with fire your sanctuary, they have defiled the dwelling place of your name. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together; they have burned up all the meeting places of *El* in the land. We do not see our signs; there is no prophet any longer; nor is there among us any who knows how long. O *Elohim*, how long shall the adversary taunt? Shall the enemy blaspheme your name for ever? Why do you withdraw your hand, your right hand? Take it out of your bosom! For *Elohim* is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.[289]

El as God of Creation

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[287] Ps. 68:20-22

[288] This idea is reminiscent of the function of *El* in the patriarchal narratives where *El* was the God associated with a particular place of Divine-human encounter. Hearkening back to this image could be a reference to *El* as the God of the Patriarchs. In Ps. 52:7, *El* is also connected to one's dwelling place. "*El* shall likewise destroy you for ever, he shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, and root you out of the land of the living. Selah." A similar concept is found in Ps. 150:1 where *El* is being praised in a designated place in contrast to v. 6 where praise to Yah is discussed in terms of who should give praise: "Hallelujah! Praise *El* in his sanctuary! Praise him in the firmament of his power!... Let every thing that breathes praise *YHWH*! Hallelujah!"

[289] Ps. 74:7-12.

Along with the God of Old, *El* is occasionally portrayed as the God of the Heavens who is responsible for creation.[290] "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day utters speech, and night to night expresses knowledge."[291] Ps. 136 describes the events from creation through the miracles and marvels in Egypt, to the saving presence of God against the kings of other lands and at the end. The Psalter hearkens back to days of old, to the saving God in history and, even further, to the God of creation, and gives praise to *El*. In this poem, *El* is contrasted with *YHWH,* both through the structure of the poem and the function attributed to the name. The poem is framed by thanksgiving to *YHWH* in the first verse and thanksgiving to *El* in the last verse. However, they are thanked for different functions. *YHWH* is attributed with goodness and *El* is responsible for the acts of creation. "O give thanks to *YHWH*; for he is good; for his loving kindness endures for ever... O give thanks to the God of heaven; for his loving kindness endures for ever."[292]

El as God of Trust and Knowledge

In addition, the name *El* is related to themes of trust and knowledge. As Ps. 68 attributed a different function to each Divine appellation, Ps. 16, in a similar fashion, contrasts *El* with other names of God, each receiving a different quality: *El* is given trust, *YHWH* credited with goodness and (the holy ones) are given delight.

> A Miktam of David. Preserve me, O *El*; for in you I put my trust. I have said to *YHWH*, You are my *YHWH*; I have no good apart from you; As for the holy ones [*Kedoshim*] who are in the earth, they are the excellent, in whom is all my delight.[293]

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[290] Ps. 19:2; 90:2; 136:26.
[291] Ps. 19:2-3.
[292] Ps. 136:1, 26.
[293] Ps. 16:1-3 (cf. 18:3).

Similarly, the following reference attributes different qualities to the various Divine appellations, and brings them all together as a shield of trust.

> With the merciful you will show yourself merciful; with an upright man you will show yourself upright; With the pure you will show yourself pure; and with the perverse you will show yourself subtle. For you will save the afflicted people; but will bring down haughty looks. For you will light my candle; *YHWH* my God [*Elohai*] will enlighten my darkness. For by you I can run through a troop; and by my God [*Elohai*] I can leap over a wall. As for *El*, his way is perfect; the word of *YHWH* is proven; he is a shield to all those who trust in him. For who is *Elohah* but *YHWH*? Who is a rock [*tzur*]but our God [*Elohainu*]? It is *El* who girds me with strength, and makes my way perfect.[294]

This psalm also reflects the Divine qualities in human behavior. Just as *El's* way is perfect, so too does *El* make "my way perfect." This concept is applied more subtly to Divine knowledge in Ps. 73.

> And they say, How does *El* know? And is there knowledge in *Elyon*? Behold, these are the wicked, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Truly I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long have I been stricken, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of your children. When I pondered how I might understand this, it was too wearisome for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of *El*; then I understood their end.[295]

El and *Elyon* are paralleled in the first verse through their juxtaposition to knowing and knowledge. The psalm begins expressing the Psalter's envy of the wicked who prosper in the world. He described the wicked as those who question Divine knowledge (v. 11). Not until the Psalter entered the sanctuary of *El* did he understand that Divine knowledge existed and that the wicked would not always prosper (v. 17). From this knowledge, he also learned that cleansing one's heart is not in vain (v. 13). The idea of a heart cleansed of wickedness permeates the psalms. Some Psalters even invited *El* into their heart to search for any traces of wickedness.

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[294] Ps. 18:26-33,
[295] Ps. 73:11-17.

> How precious also are your thoughts to me, O *El*! How vast is their sum! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you. Surely you will slay the wicked, O *Elohah*! Depart from me therefore, you bloody men! For they speak against you wickedly, and your enemies take your name in vain. Do I not hate them, O *YHWH*, those who hate you? And do I not strive with those who rise up against you? I hate them with the utmost hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O *El*, and know my heart! Test me, and know my thoughts! And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.[296]

El as Parallel to Other Divine Appellations

There are times when *El* is neither a generic description of God nor an active, distinct God-role in the Psalms. In these cases, *El* functions as a synonym for another Divine appellation. As we saw in the Balaam Oracles, *El* is often connected to another Divine name through a shared word or concept.

> The love of God [*hesed El*] lasts for all time [*kol ha yom*]...
> I trust in the love of God [*hesed Elohim*] for ever and ever [*olam va'ed*]...[297]

There are other instances where the Divine appellations share a common verb or concept, yet the immediate context surrounding the name differs quite dramatically.

> Hallelujah! Sing to *YHWH* a new song, and his praise is sounded in the congregation of the pious. Let Israel rejoice in him who made him; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise his name in the dance; let them sing praises to him with the tambourine and lyre. For *YHWH* takes pleasure in his people; he will beautify the humble with salvation. Let the pious be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of *El* be in their mouth, and a two edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the nations, and chastisement upon the peoples; To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; To execute upon them the judgment written; this is an honor to all his pious ones. Hallelujah![298]

In this case, both *YHWH* and *El* are being verbally praised. However, *YHWH* is associated with song, dance and joy in the first half of this poem; whereas *El* is associated with the sword, vengeance, and chains in the latter half of the poem. The message of

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[296] Ps. 139:17-24.
[297] Ps. 53:3, 10.
[298] Ps. 149:1-9.

both parts of the poem is the same: Be pious and praise God. The use of *YHWH* relates to the benefits of following this message and the use of *El* relates to the consequences. The two names are paralleled, both introducing their respective parts and both framed in the same verbal praise. However, the subtle, yet significant difference in the perspective of the psalm's message reveals the subtle, yet significant manner in which the psalms often distinguish between these two names. *YHWH* is associated with goodness and joy; whereas *El* is associated with protection of Israel, punishment of the wicked, and destruction of the enemy.

The Use of El Compounds

El rarely appears as an *El*-compound in the Psalms.[299] There are, however, two references to *Shaddai*[300] and seventeen references to *Elyon.*[301] As with *El, Shaddai* and *Elyon* are most often used in parallel to other Divine appellations.

> He who dwells in the secret [place] of *Elyon*,
> who passes the night in the shadow of *Shaddai*,
> Will say to *YHWH*, My refuge and my mountain-fastness,
> My *Elohim* [lit. *Elohai*], in whom I trust.[302]

From these first two verses, the parallelism of the different Divine names is apparent. The verbs *yoshev* (dwells) and *yitlonan* (lodges) convey a similar meaning, just as the imagery of "*b'seter*" (the secret *place*) and "*b'tzel*" (the shadow) present an air of mystery. With two of the three elements of the phrases in direct relation to one another, we can expect the third element, namely, *Elyon* and *Shaddai,* to parallel each other, rather

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[299] There is one reference to "*El Elyon*" in Ps. 78:35.
[300] Ps. 68:15; 91:1.
[301] Ps. 7:18; 9:3; 21:8; 46:5; 47:4; 57:3; 77:11; 78:17, 35, 56; 82:6; 83:19; 91:1,9; 92:2; 97:9; 107:11.
[302] Ps. 91:1-2.

than contrast with each other. Similarly, *YHWH* and *Elohim*, in the following verse, are paralleled in their placement and meaning. It has been suggested that *YHWH Elyon* and *Elohai Shaddai* (similar to *El Shaddai*) are the appropriate distinctions for comparison of the composite Divine names.[303] In this particular psalm, the names do not carry any specific meaning other than further the message of the psalm itself, that is, have trust in the mysterious God and God will save you.

EL IN THE BOOK OF JOB

The complex structure, as well as the unique language and style of the book, create the perfect setting for the archaized Divine appellations. Of the *El* compounds, only *El* and *Shaddai* make an appearance in Job. In addition, the name *Elohah,*[304] often supplements or contrasts *El* and *Shaddai.*[305] There are 49 references to *El*, 31 references to *Shaddai*, and 37 references to *Elohah* in the book of Job. All three names are used most often in Job's speech. Job's friends also use these name, though not quite as frequently. Bildad refers to *El* five times[306] and *Shaddai* only twice during his speeches.[307] He never uses *Elohah.* Eliphaz refers to *El* seven times,[308] *Shaddai* six times[309] and *Elohah* five times.[310] Zophar only refers to *El* twice,[311] *Shaddai* once,[312] and

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[303] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100,* The Anchor Bible, vol. 17. (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), p. 329.

[304] The name first appears in Deut. 32:15 and occurs 7 additional times outside of the book of Job (Isa. 44:8; Hab. 3:3; Pss. 18:32; 50:22; 114:7; 139:19; Prov. 30:5).

[305] Job 5:17; 6:4; 10:2; 11:7; 12:16; 31:2; 40:2.

[306] Job 8:5, 13, 20; 18:21; 25:4.

[307] Job 8:3, 5.

[308] Job 5:8; 15:4, 11, 13, 25; 22:13, 17.

[309] Job 5:17; 15:25; 17:23; 22:3, 25, 26.

[310] Job 5:17; 15:8, 20; 22:12; 26.

Elohah three times.[313] Elihu almost parallels Job in his use of *El*,[314] as well as occasionally uses *Shaddai*[315] and *Elohah*.[316] *YHWH* only makes three references to *El*,[317] one to *Shaddai*,[318] and two to *Elohah*.[319]

The author of Job placed *El* and *Shaddai* into the mouths of Job and his friends, to evoke the Patriarchal traits of Israel's hero. Job, like the Patriarchs walked faithfully and blamelessly in the ways of God. He "feared God [*Elohim*] and shunned evil."[320] However, the story of Job could not be further from the legend of the Patriarchs. The God of Old, *El Shaddai*, who promised to care for the Patriarchs, give them land, and provide many offspring is the same God who destroyed the life of a righteous man because of a "dare" from *Satan,* the Adversary. While God accepted the challenge and began to test the loyalty of his most righteous and upright servant, Job began to reconstruct his theology and challenge the Divine to its core. This section will only paint a partial picture of Job's God, the aspects presented through the Divine appellations, *El* and *Shaddai*.

The clearest and most consistent image in the book is that of Job feeling first abandoned and betrayed, then mocked and persecuted by God. The world as he knew it was turned upside down. This world, controlled by God, was now one where the wicked prospered and the blasphemers went unpunished. This God, now a representative of His creation, is depicted as a tainted, unfair Judge who perverts justice. Job asked:

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311 Job 20:15, 29.
312 Job 11:7.
313 Job 11:5, 6, 7.
314 Job 32:4, 6, 13, 14, 29; 34:10, 12, 23, 31, 37; 35:2, 13; 36:5, 22; 37:5, 10, 14.
315 Job 32:8; 33:4; 34:10, 12; 35:13.
316 Job 33:12, 26; 35:10; 37:15, 22.
317 Job 38:41; 40:9, 19.
318 Job 40:2.
319 Job 39:17; 40:2.
320 Job 1:2.

> Is not *Elohah* in the height of heaven? And behold the height of the stars, how high they are! And you say, How does *El* know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds cover him, so that he sees not; and he walks in the circuit of heaven. Have you marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Who were cut down before their time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood; Who said to *El*, Depart from us; and what can *Shaddai* do for them? Yet he filled their houses with good things; but the counsel of the wicked is far from me. The righteous see it, and are glad; and the blameless laugh them to scorn.... Why are not times of judgment treasured by *Shaddai*?..."[321]

Job suggested that *El's* judgment was clouded; thus the wicked prospered and the blameless were ridiculed. The wicked were those who had rejected *El* and questioned *Shaddai*.[322] In contrast, Job spoke of the upright and the blameless who embraced both *El* and *Shaddai*. Unfortunately, Job's God was a God who turned the idea of being blameless on its head. Just as the wicked were rewarded, the blameless were made the laughing-stocks.

> A just, blameless man is a laughing stock. In the thought of one who is at ease there is contempt for those who are ruined, who slip with their feet. The tents of robbers prosper, and those who provoke *Elohim* are secure; they who bring their *El* in their hand.[323]

In this scenario, the "bad guys" (the robbers and "provokers" of God) did not reject *El*, but rather brought *El* into their control. *El* had now transformed from a "good God," abandoned and rejected by the wicked, to a "bad God," who sided with the menaces of society.

As Job continued to paint the picture of a God who mocked the just and the blameless and sided with the robbers and the "provokers," he questioned how far he should go to show his loyalty to *El*.

> Surely I would speak to *Shaddai*, and I desire to reason with *El*. But you are forgers of lies, you are all physicians of no value. O that you would keep silent! and it should be your wisdom. Hear now my reasoning, and listen to the pleading of my lips. Will you

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[321] Job 22:12-19; 24:1.

[322] Earlier, Job (15:25) described the wicked man is he who "trenches out his hand against *El*, and behaves arrogantly against *Shaddai*."

[323] Job 12:4b-6.

> speak wickedly for *El*? And talk deceitfully for him? Will you show him partiality? Will you dispute for *El*?[324]

As Job distinguished between speaking with *Shaddai* and reasoning with *El,*[325] he implied that loyalty to *Shaddai* and *El* demanded one to shed all his values. This idea he addressed was beyond his reason. With the new set of criteria accepted and rejected by *El* and *Shaddai*, Job posed the question: "How can one be just before *El*?"[326]

Because Job chose to follow the path of the upright and blameless, rather than what he considered to be the crooked path of *El* and *Shaddai,* Job considered himself more righteous than *El.*[327] As a result, he described himself as being the innocent victim of God's twisted judgment.

> As *El* lives, who has taken away my judgment; and *Shaddai*, who has tormented my soul; All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of *Elohah* is in my nostrils; My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. Far be it from me that I should justify you; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live. Let my enemy be like the wicked, and he who rises up against me like the unrighteous. For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when *Elohah* takes away his soul? Will *El* hear his cry when trouble comes upon him? Will he delight himself in *Shaddai*? Will he always call upon *Elohah*? I will teach you concerning the hand of *El*; I will not conceal that which is with *Shaddai*. Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves; why then do you altogether breathe emptiness? This is the portion of a wicked man with *El*, and the heritage of oppressors, which they shall receive from *Shaddai*.[328]

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[324] Job 13:3-8.

[325] Job is later criticized for doing the exact opposite - not reasoning with God, rather speaking without knowledge and acting out of ignorance.
> Should he reward it according to your mind, when you refuse his judgment?
> Should he say, You shall choose and not I; therefore speak what you know.
> Men of understanding will say to me, and the wise man who hear me will say:
> Job has spoken without knowledge, and his words lack wisdom. Would that Job were tested to the end because he answers like wicked men! For he adds rebellion to his sin, he strikes his fist among us, and multiplies his words against *El*. (34:33-37).

[326] Job 9:2 (cf. 25:4).

[327] Job 35:2.

[328] Job 27:2-13.

As evidenced already, the appellation, *El,* is intimately tied to the concept of wickedness. *El,* according to Job, had already sided with the wicked,[329] and was trying to sway Job over to the other side. "*El* has delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over to the hands of the wicked."[330] But Job would not be swayed. He continued to question Divine support of those who did not support God.

> Why do the wicked live, become old, grow mighty in power?...Therefore they say to *El,* Depart from us; for we do not desire the knowledge of your ways. What is *Shaddai,* that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, if we pray to him? Behold, is not their good in their hand? Let the counsel of the wicked be far from me...*Elohah* lays up his iniquity for his children; let him reward him, that he may know it...Let his eyes see his destruction, and let him drink of the wrath of *Shaddai.* Shall any teach *El* knowledge? Seeing he judges those who are high.[331]

Ironically, Job called on the "wrath of *Shaddai*" to punish the wicked. *Shaddai* apparently could still be swayed, yet *El,* could not be taught different ways. *El* was personified as the Judge of those on high; thus how could a human teach *El* anything, let alone, what Job considered to be right from wrong.

In addition to questioning (or critiquing God's judgment of the wicked), Job described *El,* Himself, as harboring wickedness and passing it on.

> Though wickedness is sweet in his mouth, though he hides it under his tongue; Though he spares it, and forsakes it not; but keeps it still in his mouth; Yet the food in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps inside him. He has swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again; *El* shall cast them from his belly.[332]

Job's friends and Elihu responded directly to Job's assertions about God, contrasting Job's depiction of *El* and *Shaddai* to their own. Job was advised by his

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[329] Job 20:29. "This is the portion of a wicked man from *Elohah*, and the heritage appointed to him by *El*." Job 31:2. "For what would be my portion from *Elohah* above? And my inheritance from *Shaddai* on high?"

[330] Job 16:11.

[331] Job 21:7, 14-16, 19-20, 22.

[332] Job 20:12-15.

friend, Bildad, to "seek *El* and make [his] supplication to *Shaddai.*"[333] Bildad stated that if one is pure and upright, that person will prosper. He compared a person who did not know God to a path that ran amuck.

> Can the rush grow up without mire? Can reed grass grow without water? While it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withers before any other herb. So are the paths of all who forget *El*; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish; His hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall be a spider's web...If he is he destroyed from his place, then it shall deny him, saying, I have not seen you. Behold, this is the joy of his way, and from the earth others shall spring. Behold, *El* will not cast away a blameless man, nor will he help the evil doers; He will yet fill your mouth with laughing, and your lips with rejoicing. Those who hate you shall be clothed with shame; and the tent of the wicked shall be no more.[334]

Bildad's remarks were in direct response to Job's claim that *El* ignored the blameless and rewarded the wicked. Bildad believed that those who forget or provoke *El* would indeed suffer and that the righteous, upright and blameless would be able to celebrate on account of *El.*

Elihu appealed to a different side of Job. He made a point to speak to "men of understanding," and men who were "wise at heart." He emphasized that knowledge and wisdom were the key to understanding God, and the source for Divine attention. He, like Bildad, asserted that God was just and God's judgments fair.

> Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding; far be it from *El*, that he should do wickedness; and from *Shaddai*, that he should commit iniquity... Surely *El* will not do wickedly, nor will *Shaddai* pervert justice For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he sees all his steps. There is no darkness, nor deep gloom, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. For he will not lay upon man anything more; that he should enter into judgment with *El*. He shall break in pieces countless mighty men, and set others in their place. Surely he knows their works, and he overturns them in the night, so that they are destroyed. He strikes them as wicked men in the open sight of others; Because they turned aside from following him, and had no regard for any of his ways. [335]

In sum, the name, *El,* was directly related to judgment and associated with the wicked. Job personified *El* as an unfair judge who favored the wicked and mocked the

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[333] Job. 8:5.
[334] Job. 8:11-14, 18-22.

righteous, the upright, and the blameless; whereas, Job's friends maintained that *El* was a just God who remembered the righteous, the upright, and the blameless. *Shaddai* was often paralleled to *El* in situations of judgment, yet, in addition, *Shaddai* adopted images of being a wrathful God who tormented Job's soul.

III. Relational Analysis

THE TEACHING FROM THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY ANALYSES

The historical and literary analyses of *El* and *El* compounds in the Tanakh provide tremendous insight into the meaning and function of the names. The etymology of the name leads us to interpret *El* as a strong and mighty God. We see evidence of this interpretation in the expression, "*El gibbor*"(strong/ heroic God).[336] The name may also carry with it connotations and characteristics of the Canaanite *El*, the wise, old Patriarch who ruled over humanity and the gods. Throughout the Tanakh, *El* took the name "*El da'at*" (God of Knowledge),[337] and "*El gadol v'nora*" (Great and Awesome God).[338]

The name *El*, in all its forms, represents various Divine functions. Jack Miles went as far as to attribute a different epithet for God in each book (or grouping of books) in the Tanakh.[339] Though Miles did not refer specifically to *El* or the *El* compounds, the

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[335] Job 34:10, 12, 21-27. (cf. 8:3).
[336] Isa. 9:5; 10:21; Ps. 77:15.
[337] I Sam. 2:3, in the song of Hannah.
[338] Jer. 32:18; Dan. 9:4; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Ps. 96:4.
[339] Miles, Jack. God, A Biography. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), Table of Contents.
Genesis - creator, destroyer, friend of the family (patriarchs); *Exodus* - liberator, lawgiver; *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* - liege; *Joshua, Judges* - conqueror; *Samuel* - father; *Kings* - arbiter; *Isaiah 1-39* Executioner; *Isaiah 40-66* Holy One; *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachai* - Wife;

literary and historical analyses in this chapter suggest specific functions attributed to *El* in the different books. From the Patriarchal narratives, we learn that *El* is an everlasting divinity who is highly revered. Through Jacob's narrative, we learn that *El* is responsible for journeys, ensuring spiritual growth and physical migration. The name *El* also bears witness to Divine-human encounters associated with a particular location. *El* is a merciful and compassionate God,[340] who sees and hears people's suffering; and more importantly, responds to them.[341] *El Shaddai,* in particular, is associated with blessing, particularly that of prodigy and land.

In the Balaam Oracles, the idea of God as Savior is established and furthered in the later books.[342] *El* functioned as a symbol of the God of the past in contrast to *YHWH,* the God of the present. *El* was the name of the God of Jacob; whereas *YHWH* was name of the God of the Israelites.

In the book of Psalms and Job, *El* bears a unique relationship to wickedness and knowledge. *El* was employed when speaking of the wicked, either in punishment of (Psalms) or in support of (Job) the ways of the wicked. It is interesting to note that when *El* is an element of an *El* compound, *El* adopts the characteristic(s) of the compound. *El* alone is associated with words and speaking, whereas *Shaddai* (and *El Shaddai*) is associated with seeing and appearing. In the Balaam Oracles and in the Psalms, (*El*)

Psalms - Counselor; *Proverbs* - Guarantor; *Job* - Fiend; *Song of Songs* - Sleeper; *Ruth* - Bystander; *Lamentations* - Recluse; *Ecclesiates* - Puzzle; *Esther* - Absense; *Dani*el - Ancient of Days; *Ezra/Nehemia* - Scroll; *Chronicles* - Perpetual Round

[340] "*El rahum v'hanun*" (Merciful and Compassionate God), Ex. 34:6; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh. 9:17.

[341] e.g., *El Ro'i.*

[342] Isa. 12:2, "*El Yeshuati*" (God is my Salvation); Ps. 68:20, "*Ha'*el *yeshuateinu*" (God is our salvation).

Elyon is related to knowing, knowledge, and wisdom. Yet, *El* carries the association of knowledge as it appears on its own in the Book of Job.

Relationship Between God and Humanity

After learning how *El* and *El* compounds function in the Tanakh, the author questions what these functions can tell us about Divine-human relationships. To begin with, *El* is a transcendent God who has little direct contact with humanity. Though the Patriarchs and the Psalters called on *El,* the role of the immanent God alternated between *YHWH* and *Elohim.* Job, on the other hand, blamed *El* and *Shaddai* for exercising perverse judgment which directly affected his life. With the exception of *El Shaddai* who approached Abraham and Jacob directly, *El* was not the name of God which lowered Himself to the human level. After all, He was called *El Elyon,* the Most High God, for He was far beyond human grasp. Ironically, though *El* rarely approached or interacted with humanity, people still often referred to *El* in their prayers. Most of the time, the articulation of the name *El* brought with it feelings of nostalgia and a desire to recreate the intimate relationship *El* appeared to have with the Patriarchs. Though the Patriarchs interacted on a regular basis with *YHWH* and *Elohim,* their spiritual revelations always occurred in the presence of *El.* The Divine-human encounter was so intense that they called out in prayer and created a permanent memorial of the experience.

In contrast, the name *El* was associated with a distant and silent God in the book of Job. *El* judged the wicked and the righteous; whereas *YHWH* and *Elohim* carried out those judgments. Again, humanity cried out to *El,* yet an intermediary was needed to facilitate the interaction between them. It was *YHWH* who ultimately spoke to Job at the

end of the story, not *El* or *Shaddai,* the objects of most of Job's anger throughout the book. From this, we learn that humanity feels close to *El,* yet *El* distances Himself from humanity.

In the Tanakh, there are both positive and negative relationship models between *El* and humanity. On the one hand, *El* is associated with transcendent moments, where humanity interacts with the Divine on the most profound level; on the other hand, *El* is a distant concept which relies upon an intermediary to communicate with humanity. Regardless of the change in relationship, it is clear that the name *El* carries with it connotations of specific models of Divine-human relationships.

El and *El* Compounds in the Mishna and Talmud

There are different philosophic and theological doctrines which dominated Rabbinic thought during the first four centuries of the Common Era. According to A. Marmorstein (1968), most of the Sages taught that human beings should strive to acquire merits before God. These merits, he suggested, were acquired through negative acts, "by avoiding that which was forbidden" and positive acts "of moral beauty, virtue, and accomplishment, in spite of their natural shortcomings and innate faults."[343] Marmorstein posited that every action a person performed was related to these merits. In turn, these merits would allow a person "to contribute to the happiness and prosperity in the world...[and] assures [sic.] him of reward and saves [sic.] him from punishment."[344] Punishment, he found, was caused by sin; and blessing, to no surprise, was caused by merit. In addition to negative and positive acts, these merits could be acquired through the merits of past generations. The Rabbis used the example of Moses pleading with God to temper God's anger after the incident with the golden calf. Moses called on the merits of the Patriarchs: "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self..."[345] In a similar situation, Hezekiah called on *YHWH*, yet spoke only on his own behalf. *YHWH* swiftly and subtly reminded him to call on the merits of his past: Hezekiah said, "I beseech you, *YHWH*, remember now how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight...

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[343] A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinic Literature*. (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1968), p. 3.

[344] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

[345] Ex. 32:13.

Thus said *YHWH*, the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you..."[346]

"The Doctrine of Merit," as Marmorstein termed it, represented "...one aspect of the relation between God and man."[347] The Sages taught that God related to human beings not only through reward and punishment, but also through grace, salvation and love; whereas humanity related to God through faith, work, and love. This implies that God would occasionally act, not in response to human action, but purely out of the Divine inclination to do good because God was a merciful and gracious God.[348] Likewise, humanity would act, not only to gain merits, but to express their faith and love in the God of Truth,[349] the living God.[350]

In lieu of the merit system, one school of Rabbinic thought taught that everything was done for the sake of God's name. For example: "Just as I have redeemed you in this world, I will redeem you in the world to come for the sake of my name." [351] A more subtle reference to the same concept can be found in the Talmudic discussion about blessings to say at a circumcision: "Therefore as a reward for this, O living God [*El chai*], who is our portion, give command to save the beloved of our flesh from the pit, for the sake of Your covenant which You have set in our flesh. Blessed are You, *YHWH*, Who makes the covenant."[352] Similarly, the Rabbis designed some penitential prayers which began with: "for the sake of your name, if not for our sake. Do it for your sake and help

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[346] II Kings 20:3, 5. Marmorstein, pp. 17-18.
[347] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[348] "*El Rahum v'hanun,*" RH 17b.
[349] e.g., "*El Emet,*" Ber. 5a, 46b.
[350] e.g., "*El chai,*" Hag. 12b; Kid. 36a; Ta'an. 11a; Pes. 87b.
[351] Marmorstein, p.15, (M. Ps., p. 461).
[352] Shab. 137b.

us."[353] As a result of this philosophy, these Rabbis believed that if God created the world for God's glory, humanity's role was to make God's name known on Earth.[354]

Another school of thought taught that humanity could acquire enough merits so that the world would be created for humanity's sake. Accompanying this belief was the concept that God could not bestow mercy upon humanity unless humanity worked toward it. "Without Faith, Work, or Love, nothing could come about, for it would not be just and God is Just."[355] Whereas the former school of thought left room for humanity to pray for God to act on God's behalf, this school of thought dictated that humanity act in good faith and love towards God in order that God would act on humanity's behalf. Thus, this approach called on humanity to take a more active role in the world. Both streams of Rabbinic thought are found in Rabbinic discussions regarding the content and choreography of prayer, as well as debates concerning human behavior and actions.

The cultural movements and philosophical streams during the first few centuries of the Common era affected the theology of the Rabbis. The Stoics circulated the belief that there was going to be a great, cataclysmic disaster at any given moment which would destroy the foundations of the world. They believed the world was created for a purpose which they sought to discover. They upheld the idea that the work of the previous generation should benefit the people of the present generation, who, in turn, would work to help sustain future generations.[356] These ideas influenced Rabbinic thought and permeated Rabbinic literature. The rumors regarding an upcoming, universal disaster clearly found its way into Rabbinic literature via the emphasis, in both aggadic and

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[353] Marmorstein, p. 13.
[354] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[355] *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

halakhic material, on the world-to-come. Merits that one may acquire in this world would have consequences in the world-to-come.[357] This concept is virtually absent in the biblical writings. Similarly, the concept that the work of one generation would influence another is prominent in Rabbinic writings.[358] Applying this concept to the Marmorstein's Doctrine of Merits, the merits of one generation could be passed on to the next. Such may be the reason that the latter Rabbinic school of thought suggested that people, Jews, in particular, should seek credit from previous generations and call on the merit of their ancestors when approaching the Divine.

Throughout Rabbinic literature, there are numerous examples of this theology. The Mishna and Talmud, in particular, provided people with tools for the practical application of this theology by discussing ways to accumulate merits in all areas of life. The most common technique the Rabbis utilized to illustrate their theology was the use of biblical proof texts which either supported a particular Rabbinic concept or was explained in such a way to illuminate a particular Rabbinic concept. Another common technique employed biblical personalities, who embodied rabbinic principles, to exemplify the general notions of different merits.[359]

In addition to describing the active ways humanity could take part in this theology, the Rabbis also addressed the Divine partner in the relationship. The epithets the Rabbis used to denote God often exemplified the manner in which they understood and related to God. The most common epithet for God in the Mishna and Talmud is the Holy One, Blessed be he (*Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*). Above all, God was viewed as holy,

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[356] *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.
[357] e.g., Shab. 127a; Eiruvin 18b.
[358] e.g., Ta'anit 23a.

separate, apart from humanity. Also commonly used were the epithets: *Ribono shel olam* [Master of the Universe], *Ha'Makom* ['Holy' Place][360] and *Shekhinah* ['Divine' Presence]. The Amoraic reference to *Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu* parallels the Tannaitic reference to *Makom*,[361] both referring to God's holiness; whereas *Shekhinah* is the term used in Tannaitic literature to express the closeness of *YHWH* to humanity.[362] These epithets suggest that the Rabbis understood God as the controller of all that happened in the world, as well as a presence which dwelled among the people in a certain place. Most of these epithets were introduced through Rabbinic literature.[363]

There was only one name for God according to the Rabbis, and that was the unarticulated name signified by the tetragrammaton.[364] The Sages taught that the Divine name must be kept secret.[365] The secrecy of the name represented a growing sense of God's transcendence during the Rabbinic period.[366] All other Divine appellations, according to one discussion in the Talmud, are substitutes for the Tetragrammaton.[367] In a different Talmudic discussion, the Sages refer to nine names which cannot be erased

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[359] Marmorstein, pp. 26-28.

[360] Ephraim E. Urbach claims that "*ha'Makom*" is oten used as an epithet to refer to "the One who dwells in the Sanctuary, the holy place" in *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs.* Israel Abrahams, trans. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1979), p. 77.

[361] *Ibid.*

[362] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[363] With the exception of *Shekhinah,* which has a limited number of occurrences in the Tanakh.

[364] Louis Finkelstein noted that in a *baraita* found in *Tosefta Berakot* 6 (7), the Pharisees referred to philosophers as "*burim*" [ignorants] because they upheld the belief that "[t]he Tetragrammaton reflected a manifestation of God, while the term *e-l-o-h-i-m* was His proper name...They used the Tetragrammaton to open their prayers, because of the special significance of the name to the relationship between *YHWH* and Israel. They used the term *Elohim* in the doxology to end their prayers because they believed that *Elohim* had the power to control events. The Pharisees believed that "the use of the name *e-l-o-h-i-m* for the Deity suggested the notion that the God of Israel was in fact identical with the supreme deity of other peoples, all of whom believed in many gods and recognized one among them as being the highest of all." in "The Origin of the Pharisees Reconsidered," (*Conservative Judaism, XXIII*, Winter, 1969), pp. 30-31.

[365] Pes. 50a. cf., Kid. 71a, Ex. Rab. 3:7.

[366] Samuel S.Cohon, "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology." *HUCa, XXIII,* (1950-51), p. 583.

(regarding issues of testimony): *El, Elohim, Elohecha, Ehyeh asher Ehiyeh, Elohah, YH'* (referring to the Tetragrammaton), *Adonai, Shaddai,* and *Tzevaot.*[368] All of these names have biblical origins, [369] in contrast to the popular Rabbinic epithets, which originated after the Tanakh had been canonized.

Marmorstein designated ninety-one terms for God in Rabbinic literature.[370] He posited that various words reflected the relationship between God, humanity, and the world. He believed that these words conveyed the meaning of God in the life and thought of the Jewish people. He categorized *Elohim,*[371] *El* and *Shaddai* in terms of God's might. He placed the second element in the *El* compounds seen in the Tanakh in different categories. He saw *Elyon* in terms of relation to space; *chai* in relation to reality; *Olam* only in combination with other words as relating to either eternity or God's relation to the world.[372]

This chapter will examine the use of *El* and *El* compounds in the Mishna and Talmud. *El* appears primarily in biblical citations, yet occasionally is used in the formation of new liturgical expressions and explanations of the etymology of biblical names which are not explained in the Tanakh. The *El* compounds only appear in biblical citations. None of the *El* compounds appear on their own, as a Divine epithet or appellation, in the Mishna, and only *Shaddai* and *Elyon* appear in the Talmud. Both names are cited as biblical proof texts. The non-biblical citation of *Shaddai* refers to a

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[367] e.g., Sota 42b; BB 14b.
[368] Shavuot 35a.
[369] Midrash knows of seventy names of God of biblical origin (Num. Rabb. 14:12).
[370] Marmorstein, ch. III. (cf. Cohon , p. 601 for a clear and succinct presentation of Marmorstein's terms for God).
[371] *Elohim* was also placed in the category of "reality," to represent the understanding God and the world in terms of what is real. Cohon, p. 602.
[372] *Ibid.*

situation in the Tanakh; whereas the non-biblical citations of *Elyon* relate to the acceptance of idolatry or foreign gods. Outside of the *El* compound, *Elyon* does not occur in Rabbinic sources as an attribute or epithet for a Divine appellation.[373] The use of *El* and *El* compounds rarely reveal anything regarding the meaning and function of their names. Most often, they are cited because of the context in which they were used. In these situations, this chapter will analyze the use of the particular proof texts from which they came. In the cases where *El* and the *El* compounds appear outside of a biblical citation, the author will evaluate the use and significance of the appellation in its Rabbinic context. Finally, the chapter will determine if the names used in their Rabbinic contexts reveal anything about Divine-human relationships.

I. *El* in the Mishna

There are only four references to *El* (as a Divine appellation) in the Mishna - three of which are direct citations from the Tanakh, and one of which is associated with a particular situation in the Tanakh. The first occurrence in the Mishna is found in *Mas. Avot* 3:6 in a discussion regarding the study of Torah.

> Rabbi Halafta of Kefar Hanania said: [When there are] ten sitting together and occupying themselves with Torah, the *Shekhinah* abides among them, as it is said [in Ps. 82:1], '*Elohim* stands in the congregation of *El.*'"

In this Mishna, there is a relationship between the *Shekhinah* amidst the men studying Torah and *Elohim* amidst the congregation of *El.* The function of *El* is that of a proof text

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[373] However, Marmorstein cites two midrashic examples which refer to the deception of "*elyona*" (Gen. Rabba 22:13, cf. Tosefta Baba Kama 8:2; Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael 8, and *Midrash Tehillim* 4:2), as well as references to *da'at ha-Elyonim* [knowledge of the angels], p. 94.

for the Rabbi's message. Yet, an analogy can be drawn between *El* and Torah. A minyan and a congregation represent a grouping of Jews coming together for a common purpose (that being *El* or Torah). When this occurs, a manifestation of God (*Shekhinah/Elohim*) is with them.

In the next occurrence, *El* is employed along with Divine epithets commonly used in the Tanakh to describe God's varying roles.

> He used to say: The born [are destined] to die, the dead to be brought to life, and the living to be judged. [It is therefore for them] to know and make known, so that it become known that He is *El*, He is the Fashioner, He is the Creator, He is the Discerner [Ps. 33:15]; He is the Judge, He is Witness [Mal. 3:5]; He is Complaintant [Job 31:35]; and that He is of destined to judge, Blessed be He [Job 3:1]...[374]

The structure of this mishna suggests that *El* and *Ha-Din* (the Judge) are the two primary terms for God. Each are followed by three related epithets. God is *El*, which is *the* Fashioner, *the* Creator and *the* Discerner. *El* is not preceded by the definite article, whereas the three epithets following *El* are preceded by "*ha.*" Similarly, *Ha-Din* uses the definite article, whereas the three epithets following, *ayd, ba'al din, atid la-din*, do not. As a judge presides over a witness, complainant and the future judgment, one could infer that *El* presides over the creation, fashioning, and discernment of the world.[375]

There are two occurrences of *El* in *Mas. Tamid* 7:4 discussing the daily utterances of the priests as they enter the Tabernacle. The first, second, fifth and sixth day, the priest are to recite a verse from Psalms related to *YHWH* or *Elohim;* the third and fourth day, they recite verses related to *El;* and on Shabbat, ironically, they recite a verse which does not mention God at all.

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[374] *Avot* 4:22.
[375] Lit., the Creator, the Fashioner and the Discerner of the world.

On the third day, the priests are to recite: "'*Elohim* stands in the congregation of *El;* He judges in the midst of judges.'"[376] This psalm asks how long God will continue to judge unjustly by accepting the wicked.[377] The Psalter later calls on God, "the judge of the earth" to arise.[378] On the fourth day, the priests are to recite: "*El nekamot* [God of vengeance], *YHWH, El nekamot* shine forth."[379] This psalm asks God to take vengeance upon the wicked. The Psalter asks God to rise up against the evil-doers and return judgment to the righteous.[380] Both of these references relate to *El* as Judge and call on *El* to arise and vindicate the righteous rather than the wicked.

In contrast, the recitation on the first day discusses YHWH's creations and the goodness in seeking *YHWH*. The specific verse states that the earth and everything within it belongs to *YHWH*.[381] The recitation on the second day praises *YHWH* and the city of "our *Elohim*" (Jerusalem).[382] The Psalter praises the city of God for her beauty and refuge from their enemies. The recitation on the fifth day[383] celebrates *Elohim,* the God who helped the Jewish people through history. The recitation on the sixth day depicts *YHWH* as a majestic king, clothed in strength, and enthroned in eternity.[384]

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376 Ps. 82:1.
377 *Ibid.*, v. 2.
378 *Ibid.*, v. 8.
379 Ps. 94:1.
380 *Ibid.*, vv.14-15.
381 Ps. 24:1.
382 Ps. 48:1.
383 Ps. 81:1.
384 Ps. 93:1.

On Shabbat, the priests are to recite: "*Mizmor shir l'yom ha'Shabbat*"[385] (Sing a song for Shabbat). The mishna adds a messianic note to the Psalter's song suggesting a song for the future (*"mizmor la'atid"*), that there will come a day which will be a Sabbath of rest for all times. These citations refer to YHWH's goodness and *Elohim's* protection, as opposed to *El's* judgment on the third and fourth day.

II. *El* Compounds in the Mishna

There are three references to *Shaddai* in the Mishna, none of which refer to the Divine appellation.[386] Similarly, there are three references to *Elyon*, two of which refer to the generic concept of "higher than," and one cites Gen. 14:19 in a sequence of examples of single possessions. "Abraham is one possession. From where do we infer this? Since it is written: And He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram of *El Elyon*, Creator of Heaven and Earth."[387] We gain little knowledge about the function of the compound, other than its use as a proof text, along with other biblical verses, to support the idea of unity being emphasized here by the Rabbis.

III. *El* in the Talmud

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[385] Ps. 92:1.
[386] Rather, they are the abbreviated form of *ha'sadeh sheli* ("my field").
[387] Mach. 5:10.

There are over 130 occurrences of *El* in the Talmud. In most of these occurrences, *El* functions as part of a biblical proof text. The majority of the biblical citations come from Psalms and Job, yet many are taken from the Balaam Oracles, and a few from the Patriarchal narratives as well. The proof texts function in one of two ways. The first is simply as a biblical verse from which the Rabbis derive its "true" meaning; and the second, as support for a concept introduced by the sages. The citation of Gen.14:19 in the previous section demonstrates this second function. Often in support of a Rabbinic concept, the Sages included citations from the Patriarchal narratives to exemplify model characteristics and behaviors which the Sages tried to promote. In addition, there are a few instances where *El* occurs outside of biblical proof texts. For example, *El* appears in discussions regarding the distance between Heaven and Earth[388] and who can enter the Temple.[389] In one instance, *El* (God) was used as a play on the word *al* (not).[390] Most often, however, *El* appears as part of a folk etymology in a Rabbinic interpretation of a biblical name (which was not explained in the Tanakh), or in liturgical blessings. The Rabbis engaged in formalizing prayer and establishing new blessings. In so doing, they often debated the content, context, and Divine terminology in the prayers and blessings. As a result, the Talmud introduced new *El* compounds (or epithets) responding to the needs of the Rabbinic era.[391]

In addition to the *El* compounds, various *El* epithets made an appearance in the Talmud.[392] The most popular *El* epithets in the Talmud include: *El chai* [the Living

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[388] Hag. 13a.
[389] Nid. 13b.
[390] San. 70b.
[391] e.g., Tem. 16a; San. 109b; Ned. 55a; Eiruvin 54a.
[392] Most often through biblical citations, though, occasionally, on their own.

God],[393] *El Nekamot* [God of Vengeance],[394] *El Emet* [God of Truth],[395] and *El Da'at* [God of Knowledge].[396] Other epithets less frequently used include: *El Rahum v'hanun* [Merciful and Gracious God],[397] *El Melech Ne'eman* [God, the Faithful King],[398] *El Emunah* [God of Faith],[399] *El Kane* [a Jealous God],[400] *El Zo'am* [God of Anger/and Angry God],[401] The Talmud also explained and reinterpreted various biblical concepts concerning *El*, such as: *El Nechar* [a foreign god],[402] *B'Edat El* [in the congregation of God],[403] *kavod El* [Glory of God].[404] *Beth-El* also occurs numerous times in the Talmud - sometimes in biblical citations,[405] sometimes as a reference to the place where an altar was built,[406] and other times to designate specific coordinates.[407]

Rabbinic Explanation of Biblical Verse

The Sages often derived a Rabbinic teaching from their interpretations of biblical verses. They use additional verses from the Tanakh as proof texts for their derivations. For example:

> Now, according to both Abaye and Raba, how do they interpret this [verse], 'You are sons [etc.']? — That is wanted for what was taught: 'You are sons of *YHWH* your God'[*Elohecha*]; when you behave as sons you are designated sons; if you do not behave

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393 Hag. 12b, 13a; Kid. 36a; Ta'an. 11a; Pes. 87b.
394 San. 92a; Tamid 35b; Ber. 33a, 58b.
395 Ber. 5a, 46b.
396 Ber. 33a; San. 92a; Sota 11a.
397 e.g., RH 17b.
398 Shab. 119b.
399 Av. Zar. 18a.
400 Av. Zar. 54b, 55a.
401 Av. Zar. 4a; San. 105b.
402 San. 82a.
403 San. 6b, 7a; Git. 7b; Sota 46b; RH 31a; Ber. 6a.
404 Ket. 5a.
405 e.g., Pes. 88a; Sota 46b; Git. 7b.
406 e.g., Meg. 14b, 17a; Arachin 33a.
407 Shab. 56ab; San. 44b.

> as sons, you are not designated sons: this is Rabbi Judah's view. Rabbi Meir said: In both cases you are called sons, for it is said, "they are foolish children" (Jer. 4:22); and it is also said: "They are children in whom is no faith" (Deut. 32:20); and it is also said, "a seed of evil-doers, sons that deal corruptly" (Isa. 1:4); and it is said, "and it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said unto them, You are not my people, it shall be said unto them, You are the sons of the living God [*b'nei El chai*]" (Hos. 2:1). Why give these additional quotations? For should you reply, only when foolish are they designated sons, but not when they lack faith — then come and hear: And it is said: 'They are sons in whom is no faith'. And should you say, when they have no faith they are called sons, but when they serve idols they are not called sons — then come and hear: And it is said: 'a seed of evil-doers, sons that deal corruptly.' And should you say, they are indeed called sons that act corruptly, but not good sons — then come and hear: And it is said, and it shall come to pass that, in the place where it was said unto them, You are not my people, it shall be said unto them, You are the sons of the living God.[408]

This passage expresses the firm belief that Israel can never be entirely rejected by God for all time. The reason for this conviction is based on the belief that Israel would never engage in idol worship which would cause God to reject them. The function of this passage is to reinterpret the concept of *b'nei El chai.* The Rabbis compared the use of "*banim sochalim*" [409] (foolish children) and "*b'nei El chai*" [410] (children of the living God) to suggest that the term "sons" denotes idol worship. Thus, one could infer that "*El chai,*" according to the Rabbis, did not refer to the God of Israel (as was the case in the biblical interpretation), but rather referred to idolatry.

The Rabbis often provided isogetical interpretations of biblical verses which expressed their own theology.

> "*El emunah v'ein ol*" [A God of faithfulness and without iniquity (Deut. 32:4)]. '*El emunah*': Just as punishment will be exacted of the wicked in the world to come even for a slight transgression which they commit, So too is punishment exacted in this world of the righteous for any slight transgression which they commit. '*v'ein ol*': Just as the righteous will receive their reward in the world to come, even for the least meritorious act which they do, so too are the wicked rewarded in this world even for the least meritorious act which they do. Just and right is He:[411]

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[408] Kid. 36a.
[409] Jer. 4:22.
[410] Hos. 2:1.
[411] Ta'an. 11a.

This Talmudic passage illustrates the Rabbinic notion of retribution in the world-to-come. Whereas the biblical meaning of the text refers to a just and faithful God who will judge the righteous and the wicked during their lifetimes, the Rabbis assert their belief that the merits (and demerits) one acquires in this world will extend to the next. The significance of the epithet "*El Emunah*" is its relation to the action of Divine punishment.

Support of Rabbinic Concept

More often than explaining biblical texts to support their theology, the Rabbis, introduce a concept and use biblical proof texts to support it. The following passage from *Niddah* explains why one cannot have lustful thoughts while in the presence of God.

> Rabbi Ammi stated, He who excites himself by lustful thoughts will not be allowed to enter the division of *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*. For here it is written, Was evil in the sight of *YHWH*, and elsewhere it is written, For You are not *El* that has pleasure in wickedness; evil shall not sojourn with You (Ps. 5:5).[412]

There is a clear relationship between lustful thoughts and *El's* pleasure in wickedness. The Rabbis posit that lustful thoughts are wicked and should be avoided when in the presence of holiness. The use of *El* could be read as contrasting *YHWH* and *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*. The term "you" is ambiguous in this situation. It could be referring to *YHWH* or to the reader. The meaning of the first reference would imply that *YHWH* (related to holiness) is not *El* (related to wickedness). The meaning of the second reference would imply that the reader is not God and is not strong enough to combat the wickedness of lustful thoughts. Regardless of the precise meaning, the relationship between *El* and wickedness is consistent.

Biblical citations are also often used to introduce a parable to teach a lesson:

> The General Agrippa asked Rabbi Gamaliel, 'It is written in your Torah, "For *YHWH* your God [*Elohecha*] is a devouring fire, a jealous God [*El kane*]" (Deut. 4:24). Is a wise man jealous of any but a wise man, a warrior of any but a warrior, a rich man of any but a rich man?' He replied, 'I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a man who marries an additional wife. If the second wife is her superior, the first will not be jealous of her; but if she is her inferior, the first wife will be jealous of her.'[413]

The topic in this passage is jealousy. There are two different ways to understand the message of the Rabbis. The first is that as humanity was created in God's image, humanity will respond in a manner similar to God. If *YHWH* is a jealous god, so too does humanity experience jealousy. The second way to understand the message of the Rabbis is an attempt to better understand the Divine. A human analogy to "*El kane*" provides tangible insight into an abstract concept. Both messages are consistent with the Rabbinic approach to the Talmud. However, if we accept Marmorstein's doctrine of merit, the Rabbis were more interested in explaining how to gain or lose merits than explaining the nature of God. Thus I would think that concept of jealously, as it relates to the lessons humanity, learns from God is a more appropriate reading of this passage than an explanation of the epithet "*El kane*."

Another example supporting a rabbinic notion is the conviction that a man should not be intimate with an idolatrous woman.

> So Rabbi Kahana was made to read in his dream, Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of *YHWH* which he loved, and has been intimate with the daughter of a strange god [*El nechar* (Mal. 2:11)]. He then went and related to Rab, 'This was I made to read'. Thereupon he reminded Rab of it all: Judah has dealt treacherously, — this refers to idolatry, even as it is said, [Surely as a wife departs treacherously from her husband], so have you dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, says *YHWH* (Jer. 3:20); and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, refers to pederasty, and thus it is written, "You shall not lie with mankind as with womankind; it is an abomination" (Lev.

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[412] Nid. 13b.
[413] Av. Zar. 55a (cf. 54b).

> 18:22); for Judah has profaned the holiness [kodesh] of *YHWH*, — this refers to harlotry, and thus it is said, "There shall be no consecrated harlot [*kedeshah*] of the daughters of Israel (Deut. 23:18); and has been intimate with the daughter of a strange god (Mal. 2:11), — this refers to intimacy with a heathen woman.[414]

In this passage, the Rabbis interpret "*bat El nechar*" as a heathen woman, a woman engaged in the worship of idols. In contrast, the Rabbis reinterpret *El zar* (strange god) as the *yetzer ha'ra* (evil inclination).

> Said Rabbi Abin: This man too effects an improvement, because he appeases his wrath. But is it permitted [to effect this] in such a manner? Surely it was taught, Rabbi Simeon b. Eleazar said in the name of Halfa b. Agra in Rabbi Johanan b. Nuri's name: He who rends his garments in his anger, he who breaks his vessels in his anger, and he who scatters his money in his anger, regard him as an idolater, because such are the wiles of the Tempter: To-day he says to him, 'Do this'; to-morrow he tells him, 'Do that,' until he bids him, 'Go and serve idols,' and he goes and serves [them]. Rabbi Abin observed: What verse [intimates this]? There shall be no strange god (*El zar*) in you; neither shall you worship any strange god (Ps. 81:10); who is the strange god that resides in man himself? Say, that is the *yetzer ha'ra*! -This holds good only where he does it in order to instill fear in his household, even as Rab Judah pulled the thrums [of his garment;] Rabbi Aha b. Jacob broke broken vessels; Rabbi Shesheth threw brine on his maidservant's head; Rabbi Abba broke a lid.[415]

This passage teaches that one can gain merits by controlling one's temper and lose merits by releasing one's wrath. The Rabbis retained the pejorative association with the term "*El zar,*" seen in the Tanakh, yet re-interpreted the biblical notion of a strange god (*El zar*) to refer to a strange, evil force welling up inside (i.e., *yetzer ha'ra*).

Patriarchal Models

The Sages often used biblical characters to personify Rabbinic values. The Talmud would cite the words of the biblical characters and attribute to them a Rabbinic message.

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[414] San. 82a.
[415] Shab. 105b.

> "And he called there on the name of *YHWH*, the Everlasting God [*El Olam*]" (Gen. 21:33). Resh Lakish said: Read not 'and he called' but 'and he made to call', thereby teaching that our father Abraham caused the name of *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*, to be uttered by the mouth of every passer-by. How was this? After [travelers] had eaten and drunk, they stood up to bless him; but, said he to them, 'Did you eat of mine? You ate of that which belongs to the God of the Universe [*Elohai Olam*]. Thank, praise and bless Him who spoke and the world came into being'[416]

In this case, the Rabbis employed the words of Abraham to teach that one should always remember to thank God. This teaching is framed by Abraham's recognition of "*El Olam*" and the Rabbinic interpretation of Abraham's action to thank and praise "*Elohai Olam.*" Their model follows the pattern: This is what [biblical hero X] did. This is what [biblical hero X's action] means. This is why we should do the same thing.

Another common situation in the Talmud is the elaboration of a biblical story. For example, the Rabbis "drash" Hosea's metamorphosis as being influenced by God's relationship to the Patriarchs.

> ... then Israel who are My children, the children of My tried ones, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... As soon as he perceived that he had sinned, he arose to supplicate mercy for himself. Said *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*, to him: 'Instead of supplicating mercy for thyself, supplicate mercy for Israel, against whom I have decreed three decrees because of you'. [Thereupon, Hosea] arose and begged for mercy, and He annulled the decree[s]. Then He began to bless them, as it is said: Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea . . . and it shall come to pass that, instead of that it which was said unto them: You are not My people', it shall be said unto them: You are the children of the living God [*b'nei El chai*]'...[417]

In this passage, the Rabbis compare Hosea's "children of harlotry" to "the children of the living God." In addition to the consistent interpretation of *b'nei El chai* as heathens, the Rabbis compare Hosea's behavior to that of the Patriarchs. The Patriarchs were clearly rewarded for their behavior; and Hosea was warned that he needed to change his behavior.

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[416] Sota 10ab.

In other situations, the Rabbis re-interpret the biblical text altogether. In the following passage, the Rabbis suggest that *El* refers to Jacob and not God.

> Rabbi Aha also said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar: How do we know that *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*, called Jacob *El* [God] Because it says, And the God of Israel called him [Jacob] *El*. For should you suppose that [what the text means is that] Jacob called the altar *El*, then it should be written, 'And Jacob called it'. But [as it is not written so], we must translate, 'He called Jacob El'. And who called him so? The God of Israel [*El, Elohai Yisrael*].[418]

Rabbinic Etymologies of Biblical Names

One of the most common uses of *El* in the Talmud outside of biblical citations is the Rabbinic creation of etymologies for names in Tanakh. For example, the Rabbis suggested that "Dathan [denotes] that he violated God's law (*she'avar dat El*)..."[419] Another example makes explicit the connection between *El* and the theophoric name, *Paltiel.*

> [The second husband of David's undivorced wife] is variously called "Palti" and "Paltiel!" — Rabbi Johanan said: His name was really Palti, but why was he called Paltiel? Because God saved him from transgression. What did he do [to be delivered from sin]? He planted a sword between her [Michal] and himself, and said, Whoever [first] attempts this thing, shall be pierced with this sword. But is it not stated: And her husband [Palti] went with her? — This means that he was to her like a husband. But is it not written, He went weeping? — This was for losing the good deed [of self-restraint]. Hence [he followed her] to Bahurim, implying that they both had remained like unmarried youths and not tasted the pleasure of marital relations.[420]

In this example, the Rabbis distinguish between the two references to the name of Michal's second husband. "Paltiel" is a play on the words "*she palto El (min ha'avirah)*" meaning *El* saved him (from sin). The Rabbis continue to identify that sin as "planting a

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[417] Pes. 87b.
[418] Meg. 18a.
[419] San. 109b.
[420] San. 19b.

sword between her and him." In contrast, "Palti" is employed when the narrative refers to him merely as being her husband.

Liturgical Use of El

The use of *El* and *El* compounds were very popular in formulaic blessings and prayers during Rabbinic times. The Sages created new *El*-compounds specifically designed for liturgical use such as *El ha-hoda'ot* (God of Thanksgiving),[421] and *El Rophe Ne'eman.*[422] Though both ideas of a thankful and healing God were alluded to in the Tanakh, they were never popular enough to have necessitated their own epithet for God until the Rabbinic period. The Rabbis also utilized *El* and *El* compounds which were mentioned in the Tanakh and applied them to new blessings. For example:

> Our Rabbis taught: He who circumcises must recite [a blessing]... And he who pronounces the benediction recites: '... Who have sanctified the beloved one from the womb; He set a statute in his flesh, and his offspring he sealed with the sign of the holy covenant. Therefore as a reward for this, O living God Who is our portion, give command to save the beloved of our flesh from the pit, for the sake of Your covenant which You have set in our flesh. Blessed are You, *YHWH*, Who makes the covenant.[423]

This is one of many examples where "*El chai*"[424] was used synonymously with *YHWH,* the God of Israel, the God with whom they made the Covenant.

In addition, the Rabbis used biblical proof texts to argue why certain blessings were in existence and why certain blessings should be added.

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[421] Ta'anit 6b-7a. "Blessed are You to Whom abundant thanksgivings are due'. 'Abundant thanksgivings' [*rav ha'hoda'ot*] and not 'all the thanksgivings' [*kol ha'hoda'ot*]? — Raba replied: Read, 'The God to Whom thanksgivings are due [*El ha'hoda'ot*]'. Rabbi Papa said: Therefore we should say both '*El ha'hoda'ot*' and *rav ha'hoda'ot.*'

[422] Ber. 60a. "On going in to be cupped one should say: 'May it be Your will, *YHWH, Elohecha*, that this operation may be a cure for me, and may You heal me, for You are a faithful healing God [*El Rophe Ne'eman*], and Your healing is sure, since men have no power to heal, but this is a habit with them."

[423] Shab. 137b.

> HAVDALAH IN THAT GRACIOUSLY GRANTS KNOWLEDGE'. What is the reason? — Rabbi Joseph said: Because it is a kind of wisdom, it was inserted in the benediction of wisdom. The Rabbis, however, say: Because the reference is to a weekday, therefore it was inserted in the weekday blessing. Rabbi Ammi said: Great is knowledge, since it was placed at the beginning of the weekday blessings. Rabbi Ammi also said: Great is knowledge since it was placed between two names, as it says, For *YHWH* is a God of knowledge [*El da'at*] (I Sam. 2:3). And if one has not knowledge, it is forbidden to have mercy on him, as it says, For it is a people of no understanding, therefore He that made them will have no compassion upon them (Isa. 27:11). Rabbi Eleazar said: Great is the Sanctuary, since it has been placed between two names, as it says, You have made, *YHWH*, the sanctuary, *YHWH* (Ex. 25:17). Rabbi Eleazar also said: Whenever there is in a man knowledge, it is as if the Sanctuary had been built in his days; for knowledge is set between two names, and the Sanctuary is set between two names. Rabbi Aha Karhina'ah demurred to this. According to this, he said, great is vengeance since it has been set between two names, as it says, God of vengeance [*El Nekamot*], *YHWH* (Ps. 94:1); He replied: That is so; that is to say, it is great in its proper sphere; and this accords with what 'Ulla said: Why two vengeances here? One for good and one for ill. For good, as it is written, He shined forth from Mount Paran (Deut. 33:2); for ill, as it is written, *El Nekamot, YHWH, El Nekamot...*[425]

In this passage, the Rabbis formulate their arguments based on the structure and associations of the Divine appellations. In both Rabbi Ammi's and Rabbi Aha Karhina'ah's positions, the tetragrammaton was placed between two identical *El* epithets. Because of the repetition of *El da'at*, Rabbi Ammi argued that God's knowledge was great. Rabbi Eleazar likened this repetition to the greatness of the Sanctuary which was also placed between the repetition of a Divine appellation.[426] He, thus, equated the greatness of the Sanctuary and the greatness of knowledge to mean that "Whenever there is a man of knowledge, it is as if the Sanctuary was built in his days." Similarly, Rabbi Aha Karhina'ah suggested that God's vengeance was great because of the repetition of *El nekamot* surrounding the tetragrammaton. He went further to say that the repetition referred to two types of Divine vengeance - for good and for bad. The meaning of *El* in this passage bears little significance; yet the function of *El* relates a man of knowledge to

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[424] As opposed to "*b'nei El chai*" which alluded to idolaters.

[425] Ber. 33a.

[426] In the case of the Sanctuary, the repeated Divine name was *YHWH*, not an *El* epithet.

the building of the Sanctuary and describes two ways in which God exercises Divine vengeance.

The Rabbis often suggest using biblical citations which include *El* epithets as appropriate expressions of prayer and supplication.

> "Abaye says: Even a scholar should recite one verse of supplication, as for instance: Into Your hand I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, *YHWH*, You, *El emet* [God of truth (Ps. 31:6)]."[427]

The same biblical epithet, *El emet,* employed outside of a biblical citation, is found in the following Rabbinic liturgical construction.

> Rabbi Akiba says: 'Blessed be the true Judge'. And does one [according to the first authority] say. 'Blessed be He that is good and does good', and not 'Blessed be the true Judge'? — Read: He says also, 'Blessed be He that is good and does good'. Mar Zutra visited Rabbi Ashi when the latter had suffered a bereavement, and in the grace after meals he began and uttered the benediction: 'Who is good and does good, God of truth [*El emet*], true Judge, who judges in righteousness and takes away in righteousness, who is Sovereign in His universe to do as pleases Him in it, for all His ways are judgment; for all is His, and we are His people and His servants, — and for everything it is incumbent upon us to give thanks to Him and to bless Him.[428]

The blessings in the Talmud were specific and called on or praised the God of X - the God who was X or could do X. *El* functioned as the generic "God of" which introduced the aspect of the Divine to which the Rabbis were trying to appeal.

IV. *El* Compounds in the Talmud

El Shaddai

There are only four references to *El Shaddai* in the Talmud and ten additional references to *Shaddai* alone as the name or epithet of God. As in the Mishna, the first two occurrences of *El Shaddai* are cited from the Tanakh; whereas the third is in

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[427] Ber. 5a.
[428] Ber. 46b.

reference to events in the Tanakh. The first reference[429] brings in various citations from the Tanakh to prove Rabbi Zutra bar Tobiah's statement that the world was created by ten things: "By wisdom and by understanding, and by reason, and by strength, and by rebuke, and by might, by righteousness and by judgment, by loving-kindness and by compassion." After each attribute was accredited to the various stages of creation, Resh Lakish said: "What is the meaning of the verse, I am *El Shaddai*? [It means], I am He that said to the world: Enough!" The Rabbis are playing off the meaning "enough" from the world "*dai.*" They are thus attributing the end of creation to *El* who said "Enough." *Shaddai* is clearly not being used as a name, but rather as a statement of *El.*

The second reference[430] occurs in a discussion regarding the obligation of procreation. There is a debate whether the obligation falls on both the man and the woman or only the man. In support of the obligation placed solely on the man, Rabbi Joseph cited Gen. 35:11 when *El Shaddai* appeared to Jacob and said "*Ani El Shaddai, preh u'rveh*" (I am *El Shaddai*, be you fruitful and multiply). He pointed out that the commandment was given in the masculine singular rather than in the plural "*p'ru u'rvu*" (Be fruitful and multiply). In this situation, *El Shaddai* is superfluous in the proof text and bears no significance on the meaning of function of the name.

The final reference[431] tells of Rabbi Eleazar's visit to Alexandria. There, he met a man who told him the story of what his ancestors did for him in Egypt during the time of Moses. He told how *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu* said to Moses, "For how many times did I reveal myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name of *El Shaddai*, and they did not

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[429] Chag. 12a.
[430] Yev. 65b.
[431] San. 111a.

question my character nor say to me, What is your name?" He implied that God's name reveals an aspect of God's character. Moses asked God's name, and "the Rabbis say, he saw [His attribute of] truth." Here, *El Shaddai* is used as part of a larger narrative explaining the meaning of the name of God. The Talmud teaches that knowing God's name is like knowing God's character. This section implies that *El Shaddai* was not God's name and thus, God's character was not revealed to the Patriarchs. This passage, however, does not provide insight into what *El Shaddai* is referring.

Of the ten references to *Shaddai* alone, there are six which are cited from the Tanakh and four which originate from the Rabbis. All of the citations originate in the book of Psalms or the book of Job. As with *El*, these citations are used to further the point being articulated in the Talmud or are suggested as an incantation for a specific circumstance. For example, there is a discussion in *Ketubot* which states that a teacher who deprives a student an act of attending on him is like a person who deprives another of an act of kindness. Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak added to this and said that the teacher also deprives the student of "*yirat shamayim*" (the fear of Heaven).[432] For this claim, he brings in the biblical proof text which states: "To him who is afflicted love is due from his friend; or else he forsakes the *yirat* (fear of) *Shaddai*."[433] This citation is clearly equating *Shamayim* with *Shaddai*, both designations for the Divine.

In a Talmudic discussion regarding methods of protection, it was suggested that a person recite a particular verse from Psalms.[434] This passage suggested songs to say against the plague and against evil occurrences. In the case of the latter, it is suggested

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[432] Ket. 96a.
[433] Job 6:14.
[434] Shav. 15b.

that one recited the verse from Psalms "He who dwells in the secret place of *Elyon*, who abides under the shadow of *Shaddai*."[435] The verse is a call to God to come out from hiding and remove evil from one's midst. In this situation, the Divine epithets have little significance.

In contrast, there are situations in the Talmud where the Divine epithet does bear some significance on the situation. For example, in a passage from *Avodah Zarah*, the Rabbis discussed what appeared to be a contradiction in the Tanakh in regard to Divine power.

> Rabbi Hinena b. Papa pointed to the following contradiction: Scripture says, As to *Shaddai*, we do not find him [exercising] plenteous power, yet it says, Great is our lord [*adonainu*] and of abundant power and also, Your right hand, *YHWH*, is become glorious in power! [The answer is] there is no contradiction here: the former refers to the time of judgment, the latter refers to a time of war.[436]

In these biblical citations, *Shaddai* does not exercise much power, whereas the power of *YHWH* is great. The Talmud reconciles this contradiction with an explanation that each refers to a different time. This passage is probably suggesting that during the time of judgment, God does not exercise much power, and during the time of war, God's power is glorious. However, it is possible to read into the text that *Shaddai* could be affiliated with the time of judgment and *YHWH* could be affiliated with the time of war.

There are two examples in the Talmud where *Shaddai* spreads the radiance of the *Shekhinah*.[437] Both references are couched in the context of Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai. In these cases, God is referred to as "*Shaddai,*" who was deemed

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[435] Ps. 91:1.
[436] Av. Zar. 4a.
[437] Shab. 88b; Suk. 5a.

powerful enough to spread His Presence [*Shekhinah*] over Moses and protect him.[438] Thus *Shaddai* is the designation of God who is deemed responsible for encountering Moses at Mount Sinai.

El Elyon

Of the 55 occurrences of *Elyon,* only six of them refer to *El Elyon.*[439] There are 14 additional references to *Elyon* as a Divine designation, eight of which refer to *da'at Elyon* (knowledge of *Elyon*).[440] In one particular context, there are two references comparing *b'nei Elyon* (children of *Elyon*)[441] to *Elohim,* both referring to other gods.[442] In contrast, there is a single reference naming *Elyon* as the God of Israel.[443] The three additional occurrences of *Elyon* cite Ps. 91:1 as a proof text.[444]

The use of *Elyon* in a biblical citation is not always as a proof text. The following passage from *Sota* illustrates a situation when a biblical verse (or part of a biblical verse) is interwoven into the Rabbinic narrative.

> She painted her eyes for him; therefore her eyes protrude. She plaited her hair for him; therefore a priest undoes her hair. She signaled to him with her finger; therefore her fingernails fall off. She girded herself with a belt for him; therefore a priest takes a common rope and ties it above her breasts. She thrust her thigh towards him; therefore her thigh falls. She received him upon her body; therefore her womb swells. She gave him the world's dainties to eat; therefore her offering consisted of animal's fodder. She gave him costly wine to drink in costly goblets; therefore a priest gives her water of bitterness to drink in a potsherd. She acted in secret; and "He that dwelt in the secret place of *Elyon* (Ps. 91:1) directed His face against her [to punish her]...[445]

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438 In Suk. 5a, it says that "*Shaddai* spread the radiance of His Shekhinah and his cloud upon him." Just before the reference to *Shaddai* in Shab. 88a, there is a reference to He who "spread his cloud over him."

439 RH 18b; Ned. 32b; Sota 4b.

440 Ber. 7a; San. 105b; Av. Zar. 4b.

441 Just as *b'nei El chai* referred to the worship of other gods (Kid. 36a).

442 Av. Zar. 5a.

443 Ber. 60b. "On entering a privy one should say: 'Be honored, you honored and holy ones that minister to *Elyon*. Give honor to the God of Israel [*Elohai Yisrael*]."

444 Sota 9a; Shav. 15b.

445 Sota 9a.

The Rabbis play off of the word "secret" which is both part of the narrative and part of the biblical citation. There is no particular significance in the appellation, *Elyon*. Rather, *Elyon* happened to be the Divine name employed in the verse which connected to concept of secrecy and God's anger.

The concept of *da'at Elyon* is directly related to Divine anger. The Rabbis expound on the biblical narrative which accredited Balaam for recognizing the knowledge of *Elyon*.

> A God that has indignation every day (Ps. 7:12). And how long does this indignation last? One moment. And how long is one moment? One fifty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-eighth part of an hour. And no creature has ever been able to fix precisely this moment except the wicked Balaam, of whom it is written: He knows the knowledge of *Elyon*. Now, he did not even know the mind of his animal; how then could he know the mind of *Elyon*? The meaning is, therefore, only that he knew how to fix precisely this moment in which *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*, is angry.[446]

Thus, the knowledge of *Elyon* refers to the moment when God is angry.

Elyon served a different function in the Talmud which is never discussed in the Tanakh. *El Elyon* was designated the official name of God which should appear on bonds and loan documents.

> God's name by the Israelites, and when the Government of the Hasmoneans became strong and defeated them, they ordained that they should mention the name of God even on bonds, and they used to write thus: 'In the year So-and-so of Johanan, High Priest to *El Elyon*, and when the Sages heard of it they said, 'To-morrow this man will pay his debt and the bond will be thrown on a dunghill', and they stopped them, and they made that day a feast day.[447]

The Rabbis also used the *El* compound to invoke the Divine name of the Patriarchs:

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[446] Ber. 7a.
[447] RH. 18b.

> What means, Hand to hand, he shall not escape punishment? Rab said: Whoever has intercourse with a married woman, though he proclaim *Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu*, to be Creator of Heaven and Earth as did our father Abraham, of whom it is written: I have lift up mine hand unto *YHWH, El Elyon*, Creator of Heaven and Earth, he will not escape the punishment of Gehinnom.[448]

In this situation, the use of *El Elyon,* Creator of Heaven and Earth, recalls the Genesis narrative, yet uses the expression out of context. The function of this epithet supports the Rabbinic theology of Merit. In this case, the Rabbis provide a clear example of a situation in which the merit system can be overturned by sin. In the case of infidelity, calling on the merit of previous generations (in this case, the blessing of Abraham) will not overturn any merit a person may have acquired which would have rewarded him a place in the world-to-come.

V. Relational Analysis

According to Marmorstein, "[t]he use which the Rabbis made of the Divine name and its related expressions reveals the intensity of their effort to reach out after a fuller and firmer comprehension of the Divine."[449] Focusing only on *El* and *El* compounds, this chapter discovered that in the Mishna, the Rabbis understood *El* primarily in relation to creation and judgment; whereas the Talmudic Rabbis, in addition to adopting the Mishnaic views of the Divine appellation, understood *El* in relation to faith (*El Emunah, El Melech Ne'eman*), truth (*El Emet*), and healing (*El Rophe*). In both Rabbinic texts, the majority of references were associated with judgment and wickedness. In the Mishna,

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[448] Sota 4b.
[449] Cohon, p. 579.

El's judgment was contrasted with *YHWH's* goodness and *Elohim's* protection. *El's* judgment, however, was inclined toward the wicked and was called upon to arise and favor the righteous. In the Talmud, *El* was responsible for judging both the righteous and the wicked, yet was credited for taking pleasure in the wicked. *El's* association with wickedness was contrasted with *YHWH's* association with holiness. The Talmud also indirectly associated *El* with idolatry (*b'nei El chai, bat El nechar*), the *yetzer ha'ra* (*El zar*), and Divine anger (*El zo'am, El da'at*). The *El* compounds, *Shaddai* and *Elyon,* were associated with judgment and knowledge, respectively.

El's association to wickedness and relationship to judgment is not a novel Rabbinic concept. These ideas originated in the Tanakh. However, the Rabbinic interpretations of biblical epithets, and the Rabbinic creations of new *El* epithets, depict two very different aspects of the Divine. On the one hand, *El* encapsulates wickedness, anger, idolatry and the *yetzer ha'ra*; on the other hand, *El* is a compassionate, healing, trustworthy, and faithful God. As a God whose primary function is that of judgment and justice, *El* balances both extremes of the spectrum - from idolatry to faith, from anger to compassion, from wickedness to righteousness.

The limited use of *El* in the Mishna and Talmud provides little information about Divine- human relationships. The fact that the majority of references to *El* were biblical citations creates confusion as to the significance of *El.* *El* could be understood as a function of the name or the function of the citation. The limited rabbinic references to *El* outside of biblical citations, in liturgical formulations and etymologies of biblical names, suggest that *El* was a generic term for God. Thus, neither *El,* nor the *El* compounds on their own provide us with any insight into the Rabbinic conception of Divine-human

relationships. Rather, the contexts in which *El* appeared illustrated some of the Rabbinic views of Divine power, behavior, and attributes.

El and *El* Compounds in Medieval Jewish Philosophy

During the Middle Ages, Jewish faith was challenged both intellectually and physically. Jewish thinkers, in their time, were forced to combat dogmatic attacks on Jewish thought and Jewish law. They defended their religious faith through Jewish principles and philosophic reasoning. Above all, the medieval philosophers were concerned with defending the unity of God. As a result, their discussions concerning this unity touched upon the meaning and functions of the numerous names for God. All names were aimed to relate the essence of God to the people. It is not surprising that from the eighth through the fifteenth century there were some variations in the approach and understanding of the medieval Jewish philosophers. Most of them distinguished between the tetragrammaton and all other Divine appellations. For some, the dividing line was between the pure essence of God and Divine attributes. The discussions of Divine attributes were further debated as to that which describes the qualities of God or that which describes the actions of God. For others, the difference lay in the perception between Divine actions and the effects of Divine actions in the world (the former, an attempt to be objective, while the latter recognizes its subjectivity). Other philosophers simply explained the distinction between *YHWH* and other names of God as the difference between the use of a proper noun and descriptive adjectives.

As these Jewish thinkers expounded their theories concerning the unity and essence of God through their discussions of Divine names, many of them exemplified the use of Divine names as indicators of Divine-human relationships. This chapter will examine the thoughts and theories of the medieval Jewish philosophers concerning the

names of God. We will see how outside influences affected their thinking and how their philosophies affected the manner in which they understood the names of God. We will compare and contrast the understanding of the names *El* and *Shaddai*[450] to other names of God in order to evaluate the overall significance these names played in medieval Jewish thought. Finally, this chapter will discuss how the philosophers understood the various names of God in terms of Divine-human relationships.

SAADIAH (BEN JOSEPH) GAON (882-942)[451]

Saadiah (Ben Joseph) Gaon was one of the greatest thinkers of the Gaonic period. He was the first medieval Rabbinite-philosopher to reconcile philosophy and the Bible through his understanding of reason and faith. His philosophy was heavily influenced by the *Mutazilites,*[452] along with Aristotilian, Platonic, and Stoic thought.

In line with *Mutazilite* thought, Saadiah's greatest philosophical work, *Sefer ha-Emunot ve-ha-De'ot* (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions) attempted to find rational proof for the dogmas of the Oral and Written Law. Saadiah intended to combat heretical views of the Jewish tradition and provide his fellow Jews with spiritual guidance. In his discussions about the nature of God, Saadiah affirmed the concept of an incorporeal God as the Creator of all corporeality. He believed that God could not possibly be corporeal unless there was something else which was the cause of God's existence. Given the

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[450] The Medieval Jewish Philosophers did not discuss any of the other *El* compounds as Divine appellations. Maimonides commented on *Elyon* only as an inacurate description of a God who could not be measured.

[451] Also known as Saadiah al-Fayyumi.

[452] The oldest group of Islamic theologians which flourished in the Abbasid period (750-900 C.E.) in Iraq. Their doctrines affirmed the unity of God and emphasized monotheism. They rejected

unlikelihood of such an idea and his acceptance of the incorporeality of God's existence, Saadiah maintained that God could not be described in terms of corporeal attributes. Rather, God could only be described in terms of the incorporeal Creator.[453]

It is not surprising, therefore, that Saadiah's ideas about the names of God emerged from his discussion about the nature of God as Creator. All of the Divine names are in some way related to three essential qualities of creation: life, power and knowledge. Saadiah addressed the issue of names in his second treatise concerning "the unity of the Creator of all things."[454] The particular chapter dealing with Divine names is situated between the dualist's argument against the unity of God[455] and the application of the three attributes of creation to God. In both chapters, Saadiah focused primarily on the names *YHWH* and *Elohim*, connoting the single meaning - "Creator of the Heavens."[456] He cited examples of parallel language used in Scripture to illustrate that these two names carry the same meaning: "*YHWH* created the Heavens, He is our *Elohim*"[457] and "Know that *YHWH* is our *Elohim.*"[458] However, Saadiah the rabbinic view that the only proper noun referring to God is the tetragrammaton and all other names of God describe how God acts in the world.[459]

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anthropomorphism and favored allegorical interpretations of anthropomorphic descriptions of God and argued vehemently against those who understood the text literally.

[453] *Encyclopedia Judaica* CD-ROM Edition. (Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd., 1997), s.v. "Saadiah (ben Joseph) Gaon."

[454] Saadiah Gaon. *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* Samuel Rosenblatt, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), p. iii.

[455] From the standpoints of reason and Scripture.

[456] Gaon, p. 99.

[457] Isa. 45:18.

[458] Ps. 100:3.

[459] e.g., Sota 42b; BB 14b.

All other names referring to God are to be interpreted not as figurative names, but as expressions pertaining to the description of God's actions in relationship to the qualities of creation.[460] Though he did not specifically refer to the names *El* and *Shaddai* in his book, Saadiah explained the meaning and function of these names in his commentary on the Tanakh. *El* refers to the creative quality of power, "*ha'yachul*" (the omnipotent one)[461] or "*ha'takif*" (the strong one).[462] *Shaddai* refers to the quality of life, "*ha'maspik u'ha'mkalkel*" (sufficient provider) and functions as an adjective.[463] Saadiah divided the word *Shaddai* into two separate words - *she* and *dai*. *She* represents the modifier "that/who," as in the case "*v'asita li ot she atah m'daber immi*" (...show me a sign that you talk with me.).[464] He noted the similarity to the Rabbinic interpretation "*asher dai.*"[465] Saadiah also commented on the grammatical structure of *patakh-kamatz* which indicates an adjective, as in the case "...*alai libi davai*" (...my heart is faint in me).[466] *Ḍai* alone means "sufficient." Thus *El Shaddai* refers to "the strong one who sufficiently provides for the world."[467]

Saadiah also claimed that God could be known by more than one name, though the meaning and function of the names could be overlooked or misunderstood. Sometimes the name appeared as a noun (*YHWH*) and sometimes as an adjective (*Shaddai*).[468] One might consider the two names representing two different gods, two

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460 Gaon, p. 100.
461 The one who has power over all. Saadiah's commentary on Gen. 17:1 (*Mikrot Gedolot*).
462 *Ibid.*
463 In this case, *Shaddai* is modifying *El.*
464 Jud. 6:17.
465 e.g., Pes. 3a.
466 Jer. 8:18.
467 Saadiah's commentary on Ex. 6:3 (*Mikrot Gedolot*).
468 Similar to the use of the term "Divine" today. It functions as a noun, but its true function is an adjective.

different attributes of the same god, or two different proper names for the same god. Saadiah suggested that the Patriarchs did not quite comprehend the functions of the Divine names. He believed that God appeared to the Patriarchs as both *El Shaddai* and *YHWH* at different times. He commented that in Exodus 6:3, there is a connection between *El Shaddai* and *YHWH*. The verse reads: "I appeared to [the Patriarchs]...as *El Shaddai* **and** my name *YHWH* was not known to them (*b'el Shaddai **u'**shmi YHWH lo nodati lahem*)." Saadiah noted that the *vov* ("and") connecting the two parts of the verse, the verse could warrant the interpretation: "*...b'El Shaddai **u' b**'shmi YHWH lo nodati lahem*" (I appeared to the Patriarchs as *El Shaddai* but by my name, *YHWH*, I was not known to them.). Just as Jacob and Israel are used interchangeably to refer to the same person and *YHWH* and *Elohim* can be used interchangeably and refer to the same Creator of the universe, *El Shaddai* and *YHWH* are also referring to the same God.[469] God spoke to Jacob at different times saying both "*ani el Shaddai*" (I am *El Shaddai*)[470] and "*ani YHWH Elohai Avraham...*" (I am *YHWH*, the God of Abraham).[471] Thus, both *El Shaddai* and *YHWH* were understood by the Patriarchs as personal names of God. However, when God revealed the holy name to Moses, God also revealed the *sod* (secret) that these names were actually adjectives for God. The *sod* indicates that the names for God function as descriptions of God in terms of Divine qualities of creation rather than ascribe a personal name to the deity. The meaning of the specific names vary according to God's action in creation.

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[469] This discussion is found in Ibn Ezra commentary of Ex. 6:3 (*Mikrot Gedolot*).
[470] Gen. 35:11.
[471] Gen. 28:13.

JUDAH HA-LEVI (c. 1075-1141)

Arriving to the philosophic scene two centuries after Saadiah Gaon, Jūdah Ha-Levi brought dramatically different ideas to the realm of Jewish thought. As a poet who was also well-versed in Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic ideas, Ha-Levi brought his creativity and knowledge to the forefront with his most significant work, *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (The Kuzari.) This literary work was more of an apologia rather than an systematic treatise of Ha-Levi's philosophy. The book was designed to prove the superiority of Judaism through a comparison of the religious and philosophic teachings of Aristotle, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Ha-Levi strongly critiqued the rational teachings of the philosophers (namely, Aristotle), who strove toward the acquisition of theoretical knowledge of God. In place of this theoretical knowledge, Ha-Levi emphasized the religious experience of God through prophecy in order to foster a closer connection with the Divine.

Ha-Levi noted that prophetic revelation was most often preceded by an introduction of a Divine appellation. All appellations, other than the tetragrammaton, are considered attributes describing the way in which God's creations are affected by God's actions.[472] Ha-Levi's understanding of Divine names differ from that of Saadiah's only in the perspectives they hold. Saadiah interpreted the names as qualities directly relating to God's actions (in creation); whereas Ha-Levi suggested that the names reflect the way God's actions affect the world and everything in it. The former is a description of what God does, while the latter is a description of how what God does affects others.

In *Sefer Ha-Kuzari,* two of the five parts of the book address the names of God. The second part only touches upon the Divine appellations in terms Divine attributes and experience of God through prophecy; whereas the forth part addresses the meaning and implications of the Divine names by contrasting a God known through philosophical reasoning and a God known through the experience of prophetic revelation. First and foremost, Ha-Levi introduced his theory of Divine attributes which he divided into three categories: *creative, relative,* and *negative.* Creative attributes are those derived from Divine acts which occur by natural mediums, such as making rich the poor. [473] Relative attributes are borrowed from human praise of God, such as "The Blessed One" and "the Holy One."[474] Negative attributes are qualities which we attribute to God, not because we know them, but because we know their opposite is untrue. For example, we say God is one because we know God is not many. We say God is the living God because the converse (God is dead) cannot be true.[475]

Ha-Levi described the different names of God like different types of light emitted from the sun. Just as the essence of the different types of light is contained in and identified as a single source, the sun, the essence of God is contained in and identified as a single source, *YHWH.* Ha-Levi further explained that if God did not make the initial contact with Adam, humanity would have been satisfied with the name *Elohim*, which represented the ruler of the world on whom all creative forces depend.[476] Ha-Levi

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[472] Judah Ha-Levi, *Sefer Ha-Kuzari.* Rabbi Yehudah Ibn Tevun, trans. (Tel Aviv: Makhberet L'Sifrut, 1988), p. 67. Judah Levi, *The Kuzari.* Hartwig Hirschfeld, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 83.

[473] Ha-Levi, *The Kuzari*, p. 83-4.

[474] *Ibid.*, p. 84; (heb. p. 69).

[475] *Ibid.*

[476] *Ibid.*, p. 198.

believed that one bestows upon God a name as a designation of the God who appeared to that person. Thus, Adam recognized the Divine attribute of creation and designated the name *Elohim* to be Creator because God created the world and all life within it. The meaning of *Elohim* can be grasped by speculation, because "the Guide and Manager of the world is a postulate of Reason."[477]

However, *Elohim* does not represent the essence of God, that which can only be experienced through prophecy. Without knowing God's essence, humanity would not perceive what God was, whether God was a unity or not, or whether God was cognizant of individuals or not.[478]

YHWH is the only proper noun which indicates the Divine essence. Ha-Levi pointed out that Adam, Cain and Abel,[479] Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the prophets who experienced the Divine essence, all intuitively called God "*YHWH*."[480] The distinction between contemplating God on an intellectual level and experiencing God on a spiritual level is expressed through the names we call God. Ha-Levi, himself wrote:

> Man yearns for Adonai as a matter of love, taste, and conviction; while *Elohim* is the result of speculation. The feeling of the former kind invites its votaries to give their life for God's sake, and to prefer death to God's absence. Speculation, however, makes veneration only a necessity as long as it entails no harm, but bears no pain for its sake.[481]

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[477] *Ibid.*

[478] Because God established a connection with man, the name *Elohim* was altered after creation to *Adonai-Elohim* (Ha-Levi, p. 200).

[479] Through their father and prophetic intuition.

[480] Ha-Levi, p. 200.

[481] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

In addition, the name *YHWH* was associated to the unique link between God and Israel. The *Shem Ha-Meforash* was called the God of Israel because such an understanding of the essence of God was not found among the Gentiles.[482]

After an extensive discussion of *YHWH* and *Elohim*, Ha-Levi briefly mentioned some other Divine designations, including *El* and *Shaddai*. The name "*El*" is derived from *ayaluth*, "being the source of the forces [of nature], but exalted above them."[483] Although there was only one sentence explaining the meaning of *El*, it is clear from the context of the reference that the name *El* played a significant and utterly dependent role in the relationship between God and humanity. The *Shem Ha-Meforash* represented the totality of the Divine essence; *El* represented the source of nature; and *Elohim* channeled, arranged and guided these natural forces to work in the universe. Thus, rain originates from *El*, yet is caused by *Elohim*, "the cause of all causes."[484] One could infer from this interpretation that humanity has no direct contact or interaction with *El*. Humanity contemplates and responds to *Elohim*, has the ability to experience *YHWH*, and can only be intellectually aware of *El*. Thus, considering that *El* is the attribute which has the most indirect affect on humanity, it is not surprising that Ha-Levi gave this name the least attention.

Ha-Levi focused slightly more energy in his discussion regarding the meaning of *Shaddai*. *Shaddai* falls into this category of creative attributes (*ha-midot ha-ma'asiyot*)[485] and reveals how the Patriarchs were affected by God's presence. Ha-Levi suggested that God was understood by the Patriarchs through power and dominion.

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[482] *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 224.
[483] *Ibid.*, p. 202.
[484] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

> 'I appeared to Abraham ...as *El Shaddai* (Exod. vi.3),' viz. in the way of power and dominion... [God] did not, however, perform any miracles for the Patriarchs as [God] did for Moses, saying: 'but my name J H W H was not known to them.' [Exod. 6:3]." [486]

In contrast, the wonders performed by God for Moses and the Israelites left them no doubt that *YHWH* was the Creator of the world and all things brought into existence because of God's will. God revealed Godself as *YHWH* to Moses and the Israelites because they nourished doubt, while the Patriarchs fostered "the utmost faith."[487] Ha-Levi implied that God revealed Godself to the Patriarchs as *El Shaddai* instead of *YHWH* because the Patriarchs already knew God's essence. They required no additional signs of God's presence. By appearing to the Patriarchs as *El Shaddai,* God revealed not whether God is or isn't, but rather, how God works in relation to man.[488]

ABRAHAM IBN EZRA (1089-1164)

In addition to his biblical commentary, Abraham Ibn Ezra was also a poet, grammarian, philosopher, astronomer, and physician. In his writings, Ibn Ezra drew upon his observations of life and the experiences he gained during his years of wandering. Some of his Biblical interpretations reflected his metaphysical views, interests in mathematical theories, and belief in astrology.

Ibn Ezra's philosophy is primarily expressed through his commentary of the Tanakh. Like the Jewish thinkers before him, Ibn Ezra's philosophy was heavily

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[485] Ha-Levi., heb. p. 68.
[486] Ha-Levi, pp. 85-86.
[487] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

influenced by Platonic, neo-Platonic thought, and doctrines of the Muslim Aristotelian philosophers. Ibn Ezra divided the universe into three "worlds": the "upper world"(*ha'olam ha'elyoni*) of intelligibles or angels (which he defined as "*Elohim*"), the "intermediate world" (*ha'olam ha'tikon*) of the celestial spheres, and the lower, sublunar "world" (*ha'olam ha'shafel*) which was created in time. The "intelligible world" emanating from God, is eternal; while the terrestrial world was created in time and through the mediation of the intelligible world. The terrestrial world, however, was not created *ex nihilo*, but from preexistent terrestrial matter. Thus, he concluded that creation occurred both by God's actions and preexistent matter.

In his commentary on Exodus 6:3, Ibn Ezra stated that God appeared to Abraham as *El Shaddai,* as the victor/controller of the constellations and the upper world. Unlike his predecessors, Saadiah and Ha-Levi, who interpreted the name, *Shaddai,* as an adjective or descriptive construct modifying *El,* Ibn Ezra interpreted the name *Shaddai* as a conjugation of the root *sh-d-d*, "to overpower."[489] He therefore translated *Shaddai* as "*m'natzeah,*" the one who overpowers (i.e., the victor). In addition to the verses in Genesis and Exodus,[490] Ibn Ezra commented on the use of *sh-d-d* in Ezekiel: "And when they moved, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the *Shaddai*, the voice of a tumult, like the noise of an army camp; when they stood, they let down their wings."[491] Again, he applied the root meaning of *sh-d-d* and translated the phrase "*kol Shaddai*" as "the voice of the victor." Similarly in Job, Ibn Ezra read the meaning of victory into the following verses "Indeed, *Shaddai* (the

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[488] In the case of the Patriarchs, God worked through power and dominion. (*Ibid.*, p. 86).
[489] Ibn Ezra's commentary on Gen. 17:1(*Mikrot Gedolot*).

victor/victory) shall be your gold, and your precious silver. For then you shall have your delight in *Shaddai* (victory), and shall lift up your face to *Elohah*."[492] The association is clear. *Shaddai* is used in cases of overpowering enemies and being victorious.

Moreover, Ibn Ezra reminded us that our rabbis taught "*Ayn mazal l'yisrael*" (Israel does not function by Astrology).[493] Thus, God told Abraham not to put his faith in the stars and constellations ("*tze me'itztagninut*"). God did not threaten to destroy the celestial beings; rather God sought to teach Abraham God's name so that the Patriarch would cling to God instead of the stars. Ibn Ezra claimed that the *sod* (secret) of the Torah is the teaching of clinging to the name of God. Applying his earlier comment regarding the meaning of *Shaddai* as victor, one could infer that God appeared to Abraham as *El Shaddai* in order to convey that if Abraham clings to God, he will be victorious. This victory, Ibn Ezra implied, would be overcoming Sarah's barrenness. Thus, God would overpower the stars and ensure the victory of a successful pregnancy and future generations who will know and cling to God.

Ibn Ezra attempted to reconcile his belief in stellar decrees with his faith in providence and free will. According to his theory, individual providence is granted only to those who have attained intellectual perfection and have succeeded in uniting with the general intellect emanating from the Divine source. The Patriarchs did not quite make it. It is said that only Moses knew God face to face and learned how to cling to God. Moses, not the Patriarchs, was able to teach future generations how to cling to *YHWH*. Moses acted, with God's help, to perform the signs and wonders in Egypt and in the desert;

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[490] Gen. 17:1; Ex. 6:3.
[491] Ezek. 1:24.

whereas the Patriarchs did not work with God. They allowed God to do for them, but did not allow God to work through them. Thus, the Patriarchs knew the name of God as *El Shaddai* (the victor over the constellations who makes things happen in the universe), but by their hands they did not know God as *YHWH* (the Divine power that works through the prophet who knows to cling to God).

MOSES MAIMONIDES (1135–1204)[494]

Moses Maimonides was the most significant Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages. He was heavily influenced by Aristotle's rational philosophy and various Muslim thinkers of his day.[495] Probably the most important philosophic work of the Middle Ages (and arguably throughout all times), Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed,* was designed to teach Jews whose faith had been weakened why they should adhere to traditional Judaism. The book was geared toward those who were grounded in their religious beliefs, yet were troubled by the anthropomorphic references to and about God. The Guide was devoted to a philosophic interpretation of Scripture, or "science of the law, in its true sense."[496] As with his predecessors, Maimonides' first philosophic task was explaining his views on God.

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[492] Job 22:25-26.
[493] Shab. 156a.
[494] Known in rabbinical literature as "Rambam," from the acronym Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon.
[495] Such as al-Farabi and Avempace (Ibn Baja), *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CR-ROM edition.
[496] Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed.* Shlomo Pines, trans. Chicago: The University of (Chicago Press, 1963), p. xiv.

The discussion regarding the names of God, as with the previous philosophic works, follows the chapters on Divine attributes. In accordance with the philosophy of Ha-Levi, Maimonides maintained that the *Shem Ha'M'forash* is a clear indication of Divine essence.[497] He posited that stripped of all names, attributes, and actions, God is *YHWH* (pure essence). He cited a midrash which stated that "before the world was created, there was only the Holy One, blessed be He, and his name."[498] The *Shem ha-Meforash* is not derivative of anything else. The absolute existence of *YHWH* implies that God shall always be, for God is "necessarily existent."[499] Maimonides explained that the existence of everything else is predicated by the existence of *YHWH*; thus the *Shem ha-Meforash* is the necessary existent of creation.

All other names, however, have been derived from something and therefore indicate attributes. Derivative names evolve from relating a certain action to God or directing the mind toward God's perfection.[500] The medieval philosophers maintained that attributes are applied to two substances: essential and accidental. Essential attributes are those which are closely connected with the essence or existence of life; whereas accidental attributes are those that are lacking connection to the essence and can thus be altered without affecting the essence (such as anger or mercifulness). Accidental attributes are attributes of action. For example, if it is said that God is merciful, it must be interpreted that God acts mercifully. The distinction here is not only implying that we can know and describe God only through God's actions, but that God must be described through human perception of these Divine actions. Maimonides believed that humanity could not rationally explain or describe God;

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[497] Maimonides (1:61), p. 148.
[498] Maimonides cites Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, III in "*The Guide*" 1:61, p. 149.
[499] *Ibid.*(1:63), p. 156.

we could merely attribute what we know of God through our experience of God's actions in the world. Similarly, essential attributes cannot be known. Rather, they must be interpreted and described as negative attributes, that which simply is merely because it is not its opposite.[501] For example, if it is said that God exists, it should be interpreted that God does not *not* exist.

With the exception of *YHWH*, the names of God were derived to correspond to actions existing in the world. Each name was assigned a particular meaning related to an action.[502] Paralleling Saadiah Gaon, Maimonides upheld the interpretation that the name *Shaddai* derives from the letter *shin* indicating "who" and the word "*dai*" meaning sufficient.[503] Thus, *Shaddai* means "He who is sufficient." However, the philosophical ideas behind the grammatical interpretations of these two Jewish thinkers is slightly different. Saadiah believed that *Shaddai* was a descriptive modifier of *El,* suggesting that the mighty one (*El*) sufficiently provides for the world. Maimonides believed that the name *Shaddai* was suggestive of the "necessary being" (*hiuv ha-m'tziyut*), the idea that God does not need anything other than Godself. God's existence is necessary for the existence of everything else, but the truth that God exists is sufficient.[504] The existent God is an essential attribute, for the idea of a non-existent God could not be true. Everything in creation is dependent on an existent God. Thus God is the necessary being for all existence. The name *Shaddai,* according to Maimonides, notes the sufficiency of God's existence in the world.

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[500] *Ibid.* (1:61), p. 148.
[501] It is important to note the possible influence of Ha-Levi's concept of negative attributes.
[502] Maimonides (1:61), p. 149.
[503] "For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and more" (Ex. 36:7).
[504] Maimonides (1:63), p. 155.

Maimonides makes no reference to the name *El.*[505] In fact, other than his explanation of *Shaddai,* he only expounds on two additional appellations or epithets for God.[506] Maimonidies posited that *Elyon* could not be an appellation or epithet of God, but rather, referred to the greatness of God.[507] The absence of additional names serves to emphasize Maimonides' belief that all we can know is the essence of God represented by the *Shem Ha-Meforash.* His explanation of *Shaddai* exemplified how other names serve as attributes to describe the Divine. The sufficiency of God's existence does not describe God's essence, but rather affirms the necessary existent in accepting the act of creation.

MOSES NAHMANIDES (1194-1270)[508]

Moses Nahmanides was one of the later biblical commentators and leading Jewish figures of the Middle Ages. As a philosopher, kabbalist, poet, and physician, the Ramban added an interesting lens through which he interpreted traditional text. Ramban wrote most of his commentary on the Tanakh during his famous disputations in Barcelona against the apostate, Pablo Christiani. As he disputed the principles of the Jewish faith against Christiani, Nahmanides concretized many of his beliefs and much of his philosophy. After the disputations, Nahmanides was forced to flee Spain and emigrate to Israel. His vast experience in diverse areas added to the depth of his work. The purpose

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[505] He only once refers to *Elohim* as one of many examples of derivative attributes of *YHWH. Ibid.* (I:67), p. 147.

[506] Maimonides states the "*Tzur*" represents the attribute of reliance, being "the efficient cause of all things other than himself" in , *The Guide* (I:16, I:64) p. 42,156. Similarly "*Hassin,*" he believed derived from the notion of power (I:64), p. 156.

[507] *Ibid.*, (I:20). He asserted that since God has no body, God cannot be described in terms of higher (*Elyon*).

[508] Known in rabbinical literature as "Ramban," from the acronym Rabbi Moses Ben Nahman.

of his commentary was "to appease the minds of the students, weary through exile and trouble."[509]

Nahmanides suggested that Divine names symbolize aspects of Divine revelation. In this commentary, Ramban discussed his philosophy of Divine revelation in terms of hidden and overt miracles. Hidden miracles are natural events which occur at unnatural times. "...they are all miracles by which the disposition of natural law is overpowered, except that no change from the natural order of the world is noticeable."[510] For example, Ramban explained the blessings and curses mentioned in the Torah portions, *Bechukotai* and *Ki Tavo* as hidden miracles. "If you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments, and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit."[511] The Torah blatantly states that the rain and harvest are determined by God. What appears natural is actually a miraculous act. In contrast, all miracles which cannot be denied, those which blatantly defy the laws of nature, are considered overt miracles. In such a case, the "*shem ha'm'yuhed*" (the special name of God)[512] was employed. For example, the miraculous events surrounding Moses' life were orchestrated by none other than the "*shem ha'm'yuhed*" (a.k.a. *YHWH*): Aaron's rod turning into a serpent and eating the serpent-rods of the Pharaoh's magicians,[513] the ten plagues,[514] dividing of the sea, the manna, etc. The use of *YHWH* suggests that by this

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[509] *Encyclopedia Judaica*. CD-ROM Edition. (Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd., 1997), s.v. "Nahmanides."

[510] *Ramban, Commentary on the Torah*. Rabbi Charles B. Chavel, trans. (New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc., 1973), p. 215.

[511] Lev. 26:3-4.

[512] Referring to the tetragrammaton.

[513] Ex. 7:8-12.

[514] Ex. 7:19-20.

name, I will deal wondrously with them[515] and they will know that "I am *YHWH* that makes all things..."[516]

Ramban borrowed Rashi's idea that the difference between *El Shaddai* and *YHWH* was related to the fulfillment of promises. Whereas *YHWH,* God's attribute of keeping faith was not known to them, *El Shaddai* made many promises to the Patriarchs, but did not carry them through during their lifetimes.[517] The use of the tetragrammaton denotes that "I am certain to fulfill the words of my promise."[518] Ramban noted that even though *YHWH* was not known to the Patriarchs by fulfilling a promise, *El Shaddai* did not indicate a lack of keeping faith. He suggested that although the time for the fulfillment of the promise (entering the promised land) did not arrive in their lifetimes, the promise was ultimately fulfilled. Ramban also responded to Saadiah's reading of the verse as "*u'b shmi*" ("but by my name, *YHWH*, I was not made known to them")[519] instead of "*u'shmi*" ("and my name *YHWH* was not known to them"). Ramban further explicated the grammar of the verse to say that the two *vov*'s preceding "*v'lo noda*" and "*u'shmi YHWH*" indicate two separate statements. "My name is *YHWH*" (which denotes certainty in the fulfillment of a Divine promise) and "I was not made known to them by that name." (since I made promises to them but did not fulfill them).[520]

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[515] Joel 2:26. "And you shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you..."

[516] Isa. 44:24.

[517] Rashi's commentary on Ex. 6:3 says "I did not carry them [the promises] during *his* [referring to Abraham's] lifetime (*Mekrot Gedolot*).

[518] *Ibid.*.

[519] Ramban also read "*noda*" (was known) as "*hodati*" (made known).

[520] Ramban's commentary on Ex. 6:3. It is difficult to ignore the blatant error in this interpretation. Just as God did not fulfill the promise to the Patriarchs during their lifetimes, God did not fulfill the promise to Moses of leading the Jews to the promised land while Moses was alive.

In contrast to Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the meaning and function of *El Shaddai* as a single name for God, Ramban understood the reference to *El Shaddai* as alluding to two distinct names - "*El*" denoting "mighty," which he determined from the expression "*Elei Moab*" (the mighty ones of Moab),[521] and *Shaddai* representing the attribute of power which conducts the world. Ramban continued just after this definition to link *Shaddai* with "the attribute of justice of the world below."[522] By this connection, one could infer that *Shaddai* represents justice, the power which controls the universe.

In accordance with Ibn Ezra, however, Ramban interpreted *Shaddai,* and not the rule of a star or constellation, as the victor (*ha'minatzeah*) who would prevail over the his future. "*Shaddai* will prevail over the hosts of heaven doing great miracles with no noticeable change to the natural world order."[523]

On a slightly different note, Ramban explained that each prophet perceived of God differently. He disagreed with Ibn Ezra's interpretation that the name the prophets used to address God reflected their awareness of prophecy. Ibn Ezra stated that *El Shaddai* is used by one who prophesies but does not know it. The Talmud suggested that any prophet other than Moses was not really prophesying altogether. "All prophets contemplated Deity through a dim glass but Moses contemplated God through a clear glass."[524] Ramban interpreted this passage to mean that other prophets might think they saw God, but in reality only Moses correctly conceived of God. However, Nahmanides also noted that the prophesies of the Patriarchs came to them "in the visions of the

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[521] Ex. 15:15.
[522] Gen. Rabb. 35:4.
[523] Ramban's commentary on Ex. 6:3.
[524] Yevamoth 49b.

night."[525] Rather than discounting the experience of God by the other prophets, Ramban suggested that the way in which God approached the prophets is the demarcating factor of prophecy. God appeared to the Patriarchs. "And when Abram was ninety nine years old, *YHWH* appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am *El Shaddai*..."[526] To Moses, God spoke face to face. "And *YHWH* spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."[527] "And there has not arisen since in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"[528] However, there is one account combining the "appearance" of God and the "face to face" encounter with the Divine. After Jacob wrestled with the angel, God spoke to him and changed his name.

> And he said, Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince you have power with God and with men, and have prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I beg you, your name. And he said, Why is it that you ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.[529]

Jacob saw "*Elohim*" face to face, yet named the place "*Peniel.*" The interchangeably between *El* and *Elohim* suggest that they are synonymous. The stark parallel between *YHWH* and *El/Elohim* interacting face to face with a prophet is also undeniable within the Biblical text itself. However, after examining the uses of *El, Shaddai,* and *El Shaddai,* Ramban implied that *El* and *Shaddai* are related to "appearing" or "seeing" God; whereas the use of *YHWH* relates to "talking" or "knowing" God.

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[525] Gen. 46:2.
[526] Gen. 17:1. cf. 12:7; 18:1; 26: 2, 4; 35:1, 7, 9; 48:3.
[527] Ex. 33:11.
[528] Deut. 34: 10.
[529] Gen. 32:29-31.

Names reveal how God communicates to people and how people perceive this communication. Each prophet perceived of God differently, each called God by a specific name (not always the by the same name), thus reflecting that each had a different relationship with God. "Talking" or "knowing" *YHWH* indicates an intimate connection, like that of a lover or close friend; whereas "seeing" God or having God "appear" to the prophet indicates a more vague and distant relationship, like that appearing through a dream or "a lucid speculum."[530] Ramban noted that the mystical tradition believed that *YHWH* appeared to the Patriarchs through the lucid speculum of *El Shaddai,* but did not make Himself known to them as *YHWH*, for they did not contemplate God in such a way so that they should know God.[531] In other words, Ramban explained, the Patriarchs did indeed know the name of God, not through prophecy, rather through the Divine attribute of justice. For God interacted with the Patriarchs through justice. But with Moses, the Divine conduct was expressed through the attribute of mercy which was indicated by the use of the tetragrammaton.

JOSEPH ALBO (1380-1444)

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[530] Yev. 49b. Also metaphorically understood as "prophetic vision" (*Dictionary of the Talmud,* compiled by M. Jastrow. (New York: Verlog Choreb, 1926), p. 96.

[531] Yev. 49b.

Joseph Albo was confronted with different issues during his day. It was no longer necessary to prove the existence of an incorporeal God, for the topic had already been widely discussed and was largely accepted. He possessed a wide knowledge of both rabbinic literature and Jewish philosophy. He was also at home in Islamic philosophy (probably through Hebrew versions) and in Latin Christian scholasticism, notably Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica.* In addition, he was versed in mathematics and medicine.

Albo, like Nahmanides, lived during a time of religious disputations and forced conversions. His most influential work, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* (The Book of Principles) reflects his troubled reaction to the wavering of faith among his fellow Jews. He felt the need to restore the morale of his people by offering them a reasoned presentation of Judaism. He sought to illustrate that the basic teachings of the Jewish religion bore the essential character of a "Divine law." *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* is divided into four parts or *ma'amarim* ("treatises"): Principles, Dogmas, Derivative Principles, and Kinds of Law. The three fundamental principles of Divine law, according to Albo, the existence of God, Divine revelation, and reward and punishment. In a later treatise, Albo discussed eight *shorashim* ("derivative principles") which followed from these three principles. According to Albo, these principles and their derivatives formed the indispensable elements of the Divine Law, thus proving the validity and superiority of Judaism.

Albo discussed the names of God in his second book which focuses on his first principle, namely, the existence of God. The discussion of Divine names are introduced near the end of the book in between the chapters discussing the words *"nimtza"* (existent)

and "*emet*" (truth) as attributes of God[532] and the word "*or*" (light) as an appropriate explanation of God.[533] Though neither of these surrounding chapters mention that these words should be used as Divine appellations, they both express how these words (*nimtza, emet,* and *or*) express undeniable characteristics which can similarly be attributed to God. For example, Albo wrote that just as light is not corporeal and causes colors to pass from potentiality to actuality, delighting the soul, so, too, does the incorporeal God cause things to pass from potentiality to actuality, delighting the those who try to apprehend the Divine as much as possible.

It follows that Albo's discussion of the names of God was centered in his belief that certain words are used to express the existence of God. With one exception, Albo posited that the names for God are derived from metaphors expressing Divine activities or other aspects of God's being, "other than God's necessary existent."[534] Like his predecessors, Albo identified one and only name which referred to the necessary existent, the *Shem ha-Meforash* (*YHWH*) as separate from all other appellations for God.[535]

As the *Shem ha-Meforash* relates directly to Albo's first principle, all the additional metaphoric names for God are related to his two remaining principles and their *shorashim* (derivative principles): Divine revelation and reward and punishment. In accordance with the metaphoric attribution of the names, these appellations can be anthropomorphically ascribed to beings other than God. For example, *Elohim,* according

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[532] Joseph Albo, *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim (Book of Principles),* vol. II. Isaac Husik, ed. and trans. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1929), pp. 165-72.

[533] *Ibid.*, pp. 187-196.

[534] *Ibid.*, pp. 173.

[535] *Ibid.* Albo referred to the *Shem ha-Meforash* as the "separate name," as he explained that *YHWH* is "the name that is peculiar to Me."

to Albo, denotes power, and can also be attributed to angles or judges. Similarly, *aleph dalet nun yod* signifies lordship of the Divine, as well as of master to a slave. Albo justified the metaphoric use of names in two ways. First, there is a similarity, though remote, between two things: the name/metaphoric image and the thing which it is describing. Second, the name points to the thing in question, "as an instrument points to the owner of the instrument."[536]

Albo did not deal with the names *Shaddai* and *El* directly. One might attribute this oversight to Albo's primary focus on Rabbinic texts and earlier philosophers. As mentioned earlier, Albo was interested in the existence of God. Thus he focused primarily on the *Shem ha-Meforash* as an expression of his first principle. He gave only three examples of metaphoric names relating to Divine attributes or actions: *Elohim, Adonai,* and *Shekhinah.* In addition, he used the names, *Shem ha-Meforash* and *Shem Yitbarakh.* The former names were names taken from the *Tanakh* and expounded upon in tremendous detail in later Rabbinic texts; whereas the latter two names were introduced in Rabbinic texts[537] and regularly adopted by the medieval Jewish philosophers. Thus, as time drifted from the Biblical era to the later Middle Ages, the oldest names of God had apparently lost their independent significance. Their influence was lessened by the rabbinic period to the point that by the 15th century, *El* and *Shaddai* were but a vestige of the past.

Relational Analysis

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[536] *Ibid.*, p. 175.
[537] Mishna Yoma 6:2; TB Yoma 66a, 69b.

These medieval Jewish philosophers illustrated how the names of God represent different meanings and functions related to the unity of God. Most of these Jewish thinkers explained Divine names as descriptions or attributes of God for God's sake. Saadiah, Maimonides, Ibn Ezra, and Albo, for example, all believed that Divine names were assigned not to describe what God is, but how God acts in the world. Saadiah specified that Divine names relate directly to the qualities of God associated with creation; whereas Maimonides suggested that Divine names relate to all essential or accidental attributes associated with God's existence. According to Saadiah, *Shaddai* represents the quality of life which sufficiently provides for the world, and *El* represents the quality of power, emphasizing God's strength in the world. According to Maimonides, God is not "*Ha Rahaman*" (the Merciful One), "*Ha'Din*" (The Judge), or "*Tzur*" (the Rock); rather, God acts mercifully, judges humanity, and is the reliable, efficient cause of all existence.[538] Maimonides, and later Albo, affirmed that the *Shem Ha-Meforash* represents the one certainty of faith that God exists, has existed and will continue to exist and is, hence, the necessary existent. *Shaddai* is an essential attribute confirming that God's existence is sufficient. All of these names represent the faith in God's existence and describe what God does, yet still do not reveal or define what God is, merely *that* God is. Similarly, Ibn Ezra interpreted the use of Divine names as a sign of what God can do. *El Shaddai* represents the power God has over the constellations; whereas the name *Shaddai* alone signifies a victory over a difficult situation,[539] or over one's enemies.

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[538] Maimonides (I:16), p. 42.

[539] As in the case of Sarah's barrenness.

In contrast to these four Jewish thinkers, Ha-Levi and Nahmanides interpreted Divine names as indicators of Divine-human relationships. They discussed how the specific names of God reveal the ways in which God and humanity interact, not simply the ways in which God acts independently of the world. Though neither Ha-Levi nor Ramban explicitly stated the connection between the names of God and Divine-human relationships, their discussions and interpretations of Divine names suggested that Divine names relate directly to the manner which humanity perceives God and God reveals Godself to humanity. Ha-Levi stated that names do not reflect God's actions, but how God's actions affect humanity. He provided the example of Adam naming God based on what God did for him, namely create; thus, Ha-Levi stated that *Elohim,* the name attributed to God by Adam, means "Creator." Similarly, *El Shaddai*, the name by which God affects the Patriarchs, reveals God's presence of power and dominion. According to Ha-Levi, the names also reveal how people understand and know God. *YHWH*, the name revealing God's essence, was made know to Moses and the Jewish people because they doubted God (i.e., they did not yet know God's essence). By revealing God's name as *YHWH*, the people were made aware of God's essence. Ha-Levi believed that the Patriarchs already knew God's essence (i.e., knew God by the name of *YHWH*) and were furthering their relationship with God by learning what God does for them (through the name *El Shaddai*).

Similarly, Ramban associated the various names of God with the various manners of Divine-human communication. He believed that Divine names symbolized both how God reveals Godself to humanity and how humanity perceives God. God reveals Godself through hidden and overt miracles (i.e., natural or supernatural events which occur in the world). The use of the name *El Shaddai* is associated with hidden miracles; whereas the

use of the name *YHWH* is associated with overt miracles. Thus, we can infer from this interpretation that names are precursors to how God is going to communicate to people. If *YHWH* speaks to Moses, we can assume that *YHWH* will perform an overt miracle. Or if the rain falls during the winter, we can assume the work of *El Shaddai* is upon us.

Ramban also focused on the difference in *El Shaddai's* "appearing" to the Patriarchs and *YHWH's* "speaking" to Moses. As mentioned earlier, *YHWH's* "speech" and Moses' "knowing *YHWH*" indicates a closer, more intimate relationship, whereas *El Shaddai's* appearance indicates a more distant relationship between God and the Patriarchs.[540] In this case, we can see a connection between the name of God and the verb used to express the relationship between God and humanity.

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[540] Ibn Ezra also alluded to this distance when he commented on the difference between *El Shaddai*, controlling the constellations, and *YHWH* working with Moses to create the miracles in Egypt and in the desert. The former name indicates action at a distance - God making things happen for the Patriarchs - whereas the latter name indicates reciprocal participation - God acting through Moses. Ibn Ezra's commentary on Ex. 6:3 (*Mikrot Gedolot*).

Conclusion

> And *Elohim* said moreover to Moses, Thus shall you say to the people of Israel, *YHWH*, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you; this is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations.[541]

Divine names have memorialized the relationship between humanity and the Divine throughout the ages. However, it has been said that "God is essentially nameless, transcending any designation that humanity can apply to God."[542] Though the meaning and function of the names may change over time, one thing is certain. The prevalence of Divine appellations throughout Jewish texts reveals the human need to identify God in order to know and understand the Divine. God may transcend all names, but humanity cannot. Thus in order to foster a relationship between God and humanity for all time, humanity has created various Divine appellations. Philo, in discussing the God's reply to Moses's request for God's name, said that God created the names for Himself for that very reason.

> ...God indeed needs no name; yet, though He needed not, He nevertheless vouchsafed to give to humankind a name of Himself suited to them, that man might be able to take refuge in his prayers and supplications and not be deprived of comforting hopes.[543]

Of the Divine appellations which this thesis traced through various biblical, rabbinic, and medieval texts, there have been many consistencies and inconsistencies to note. Though *El* and some of the *El* compounds maintained some significance throughout the different texts, the appearance of *El* and *El* compounds was most extensive in the Tanakh. Yet even within the Tanakh, there was evidence of the

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[541] Ex. 3:15.

diminishing use of the names. By the rabbinic period, the Rabbis focused on epithets rather than appellations because of their conviction in the one God. According to Ephraim E. Urbach, the Sages believed that "God's names bear testimony to His attributes and deeds and His relationship to man."[544] In addition, the Rabbis maintained that Divine names signified human perceptions of the Divine personality.

> Names of God have retained their place in advanced Jewish monotheism not merely as survivals of earlier and less developed religious views but also as indispensable designations of the personality of the Divine and as compact attributes of His nature.[545]

The medieval Jewish philosophers emphasized not only the one God, but the unity of an incorporeal God. They maintained that God could not be described in terms of a personality or behavior; rather God could only be discussed in terms of the reality of God's existence and how God manifested the Divine presence in the world. "...Instead of being proper names of God, in the customary sense of the word, they simply point to His reality and His effects."[546]

It should then come as no surprise that the *El* compounds diminished in use in the rabbinic texts, and disappeared completely by the Middle Ages. *El Olam* only occurred once in the Tanakh and was cited once in the Talmud. *Olam,* as a Divine epithet, never appeared on its own in any of the texts. Thus, this *El* compound would not signify a memorial for God for all times, but rather, would suggest one of the many uses for *El* in the Tanakh. *El Elyon,* on the other hand, appeared fairly consistently in the Tanakh (with the exception of the book of Job). *Elyon* also appeared on its own, often paralleling or

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[542] Cohon, p. 582.
[543] Cohon cites Josephus (*Against Apion,* II, 167, 190-91; *On Abraham,* 51), pp. 581-82.
[544] Urbach, p. 37.
[545] Cohon, p. 582.
[546] *Ibid.*, p. 583.

contrasting *El* or *Shaddai.* In rabbinic literature, *El Elyon* was cited only once in the Mishna and six times in the Talmud. *Elyon* on its own, however, was employed more often in the Talmud. The concept of *Elyon,* rather than an indication of a Divine epithet or appellation, appeared in the Medieval works of Maimonides as one of the many descriptions which could not adequately describe God. *El Shaddai* was the most popular *El* compound in the Tanakh, as well as in the Mishna and Talmud (as biblical citations). In all texts, *Shaddai* appeared more often on its own than as an *El* compound. Some biblical scholars considered *Shaddai* to represent a different God altogether; whereas the Rabbis and philosophers treated *Shaddai* as a representation of a Divine attribute or action. In the majority of occurrences in all three literatures, *El* appeared on its own and was attributed significance of its own.

Meaning of El and El Compounds

El was interpreted as "the Strong and Mighty One" both in the Tanakh and by some of the medieval philosophers.[547] In the Psalms and the book of Job, *El* was often associated with judgment on the side of the wicked. This association carried through to the Mishna and the Talmud, where *El* was often portrayed as or compared to a Judge. The biblical and rabbinic literature also both commonly used *El* to hearken back to the days of Old, or to refer to foreign gods or idols; whereas the medieval philosophers did not conceptualize such a tangible God.

As for the *El* compounds, (*El*) *Elyon* was associated with knowledge in the Balaam Oracles and in the Psalms, as well as in the Talmud.

El Shaddai maintained its connection to the Patriarchs in all three textual sources. In addition to *El Shaddai's* original appearance in the Patriarchal narrative, the appellation appeared in other places in the Tanakh and in the Talmud in reference to the God of the Patriarchs. Ibn Ezra suggested that not only was *El Shaddai* the God of the Patriarchs, but was the God who controlled the stars (the course of events) for the Patriarchs. Ha-Levi suggested that *El Shaddai* reflected God's appearance to the Patriarchs by way of power and dominion.

In the Tanakh, *El* and the *El* compounds carried additional meanings which were not discussed in the rabbinic or medieval texts. *El* often alluded to the Supreme God and original name of the God of the Israelites which eventually became known as *YHWH*. *El* was also portrayed as the Savior and the God who heard the prayers of the people. *El Olam* referred to the Everlasting God or the Ancient God. *El Elyon* referred to the Most High God, who was also the Creator of Heaven and Earth. *El Shaddai* was associated with blessings related to progeny and land. These additional meanings for the Divine appellations are consistent with the biblical trend of multiple gods. Whereas these *El* compounds could be referring to different gods in the Tanakh, the rabbinic and medieval literature rejected this concept. The Mishna and Talmud added new epithets to reflect various Divine attributes; whereas the medieval philosophers interpreted pre-existing appellations or epithets in terms of Divine actions or attributes.

The philosophers took a particular interest in *Shaddai* as significant on its own. Saadiah understood *Shaddai* as representing the Divine function of providing for or maintaining the world. Ha-Levi, like many biblical translations, interpreted *Shaddai* as a

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[547] Saadiah and Nahmanides.

creative attribute for might and strength. Maimonides believed that *Shaddai* was expressing the belief that God's existence was sufficient.

Function of El and El Compounds

In both the biblical and rabbinic texts, *El* functioned as a generic appellation of God; whereas *El* was also considered a proper name for God in the Tanakh. In contrast, *El* functioned neither as a generic appellation nor a proper name for God in the medieval philosophic interpretations. The philosophers either discussed *El* in terms of an attribute or representative of a Divine action, or did not mention the term at all. In the Mishna and the Talmud, *El* often introduced an attribute of God rather than represented one itself. For example, when the philosophers used *El* to signify God's strength, the Rabbis used "*El gibbor*" (God of Strength).

The biblical and rabbinic texts also both used *El* in liturgical formulations. In addition, *El* and *El* compounds were used in spontaneous outcries to God in the Tanakh; whereas they were only used in formulated blessings in the Talmud.

There is one reference in the Talmud where *El Elyon* functioned as the official name of God which appeared on bonds and loan documents.

Divine-Human Relationships

In both the Tanakh and some of the medieval philosophic writings, *El* and the *El* compounds signified various aspects of Divine-human relationships. A dichotomy regarding the relationship between *El* and humanity can be found in the Tanakh. On the

one hand, the Tanakh presented *El* as a transcendent God, having little to do with humanity. At some points, *El* even needed an intermediary (either *Elohim* or *YHWH*) to communicate directly with humanity. The biblical characters would often talk about *El* or offer prayers to *El*, but *El* did not respond.[548] On the other hand, some of the most intimate Divine-human encounters happened at *Beth-El*, and humanity credited *El* for the encounter.

Of the six medieval philosophers, two of them interpreted Divine names as indicators of Divine human relationships. Ha-Levi believed that names revealed how God's actions affected humanity, thus every Divine name which is used indicates a Divine-human interaction. Nachmanides believed that Divine names symbolized both how God reveals Godself to humanity and how humanity perceives that revelation. The manner in which God communicates with a person suggests the type of relationship God has with a person. Because *El* appeared and was seen through visions or dreams, the name *El* indicated a more distant relationship between humanity and the Divine.[549]

In the Mishna and the Talmud, these Divine appellations provided no insight into Divine-human relationships because *El* and *El* compounds were so often used in biblical citations or referring to biblical situations. They aided in illustrating the rabbinic concepts of God and how humanity should act in order to acquire merits from God. They did not, on their own, demonstrate how the Rabbis perceived Divine-human relationships.

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[548] With the exception of *El Beth-El* and *El Shaddai*. However, even with *El Shaddai*, either *Elohim*, or *YHWH* initiated the conversation, e.g., "And *YHWH* appeared to Abraham and said, 'I am *El Shaddai*..." (Gen. 17:1).

[549] In contrast to *YHWH*, who spoke to and was known by humanity (Moses). This direct contact suggests a more intimate relationship.

In conclusion, *El* and *El* compounds had distinct meaning and functions in the biblical, rabbinic, and philosophic texts. Though some of those meanings and functions overlapped in two of the literatures, nothing was consistent all the way through. These inconsistencies can be explained based on the various philosophies and outside influences of the different times. There was some indication that names revealed Divine-human relationships, but not enough evidence to sustain a solid theory. Regardless of their differences, the use of *El* and *El* compounds in the various texts suggests that there is great significance in the meaning and function of Divine names in terms of humanity's understanding and knowledge of God.

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