“YOU ARE THE ONE WHO FILLS ALL NAMES, BUT YOU YOURSELF HAVE NO SPECIFIC NAME”: PROJECTION AND THE PERSONAL GOD IN THE THEOLOGY OF ARTHUR GREEN

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Summary

This rabbinical thesis explores the theology of Arthur Green (b. 1941) as expressed in his popular theological trilogy. In particular, it explores the role of projection in Green's notion of the personal God.

Green describes his theology of mystical panentheism as "monistic"—that is, non-dualistic. Nevertheless, Green remains committed to the classical Jewish "mythology of relationship"—the claim that God cares for and makes demands of humankind. In a non-dualist system—where there is no separation between self and God—such a claim is counterintuitive.

The goal of this thesis is explore how Green bridges the divide between monism and the mythology of relationship.

Chapter 1 explores the fundamentals of Green's theological system. Chapter 2 seeks to understand how Green's non-dual God is approached in relationship.

Primarily, this thesis relies on Green's popular theological trilogy: *Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology* (2003), *EHYEH: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow* (2004), and *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition* (2010).

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Abstract

This rabbinical thesis explores the thought of Arthur Green (b. 1941) as expressed primarily in his popular theological trilogy: *Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology* (2003), *EHYEH: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow* (2004), and *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition* (2010). In particular, it explores the role of projection in Green's notion of the personal God.

Chapter 1 explores the fundamentals of Green's theological system. Green presents a theology of mystical panentheism, wherein God is present in every bit of matter and every wave of energy in the universe, and wherein the total is greater than the sum of its parts. All parts are connected in the underlying Oneness of All Being. That Oneness is expressed on two levels: "the higher unity," the level on which all things are fundamentally the same, and "the lower unity," the level on which all things are fundamentally different. Since both the higher and the lower unity express that all things share a fundamental quality (sameness or differentness), the two unities are understood to be one: the Oneness of All Being. In classical Jewish language, the Oneness of All Being is expressed by the divine name Y-H-W-H (*yod-heh-vav-heh*), which Green approximates as "Is-Was-Will Be." Since all things are united in the Oneness of All Being (that which theologians typically refer to as "God"), Green's theology is understood to be monistic: that is, non-dualistic. There is no separation between the self, the world, and God—only a difference of perspective.

Despite his monistic vision, Green remains committed to the classical Jewish "mythology of relationship"—the claim that "God" (or for Green, "the One of All

Being") cares for and makes demands of humankind. In a non-dualist system—where there is no separation between the self and God—such a claim is counterintuitive.

Chapter 2 seeks to understand how Green's non-dual God is approached in relationship. Green recognizes that theological systems are conflicted over whether God is knowable or unknowable. This conflict between intimacy and abstraction is expressed in biblical language as the conflict between whether God's face can or cannot be seen. Green argues that Y-H-W-H—which is at once Israel's personal name for God and at the same time represents Is-Was-Will Be—serves as a bridge between intimacy and abstraction. Our concrete, intimate name for God is the slippery abstraction "Is-Was-Will Be." Said differently: "You are the One who fills all names, but You Yourself have no specific name."

Building on this insight, Green argues that all the names, images, and metaphors we use to approach God are projections that arise in response to the needs of the hour. Each one paints a partial picture of God, and serves to make the abstract more intimate. But each one is only a partial picture. God is greater than them any one of them; or rather, God (the One of All Being) is the sum of them all.

But the work of projection should not be misunderstood as a merely human endeavor. The One of All Being expresses itself in a variety of forms, but desires to be known by its constituent parts as a unified whole; thus, the One wants humans to project images onto it, in order that humans may come to know it, however partially. Said differently: God creates humans and humans create God. Green understands these two truths not as contradictory, but rather as two modes of understanding. The later ("humans create God") corresponds to the rational/discursive mode of understanding, while the

former (“God creates humans”) corresponds to the poetic/prophetic. While Green believes that both modes of understanding represent forms of truth, his religious commitments cause him to maintain that the poetic/prophetic represents a “deeper” kind of truth.

The main body of this thesis concludes the way that Green’s trilogy begins, with a parable by Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav, “A Portrait of the King.” This parable articulates in narrative form the religious seeker’s journey, the discovery of monism, and the notion that every human life—indeed, each expression of variety in the universe—is a unique expression of the One, “A Portrait of the King.”

Finally, in the Conclusion, I present the implications of Green’s monistic vision for the categories of Torah, Israel, and God. I read these implications through the lens of Green’s critics: Daniel Landes, David Wolpe, Yehudah Mirsky, and Shaul Magid.

Chapter 1: Understanding the Problem

Green defines his theology as "mystical panentheism."[1] In this chapter, I will define that terminology, present an overview of relevant features of his theological landscape ("the higher and lower unity" and Y-H-W-H), and explore the term "monism" and its implications. This chapter will conclude with Green's notion of Judaism as a "mythology of relationship." I will hope to demonstrate the there is an natural conflict between "monism" and the "mythology of relationship." Hence, we will come to understand why the notion of a personal God is problematic in Green's theology.

Mystical Panentheism: "God is the place of the world, and the world is not God's place" (Bereshit Rabbah 68:9)

Green writes: "The basic teaching of mystics … is essentially this simple message: There is only One."[2] All parts of the universe—matter, energy, animate life, inanimate material, human thought and feeling—though they may all appear to the human eye to be distinct and disparate, are united. "The 'One' … is the single unifying substratum of all that is."[3] Green's unitive beliefs are well illustrated by the texts that frame *Seek My Face*: it opens with a meditation on the *Shema* (all is *echad*—"one") and it concludes with a meditation on *Aleinu L'shabeiach* (*bayom hahu, yihyeh YHWH echad,*

[1] Green, Arthur. *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 18.
[2] Green, Arthur. *EHYEH: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 19.
[3] *Radical Judaism*, 19.

u'shmo echad—"on that day, God shall be one, and God's name shall be one.") Green believes that the entirety of the universe is united in a One: God.

To illustrate his understanding of mysticism, Green uses the following parable of the Ba'al Shem Tov:

> A great king sought to test his beloved son, to see if he would truly seek him out. He created the optical illusion of a beautiful palace. All who came to see the king, it was announced, would have to come through that palace. One person came to see the king and got only to the outer courtyards. There he came upon barrels of silver coins, glistening in the sunlight. They were so beautiful that he turned aside to gaze upon them and to touch them. He is there still, playing with his silver coins. Another was stronger, and he traversed the outer courtyards until he came to the chambers within. But there he found vessels of pure gold so lovely that he could not take his eyes from them. He is there to this day, staring at the gold. One by one the visitors were turned aside by the beauties of the palace. But then the king's true son came along. He saw immediately that the palace was all illusion, that there was nothing there but the king himself.[4]

In this parable, "the palace" refers to the entire universe, "the king" refers to God, and "the king's true son" refers to the religious mystic. Though "one person" or "another" may think that the palace is filled with lovely "silver coins" or "gold coins," only the religious mystic recognizes that all the beauties (and also the troubles) of the universe are but expressions of God's own self. "*All* is God."[5]

From a more technical point of view, Green writes:

> Mysticism is generally taken to describe a certain category of religious experiences, and secondarily all the theology, textual sources, religious movements, and so forth that derive from them. … Mystics share with other religious people an intense awareness of Divine Presence and a constant readiness to respond to that presence in both prayer and action. For the mystic, that presence is revealed through powerful and transformative inner experiences. These seem to come from a source that lies beyond the ordinary human mind; they are usually understood as a divine gift, as a source of special favor or grace, as an act of revelation. The intensity of these experiences lends a sense that the consciousness

[4] *EHYEH*, 19-20.
[5] Green, Arthur. *Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003), 7.

> they represent is a deeper source of ultimate truth than ordinary or 'external' human experience.[6]

The above paragraph demonstrates that by "mystical," Green refers to a way of understanding the world (that All is One), which is often based on a particularly powerful experience of the world. Humans do not ordinarily experience the world as if All is One; mystics may have had such an intense experience on a number of occasions; their worldview is shaped by those experiences.

Green writes that mysticism can be distinguished from other religious forms by three faith claims: (1) God is knowable, (2) creation is ongoing, and (3) the universe is an emanation of God. (1) God is knowable: "Creation begins not with the material world, but with the emergence of the knowable, personal God out of the mystery of Divine Oneness."[7] (2) Creation is ongoing: "Creation is not a distant one-time event, nor is it a formal theological doctrine to which one must give adherence. Creation may be experienced each day, indeed in every moment."[8] (3) The universe is an emanation of God: "God creates out of God's own self. The flow of energy by which Creation happens comes directly from God. When the mystics encountered the old theological formula claiming that God creates the world *yesh me-ayin*, 'out of nothing,' they agreed, saying that God is the No-thing out of which Creation comes!"[9] These three faith claims combine to make the point: the universe is an expression of God's self, which is revealed and re-revealed to us in every moment; thus, by coming to know the universe, we may come to know God, and come to know that all of the universe is One in God.

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[6] *EHYEH*, 96.
[7] *EHYEH*, 27.
[8] *EHYEH*, 27.
[9] *EHYEH, 27-28.*

Elsewhere, Green hangs this third point (that the universe is an emanation of God) on the phrase *ke-haden qumtsa' di-levushey minney u-veyh*—"like the locust, whose garbing comes forth from his own self" (*Bereshit Rabbah* 21:5). That is to say: the "garments" of creation "come forth from God's own self." The universe is God's clothing, coming forth from God's body.

By "panentheism," Green means: "[the] whole is mysteriously and infinitely greater than the sum of its parts, and cannot be fully known or reduced to its constituent beings."[10]

In defining panentheism, Green returns again and again to a phrase from *Bereshit Rabbah* 68:9: *hu m'kom-o shel olam, v-ein olam-o m'kom-o*—"God is the place of the world, and the world is not God's place."[11] In its original context, that phrase is a comment offered by Rav Huna in the name of Rav Ami on the verse, "And [Jacob] came upon a certain place [*makom*]" (Gen. 28:11)—indicating that *Makom* is a name for God, and tying it to the verse, "See, there is a place (*makom*) near Me" (Ex. 33:21). Green explains his use of the phrase: "[The] One … is infinitely more than the sum of its parts. 'God is the locus of the world,' the Rabbis teach, meaning that the universe exists entirely within God, 'but the world is not God's locus.' God remains transcendent to the universe, a mystery never fully grasped."[12] "The phrase… has long been used to provide justification for Jewish panentheism, the world included or 'located' within the Divine."[13]

Panentheism is distinct from pantheism. Pantheism asserts that "all is God;" pan*en*thism asserts that "God is all and more." Pantheism asserts that the whole is equal

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[10] *Radical Judaism*, 18.
[11] *Seek My Face*, 192; *EHYEH*, 2; *Radical Judaism*, 168.
[12] *EHYEH*, 2.
[13] *Seek My Face*, 193.

to the sum of its parts; pan*en*theism asserts that the whole is *more* than the sum of its parts. Pantheism believes that God is equal to nature; pan*en*theism asserts that God is experienced through nature, but is ultimately more than just nature. Pantheism asserts that "God is the place of the world;" pan*en*theism adds, "and the world is not God's place."

Taken together, "mystical panentheism" asserts that "this underlying oneness of being is accessible to human experience and reveals itself to humans — indeed, it reveals itself everywhere, always."[14] The human may become attuned to this underlying oneness by "a lifting of veils, a shifting of attention to those inner realms of human consciousness where mystics, and not a few poets, have always chosen to abide."[15] Opening oneself to mystical consciousness is matter of experiencing the world differently. "We can find [this underlying oneness] anywhere, wherever the eye is open, and anytime—'Today, if you listen to God's voice' [Ps. 95:7]."[16] (In an endnote, Green notes that this phrase from the Psalms is also used by the rabbis [in Sanhedrin 98a] to answer the question: "When will messiah come?"[17] The comparison between and mystical consciousness and messianic redemption is striking.)

In this way, Green's theological position is not so much an intellectual one as it is an experiential one:

> The 'radical otherness' of God, so insisted upon by Western theology, is not an ontological otherness but an otherness of perspective. To open one's eyes to God is to see Being — the only Being there is — in a radically different way. Such a unitive view of reality is entirely other (*ganz andere*, in theological German) from the way we usually see things, yet it is the same reality that is being viewed.[18]

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[14] *Radical Judaism*, 18.
[15] *Radical Judaism*, 18.
[16] *Seek My Face*, 23.
[17] *Seek My Face*, 204.
[18] *Radial Judaism*, 18.

In theological terms, "radical otherness" is often referred to by the word "transcendence." In Green's mystical panentheism, that term needs to be redefined: "'Transcendence' in the context of such a faith does not refer to a God 'out there' or 'over there' somewhere beyond the universe. … Transcendence means rather that God — or Being — is so fully present in the here and now of each moment that we could not possibly grasp the depth of that presence. Transcendence thus dwells within immanence."[19] "I think of that underlying One in immanent terms, a Being or life force that dwells within the universe and all its forms, rather than a Creator from beyond who forms a world that is 'other' and separate from its own Self."[20]

I would take a moment here to note that Green's understanding of God will likely be highly attractive to the "spiritual, but not religious" set, to borrow language from the 2013 Pew Research Center study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*. Green notes that many spiritual seeks are looking to Eastern traditions for wisdom, even when their own Jewish tradition natively contains within it many of the attractive ideas they seek. He argues that a mystical-panentheistic Judaism may allow for a homecoming of those Eastward-oriented Jews. (Whether Green's theology will be attractive or accepted by Jews who are already religiously engaged—or who are Jews of no religion and are also not spiritual inclined—remains to be seen.) We also see similar mystical-panentheistic trends in religious thought and writing outside of the Jewish world. Scholar of American religion Diana Butler Bass recently published a beautiful book called *Grounded*, in which she expresses a multi-faith vision of "God in the world, not above it."

[19] *Radical Judaism*, 18.
[20] *Radical Judaism*, 21.

We might summarize Green's mystical panentheism "by the ancient phrases that became daily watchwords of the new Hasidic piety: 'The whole earth is filled with [God's] glory! There is no place devoid of [God]!'"[21]

Uniformity and Variety: "The Higher and Lower Unity" (Zohar 1:18b)

Green's theology is structured as a two-pronged model of Oneness. He uses many different terms to describe this two-pronged model. We shall primarily refer to them as the "higher unity" and the "lower unity."[22]

The "higher unity" refers to the level of oneness at which:

> The world makes no difference. Its existence is wholly unreal or totally inconsequential from the point of view of the One. Infinity goes on as though our world, with all its variety and beauty, with all its suffering and crises, makes not the slightest bit of difference. … Our death—and our life—have made no significant ripple in the great ocean of the cosmic One. Only infinity is real here: God of endless cosmic space-time.[23]

The "lower unity" refers to the level of oneness at which:

> Each flower, each blade of grass, each human soul, is a new manifestation of divinity, a new unfolding of the cosmic One that ever reveals itself through its multicolored garments, in each moment taking on new and ever-changing forms of life. In the very variety of life's riches we discover the unity that flows through them all, the divine life that animates all of being. … Each [form of being], real and distinctive in itself, bears witness to the single force of being that animates and unites them all. Existence here is celebrated in variety, in specificity, rather than in vast sameness. This God too represents infinity, but the infinity of One-in-many.[24]

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[21] *Radical Judaism*, 67.
[22] *Seek My Face*, 4-5.
[23] *Seek My Face*, 4.
[24] *Seek My Face*, 5.

Green alternatively refers to the higher and lower unity as: Shema Yisrael and Baruch Shem (drawing on Zohar 1:18b);[25] transcendence and immanence;[26] the inner and outer gates (drawing on Shabbat 31b);[27] *sovev* and *memale*, that which "surrounds" and that which "fills;"[28] the seated figure of God and the dancing figure of God;[29] stasis and movement;[30] formlessness and all forms that exist;[31] being and becoming;[32] noun and verb;[33] *eyn sof* and the light it gives forth[34] (alternatively, *eyn sof* and the *sefirot*);[35] *ayin* and *yesh*;[36] the oneness of silence and the multiplicity of words;[37] and others. The higher unity is the level on which all things are fundamentally the same; the lower unity is the level on which all things are fundamentally different. Green writes:

> The transcendent God [higher unity] is entirely faceless. This God is none other than *Eyn Sof*—that which is without limit, without end, without definition: God as mystery. The God who fills the world [lower unity] has a thousand, a million, a billion infinite faces. Changing in every moment as the world develops and grows, as generations come and go in the seemingly endless cycle of birth and death, it is both mother and father of these birth cycles, both parent and child.[38]

These two planes are each referred to as a "unity" because they both admit that All is One. Whether all things are fundamentally the same or all things are fundamentally

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[25] *Seek My Face*, 4-5.
[26] *Seek My Face*, 7.
[27] *Seek My Face*, 4-5.
[28] *Seek My Face*, 6.
[29] *Seek My Face*, 47.
[30] *Seek My Face*, 47.
[31] *Seek My Face*, 47.
[32] *Seek My Face*, 17.
[33] *Seek My Face*, 17.
[34] *Radical Judaism*, 68.
[35] *Seek My Face*, 59.
[36] *Radical Judaism*, 68.
[37] *Seek My Face*, 58.
[38] *Seek My Face*, 47.

different, by virtue of all things sharing some fundamental quality, all things are demonstrated to be One.

The deeper truth of the higher and lower unity is that *they*, in fact, are one. Though each unity expresses a different kind of Oneness, their shared assertion that all things are One unifies the highly and lower unity. Green writes: "These two truths stand in dialectical relation to one another; they represent the same finely wrought transparent vessel, here seen in emptiness, here in fullness. Our religious task is to see through to the oneness of these two truths, to recognize that the one beyond and the one within are the same One."[39] The Oneness of uniformity and the Oneness of variety are the same Oneness.

Drawing on the image of outer and inner gates (from Shabbat 31b), Green notes that the lower unity is the way to the higher unity—the way to experiencing transcendence is through immanence:

> The way to God is through the world, not around it. It is in encountering the richness and diversity of life, in loving both people and the natural world for who and what they are, that we come to know the One. … It is this experience of divine immanence, the presence of the One in the here and now, that leads us to intuitive intimations that there is something "beyond" as well.[40]

Said differently, one can only enter the "inner gates" by way of the "outer gates." One can only come to experience the vast sameness of all things by experiencing the vast uniqueness of all things.

Green often uses the metaphor of a cloak or a "coat of many colors."[41] He writes: "The world is not an entity separate from God but a cloak that both hides and reveals

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[39] *Seek My Face*, 5.
[40] *Seek My Face*, 6.
[41] Seek My Face, 61.

God's presence. Through that cloak, in all its infinite varieties, we can gain a glimpse of the One within."[42] Sometimes, he uses the metaphor of a mask: "It is through the many masks of God that we will come to catch a glimpse of the single 'face' that lies behind them all."[43] These two metaphors bespeak variety: our world is multitude of masks or cloaks that garb in the One of sameness in variety.

If the upper unity and lower unity are in fact one, we are left with the question of how the One became the many. Here, Green relies again on the notion of emanation: "Once we speak about the relationship of the transcendent unmoved One and the immanent ever-flowing Life Force in narrative terms, we have to invoke time. Thus we come to Creation. 'God created the world' is our Jewish-mythic way of saying 'The One underlies—and enters into—the many.'"[44] Green understands the verse "God created the world" as a narrative way of expressing the idea of emanation: the One underlies the many. It is not a historical truth, but a narrative form of mystical-panentheistic truth. "The Genesis Creation story is thus to be read as a tale of the origins of multiplicity, a biblical attempt to answer the eternal question of mystics that the later account of the *sefirot* also addressed: 'How do the many proceed from the One?'"[45]

The midrashic literature (Bereshit Rabbah 1:10) began to pursue an answer to this question when it asked why the Torah began with the letter *bet*:

> *Bet* is numerically "two"; its positioning at the beginning of Torah indicates that here is the beginning of duality. From this point on, there is not just "God," but "God and…" This meaning is dramatically reinforced by the emergence of Creation in what are repeatedly described as pairs: light and darkness, day and night, heaven and earth, upper and lower waters, sun and moon, male and female,

[42] *EHYEH*, 32.
[43] *EHYEH*, 32.
[44] *Seek My Face*, 56.
[45] *EHYEH*, 113.

> and all the rest. Behind all these twos, however, behind the *bet* of *bereshit bara'* ("In the beginning God created"), lies the hidden, singular, silent *aleph*. This One, representing the absolute Oneness of being, the One after which there can be no "two," is to be proclaimed at Sinai in the opening letter of *anokhi*, "I am," the opening word of the first commandment and the very heart of revelation.[46]

Elsewhere, Green refers to this higher unity as "*alufo shel 'olam*, the cosmic Aleph, or the single One."[47] Though the world as we experience it begins with a *bet*, it is underlain by a silent, hidden *aleph*—a One.

Another way in which Green answers the question, "How do the many proceed from the One?" is through the word *yehi*. Drawing on Zohar 1:16b, Green writes: "*yehi* itself is a divine name, midway between YaH, referring to the sefirot *hokhmah* and *binah*, and Y-H-W-H, embracing the entire *sefirotic* realm."[48] That is to say, the word *yehi*—Yod-Hey-Yod, "Let there be," which God utters nine times in Genesis 1 to create the universe—is orthographically halfway between Yod-Hey (Divine silence) and Yod-Hey-Vav (all words). "In each moment of existence, 'Let there be!' is flowing forth from its divine source."[49]

Y-H-W-H: Is—Was—Will Be

Key to Green's theology is the divine name Y-H-W-H (*yod-heh-vav-heh*). For Green, Y-H-W-H refers to "the One of all being."[50] Y-H-W-H represents the union of upper unity and lower unity. The closest thing to an English translation that he is willing

[46] *EHYEH*, 113.
[47] *EHYEH*, 21.
[48] *Seek My Face*, 225.
[49] *EHYEH*, 31.
[50] *Seek My Face*, 16.

to offer is: "is—was—will be."[51] He notes that in contrast to other theological systems (for example, Bereshit Rabbah 33:3), which associate Y-H-W-H with God's compassion and Elohim with God's judgment, he understands Y-H-W-H to signify "the oneness and ultimate indistinguishability of being and becoming."[52]

If the upper unity is stasis and the lower unity is motion, Y-H-W-H represents both stasis and motion. It is both noun (higher unity) and verb (lower unity):

> [Y-H-W-H] is to be read as an impossible construction of the verb "to be." *HaYaH*—that which was—*HoWeH*—that which is—and *YiHYeH*—that which will be—are here all forced together in a grammatically impossible conflation. Y-H-W-H is a verb that has been artificially arrested in motion and made to function as a noun. As soon as you try to grab hold of such a noun, it runs away from you and becomes a verb again. "Thought does not grasp you at all," as the wise have always known. Y-H-W-H as noun can be the bearer of predicates, but those too become elusive as soon as the verbal quality of the divine name reasserts itself. Try to say anything definitional about Y-H-W-H and it dashes off into "I will be what I will be" (Exodus 3:14), mocking your attempt at definition.[53]

Since, "most nouns in Hebrew are formed from verbal stems,"[54] and may therefore be seen as "artificially arrested in motion," Y-H-W-H may be seen as "at the head of this pyramid of language: the most impossible configuration of the most abstract of verbs."[55] Thus, Y-H-W-H becomes a symbol of all language, an attempt to describe the concrete using the abstract.

The elusiveness of Y-H-W-H goes beyond its verbal construction. Of the letters that comprise that name, Green writes: "there is nothing hard or defined in their sound. The name of that which is most eternal and unchanging in the universe is also that which

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[51] *Seek My Face*, 17.
[52] *Seek My Face*, 199.
[53] *Seek My Face*, 16.
[54] *Seek My Face*, 196.
[55] *Seek My Face*, 196.

is wiped away as readily as a passing breath."[56] Hence, the word is abstract both in meaning and in form (sound).

The elusive nature of Y-H-W-H may be best captured by the story of Moses at the Burning Bush. Moses asks God for God's name. God responds: "I shall be"—which, Green notes, is "clearly offered in association with the name Y-H-W-H."[57] Green interprets it thus: "'I shall be' can mean 'I am nameless, because no name could ever grasp who I really am.' Or it could mean 'Call Me whatever you like. It makes no difference what you call Me, because I fill all names—all words, all things, all times and places—and any name you give Me will indeed be mine.'"[58] On the one hand, Y-H-W-H is total abstraction, not able to be captured in words; on the other hand, Y-H-W-H is total potentiality, the beginning point of all words. Here, it may be helpful to remind ourselves of Green's near-translation: Is-Was-Will Be. On the one hand, what could one concretely say about Is-Was-Will Be? On the other hand, Is-Was-Will Be already accounts for all that has ever and will ever be said about it.

Y-H-W-H stands in for all of Being: "Y-H-W-H … is revealed as God's name. This means nothing less than the truth that God is Being itself. All of Being. Everything contains God."[59] This is true in the symbolic world of the *sefirot* as well:

> The letter *yod*, smallest of the letters, represents *hokhmah* as primordial point, the beginning of existence. The tip of the *yod* points upward, hinting at *keter*, an essence so elusive that it cannot be captured in writing. The first *he*, graphically depicted as an open structure, is *binah*, primal female into which the *yod* enters. *Waw* stands for the number six, representing the six forces centered in *tif'eret*. It also represents an elongation of the *yod* and thus becomes a phallus-like

[56] *Seek My Face*, 17.
[57] *Seek My Face*, 196.
[58] *EHYEH*, 1
[59] *EHYEH*, 2.

> embodiment of male energy within God. The second *he*, again female, is the home of the *waw*, the ark of the covenant, and also the home of the soul.[60]

The ten *sefirot*, symbolically representing the entirety of existence, are captured in the letters *yod*, *heh*, *vav*, and *heh*. (The entirety of *Seek My Face* is designed as a meditation on this four-letter name. *EHYEH* explores the the *sefirot* in detail.) Translated out of *sefirotic* language, the paragraph quoted above might say: "The four letters of the Name, taken in reverse order, spell the word H-W-Y-H, pronounced *hawayah*, meaning 'existence.' All that is exists within God. … God remains transcendent to the universe, a mystery never fully grasped. Y-H-W-H is greater than H-W-Y-H."[61] The *sefirot* symbolize the entirety of existence; Y-H-W-H symbolizes the entirety of existence, past-present-and-future; both are symbols for the One of All Being.

Monism: "There is naught but You" (Deut. 4:35)

Green's describes his theological framework as "monism"[62]—which is to say, non-dual. The distinction between his monistic framework and other theologians' dualistic frameworks is expressed by the question: "Is it really an 'Other' of which we speak when we think of the divine reality we name as God? … Or might it be better defined as a quality of being, another mode in which this same universe may be seen to exist?"[63] Green asserts that we are not really "other" from God. We are a part of God—part of the lower unity, an expression of the fundamental variety of all things.

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[60] *EHYEH*, 82.
[61] *EHYEH*, 2.
[62] *Seek My Face*, 229, 232; *EHYEH*, 140; *Radical Judaism*, 28, 68, 74, 75, 141, 143.
[63] *Seek My Face*, 11.

To see the dualist trend within Judaism, Green points to "the Bible's [verse] 'The heavens are the heavens of God, and the earth God has given to the children of men [Ps. 115:16]"[64] or "Martin Buber's insistence that the I-Thou relationship is the basis of all religious life."[65] Monism, by contrast, declares, "There is naught but You!"[66] (Deut. 4:35). Describing his monism, Green writes: "I simply do not encounter God as … a Supreme Being or Creator who exists outside or beyond the universe. … Indeed, I do not know that such an 'outside' or 'beyond' exists."[67]

Of course, a monistic system presents its own challenges:

> For the nondualist, speaking *to* God is as much of a betrayal as speaking *of*. Although I continue to use the dualistic language in prayer ("Blessed are You…"), I know that I do not mean it in its simplest sense. This language is a way of addressing the One as though it were possible for me to stand outside it in such a moment, as though there really were an "I" who could speak this way to a "Thou." But if such prayer is betrayal of our deepest consciousness, it is there to keep faith with our ordinary experience as human beings. … The self who continues to live in the world of "self" and "other" needs the dualistic language of "I" and "Thou," even though it does not mirror the deepest truth we know.[68]

Monism may reflect the deeper truth about the world, but dualism is the way we primarily experience the world, for our own safety and productivity. Green continues: "For us simply to proclaim "All is One! All is One!" running through the streets in the kind of ecstatic outbursts that characterized Hasidism in its early days, would only land us in the asylum."[69]

If monism represents the deeper truth of reality, and dualism is a mere human way experience of the world, the question arises as to the discrepancy between these two.

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[64] *Seek My Face*, 12.
[65] *Seek My Face*, 12.
[66] *Seek My Face*, 14.
[67] *Radical Judaism*, 2.
[68] *Seek My Face*, 15.
[69] *Seek My Face*, 24.

How does the truth of monism get masked in our experience of dualism? Green provides three responses: (1) *tsimtsum*, (2) gradual steps, and (3) *sod iq*.

Regarding (1) *tsimtsum*, Green writes:

> According to the Hasidic masters, latter-day heirs to and reshapers of the Platonic legacy, the greatest gift God gives us is *tsimtsum* (literally, the "contraction" of God), which to them means the illusion of our separate identity. God contracts or withdraws from our awareness in order that we see ourselves as real and separate beings. Only bit by bit and by means of careful training are we allowed to peer beyond that.[70]

Translating the notion of *tsimtsum* into a human analogy, Green writes: "the word as spoken is never fully separate from its speaker; the child remains deeply connected to and nourished by the one who gives birth to it."[71] Here, "the word spoken" corresponds to creation and "the speaker" corresponds to God; "the child" corresponds to creation and "the one who gives birth to it" corresponds to God. A quote is cited in the name of the person who uttered it. A child is given a name (in the Western tradition, a surname, in the Jewish tradition, a lineage name) that identifies in with its parent(s). In both metaphors, the appearance of total separation is only illusion; the separation is only partial. Green continues: "Revelation takes place through an act of hiding, for the One is now cloaked within the many. This [is a] two-sided process, a self-revelation of God that comes about through the hiding or cloaking of the divine Self."[72] Human beings come to know God only as a result of God partially withdrawing God's self. If a person knew God fully, s/he couldn't exist as a separate other. There would be no "other" to do the knowing. God partially withdraws God's self so that we can partially exist as separate others, and thus come into knowing relationship with God. Finally, Green writes: "Love needs an other.

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[70] *Seek My Face*, 25.
[71] *Seek My Face*, 59.
[72] *Seek My Face*, 61.

There must be someone to witness, to appreciate, even to respond. Hide-and-seek just doesn't work as solitaire!"[73]

The second response to our question (the conflict between monism and dualism) is (2) gradual steps. Green writes: "Only bit by bit and by means of careful training are we allowed to peer beyond [the dualistic] veil, and always in doses that will nourish rather than destroy us. The vehicle for this growth process is the projected screen image."[74] I am reminded of the famous Talmudic *sugiya* (BT Chagigah 14b) about the four sages who entered the *Pardes*. Three of them did not return from the experience unscathed. The truth of monism was too overwhelming for their human capacities to absorb in one fell sweoop. Only Rabbi Akiva (who, presumably, took gradual steps towards the truth of monism) was able to return unscathed. Elsewhere, Green writes: "The theory that underlies *sefirot* … may be seen as an attempt to [show] … the infinitely gradual and complex steps by which the One became or gave forth the many."[75] Just as humans may come to experience the truth of monism by gradual, baby steps, so too do the *sefirot* serve to act as a buffer, a series of small steps by which the One safely and gradually manifests as the many.

The third response to our question (the conflict between monism and dualism) is (3) *sod iq*. Regarding this, Green writes: "*sod iq* or *aleph-yod-quf*, the secret of 1-10-100. The decade of the *sefirot* is but a repetition of the primal monad; only a zero has been added. Thus the ten are truly only one, but just raised to the next power. … This 'secret'

[73] *Seek My Face*, 62.
[74] *Seek My Face*, 24.
[75] *Seek My Face*, 227.

may be described as a mathematical response to a theological problem."[76] Elsewhere, he continues: "Using our Arabic (actually Indian-derived) numerals, we may say that '10' adds nothing but a zero to the '1,' but opens it to a deeper dimension."[77] The world is truly One; but we experience it as ten. The only difference between "1" and "10" is a "0"—zero, nothing. Monism is dualism pared down to its basest form—a 10 pared down to a 1.

The dualist world is "named both as 'the world of separateness' and 'the world of lies' by the kabbalists."[78] The experience of "separateness" is but a "lie." By way of *devekut*, "cleaving to God," human beings may bridge the gap between monism and dualism:

> But the human experience that stands behind *devekut* is also that of marriage, including moments of great intimacy and even union. … In its highest form it may indeed be described as mystical union, a moment when the self is completely absorbed and overwhelmed by the reality of oneness, the climax of religious experience. Yet it also allows for the soul to return to itself, enriched and even transformed by the unitive moment but still able to live and act as a separate spirit — indeed, still able to maintain its existence within the body.[79]

Just as two bodies are united in the act of sexual intercourse, so two can a human become united with God in an act of devotion, love, and cleaving. In that brief moment of consort, the boundaries between self and other are blurred; it is a feeling of ecstasy. And then, the experience of self and other is restored.

Having now explored the main elements of Green's theological framework, we will ask the question that forms the crux of this thesis: How does one relate to a personal God in a

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[76] *Seek My Face*, 227.
[77] *EHYEH, 39.*
[78] *EHYEH*, 25.
[79] *Radical Judaism*, 69-70

mystical panentheist system? If God is the One of All Being, from which I am not entirely separate, how does the One of All Being show concern for me and/or make demands of me, as Judaism insists it must?

The Mythology of Relationship: *B'hibaram, B'Avraham* (Bereshit Rabbah 12:9)

Green writes that biblical and later Jewish tradition is "a mythology of relationship, a series of tales about how God, singular and independent, decides to create humans and enter into dialogue and relationship with them."[80] He goes through the Genesis and Exodus narratives, highlighting how each story deepens the relationship between God and humans. Of the creation story, Green writes: "The decision to bring forth these creatures in God's own 'image and likeness,' we should recall, came at the last possible minute. … But after the beasts emerged, God seems to have felt that creation was still incomplete."[81] God created humanity so as not to be so alone. Of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Green writes: "But even this tale of expulsion, an attempt to explain human alienation, is a myth of relationship. Like many myths, it tells of trust betrayed, resulting in intimacy gone sour."[82] God is affected by human actions, and grows angry when we err. Of the Cain and Abel story, Green writes: "Life is tough and arbitrary; there is no reason why one flourishes and another suffers, none that has to do with justice, in any case. … How can you live in such a world? Our rage at God is also part of the divine-human relationship, a fact that needs to be explained by an

[80] *Radical Judaism*, 41.
[81] *Radical Judaism*, 41.
[82] *Radical Judaism*, 42.

ancient story."[83] Humans are affected by God's actions, and grow angry when we feel we have been mistreated. Each of these opening stories expresses a "mythology of relationship" between God and humans.

Finally, after Noah and the Tower of Babel, Green writes:

> These mythic tales of God's ongoing encounters with this new human species … give us a glimpse into the personal growth and education of the Creator. … The One who had been alone for countless ages now has sought to find a partner, one with whom to enter into the dance of mutual relationship. This is not entirely easy or comfortable, given the strong and willful creature who has come forth, perhaps in a process that did not happen altogether as anticipated. … Only with Abraham, whom God loves so greatly, does the tide of failure begin to turn.[84]

Regarding the comment, "only with Abraham … does the tide of failure begin to turn," Green cites in a footnote the comment in *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:9: "R. Tachlifa said: *B'Avraham* – these are the same letters as in *b'hibram*: [the world was created] on the merit of Abraham." Of this Midrash, Green writes: "The rabbis' reading … is not entirely unfaithful to the larger text."[85] The midrash makes the point that God created the world "on the merit of Abraham"—as if to say that the whole purpose of creation was for God to find a fitting human partner, which was eventually found in Abraham.

Green continues with his reading of Genesis and Exodus as a "mythology of relationship." At Sodom and Gomorrah, "[God] accepted the right of his beloved Abraham to argue for the people of Sodom, [and] God has learned to turn away from His own fuming anger."[86] In the story of the Exodus from Egypt—which Green calls "the core of biblical myth"[87]—"God sees the suffering of Israel and 'knows' (Ex. 2:25), as

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[83] *Radical Judaism*, 42.
[84] *Radical Judaism*, 43.
[85] *Radical Judaism*, 171.
[86] *Radical Judaism*, 44.
[87] *Radical Judaism*, 44.

though He too had shared in their suffering. God comes down from the heights to learn what it means to enter into relationship with humans."[88] Finally, when the Israelites build the Golden Calf, God "back[s] down from His fierce intent to destroy Israel. … He responds with compassion when Moses stands up for the people, and He remains faithful to His promise even through long periods when Israel seems undeserving of His love."[89] Though the relationship is grounded on a betrayal (Adam and Eve in the Garden), and though it is sometimes rocky (the Golden Calf, the murmurings the wilderness), and though even God sometimes fails to uphold God's end of the relationship (Cain)—through all of this, the core of the Biblical myth is that God is in relationship with humankind.

Here, Green is entering into new territory. I earlier noted that Green's mystical panentheism will likely be attractive to Jews of no religion who are also spiritual seekers. Up until now, Green's theology would have likely proven attractive to the new-agey, Eastern-oriented set. But here, Green's religious roots add a new layer. He is committed to retaining a mythology of relationship, so crucial to Jewish thought. Anecdotal observation shows that spiritual-but-not-religious Jews currently in their 20s and 30s don't share Green's desire for the One of All Being to be in relationship with humanity. They are perfectly happy to reframe the concept of God in mystical-panentheistic terms, and leave it there. One peer specifically says that she doesn't believe that God has anything to do with human joys or suffering. God just *IS*, independent of human experience. But Green, as an inheritor of Jewish tradition, needs to square the God that

[88] *Radical Judaism*, 44.
[89] *Radical Judaism*, 44.

just *IS* with the God that our tradition says somehow cares about us and makes demands of us.

Of all these biblical myths of divine-human relationship, Green writes:

> Having to deal with mortals as His only love partners, God is ever learning what it is to be the parent of a wayward child or the husband of an unfaithful wife. A deity who had other outlets for relationship might well have given up on humans. Only One who is otherwise quite wholly and intolerably alone can be counted on to remain engaged in the enterprise of divine/human intimacy forever, no matter how hard it gets. Thus it happens that relationship, modeled on multiple forms of human interpersonal intimacy, forms the essential subject of biblical myth and becomes the essential truth of Jewish and Western religious life.[90]

God's loneliness is, surprisingly, an impetus for God's need for relationship. If God is lonely, then God is imperfect. Here, we must assume that Green refers to God's loneliness as an element of the lower unity, in which God's "perfection" consists not of total sameness but of total differentiation. We may also wonder in what ways does Green's teacher, Heschel, impact his thinking here.

Green writes: "The one God is, as we have noted, all alone. … The old pagan chief deities all had divine consorts. … Monotheism means an essential change to what may be called the erotic situation of God, who is left without a partner. God has no one to love except you."[91] God is lonely, and wants to be in relationship with humanity. "Everything created in the opening chapter of Genesis comes forth as a member of a pair: day and night, light and darkness. … Everything is paired — except God. … At Sinai there is a new pairing, that of God and Israel as Lover and Beloved."[92]

I wonder what is at stake for Green, beyond a need to anchor himself in "the essential truth of Jewish and Western religious life." Could he live with a God that does

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[90] *Radical Judaism*, 44.
[91] *Radical Judaism*, 53.
[92] *Radical Judaism*, 54.

not enter into relationship with humanity? Could he live with a God that just *IS*? Could he do so as a human, but not as a Jew? My sense is that his mystical panentheism already admits an element of Divine care, apart from his roots in the Jewish tradition. He writes that the One "delights in each of its endlessly diverse manifestations"[93]—an intimation that his mystical panentheism, stripped of its Jewish traditional content (as if such a thing were possible), already admits an element of Divine concern for human affairs (or rather, the affairs of each distinct expression of variety in the lower unity). It seems that it is not only Green's traditional Jewish roots that urge him towards a mythology of relationship; his mystical panentheism also does so. His traditional Jewish roots provide him with language in which to ground that myth.

And yet, an important question remains: How does Green square his monistic vision with his "mythology of relationship?" If I am a part of God, then how can I reasonably pray "to" God? How can God care "for" me? How can God make demands "of" me? How can one enter "into" relationship with God? We will explore these questions in the next chapter.

[93] *Radical Judaism*, 20.

Chapter 2: Approaching a Solution

In this chapter, we will attempt to explain the theological mechanism by which Green's monistic vision is opened up to a theology of relationship—or, put differently, how Green understands the idea of a "personal God." To do so, we will explore the conflict in Jewish traditional texts between an intimate God and an abstract God, and how the relational power of naming (particularly, the name Y-H-W-H) serves to bridge that conflict. We will then explore how projected images from the human realm serve to make God more human and humans more like God. We will then explore the role of poetics in Green's thinking. Finally, we will conclude with a parable of Rebbe Nachman that is central to Green's theology.

The Conflict Between Intimacy and Abstraction: "No human may see Me and live" (Ex. 33:20) versus "They saw the God of Israel" (Ex. 24:10)

Green highlights the conflict between intimacy with God and abstraction of God. These two poles are best summarized thus:

> Seeing God. The Torah itself seems to be conflicted on the question of whether such a thing can happen. … Moses asks to see God's face and is told, "No human may see Me and live"(Exodus 33:20). … When God passes by the cleft of the rock where Moses is hidden at Sinai, Moses is told, "You will see My back, but My face may not be seen" (Exodus 33:23). *And yet* [emphasis added] in another chapter, also describing the Sinai experience, the text says quite clearly of Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders, "They saw the God of Israel" (Exodus 24:10). … [And also, the Torah] concludes by describing Moses as one whom God had known "face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10).[94]

[94] *Seek My Face*, 34.

On the one hand, the Torah claims that God's face cannot be seen, that God is total abstraction. On the other hand, the Torah claims that God's face can be seen, that God can be known intimately. Which is it? What do we make of these conflicting claims?

Let us first deal with the school of abstraction. Green writes: "To the sophisticated medieval mind, the sacred stories of the Bible … were embarrassingly primitive and grossly anthropomorphic. … Philosophical Judaism was frequently accompanied by a massive effort at reinterpreting, and often explaining away, the anthropomorphic theology of the received tradition."[95] Green cites the Hellenistic Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria as an early example of this line of thinking. He continues: "The true transcendence of God lay … in the endless abstraction of God as a concept and the degree to which the mind had to stretch itself to gain even the smallest intellectual glimpse of the divine."[96] This trend in Jewish thought may be best represented by Maimonides' in his *Guide for the Perplexed*:

> The first section of the *Guide* is concerned mostly with dismissing any literal truth claim that might be made for either anthropomorphic (human-form-like) or anthropopathic (human-emotion-like) descriptions of God to be found in the Bible. … This process of negation is then carried over to the realm of emotion, since such feelings would imply lack or need, compromising the supposed perfection of God. This "perfection" itself, we should add, is an assumption of philosophy, and does not represent a claim found in the biblical or rabbinic tradition. Once all concrete attributes are denied to God, the seeker may only use ongoing apophatic claims (negative assertions or denials) to speak about the divine nature. We come to know God best by denying all false and untenable claims that can be made regarding "Him."[97]

But it is not only Maimonides who promulgates the notion of God's abstraction. Green also cites "certain Rabbinic texts, the Targumim, and … the classics of medieval

[95] *Radical Judaism*, 60.
[96] *Radical Judaism*, 61.
[97] *Radical Judaism*, 62.

Jewish philosophy"[98] as among the same school of thought. In a footnote, he specifies the *sugiya* in BT Yevamot 49b, "where Isaiah is said to have been sentenced to death for having claimed that he saw God."[99] He cites also *Sifrei Bamidbar* 103, "where it is made clear that Moses himself attained no more than 'a vision of the Word' (*mar'eh dibbur*)."[100]

The total abstraction of God lies not only in the classical sources, but even in the world of modern Jewish thought. "Rooted in the world of German post-Idealism, our theologians chose to write in the language of abstraction, … [in] the antiseptic niceties of philosophical theology."[101] He describes the theologies of post-Kantian Jewish philosophers as describing "a God who begins in the human mind, a mere idea of God."[102] This whole school of thought, in which God is equated with total abstraction, Green calls the school of "radical transcendence."[103]

The Reform movement—in particular, its high classical expression—is heir to the school of radical transcendence. One need look no further than the architecture of the flagship Temple Emanu-El in Manhattan: its vault ceilings, its soaring acoustics, its lofty *bimah* and ark all combine to create a sensory worship experience of a God of transcendence. Reform theological innovation—with its emphasis on ethical monotheism—can easily be understood as an attempt to whitewash Jewish tradition to

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[98] Green, Arthur. "The Children in Egypt and the Theophany at the Sea." *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, Vol. 24, No.4, Fall (1975), 447.
[99] "The Children in Egypt," 447.
[100] "The Children in Egypt," 447.
[101] "The Children in Egypt," 446.
[102] *Radical Judaism*, 18.
[103] *Radical Judaism*, 58.

make it more palatable and recognizable to the early Reformers' German protestant neighbors.

Let us deal now with the other school of thought, which claims that God's face can be seen, that God can be known intimately. Green refers to this thinking as the school of "radical immanence."[104] If Maimonides represents the central pillar of the school of radical transcendence, then the Kabbalists represent the central pillar of the school of radical immanence. Green writes:

> If the Maimonidean seeks to purify one's thinking about God by questioning and progressively removing all anthropomorphic and anthropopathic images, the Kabbalist seeks to mentally flood the reader with an overwhelming excess of images, leading to the conclusion that the divine reality must ultimately transcend them all. Virtually everything, almost any noun encountered in Scripture and any object within the natural realm, becomes an image term that leads back to contemplation of some aspect of God. If the same element or stage of self-revelation within the Godhead may be called by a diverse set of names (the third *sefirah*, for example, is "mother," "womb," "jubilee," "fountain," "repentance," "upper Eden," "heart," "understanding," "palace," and a host more), it becomes clear that all of these are somehow pointing beyond themselves and that no single name, image, or symbol fully expresses just what this *sefirah* (or symbol cluster) is. "You are the One who fills all names," as the *Tiqquney Zohar* famously expresses it, "but You Yourself have no specific name."[105]

Whereas the school of radical transcendence asserts that no words can describe God, the school of radical imminence asserts all words, taken together, describe God. The *sefirot*—the word/image clusters the describe various aspects of the godhead—are the prime example of this trend. God is "mother" plus "womb" plus "jubilee" plus "fountain," and so on.

But the school of radical immanence exists beyond the Kabbalistic sources:

> Midrashic literature, particularly in those passages which involve interpretation of the Song of Songs … the long-respected literature of *Shi'ur Qomah*, which

[104] *Radical Judaism*, 58.
[105] *Radical Judaism*, 64.

> discusses the dimensions of the mystical body of God … the *Idrot* of the Zohar, which deal in detail which such matters as the difference between the hairs of God's head and those of His beard, and the vast literature of Lurianic Kabbalah, which describes the various states of conjugal union of the male and female aspects of the Deity in strikingly unabashed detail.[106]

This trend is found in modern sources, too: "A.J. Heschel and Aaron Zeitlin. … the writings of Isaac Bashevis Singer and Elie Wiesel. … The turn of such a figure as Emil Fackenheim to the search for a new Midrash, and perhaps above all, the work of Gershom Scholem and his followers."[107]

Green notes that the school of radical intimacy may be "rooted in … the mythical views held by certain ancient rabbis … [characterized] as 'the school of Rabbi Akiva' … [while the school of radical abstraction may be] rooted in the 'school of Rabbi Ishmael.'"[108] Elsewhere, Green elaborates on this point: "Rabbi Akiva … derive[d] 'heaps and heaps of laws from the crowns on each of the letters [BT Menachot 29b].' … *All* of Torah even, the seemingly most mundane, belongs to the great mystical moment of Sinai."[109] It seems that Green borrows this idea from his teacher Heschel's *Torah min Hashamayim*.

Green notes that "until recent times, it was still commonplace to present the former of these two tendencies [the school of radical abstraction] as that of 'normative' rabbinic Judaism."[110] And yet, the school of radical intimacy has persisted. Green posits an explanation: "Maimonides' universe was one that left no room, they [the Kabbalists] felt, for the significance of human action. What difference could it make to the abstract

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[106] "The Children in Egypt," 448.
[107] "The Children in Egypt," 447.
[108] *Seek My Face*, 229.
[109] *A Guide to the Zohar*, 70.
[110] "The Children in Egypt," 448.

Maimonidean God whether we existed or not, whether we fulfilled the commandments or not? The kabbalists created an image of the universe in which God is incomplete without human action."[111]

I think that Green has successfully captured the root of the conflict here. Is God perfect and unresponsive to humankind, or is God imperfect and very much in need of humankind? The persistence of the "three omni-s"—God as omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient—as a basis for atheism demonstrates that this debate is still active. Humans imagine a God who is perfect, but want a God who is responsive to them. This debate may be seen not only between schools of thought (as between the Maimonideans and the Kabbalists), but also within the individual.

Green summarizes the conflict between intimacy and abstraction thus:

> RaMBaM and the Zohar understood that the reality of Y-H-W-H lies beyond all description in human terms. Maimonides chose the apophatic path: saying less about God is saying more. Purify your theological language, attempt to come as close as you can to the abstract truth. Get rid of myth. The Zohar, recognizing the same truth and inadequacy of language, takes the opposite strategy. Drown them in metaphor! Make everything a metaphor.[112]

Naming: "I will raise him up because he knows My name" (Ps. 91:14)

Before we can resolve the conflict between intimacy and abstraction, we need to trace another central point in Green's theology: the power of naming.

Green writes: "Possessing a name renders one capable of being addressed: I call upon you by your name; I can address you directly because I know your name."[113] The act of naming brings one into relationship with the object named: "The one named, at

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[111] *Seek My Face*, 64.
[112] Green, Arthur. "Personal Theology." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly*. Spring, 2014: 7.
[113] *Seek My Face*, 19.

least in our experience within the human interpersonal realm, steps forth from anonymity and becomes fully human. … To call a person by name is to recognize that person's humanity. On the less-than-human level too, we enter into relationship with an animal, declare it our pet or protected one, by the act of naming."[114] "'I know your name' means that I can speak to you; I possess the word that will cause you to look up and respond when I call out."[115]

But naming is not just a relational act. It is also an act of power. Green elaborates:

> Naming is … an act of great power. This aspect of stating a name reaches back to the very first stirrings of language, both in the collective history of humanity and in the life of the individual. The ability to name something is an act of mastery. By knowing what it is, we are able to control it. The child who learns to speak begins by naming things; in doing so he or she gains a measure of control not previously possessed. Both science and magic, each in its own way, may be seen as deriving from this insight. The scientist categorizes and classifies; this is a variety of control by naming. Knowing the species or genus to which a particular phenomenon belongs permits the prediction of behavior. This predictability, as one manipulates the circumstances, allows a measure of control. The magician exercises power in a less subtle way. Reciting the proper formula, a litany of names of angels or powers, is sufficient to transform reality, to rain down curses upon one's enemies, or to bless one's friends.[116]

The ability to name something both brings us into relationship with that thing and also gives us some sort of power over it. To find precedent for this idea in Jewish traditional sources, Green turns[117] to *Bereshit Rabbah* 17:4:

> You recall that the creation of humans did not win much favor with the angels, apparently God's unchallenged favorites until then. But God said to them: "Look how smart this new human is! At that, God paraded a series of four-footed creatures across the stage. "What are these?" the divine voice asked. Having no part of the world of flesh and blood, the angels were dumbfounded. That God asked Adam: "What's this one? What's this?" Adam blithely replied, "This is called a dog. This is called a cat." "And what should you be called?" God asks.

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[114] *Seek My Face*, 20.
[115] *EHYEH*, 78.
[116] *EHYEH*, 79.
[117] *Seek My Face*, 19; "Personal Theology," 7.

> Adam replies, "I should be called *Adam*, earthling, because I was taken from *Adamah*." […] [118]

We pause the midrash here, because we have reached a critical pivot-point in Green's thinking. In our section on "Projection," we will pick up this *midrash* where we left it off.

For now, we must begin our journey back through the relational power of naming towards the bridge between intimacy and abstraction. Green writes:

> The Jewish religious experience at its very root claims to know the name of God. True, it dare not pronounce this name and substitutes one circumlocution after another for it. But the unpronounced breathlike word is still there, inscribed on the diadem of the ancient priest, written in the *tefillin* of the modern worshipper or in the *mezuzah* on the doorpost of the Jewish home, or spoken—via circumlocution—at the heart of all Jewish prayer. … The ability to call upon God's name has a quasi-magical quality about it, something that surpasses mere supplication or that makes true supplication possible. "I will raise him up because he knows My name," the Psalmist's God says of the worshipper (Psalm 91:14). "We will pronounce Your name and enthrone You, our God and King," reads our daily introduction to the morning psalms [*Baruch She-Amar*], even though we in fact do not pronounce God's name. … The very fact that we avoid direct mention of the name even in prayer, lest it be degraded, points to the almost infinite reverence with which Judaism regards this act.[119]

Even though they never pronounce it—or rather, when the Temple stood, only the holiest person (the High priest) on the holiest day of the year (Yom Kippur) when he entered the holiest place (the Holy of Holies) could pronounce this holiest of words (God's name)—the Jewish people knows God's name. And in so knowing, they enter into relationship with God and have some sort of power over God: "I [God] will raise him [the one who is devoted to God] up because he knows My name" (Ps. 91:14). In a footnote, Green comments on his use of this verse. He cites *Midrash Tehillim* 91:8, which quotes Rabbi Pinchas ben Ya'ir as teaching: "Why are the prayers of Israel in this world

[118] "Personal Theology," 7.
[119] *Seek My Face*, 19.

not answered? Because they do not know the *shem ha-meforash*. But in the future the blessed Holy One will tell them His name…and they will pray and be answered." Green suggests two possible readings of this midrash: one "magical/scientific" and one "humanistic," corresponding to the two modes of naming cited above—naming as an act of power, and naming an act of relationship. He writes: "It is because of a real 'person-to-person' intimacy with God [relational, humanistic] that Israel is to have supernatural power [powerful, magical/scientific] in the future world."[120]

On his use of the phrase, "We will pronounce Your name and enthrone You, our God and King," (*v'nazkir shim-cha v'namlich'cha*) from *Baruch She-amar*, Green notes that this phrase may be a reflection of Exodus 20:21: "In every place where I mention My name, I shall come and bless you." "It seems likely that the Torah text here has been emended, a copyist shrinking back from an earlier 'In every place where *you* [emphasis added] mention My name.' Several early versions confirm this reading."[121] It seems that the earlier, pre-emendation version of the text makes a claim for the effective power of humans mentioning God's name.

In summary, Green writes: "This personal dimension of calling upon God's name is essential for the Jewish religious quest. Judaism insists that the secret of existence is a 'Who?' not a 'What?' question. Knowing God's name is therefore a matter of intimacy; to speak it is an act of love. We call it out the way a lover revels in the great delight of pronouncing a beloved's name."[122]

Perhaps his most endearing summary is expressed thus:

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[120] *Seek My Face*, 199.
[121] *Seek My Face*, 200.
[122] *EHYEH*, 78.

> We talk about the divine like it's some old relative, someone who we know well, and I love that the *midrash* and Hasidic worlds talk about God as one of the characters in the story. When *Fiddler on the Roof* was first produced on Broadway, the literary critic Irving Howe wrote about it. He said: "Tevye spoke to his wife like he spoke to his horse, and he spoke to his horse like he spoke to God, and Kierkegaard never would have understood it."[123]

The Bridge Between Intimacy and Abstraction: "*EYHEH* has sent me to you. … *Y-H-W-H* has sent me to you" (Ex. 3:14-15)

Y-H-W-H is the bridge between intimacy and abstraction. On the one hand, it is God's name—a sign of intimacy. On the other hand, it means Is-Was-Will Be—the ultimate in abstraction. Green writes: "Y-H-W-H is ever the union of Being and Becoming … and also … it does remain the name of God, and not simply an abstraction."[124]

Green writes:

> It is the union of these two aspects of the word Y-H-W-H that creates the unique power of Jewish theology, as well as the tension that continues to drive it. The most abstract of words, that which encompasses being and becoming within it, is also the name by which that ever-elusive One is called. In joining these two in a single word, Jewish faith claims an intimacy with the abstract. Jewish worship proclaims the ability to bridge abstraction and intimacy in a single act of faith. Throughout its history, Judaism has striven on the one hand for a pure, elevated, and entirely abstract notion of God, one that removes all traces of idolatry. This striving is Judaism's representation of the intellectual growth and maturation of humanity, ever seeking to elevate and purify its highest ideal. But our tradition has also recognized the need for a religious language that allows for the whole involvement of the individual and the community—emotional as well as intellectual—that makes for living faith. The insistence that both of these are one in the single name of God, the word that transcends human language and existence itself, lies at the very core of Judaism's claim. Y-H-W-H, the essence of abstraction, is also Israel's name for the One, the bearer of its most intimate cry.[125]

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[123] Arthur Green in a private conversation, October 15, 2015.
[124] *Seek My Face*, 198.
[125] *Seek My Face*, 20.

Y-H-W-H as the union between intimacy and abstraction is the core insight of Jewish faith. "Abstraction demands that God be understood as nothing less than the unity of all being, the One that underlies all the infinitely varied and changing faces of reality. … But the longing for this abstract One was ever described in language taken from the personalist terminology of ancient Jewish tradition."[126] Hence, our intimate name for God is the very essence of abstraction. Recall, we said in our section on Y-H-W-H: "'I shall be' can mean 'I am nameless, because no name could ever grasp who I really am.' Or it could mean 'Call Me whatever you like. It makes no difference what you call Me, because I fill all names—all words, all things, all times and places—and any name you give Me will indeed be mine.'"[127] The Jewish people calls God by the name Y-H-W-H: that is to say, our personal name for God is that God has no specific personal name.

Y-H-W-H as God's name is but a symbol, a temporary and artificial freezing of Y-H-W-H as Is-Was-Will Be. "The personified 'God' needs to be clearly described as a symbolic way to express this truth [that God is both in the uniqueness of each individual creature and in the underlying and mysterious unity of all]."[128] Y-H-W-H as name is but a personification of Y-H-W-H as Being. "The name [Y-H-W-H] … is an impossible configuration, a pseudo-noun, created out of the verb 'to be,' and should probably best be translated 'was/is/will be.' … If you think that Y-H-W-H is a noun that indicates some substantial and definable entity, Scripture laughs at you as God becomes a verb again [EHYEH]."[129] The key passage for understanding this point is Exodus 3:14-15, where God instructs Moses to tell the Israelites: "*EYHEH* has sent me to you. … *Y-H-W-H* has

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[126] *Radical Judaism*, 70.
[127] *EHYEH*, 1.
[128] *Radical Judaism*, 72.
[129] *Radical Judaism*, 76.

sent me to you." On this verse, Green writes: "God's answer is at once a self-revelation and a rebuff: My name is Y-H-W-H—Being—and I shall be whatever I shall be."[130] God's name—that by which we might become intimate with the abstract—is the essence of total abstraction. "The sounds that form the name also indicate abstraction. There is no firm consonant among them; the y, the w, and the h are all nothing more than shapings of the breath. … The God who is ever blowing the breath of life into Adam's nostrils … now turns out to be that very breath."[131] "On the one hand, we know God's name. On the other hand, we never pronounce that name, YHWH—that name is too abstract, too holy for our mere human lips to pronounce. … Instead, we say: Adonai—*My* Lord—with a personal possessive on Adon-*ai*. And there's a submission that's in that word. That's the intimacy. You are being intimate with that which is the unknowable unity of all being."[132]

Here, Green's lofty theology comes up against the hard realities of the American Jewish landscape. Observation shows that many American Jews think that "Adonai" *is* God's personal name, rather than a temporary appellation, moniker, or metaphor. But Green is very clear to distinguish Y-H-W-H from the way it is pronounced. The former is God's personal name/the essence of abstraction; the later is one of many projections/metaphors that we use to express our personal relationship with God. Said differently, God's personal name is "Is-Was-Will Be," not "My Lord." Reaching this point requires significant deconstruction and reconstruction. It will likely be a stumbling block for the average North American Jew in accessing Green's meaning.

Here is the core of the argument that Green is making:

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[130] *Radical Judaism*, 45.
[131] *Radical Judaism*, 76.
[132] Arthur Green in a private conversation, October 15, 2015.

> The personal God is a symbolic bridge between transcendent mystery (that which by definition the mind cannot grasp) and a humanity that constantly reaches forth toward it. Because that "reaching" needs to be undertaken by the whole of the human self, including emotion and body as well as mind, the "bridge" needs to be one to which we can most wholly respond, a projection of our own form."[133]

Green translates this teaching into Kabbalistic terms:

> The Zohar understands well that the personal God-figure, in both its male and female articulations (*tif'eret* and *malkhut*) is a series of symbolic constructions, less than the divine absolute. … The mysterious reality beyond, that which the Kabbalist would call *'atiqa*, "the Ancient One," or *eyn sof*, "the Endless," exists before and after our reaching out [to the personal God-figures of *tif'eret* and *malkhut*], and is none other than the underlying oneness of Being.[134]

The figure of a personal God is nothing but a symbolic bridge to the One of All Being. *Tif'eret* and *malkhut* are nothing but symbolic bridges to *'atiqa* and *eyn sof*. *Adonai* is nothing but a symbolic pronunciation of Y-H-W-H. "My Lord" is nothing but a symbolic reconstruction of God's personal name, "Is-Was-Will Be."

In a footnote, Green cites a teaching of the Zohar (Zohar 1:3a) to make this point: "The sin of the Golden Calf … [was] worship of *eleh* ('these,' as in '*These* are your gods, O Israel' [Ex. 32:4]), representing the *sefirot* that encompass divine personhood, detached from *mi* [*mi* + *eleh* = *elohim*], the ultimate question that transcends them. … The unspoken but clear implication is that worshipping the personal God alone, detached from the mystery beyond, is nothing but idolatry."[135] The personal God, *tif'eret* and *malkhut*, *Adonai*, and "My Lord" are all examples of *eleh*; the One of All Being, *'atiqa* and *eyn sof*, Y-H-W-H, and "Is-Was-Will Be" are all examples of *mi*.

Of course, if Y-H-W-H is both our intimate, personal name for God and also the abstract Oneness of All Being, a question still remains: "[will] Y-H-W-H be when the

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[133] *Radical Judaism*, 73.
[134] *Radical Judaism*, 74.
[135] *Radical Judaism*, 176.

human mind is no more[?] … Of course Y-H-W-H as name will have ceased to function, for such a category is meaningless without a namer. But … of course Being will still be. … Being itself was before there existed a human mind to know it and will be afterward as well."[136] Here, Green begins to hint at the role of projection in his theology: humans become intimate with the abstract by way of projection.

Projection: "I kept looking until the thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took His seat" (Dan. 7:9)

To begin our discussion on projection, let us return to a midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 17:4) that we began discussing in our section on "Naming." That midrash imagines God presenting a parade of animals before the first human, showing off to the angels Adam's ability to name his fellow creatures. We left off our discussion of the midrash with the first human declaring: "I should be called *Adam*, earthling, because I was taken from *Adamah*." In our section on Naming, we used this midrash to demonstrate the relational power of naming.

But now, we are able to read on to the end of the midrash and see how Green uses it to demonstrate the role that projection plays in his theological framework:

> "And what should I be called?" God asks. … Now this is the great moment. The human is being asked to name the divine, to give Y- H-W-H, breathy abstraction itself, an identity, a way of being known, becoming manifest in the human realm. Adam could have said anything. But without missing a beat, he says "You should be called Lord, for You are lord over all your works." *It is we, in other words, who have set up the master/servant relationship with the divine, clearly a projection from human society*. [Emphasis added.] Why? Because that was what we needed: someone before whom to bow, to whose authority to submit. It was not God that needed – or needs – to be king; it was rather we who needed to be servants.

[136] *Seek My Face*, 22.

Green insists again and again that our personalized images of God are responses to the needs of the hour. For one very relatable example of this need, Green cites the examples of the classical Rabbis. He comments on the two primary lenses through which the Jewish tradition understands God: love and judgment. "The Rabbis … love[d] both the people and the Law. … They often find themselves having to choose between the love of Israel and the love of Torah. … The Rabbis projected [an] image of a God who struggles between love and justice."[137]

Green also finds evidence of the role of projection within Jewish traditional texts. He primarily uses three textual sources: (1) a source from Mekhilta, (2) a Hasidic interpretation of a verse in Ezekiel, and (3) a source from Deuteronomy Rabbah.

The source from Mekhilta (*Mekhilta Beshalach Shirta* 4) makes the case for the role of projection most plainly. Green writes:

> There are two great moments when Israel actually saw the divine form. At the crossing of the Red Sea, they saw God as a young lover and hero. At Sinai they saw an elderly lawgiver and judge. Each revelation was in accord with the need of the hour. On the day of battle, a frail elderly God could hardly be the right vision for the moment. On the day of judgment, no one could be satisfied with a God who looked any less distinguished than the jurists of the day, "the elders who sit at the gate." What is this midrash if not a primitive understanding of projection?[138]

Green cites another version of this Midrash (from *Pesikta Rabbati* 21:6) that extends the message of projection and makes it even more explicit. The extension there reads: "Thus Daniel says: 'I kept looking until the thrones were set in place and the Ancient of Days took His seat' (Dan 7:9)."[139] Here, the extension serves as if to say that

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[137] *EHYEH*, 51.
[138] *Seek My Face*, 32.
[139] "The Children in Egypt," 455.

if we make a throne for God, God will appear to us as a Ruler. Our images of a personal God originate in us, and change depending upon the needs of the hour.

Green's second key text on projection comes from a Hasidic interpretation (quoted in the name of Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt) of a verse in Ezekiel. Green summarizes that Hasidic text thus: "'the figure with the appearance of a man' that Ezekiel saw sitting on the divine throne is there only because we place him there (Ezekiel 1:26)."[140] Green adds in a footnote: "See also the much earlier comment by Shabbatai Donnolo, a tenth-century physician and religious thinker, that Ezekiel was shown the image of a man, a figure familiar to him, on the throne in his vision, lest he become too frightened by 'the image of God as it really is' and die a sudden death."[141] God is far to abstract to be captured by such human images as "a man on a throne." We put the man on the throne, because God-as-God-really-is (the One of All Being) is too intense for day-to-day human experience. (Elsewhere, Green elaborates on Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt's interpretation to demonstrate that projection is a two-way street. We will return to this in our section "The Hall of Mirrors Can Be Entered from Either End.")

But perhaps Green's most powerful (and also beautiful) key text on projection comes from Deuteronomy Rabbah (he cites it as "a variant text of Deuteronomy Rabbah," and adds in a footnote "*Deuteronomy Rabbah* (ed. Lieberman), p. 14f."[142]). Green notes that this text "has a richness of detail … which makes it worthy of being

[140] *Seek My Face*, 32.
[141] *Seek My Face*, 212.
[142] "Children in Egypt," 449-450.

quoted in its entirety."[143] We have truncated it here, though the full text is worthy of further reading.

> When Pharoah decreed that every male child be cast into the Nile, an Israelite woman would go out into the fields when she felt herself ready to give birth. After her child was born, she would turn he eyes heavenward and say: "I have done mine, as You have said: 'Be fruitful and multiply' (Gen. 1:28). Now You do Yours!" […]
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> How did those children live in the fields? Said Rabbi Levi: "God would send two angels to each of them, one to wash him and one to dress him. They would provide for him to be nursed and anointed with oil, as is said: 'He suckled him with oil from the rock, and honey from the flintstone' (Deut. 32:33). Thus, Scripture further says 'I bathed you in water … and gave you garments of brocade' (Ezek. 16:10)."
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> Rabbi Hiyya Rabba said: "It was not the angels who did this, but rather God Himself, for Scripture says: 'I bathed you.' Had the verse said: 'I caused you to be bathed,' one might think it was done by an angel. But 'I bathed you' means that there was no angel involved. Praised be the name of God! He Himself did this for them!"
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> The children grew up in the field like plants, and when they were grown they would return in flocks to their homes… But how would a child know the home of his own parents? God would go along with them, and to each child he would point out his father's house. He would tell them: "You father is to be called thus, and your mother thus." The child would say to his mother: "Do you remember the day you gave birth to me, in such-and-such a field, on such-and-such a day, five months ago?" Then the mother would ask: "Who cared for you?" And the child would answer: "A young man with beautiful curls [a reflex of Cant. 5:11]; there is none like him. He brought me here and is waiting outside." The mother would say: "Show him to me." When they went outside, however, though they would search everywhere, they could never find him.
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> When they saw Him at the Sea of Reeds, they pointed with their fingers to show their mothers: "This is the one who raised me! '*This* is my God and I will glorify him!'" (Ex. 15:2).[144]

This exquisite midrash serves dual purposes in Green's theology. First, and most central to our endeavor, it gives textual evidence for the notion that our personalized

[143] "Children in Egypt," 450.
[144] "Children in Egypt," 450.

images of God are all responses to the needs of the hour. They are projections. Beyond our purposes, Green uses this midrash as evidence of the all-but-lost Jewish image of God-as-young-lover (the "young man with beautiful curls"), which, Green argues, was purposefully downplayed in the early centuries C.E. because of its similarity to the image of Jesus. Green argues that this image of God desperately needs to be restored to the canon of Jewish images for the personalized God (alongside our more common images of God-as-parent and God-as-sovereign), in order to re-activate the metaphor of the divine-human relationship as lovers in intimate union.[145]

A question remains: are there certain projected images of God that fall outside the acceptable boundaries? If our images arise in response to the needs of the hour, are there limitations on how one might imagine God as a response to the needs of the hour? God as parent, sovereign, and lover are clearly acceptable. What about God as rock? Our tradition seems to support this image. What about images that come from outside the tradition: say, for example, God as Pharaoh, or God as Golden Calf?

Based on the textual richness of Green's work, I suspect that he would have a strong preference for images that have some traditional grounding in the Jewish tradition. We should also note that the key to these projected images is that they are only bridges, ways of making the abstract more intimate. These personal—and therefore, partial—images of God should not be confused for the totality of God.

[145] See *Radical Judaism*, pp. 53-58.

Many Images, One God: "I, I am He" (Deut. 32:39)

Having made the case that "our images of God change according to the needs of the hour,"[146] Green opens up the range of possible God images. If our images of God are projections, then almost any image for God should be useful. Green summarizes this idea best by quoting a line from "*Patach Eliyahu*" (originally in *Tiqquney Zohar* 17a, and also appearing in many *siddurim*): "You are the One who fills all names, but You Yourself have no specific name."[147] That is to say, all of our projected images of God serve the same purpose. "You are the One who fills all names"—almost any image will do. "But You Yourself have no specific name"—but all of these images are merely metaphors, pointing to a larger, more abstract God, the One of All Being. Green writes: "The kabbalists refer to this insight in their distinction between *Eyn Sof*, the boundless, undefined, and essentially impersonal divine reality, and the *sefirot*, which may be seen as the multiple faces or masks of God."[148] As we observed in our section on "The Conflict Between Intimacy and Abstraction," "the Kabbalist seeks to mentally flood the reader with an overwhelming excess of images, leading to the conclusion that the divine reality must ultimately transcend them all."[149]

In a personal interview, Green said: "I love the Zohar, because the Zohar uses natural metaphors as well as personal metaphors: God as father, God as bride, but God is also tree, and river, and sea, and sun, and moon. Now, they are all symbolic language, but that's OK, meanwhile the metaphor is very powerful."

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[146] *Radical Judaism*, 45.
[147] *Radical Judaism*, 64.
[148] *Seek My Face*, 32.
[149] *Radical Judaism*, 64.

There are three key texts that Green utilizes to underscore his point that "You are the One who fills all names, but You Yourself have no specific name." The first is from *Mekhilta Shirta*, the second is from the Zohar, and the third is from *Shir HaKavod* [from the liturgy].

The text from *Mekhilta Shirta* 4 reads:

> *The Lord Is a Man of War* (Ex. 15:3) Why is this said? Because He was revealed at the Sea as a warrior in battle … and at Sinai as an old man full of compassion … Scripture took care not to allow an opening for the nations of the world to say "They are two domains." "YHWH is a man of war, YHWH is His name." He it was in Egypt; He it was at the Sea. He was in the past and He shall be in the future! He is in this world and in the World to Come! Thus Scripture says: "See now that I, I am He; [there is no god beside Me]" (Deut. 32:39). And it is written: "Unto old age I am He" (Is. 46:4) and further: "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, King and Redeemer of Israel: I am the Lord of Hosts, the first and the last; [there is no god beside Me]" (Is. 44:6).[150]

This midrash follows on Green's earlier point that our images of a personal God are projections, suited to the needs of the hour, and adds the point that though there are many projections, they all serve as bridges to the singular One of All Being. Green writes: "'YHWH is His name' in Exodus 15:3 was written in order 'not to allow an opening for the nations of the world to say: "They are two domains."' … The Rabbis sought to assert in the strongest terms that God as elder and God as young man are one and the same."[151]

In particular, the phrase "I, I am He" is meant to indicate that although the two images may appear as two different "I"s, in reality, they are both "He." Also, the repetition of the phrase "there is no god beside Me" (which doesn't appear in the *Mekhilta* text but, as Green points out in a footnote, is the concluding phrase of both

[150] "Children in Israel," 453-454.
[151] "Children in Israel," 455.

Deut. 32:39 and Is. 44:6) serves to indicate that although we may project many images, all images portray the same God, beyond Whom there is none else.

Green's second key text is from the Zohar (Zohar 1:3a). We have previously encountered it in our section on "The Bridge Between Intimacy and Abstraction." The text is a Kabbalistic understanding of the sin of the Golden Calf. Previously, we quoted his summary of that text as it appears in *Seek My Face*, to demonstrate that worship of anything less than the One of All Being constitutes idolatry. Here, we offer Green's more lucid summary of that text:

> [The Kabbalists] read the word [*Elohim*] as composed of two shorter Hebrew terms: *eleh* and *mi*, meaning "these" and "who." "These" refers to the seven lower *sefirot* or "aspects" of the divine Self. By extension, it includes all our images, ideas, and descriptions of God. "These" are as varied as are the sacred languages of humanity; every one of them contains some aspect of truth, but all are incomplete. "Who" stands for *binah*, the secret that defies all description, the God of transcendent mystery. No words or images can describe this God, the One who is only question, not answer. The first great homily of the Zohar quotes the prophet Isaiah: "Raise your eyes to heaven and see *who* created *these*" (Is. 40:26). Mystery and images are one. *Mi* and *eleh* have to be joined. Only together do they comprise *elohim*. And here the Zohar warns us severely of the dangers of idolatry. Those who worshipped the Golden Calf, it reminds us, called out: "*These* are your gods, O Israel!" (Ex. 32:4).[152]

Here, Green uses the Zohar's Golden Calf text to demonstrate that our flood of images for a personal God (*eleh*, "these," the *sefirot*) are all gateways to the One of All Being (*mi*, "who," *ain sof*). Many images, one God. "Of course God is an elder on the throne—Daniel saw Him that way! But so too is God mother, warrior, sun and moon, fountain and river, myrtle-branch and *etrog*, bridegroom and bride."[153] "You are the One who fills all names, but You Yourself have no specific name."

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[152] *EHYEH*, 85.
[153] "Personal Theology," 7.

Finally, Green uses Shir HaKavod: *Dimu otcha v'lo ch'fi yesh-cha* / *va-y'shavucha l'fi ma'asecha* / *himshilucha b'rov chezyonot* / *hincha echad b'chol dimyonot* / *va-yechezu v'cha ziknah u-vacharut* / *u-s'ar roshcha b'seivah v'shacharut* / *ziknah b'yom din u-vacharut b'yom k'rav* / *k-ish milchamot yadav lo rav*—"They told of Thee, but not as Thou must be / Since from Thy work they tried to body Thee. / To countless visions did their pictures run / *Behold through all the visions, Thou art one* [emphasis added]. / In Thee old age and youth at once were drawn / The grey of eld, the flowing locks of dawn, / The ancient judge, the youthful warrior, / The man of battles, terrible in war" (translation by Israel Zangwill).[154] Though our images of God may differ, they all point to the same God. "Through all the visions, Thou art one."

The Hall of Mirrors Can Be Entered from Either End: "'What (*mah*) does Y-H-W-H your God ask of you?' *Adam*!" (Apter Rebbe)

But Green doesn't mean to say that our images of a personal God are *merely* projections. Green writes: "Our need to create God, I believe, comes out of the deepest recesses of ourselves, the place within us that also knows, in a way we cannot fully articulate, that God created us. … We are created in the image of God … and we are obliged to return the favor. God seeks to make us become ever more holy; we seek to make God human."[155] Green calls upon a rabbinic idiom to describe his understanding of projection: our images of a personal God are each a "*keli mahazik berakhah*, 'a vessel to contain blessing.'"[156] We are each a part of the One, and so we try to relate to the One by making it in our image. Said differently: "The mirror of projection goes both ways. We

[154] "Personal Theology," 5-6.
[155] *Seek My Face*, 30.
[156] *Seek My Face*, 209.

may project a God-image that reflects us, but God may also project a human image that reflects God. … Who can determine where this hall of mirrors begins? 'The eye with which I see God and the eye with which God sees me are the same eye,' says the great Christian mystic Meister Eckhardt. The mirror turns both ways."[157]

"It is only from our limited point of view that we see this process as projection. Seen from God's perspective, as it were, it is the diminution of infinity so that it can enter the finite human mind."[158] Projection is the One's gift to us, so that we may come into relationship with the One! Perhaps the farthest Green takes this point is: "God demands of us that we create the projection of God that we can worship!"[159]

In order to support this idea that Being "demands" that we project images of a personal God, Green returns to Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt's interpretation of a verse in Ezekiel. We encountered this teaching earlier, in our section on "Projection." Green cites this teaching in a several places throughout his work.[160] We present it here in its most lucid form:

> On Deuteronomy's *mah Y-H-W-H elohecha shoeil mei-imach* (Deut. 10:12)—"What does Y-H-W-H your God ask of you?"—he noted that the word *mah* is numerically 45. So too is the word *adam*. The simpler *hasidim*, when they heard this, must have understood him to be saying: God wants you to be a *mensch*. But to his closer disciples—one of them quotes this in his name—he said that he was referring to the *Adam* of Ezekiel's vision: *demut k'mareh adam alav mi-l'ma'alah*, "and on top, [upon this semblance of a throne,] there was a semblance of a human form" (Ez. 1:26). An image like that of man was upon the chariot. What does God want of you? *Adam*! That is the *Adam* God wants of you—that you place the image of man atop the chariot. Yes, projection is a *mitsvah*.[161]

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[157] *EHYEH*, 51.
[158] *Seek My Face*, 32.
[159] *EHYEH*, 51.
[160] *Radical Judaism*, 171; "Personal Theology," 7; *Seek My Face*, 32.
[161] "Personal Theology," 7-8.

Many readers may find themselves wondering, "Which does Green *actually* believe: are we created in God's image, or is God created in our image?" (Green hinted to me in our personal interview that he often gets that kind of question.) Ultimately, Green is unwilling to choose—or rather, he truly believes it is both. (We will come back to this idea in our section on "Poetics.") But beyond the the nature of "poetics," I notice that Green's theological system often self-definitional. Is-Was-Will Be is the One of All Being; thus, the beginning contains the end and the end contains the beginning.[162] This kind of circular logic allows Green to get away with saying: It's both—we create God and God creates us. (Our section on "Poetics" will provide a different perspective.)

Green expresses the dual-simultaneous nature of projection (we create God and God creates us) in four key metaphors. The first metaphor is sexual: "As lovers, we know that we are all both givers and receivers, indeed that our own greatest pleasure may lie in giving to the other in ways that entirely blur the clarity of who is giving and who is receiving."[163] We quickly see that Green's circular logic (described above) is easily mitigated by this metaphor.

The second metaphor is breathing, and is based on two texts: "We receive; we give back. *Kol haneshamah t'halel Yah*—"Every breath goes back to *Yod-Heh*" [Ps. 150:6] the highest divine name, the deepest inner divine place, which is also *nishmat kol chai* [from the liturgy]—ever breathing that breath back out into us, renewing the first breath of life."[164]

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[162] For a further elaboration of this idea, see *Seek My Face*, 22.
[163] "Personal Theology," 9.
[164] "Personal Theology," 10.

The third metaphor is a door, and is also based on two texts: "*Pitchu li shaarei tzedek, a-vo vam odeh Yah*—'Open the gates for me, that I may come in to praise the Lord' [Ps. 118:19]. … We stand before the gates, needing to call upon God, or upon someone, to let us in. … *Kol dodi dofek: pitchi li*—'The sound of my beloved knocking, "Open up for me!"'[Song. 5:2]. … *We* are the ones with our doors shut; it is we who have to open them to let God in."[165]

The fourth metaphor is seeing (Green uses this trope elsewhere[166] too), and depends on the grammatical form the word "appeared" in a particular midrash:

> At the Reed Sea God appeared to them as a youth, while at Sinai they saw God as an elder. … The Midrash is cautious in its language: *nireh*—"appeared." Is the change in God or in them? This would seem to make all the difference. Are we talking about grand-scale supernaturalism, the greatest miracle of revelation, that God can know what each heart and each moment needs, then change appearance accordingly? Or are we simply saying that all our images of God are human projections, reflections of our own need? … There is no answer to that question. As in our previous examples, both are true at once. Yes, God creates us in the divine image. Yes, all our images of God are our projected creation. There is a kaleidoscopic hall of mirrors here, but you can look into this kaleidoscope from either end.[167]

These four metaphors (sexual encounter, breathing, knocking at the door, and "appearing") all demonstrate that in the world of human encounter, as well as in Green's theology, any relationship is a two-way street. God creates us, and we create God.

Poetics: *Emet* versus *emet l'amito* (Rebbe Nachman)

Green truly believes that "the hall of mirrors can be entered from either end." Humans create God and God creates humans. Both of these are true. Green doesn't see

[165] "Personal Theology," 5.
[166] *Radical Judaism*, 45.
[167] "Personal Theology," 6.

these competing truths as in contradiction; rather, he sees them as two modes of understanding: the rational/discursive and the poetic/prophetic.

Green most frequently employs the distinction between these two modes of understanding in his discussion around evolution. If the poetic/prophetic mode of understanding were applied to the natural history of the universe, "the evolutionary process would then be conceived in a unitive way as the halting, struggling self-assertion of … a singular force or presence, rather than as the endless war of creatures against one another. … [We would understand evolution as the emergence of] more conscious life forms … instead of as 'the survival of the fittest.'"[168] Green writes that "the real task may be that of integrating our two tales, the one inherited from ages past [Genesis 1], and the one emerging from our own spiritual understanding of contemporary science [Darwin]."[169] He notes that we as Jews revere the courage of Nachshon ben Aminadav, "the first person to step into the Sea of Reeds after Israel left Egypt. … But what about the courage of the first creature ever to emerge from sea onto dry land? Do we appreciate the magnificence of that moment?"[170]

In kabbalistic language, Green seeks to reframe the natural history of the universe as "the infinitely varied self-garbing of an endless energy flow. All being exists in an eternal dialectic of *hitpashtut*, the emanatory flowing forth of that single energy, and *hitlabbeshut*, the garbing of that energy in distinctive forms."[171]

Of course, in the context of poeticizing the history of the natural universe, Green's theology fails (as do most systematic theologies) to provide an explanation for

[168] *Seek My Face*, 50.
[169] *Seek My Face*, 54.
[170] *Radical Judaism*, 21.
[171] *Radical Judaism*, 25.

suffering. "The survival of the fittest" accounts for suffering in a way that "the halting, struggling self-assertion of a singular force" does not. Green provides several responses to the problem of suffering (which are, for the most part, beyond the scope of our study). Most notably, Green suggests that the very self-contraction (*tzimtzum*) of *eyn sof* which allows the One to be expressed as the many—that contraction itself is a limiting force, a constricting of possibility. Said in Kabbalistic terms, the *sefirot* need boundaries. These boundaries account for the frequent blind-alleyways in the unfolding of the One. Poetic vision, in its insistence on harmonization (or at the very least, coherence), can easily overlook the problem of suffering.

As an earlier historical example of this "mythopoetic transformation, … [or] remythologization,"[172] Green cites the shift in worldview that Genesis 1 represents:

> The original readers/hearers of Genesis 1 … knew of another account of Creation, one of conflict, slaughter, and victory [the old Mesopotamian and Canaanite Creation myths]—"the survival of the fittest" among the gods. … Genesis 1 [by contrast] offers a purely harmonistic version of the origin of creatures, one where everything has its place as the willed creation of a single deity and all conflict has mysteriously been forgotten. Our civilization has been transformed over the past century and a half in no small part by our acceptance of a new tale of origins, one that more or less began with Darwin. … The history of living creatures is again depicted as a bloody and violent struggle, the implications of which for human behavior … have hardly gone unnoticed. We, too, are urgently in need of a new and powerfully harmonistic vision.[173]

Green seeks to harmonize two modes of understanding: the Darwinian theory of evolution (or its corollary, the Big Bang theory) and his monistic vision. "The time has come to end that opposition, to see the two tales as versions of the same story, representing two stages in humanity's own evolving self-understanding."[174] He writes:

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[172] *Radical Judaism*, 33.
[173] *EHYEH*, 110.
[174] *Seek My Face*, 54.

> This is the point at which science and religion should be seen to complement one another, rather than to stand in conflict. Yes, religion will pull harder in the direction of consciousness and will in its understanding of the evolutionary process. … Science will be more mechanistic and less sweeping in its vision, more inclined to attribute existence to serendipity than to plan. … Somewhere, in a formula not yet articulated, there lies a meeting of these views, two observations of the same reality.

These two modes of understanding correspond to the two sides from which the hall of mirrors can be entered:

> Are we the image of God? Is God our image? Is God projecting us? Are we projecting God? I think it depends on what day I ask it, what moment I ask it. Am I standing inside the siddur that day, or am I standing from the detached, critical point of view? Is it a moment of mystical consciousness or of rational query? All those moments co-exist in me, in us. So I don't think one can say: "Well, which one does he really mean?" I really do mean both. And they, in some ways, represent different modes of consciousness. The religious mind is created to address a different mode of consciousness than the rational, discursive mind. It's the mode of consciousness to which great music and great art also speak. You could say it is a deeper level of mind or a pre-conscious level of mind. And its truth coexists alongside rational truth—and they don't say exactly the same thing. There's a sort of dissonance between them. The medieval philosopher would say: "Of course, there's the method of reason and the method of revelation, but they are both exactly the same truth." But I say that it's only on some deep, abstract level that they're the same. There really is some dissonance. But we have to be able to listen to both.[175]

Green truly does believe that both truths are real. And yet, he puts a greater positive valence on the poetic mode of understanding. "Poetics are a deeper plane. … Rebbe Nachman distinguishes *emet* from *emet l'amito*—the truth, versus the truth of truth."[176] Again, from a pastoral perspective, this greater positive valence on the poetic mode has the potential to overlook the reality of suffering. But Green does so with confidence:

> I am also one who knows that religious truth belongs to the language of poetry, not discursive prose. I recognize fully and without regret that theology is an art,

[175] Arthur Green in a private conversation, October 15, 2015.
[176] Arthur Green in a private conversation, October 15, 2015.

> not a science. We people of faith have nothing we can prove; attempts to do so only diminish what we have to offer. We can only testify, never prove. Our strength lies in grandeur of vision, in an ability to transport the conversation about existence and origins to a deeper plane of thinking. My faith, but also my human experience, tells me that this shift profoundly enhances our understanding of our own lives and of the world in which we live. Opening our minds, and ultimately the mind of our society, to the truth accessible from that inner "place" constitutes our best hope for inspiring change in the way we live on this earth. There is nothing mere about poetic vision.[177]

Green writes: "In Yiddish, [the rationalist objection to poetic vision] is called a *kashe oif a mayse*, 'an objection to a story.' Stories should be allowed to stand on their own merit as stories, free from intellectualized objections."[178] No one ever challenges Tinker Bell: "But *how* does pixie dust enable Peter to fly?" We get swept up in the fantasy of the story. And in so doing, we allow ourselves to access a different (Green would say "deeper") mode of understanding, one in which the truth of youthful imagination is greater than the truth that humans cannot fly.

This stance—in which poetic vision corresponds to the deeper "the truth of truths"—is, for Green, the essence of the religious mindset. "The step from 'wonder' to 'God' is not an act of inference but an act of naming. … It is we who attach the word 'God' to our search for meaning."[179] "As 'the One' becomes personal, 'Being' (*HWYH* in Hebrew) becomes 'God' (*Y-H-W-H*)."[180] Green takes this poetic stance well aware of some of its possible negative implications: "The shared use of the term 'God' is not without its problems. In speaking of the One that underlies the many, I use the same word that for others has a very different meaning. I choose not to abandon this term that bears

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[177] *Radical Judaism*, 18-19.
[178] *Seek My Face*, 60.
[179] *Seek My Face*, xxiii.
[180] *Radical Judaism*, 33.

within it so much of the legacy of our faith."[181] Green echoes Martin Buber (Green says so in a footnote[182]) in Buber's *The Eclipse of God*: "[God] is the most heavy-laden of all human words. None has become so soiled, so mutilated. Just for this reason, I may not abandon it. … We cannot cleanse the word 'God' and we cannot make it whole; but, defiled and mutilated as it is, we can raise it from the ground and set it over and hour of great care." Green's poetic vision corresponds to Buber's choice not to abandon the word "God." Green chooses to see the universe as a monistic whole, and chooses to call that One of All Being "God."

Summarizing the role of poetics in religion, Green relies on insights from Maimonides' *Guide* 2:32: "Maimonides claim[ed] that prophecy contained a perfect mixture of intellect and imagination. … What is the role of imagination in religion if not to project images from our own experience that will serve as vessels to catch and embody the light?"[183] Indeed, Green does recognize that his "own experiences serve as vessels" in shaping his theological framework—not just in informing the projections of a personal God that resonate with him, but in shaping the very framework of his theological system. (We will more deeply explore the role of personal experience in projection in our section on "The Portrait of the King.") Green's biography helped to shape his notion of two modes of understanding. He notes:

> If you want to psychoanalyze me, you could say that's my father and my grandmother speaking. … My dad was a militant atheist. They were Jewish, leftists, secularists, anti-religious Jews. … My mother's parents were traditional east European Jews. Grandpa's shop was open on Shabbas—but upstairs above the shop, it was Shabbas and pretty old fashioned. My grandmother was deeply pious an old world kind of way. … My dad would have been an academic, had it

[181] *Seek My Face*, 14.
[182] *Seek My Face*, 195.
[183] *Seek My Face*, 32.

> not been for the depression. … I was something of a football between my grandparents' traditionalism and my father's rationalism. … I was sort of torn between those two worlds, which is to say, deeply attracted to faith and deeply critical of it as the same time.

Green's father corresponds to the rational/discursive; his grandmother corresponds to the poetic/prophetic. Just as the two personages cohere in him, so too do the two modes of understanding cohere in him and in his theological framework.

A Portrait of the King (Rebbe Nachman)

Perhaps the most important text for understanding the role of projection in Green's theology is Rebbe Nachman's tale "The Portrait of the King." He notes[184] that he has had the opportunity to publish on that story three times (in *Tormented Master*, in *Seek My Face*, and in Horen's *Ha-Hayyim ke-Ga'agu'a*). I present here a truncated version of that story, based on the way Green tells it in *Seek My Face*.

> Once there was a king. That king had a wise man who was his closest advisor. One day he called the wise man into his chambers and said to him:
>
> "You see that here in my palace I have a collection of portraits of all the kings of all the countries. But there is one king of whom I have no portrait, and in fact, no one has a portrait of him. He designates himself as … 'a man of truth, and a humble person.' […] That king is hidden from people. He sits behind a curtain and remains distant even from his subjects. I want you to go and fetch me a portrait of that king."
>
> Before [the wise man] went [to that country], he knew that he had to know the essence or the secret of that country. … He came to understand … that the place … was the country of lies. It was filled with lies from beginning to end.
>
> As soon as he got [to that country], he went to the marketplace, and there he let himself be cheated. Sure enough, the merchant deceived him. When he tried to call a policeman, he was cheated again. … [The lies and bribery went all the way to the top: from the policeman, to the magistrate, to the high court, to the senate.] Finally, he was brought before the king.

[184] "Personal Theology," 10.

> When the wise man came before the king, he cried out: "Over whom are you king? … Your whole country is one big lie!" … And he began telling the king about all the lies of the country.
>
> The king, who was hidden behind his curtain, bent his ears forward toward the curtain to hear the wise man's words. He was amazed to know that there was someone here who knew all about the lies of his country. …
>
> Then the wise man concluded: "Now you might say that the king of the country of lies is himself the greatest liar of them all. … But now I see how you are indeed 'a man of truth.' … It is for this reason that you dwell behind a curtain. You are a man of truth who cannot bear to look upon the lies of your kingdom."
>
> And so the wise man began praising the king more and more, heaping praises upon him. But the king was very humble. … So it is with humble people: the more you praise them, the smaller they feel in their own eyes. … The more the wise man built him up, the smaller and more humbled [the king] felt until the moment when he finally became so small that he was nothing at all. At that moment the king could no longer restrain himself, and he cast aside the curtain, saying: "Who is this that knows all the lies of my kingdom and reveals them all?"
>
> In that moment the face of the king was revealed. The wise man saw him, painted his portrait, and took it home to his king.[185]

Green writes about this story: "This tale … has become my story."[186] In many ways, it captures Green's theology. "There are two kings here—the king who is discovered at the end of the tale and the king who sends the wise man. … The two turn out indeed to be one. It is a new and unique portrait of himself that the original king demands of the seeker."[187] Green is saying that each human life—indeed, each expression of variety in the lower unity—is a portrait of the king, a self expression of the One, containing the whole of the higher unity: transcendence dwelling within immanence.

Later Green adds: "When the curtain is thrown aside, what is it that both the king and seeker see? Is it not the human being, made 'in the image and likeness of God' that

[185] *Seek My Face*, xiii-xvi.
[186] *Seek My Face*, xvi.
[187] *Seek My Face*, xvii-xviii.

the king sees? And is it not that very image and likeness that is revealed to the seeker? Do not both king and seeker see in that moment that their otherness is not so 'other' after all?"[188] Green is saying that the image of God is the image of the seeker. We create God in our image, and God creates us in God's image. "The hall of mirrors can be entered from either end."

Our whole lives, our glories and our failures, are each a unique portrait of the king. The happenings and circumstances of our lives constitute the personal God; our images of God arise in response to "the needs of hour," the needs of our lives. This is what is meant by "personal theology"—an understanding that one's life journey is in fact a new and unique portrait of the king. "Persons … can understand themselves as going forth on the journey to bring back portraits of the King. That is the task of consciousness alone. We are life articulate, being that has become self-conscious."[189]

[188] *Seek My Face*, xvii-xviii.
[189] *Seek My Face*, 69.

Conclusion

Just as Green organizes his material in the classic (Green credits Rosenzweig[190]) tripartite structure of God, Torah, and Israel, so too can critical response to Green be organized around those same categories. In this conclusion, I will first focus on the questions of Torah and Israel, followed by a few brief comments on Green's 21st century American context. Finally, because the particular focus of this thesis has been on the question of Green's monistic vision and the personal God, I will conclude with comments on Green's vision of God.

Torah

For Green, Torah is a response to the question "*Ayekah*—Where are you?"[191] And while this question advances the moral and universal agenda, it makes no substantive claim for particularly Jewish ritual observance. Green claims that the first mitzvah is: "Be Aware"[192]—the corollaries of which are, "treating every human being as the image of God,"[193] living within "Shabbat consciousness,"[194] "acting with concern for the healthy survival of Creation itself,"[195] and having "sympathy with pain caused to animals."[196] While these obligations are worthy, and are *grounded* in Jewish tradition, none of them (with the exception of Shabbat) is particularly Jewish in *content*. Why should Jews wrap

[190] *Radical Judaism, ix.*
[191] *Radical Judaism*, 93.
[192] *Seek My Face*, 75.
[193] *Seek My Face*, 77.
[194] *Seek My Face*, 81.
[195] *Seek My Face*, 82.
[196] *Seek My Face*, 85.

tefillin? Why should Jews sit in the sukkah? Why should Jews eat *matzah* on Passover? Why should Jews study Torah?

Daniel Landes, in a review of *Radical Judaism*, writes that "the dismissal of clear legal norms as nothing more than a transitory response to a wordless call … is a failure to reckon with the power of temptation and the function of law, human or divine."[197] While Landes's critique of Green strays from the intellectual into the personal (Landes focuses overmuch, I think, and unfairly,[198] on Green's interpretation of the seventh commandment), Landes's comment on "the power of temptation" is not misplaced. When Green's monistic God asks *Ayekah*, is there any ultimate guidepost by which to judge one's response? Green counters that even "the high fences of *halakhah* have [not] been terribly successful of late at helping some Orthodox teachers to defeat temptation, either sexual or financial."[199] But while this argument underscores the unenforceability of *halakhah* (and is, in many ways, Green's personal response to Landes's personal critique)—and perhaps even illustrates the *need* for a new (monistic?) vision—the comment does not explain how Green evaluates individual responses to the question of *Ayekah*. Yehudah Mirsky poses a similar challenge to Green: "Can we truly ground moral commands in the absence of a commander?"[200]

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[197] Landes, Daniel. "Hidden Master." *Jewish Review of Books*. Fall, 2010. Accessed January 21, 2016. http://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/118/hidden-master/
[198] Green, Arthur. "Pardes/Hebrew College Theology Throwdown" (leaked response from Green). *Jewschool: Progressive Jews and Views*. October 30, 2010. Accessed Jan 22, 2016. http://jewschool.com/2010/10/24395/pardeshebrew-college-theology-throwdown/
[199] Green. "Pardes/Hebrew College Theology Throwdown."
[200] Mirsky, Yehudah. "The God of the Kabbalists." *Jewish Ideas Daily*. September 29, 2010. Accessed January 22, 2016. http://www.jewishideasdaily.com/727/features/the-god-of-the-kabbalists/

David Wolpe assesses Green's ethical commitments more favorably: "For Green, a religious position that does not embrace his politics contradicts the heart of his theology of interdependence: As we are all bound together, universalism, environmentalism, [and] radical activism … [are] concomitant of theological understanding."[201]

But it is Magid who is able to respond to the serious challenge raised by Landes and Mirsky. "Many Jews adopted Kant's principles of a universal law—questioning particularity, revelation, and a 'moral commander'—and molded Judaism around it. … Why is Green's voyage … categorically different from Mordecai Kaplan or the practice of many in the Reform movement? To posit that human beings need a divine commander to be moral agents accepts a kind of Jewish-Barthianism that is surely legitimate but hardly definitive."[202] (Elsewhere, Magid defines what he means by Barthianism: "making the human powerless."[203]) Magid is arguing that while Landes and Mirsky are correct to wonder about the "absence of a commander" in Green's work, they are incorrect to assume that humans do not have an intrinsic moral compass.

So far, we have only considered the category of Torah as it corresponds to ethics. We will now consider Torah as it corresponds to Jewish ritual observance.

Wolpe writes: "Certainly much of [Green's] theology is not 'specifically' Jewish"[204]—by which he seems to mean that Green does not adequately recognize that

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[201] Wolpe, David. "Rethinking Judaism." *Jewish Journal*. March 20, 2010. Accessed January 22, 2016. http://www.jewishjournal.com/books/article/rethinking_judaism_20100331

[202] Magid, Shaul. "(Re) Reading Radicalism: Reading Reviews of Arthur Green's *Radical Judaism*." *ZEEK: A Journal of Jewish Thought and Culture*. March 10, 2011. Accessed January 22, 2016. http://zeek.forward.com/articles/117106/

[203] Magid, Shaul. *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 95.

[204] Wolpe. "Rethinking Judaism."

"Jews have special responsibilities arising from their history."[205] As I ask above: Why should Jews wrap *tefillin*? Why should Jews sit in the sukkah? Why should Jews eat *matzah* on Passover? Why should Jews study Torah? Magid responds, asserting that Wolpe's true objection is to Green's syncretism: "as a student of Jewish history [Wolpe] knows that syncretism has been around for a long time. … There is no real categorical distinction between a theology that is 'normative' and one that is 'syncretistic.'"[206] Magid seems to mean that even our established, now-"normative" canon of Jewish thought is comprised of syncretic elements (Maimonides the Aristotelian, for example). But still, Magid's argument in favor of syncretism does not answer the question as to why Jews should wrap *tefillin*.

Magid approaches an answer to this question in *American Post-Judaism*, where he writes: "the theophany at Sinai is not, for Green, a *revelation* at all. … [Rather] that response *to* the One is not *part of* the One but *clothes* the One and articulates God's universal reach to a particular community."[207] Judaism is not a *part* of the One; it is a *response* to the One. This accounts for the existence of uniquely Jewish practices, but it still does not make a compelling case for why to engage those practices (as opposed to others). (It should be noted that Green is not alone in this regard. In many ways, all of modern Jewish thought can be understood as an attempt to answer the question: Why be Jewish?) Landes, in a particularly biting—but also particularly insightful—comment

[205] Wolpe. "Rethinking Judaism."
[206] Magid. "(Re) Reading Radicalism."
[207] Magid. *American Post-Judaism*, 104.

notes: “There may be faster and more direct approaches to the Source available in the constant hum of the universe. And what is a Jew to do then?”[208]

Israel

In the weeks following the 2013 Pew Research Center study *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, many responses to the Study cropped up on the internet. Many of these responses seemed to be written in state of panic over the future of American Jewry. Green, by contrast, published an article in which he called the Pew findings the “entrance point to an uncertain but exciting new era in our people’s history.”[209]

Unlike the many hand-wringers who worried that Pew signaled the beginning of the end for non-Orthodox Jewry in America, Green saw in the Pew study an opportunity. Green writes: “This is America, a nation of seekers, where the longing to believe has deep roots and many branches. There are Jews … who have looked elsewhere for spiritual satisfaction but might well find themselves drawn to” his approach to Judaism. Clear headedly, he adds in the very same paragraph: “Will such an approach to Judaism bring back all of those young Jews who checked the ‘none’ box when it came to religion? Of course not. Many, perhaps most, will remain hopelessly indifferent.”

These two statements capture the impact that Green’s thought and work will have on American Jewry. For the “spiritual, but not religious” set, Green’s work will likely find resonance—a Jewish spiritual path for the serious seeker. For the “just Jewish” set, Green’s work addresses a non-existent need.

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[208] Landes. “Hidden Master.”
[209] Green, Arthur. “From Pew Will Come Forth Torah.” *eJewishPhilanthropy*. October 23, 2013. Accessed January 18, 2016. http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/from-pew-will-come-forth-torah/

But Green also addresses a third group who may constitute the people Israel. Green writes: "Being 'Israel' means identifying fully with [the] experience [of being liberated former-slaves]."[210] He continues: "[I admit,] (partly in sadness!) that it no longer suffices to limit my sense of spiritual fellowship to those who fall within the ethnic boundaries that history has given us."[211]

Landes responds: "Although Green himself is a person who is clearly attached to the Jewish people, the logic of his position is disturbing. It leads him to privilege people possessing the proper spiritual consciousness … over the actual people of Israel."[212] According to Landes, Green addresses the "spiritual but not religious" set, but ignores the "just Jewish" set. Wolpe's critique is similar. Playing on Green's reliance on *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (Ex. 3:14), Wolpe writes: "This book will be persuasive for those to whom it is persuasive. … Can 'radical Judaism' speak to people outside the envisioned circle?"[213] Even Magid, who tends to read Green favorably, notes: "It is not clear to me whether a Jew who identifies as a Jew by purely ethnic criteria would be a part of Green's Israel."[214] (We should note that this is not an *un*favorable reading; merely an insightful comment. As if to argue against himself, Magid notes elsewhere: "Did Jews always have ironclad criteria of Jewishness? Shaye Cohen, hardly a radical, in his *The Beginning of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* seems to think otherwise."[215]) On the question of "who is a part of Green's Israel," Magid adds: "There is perhaps an implied distinction here between 'Jew' and 'Israel' in Green's position. The Jew is one who

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[210] *Radical Judaism*, 132.
[211] *Radical Judaism*, 141.
[212] Landes. "Hidden Master."
[213] Wolpe. Rethinking Judaism.
[214] Magid. *American Post-Judaism*, 105.
[215] Magid. "(Re) Reading Radicalism."

belongs to an ethnos. … 'Israel' for Green seems to be at least partially a spiritual category that may have been initiated by the 'Jews' … but is not limited to them."[216]

We should note that Green does seem to have a love for Jews by ethnicity. However, he is skeptical that the Jewish ethnic project can thrive in North America. In the same *eJewishPhilanthropy* article cited above, Green writes: "I for one would love to see a strong culture-based secular Jewish life re-emerge in this country, but I believe it's an uphill struggle. American society is so defined by its struggle with race that ethnic identities not visible on the skin have little place in this society."[217]

Magid locates Green's tendency towards a universal Israel within his tendency towards an immanent God. He writes: "I suggest that maintaining the theological categories of 'transcendent' and 'immanent' as co-existing in a paradox also enables the categories of 'universal' and 'particular' to survive the humanistic critique of Judaism in modernity. When one collapses, as it does in Green's *Radical Judaism*, the other is soon to follow."[218] Indeed, Magid notes that without a transcendent God to enact the election of Israel (or, similarly, to command the *mitzvot*), the category of chosenness falls away. Magid notes that for Green, chosenness is a theological response to historical circumstances: "election as … a response [to] … Israel's disempowered state and its desire to transcend its subjugation."[219] For Green, God didn't choose the people Israel; the people Israel chose covenant with God (read: chose to respond to the One).

So far, we have dealt exclusively with Israel as a people. Let us turn now to Israel as a modern nation-state. Green calls himself "a religious Jew and a secular Zionist,

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[216] Magid. *American Post-Judaism*, 105.
[217] Green. "From Pew Will Come Forth Torah."
[218] Magid. "(Re) Reading Radicalism."
[219] Magid. *American Post-Judaism*, 104.

which is to say that … I accord no messianic or protomessianic meaning to the existence of a Jewish state."[220]

Unsurprisingly, Landes (who is the director of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem) is Green's biggest critic on this account. He writes that Green's secular Zionism is "astonishing, because nothing else in his book is secular. Every mosquito, rock, indigenous religious practice, every person, place, or thing, is given a spiritual status. … But Israel is presented as an abstract entity, lifeless."[221]

But Landes's critique goes further than this. He writes: "The State of Israel … is always … making messy choices. … Thematically, all this runs counter to Green's hopeful evolutionary narrative. … Israel exposes ruptures in 'the unity of reality' in ways stark (we have enemies), necessary (we need to survive), and human (sometimes we do well and sometimes we don't). It just doesn't fit into [Green's] sunny evolutionary spiritualism."[222] Indeed, as we noted above in our section on "Poetics," and as we shall see below in our section on God, Green's poetic vision has the tendency to harmonize messiness. The State of Israel faces messy decisions daily.

Landes's comments seem to have touched a particular nerve in Green. In response, he writes: "I remain committed to the vision of a Jewish and democratic state (There—I have signed my loyalty oath!) while according it no messianic significance."[223] Green's comment about "a loyalty oath," however rhetorical, illustrates how deeply the question of loyalty to Israel cuts.

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[220] *Radical Judaism*, 145.
[221] Landes. "Hidden Master."
[222] Landes. "Hidden Master."
[223] Green. "Pardes/Hebrew College Theology Throwdown."

Magid cools things off a bit by noting that Green's "secular Zionism" is not unique among religious thinkers: "Yeshayahu Liebowitz made a similar claim and Gershom Scholem often warned against the danger of founding Zionism on theological principles."[224]

At the time of this writing, a Hebrew translation of *Radical Judaism* (with an addendum on Prayer) is underway. It will be interesting to see how Green's work is received in Israel.

Context

Both Mirsky and Magid note that the context in which Green writes influences the way in which he is received. Mirsky writes: "It is especially difficult to see how a reader without Green's personal experience of traditional life and culture—which, even as it informs [his] loving descriptions of Jewish ritual and peoplehood, operates on rather different premises from those [he] embrace[s] here—is to make sense of [his] arguments."[225] Mirsky seems to be saying that Green is able to concede as much as he is because he is starting from a position of relative strength. His Jewish life and identity are not at risk; he is a deeply committed Jew. Thus, he is able to relinquish the notion of a transcendent, personal God without endangering his Jewish self. (This argument, of course, is counter to Green's own sense of his biography. He writes: "The encounter with the mystical tradition saved Judaism for me. Without it I would have wandered away."[226]) Nevertheless, Mirsky is right to note that Green's theology may be better suited for those who are already strongly attached to Judaism, even if they are

[224] Magid. "(Re) Reading Radicalism."
[225] Mirsky. "God of the Kabbalists."
[226] *Radical Judaism*, 5.

disenchanted with certain of its theological ideas, than it is suited to people who are entirely detached from Judaism. In this way, Green's work may serve better for *tshuvah* ("homecoming") than for *keiruv* ("outreach.")

Magid makes a different point about Green's context. Even while noting that Green is not the first Jewish panentheist (Moses Cordovero, the early Habad theologians), Magid says that the others before Green "lived very much inside what we may call anachronistically 'orthodoxy' and thus never overtly took their metaphysical positions to their logical (perhaps heretical) conclusions."[227] Magid makes this point to hypothesize as to why Green has been greeted with such strong (and in many cases, negative) reactions. "Green is surely not the first to make this [religious humanist] move but he does so in a way that makes early twenty-first century Jews who are threatened with 'survival' not via anti-Semitism but rather assimilation, rather nervous. … In our time [Green] seems to cede too much for a progressive Jewish community hanging on to a diminishing multiculturalism and the emergence of post-ethnic society where ethnicity no longer plays a central role of communal identity." [228]

God

Despite the troubling implications for Torah and Israel, I find Green's mystical panentheistic vision of God compelling. In poetic prose, he describes a shift in our understanding of God and makes the case that such an understanding is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. He correctly notes that American Jewry has inherited a relatively thin religious tradition—"a Judaism of rather simplistic rabbinic faith, the religion, to say it in

[227] Magid. "(Re) Reading Radicalism."
[228] Magid. "(Re) Reading Radicalism."

capsule form, of RaShI rather than that of either Maimonides or the Zohar."[229] He adds in a footnote that American Jewry has been "shielded, for apologetic reasons, from much of [its] more interesting and potentially attractive theological literature."[230] Green's expanded theological vision—reclaiming the traditions of Maimonides, the Zohar, and Hasidut—is indeed far more sophisticated, interesting, and attractive than the "our Father, our King" theology that he decries.

I would argue that Green is successful in navigating the tension between monism and the personal God. He says in no unclear terms that "the personal God is a symbolic bridge."[231] That bridge is created both by humans *and* by the One (after all, human beings are *a part of* the One): humans create it in order to know the One; the One demands it of humans in order to be known as a unified whole.

Four questions arise in response to Green's system: (1) What is the nature of the One's desire for its constituent parts? (2) How does the One become the many, and is there intelligent design? (3) Why—as people often ask of theological systems—do humans suffer? And, (4) is the One qualitatively "better" than the many?

(1) What is the nature of the One's desire for its constituent parts? Green speaks alternately about *sha'ashu'a* and *ga'agu'a*. *Sha'ashu'a* can be translated as "delight … [and refers to] the pleasure God takes in each step of the ongoing process of self-manifestation."[232] For the brief moment that the One expresses itself in any form of variety—as a human life, as a tree, as a symphony, as a table—the One delights in taking that form. The higher unity delights in each form of the lower unity. This idea is best

[229] *Radical Judaism*, 71.
[230] *Radical Judaism*, 175.
[231] *Radical Judaism*, 73.
[232] *Radical Judaism*, 48.

expressed by Rebbe Nachman's parable, "A Portrait of the King." In the end, the seeker paints a portrait of his own "image and likeness." His journey—his very life!—is but another portrait of the king. God delights in each of these portraits.

The second term, *ga'agu'a*, can be translated as "yearning," and refers to the "deep and ultimately inexpressible longing for the restoration of cosmic unity."[233] The One desires the reunification of its constituent parts, and so it reaches out and offers pathways towards an awareness of the One. This reaching out is a form of desire. The One not only delights in each portrait of the king; it desires a full "collection of portraits of all the kings of all the countries."

These two tendencies—the delighting of the One in its constituent parts (*sha'ashu'a*), and the yearning of the One to be known by its constituent parts (*ga'agu'a*)—are the basis of the One's desire for us. The "mythology of relationship" is not only a response to Jewish tradition; it is an integral component of Green's mystical panentheism. Consequently, the personal God is not a problem for mystical panentheism; it is a component of it (even if it is only a "symbolic" component).

The second question that arises in response to Green's theology is: (2) How does the One become the many, and is there intelligent design? We addressed the question of how the One becomes the many in our section on "Monism." We provided three responses: *tsimtsum*, gradual steps, and *sod iq*. We noted also that the One does not "become" the many, but more accurately, the One underlies (emanates) the many. Green

[233] *Seek My Face*, 228.

adds: "To answer such a question [how/why does the One become the many] would be to say more about *Eyn Sof* than we can."[234]

Regarding intelligent design, Green refers to two terms: *keter* (the "highest" *sefirah*) and *Ehyeh* (the name that God reveals to Moses in Ex. 3:14). "*Keter* represents the first stirrings of intent within *Eyn Sof*, the arousal of desire to come forth into the varied life of being. … There is no specific "content" in *keter*; it is a desire that potentially bears all content, but actually none. It is therefore often designated by the kabbalists as 'Nothing.'"[235] Similarly, regarding *Ehyeh*, Green writes: "*Ehyeh* [means] 'I shall be.' … *Ehyeh* is God as future, the One of utter openness to all that is to be."[236] Synthesizing these two symbols, Green writes: "In that inner place called *keter*, or *Ehyeh*, we understand that God loves everything that comes forth (yes, death as well as life; pain as well as pleasure). Whatever it is, God will be there in it."[237]

Bringing these two symbols to bear on the question of intelligent design, we can only say that God is "open" to whatever unfolds in the universe. There does not seem to be a specific plan. However, we should note, that the next *sefirah* after *keter* is *hokhmah*, "wisdom." Green writes: "Within [*hokhmah*] lies the entire unfolding of existence … in a literal sense of potential (meaning that its potency, its power, is all fully present)."[238] So while the One is "open" to whatever unfolds in the universe, the One already contains within it the "potential" for all things that can and will unfold in the universe. In its act of

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[234] *EHYEH*, 24.
[235] *EHYEH*, 24.
[236] *EHYEH*, 5.
[237] *EHYEH*, 5.
[238] *Radical Judaism*, 25.

tsimtsum, the One relinquishes the actual unfolding of events; but in potential, the One contains (and remains open to) all that will unfold.

Magid also notes that *keter* plays a key role in Green's system. He writes: "*keter*, or the cosmic place of non-distinction, serves as the cornerstone of [Green's] panentheism."[239] *Keter*, argues Magid, allows *Eyn Sof* to enter into Green's system as "an undivided whole,"[240] rather than remain impossibly distant. (Compare this to RaMBaM's active intellect, which can only be accessed by the most refined of minds.) Mirsky also picks up on this: "Nothingness, or the Void, is an important concept. … Nothingness in Kabbalah is paradoxically also the fount of Being, the guarantor of existence beyond human finitude. … In Kabbalah, the Void's seeming emptiness is but the refraction in our limited human consciousness of a fullness and vitality too great to be imagined."[241] *Keter*, which is also called "Nothing," represents both the absence of content and also the presence of all potential content. *Keter* is the prism through which One is refracted to become the many.

We have now already hinted at our third question: (3) Why do humans suffer? We have already said that *keter*/*Ehyeh* "loves everything that comes forth (yes, death as well as life; pain as well as pleasure)." But the openness of *keter*/*Ehyeh* is hardly a comfort for suffering. Here, Green relies upon the "lowest" *sefirah*: *shekhinah*. (He notes, appropriately, that "one of the most important names for *shekhinah* in Kabbalah is *'atarah*, another Hebrew term for 'crown.' The first and last *sefirot* are both crowns,

[239] Magid. *American Post-Judaism*, 102.
[240] Magid. *American Post-Judaism*, 101.
[241] Mirsky. "God of the Kabbalists."

keter and *'atarah*."[242] Thus, the compassion of *shekhinah* is also the compassion of *keter*.) *Shekhinah* is detached from the other nine *sefirot*. It contains within it all of the suffering and detachment in our universe. The One, as it becomes manifest as the many, must become constricted and partially detached (*shekhinah*). Thus, our suffering and detachment are part of the One's suffering and detachment. The One is with us (in the form of *shekhinah*) in our suffering.

Landes picks up on this point: "Kaplan's God transforms chaos into order, while Green's allows for the evolution of higher complexity. … Both present optimistic theologies that have no sense of the tragic, and tend to ignore evil."[243] Magid responds: "Kabbalah is not better or more comforting than science nor does it offer a comprehensive world-view. It offers a compelling albeit incomplete system. It does not finally solve the riddle of human existence, even for the believer."[244] In other words: no theological system can solve the problem of suffering. But Landes is correct to note that Green's system tends to harmonize suffering.

Our fourth and final question is: (4) Is the One qualitatively "better" than the many? Although Green seeks to deconstruct the vertical metaphor (see the similar tendency in Diana Butler Bass), in some ways he sets up a new verticality, wherein the One is "higher" than the many. He speaks of a "higher" and "lower" unity. He speaks of his poetic vision as representing a "deeper" mode of understanding—the "truth of truth." Are these new constructs not reformulations of the old problem of verticality? In some ways, has Green not expressed a new language of transcendent Other?

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[242] *EHYEH*, 58.
[243] Landes. "Hidden Master."
[244] Magid. "(Re) Reading Radicalism."

Both Landes and Magid pick up on this point. Landes, predictably, argues that Green has expressed a new language of transcendent Other. He writes: "Green's God of Evolution is a jealous God. It devours the personal God of the Bible and the Rabbis, and spits out all parts of the Torah that are not conducive to the worship of 'the unity of being.' … Pursuing the logic of its insatiable appetite for 'Oneness,' it may even consume Green's own platform of radical Neo-Hasidic Jewish mystical learning and practice as being too particularistic."[245] Magid, equally predictably, argues that Green has not expressed a new language of transcendent Other. He writes: "It [Green's belief that 'There is naught but the One'] does not reject 'other gods' *per se*, it only rejects any other G/gods that make any exclusive claim to divinity and that would include the transcendent God of the Bible!"[246]

Here, I agree with both Landes and Magid. On the one hand, Green argues that the deepest form of truth is the One. On the other hand, he says that that deepest form of truth (the One) is entirely knowable through the many. The One exists *within* the many. The outer gates of variety, which are so obviously apparent to us in every facet of the universe, lead to the inner gates of unity, which are hidden just over the horizon. Though the higher unity represents the level on which all things are fundamentally the same and the lower unity represents the level on which all things are fundamentally different, *both* levels claim that all things share something fundamental. The higher and lower unity are one. They can be experienced by any person.

Regarding our four questions, we may conclude: Green's mystical panentheistic system easily admits (1) the notion that the One delights in the many. It equally easily

[245] Landes. "Hidden Master."
[246] Magid. *American Post-Judaism*, 102.

admits (2) the notion that the One is open to whatever unfolds in the universe. These two questions do not conflict with Green's notion of the personal God as symbolic bridge. And while Green's theology does not ignore (3) the problem of suffering, it has the potential to try and harmonize suffering. What's more, *shekhinah* (along with all the other *sefirot*) is a symbolic bridge, an example of the personal God. In order to address the problem of suffering, Green has to rely on a (highly deconstructed) version of the personal God. Finally, we can say that (4) yes, Green believes that the "truth of truth" is "deeper" than the truth (a position of theological distance), and also yes, Green believes that the "truth of truth" can be known by any person at any time (a position of theological nearness).

With this final observation in mind, we recognize that Green has achieved exactly what he claimed to: he has built a bridge between intimacy and abstraction. That bridge is the symbolic, personal God, whose name, according to the Jewish people, is Y-H-W-H. Our concrete, intimate name for God is the slippery abstraction "Is-Was-Will Be." Said differently: "You are the One who fills all names, but You Yourself have no specific name."