



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Open Access

The Personality of the Divine: Impact on the Healing Interaction

Julian Ungar-Sargon MD, PHD*

Borra College of Health Sciences, Dominican University IL, USA.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 Feb 2025

Accepted 24 Mar 2025

Published 31 Mar 2025

KEYWORDS

Divine Personality, Spiritual Healing, Therapeutic Interaction, Faith and Healing, Psychological Well-being.



Introduction

The influence of divine personality on the doctor-patient relationship can be profound, particularly in shaping the ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of medical care. When physicians and patients conceive of God as either personal or impersonal, it influences their perspectives on healing, suffering, and the role of medicine.

The concept of God's personality has been a central concern in both Western and Eastern philosophical and religious traditions. While Western thought, particularly within the Abrahamic traditions, often emphasizes a personal, interactive God, Eastern philosophies, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, frequently lean toward a more abstract, impersonal, or non-dualistic divine essence. Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition, presents a nuanced synthesis, incorporating elements of both perspectives. This essay explores the personality of God in Western and Eastern thought, highlighting the unique insights of Kabbalah in reconciling these differing conceptions.

The Western Perspective: A Personal God

Western monotheistic traditions Judaism, Christianity, and Islam tend to portray God as a personal being with attributes such as will, knowledge, and moral concern. In the Hebrew Bible, God engages in direct communication with humanity, issuing commandments, responding to prayers, and displaying emotions such as love, anger, and mercy. The Christian tradition further personalizes God through the doctrine of the

Trinity, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ. Islam, while emphasizing God's transcendence, also upholds a deeply personal relationship between God (Allah) and believers, as seen in the Qur'an's depiction of divine mercy and guidance.



The Eastern Perspective: An Impersonal or Transcendent Reality

In contrast, many Eastern traditions perceive the divine as an impersonal, all-encompassing force. Hinduism, particularly in Advaita Vedanta, teaches that Brahman, the ultimate reality, is beyond personal attributes and distinctions, manifesting as pure consciousness. Buddhism largely refrains from a personal God concept, emphasizing instead an ultimate state of Nirvana beyond self and deity. Taoism envisions the Tao as an impersonal, self-regulating cosmic principle rather than an entity with personal attributes.



Contact: Julian Ungar-Sargon MD, PHD, Borra College of Health Sciences, Dominican University IL, USA.

Kabbalah: Bridging the Personal and Impersonal

Kabbalah offers a unique perspective that integrates both personal and impersonal aspects of God. Central to Kabbalistic thought is the distinction between Ein Sof, the infinite, unknowable divine essence, and the Sefirot, the ten emanations through which God interacts with creation. Ein Sof aligns with the impersonal divine of Eastern traditions beyond attributes, beyond form. However, through the Sefirot, God becomes personal, revealing aspects such as wisdom (Chochmah), understanding (Binah), and mercy (Chesed), which resonate with the Western concept of a personal God.

One of Kabbalah's most profound insights is the doctrine of Tzimtzum, the self-contraction of God to allow for creation. This idea echoes both Western theistic notions of a God who creates and interacts with the world and Eastern ideas of divine concealment and self-negation. The Hasidic tradition, especially in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and the Rebbe Rashab, further develops this balance, emphasizing both Deveikut (cleaving to God in personal devotion) and Bitul (self-nullification in the face of the divine).

Hasidism and Deveikut: The Personal and Mystical Relationship with God

Hasidism, emerging from Kabbalah, places a special emphasis on Deveikut, the mystical concept of clinging to God. Unlike classical theologies that focus on structured religious practice alone, Hasidism encourages an intimate, experiential relationship with the divine, emphasizing joy, simplicity, and devotion. In Hasidic thought, Deveikut is not merely an intellectual or ritualistic connection but an ongoing state of spiritual awareness, where the divine is present in all aspects of life. The Baal Shem Tov and his followers taught that even mundane actions could be infused with holiness, further personalizing the divine experience.

Hasidism also emphasizes the Tzadik, the righteous leader, as a bridge between God and the people. The Tzadik serves as a model of Deveikut, demonstrating how one can maintain closeness to God amidst worldly distractions. This aspect of Hasidism brings a personal, almost relational dimension to Jewish mysticism, further aligning it with the Western concept of a personal God, while still embracing the transcendence and immanence seen in Eastern traditions.



Implications for the Compassionate Healer and the Use of Prayer in Medicine

The balance between a personal and impersonal God has significant implications for the role of the compassionate healer, particularly in the integration of spirituality and medicine. The

concept of Deveikut suggests that the healer is not merely a technician of the body but a conduit of divine energy, bringing both practical care and spiritual presence to the healing process. In Hasidic and Kabbalistic thought, healing is not only a physical act but also a sacred mission infused with divine light and intention. Prayer plays a crucial role in this dynamic, serving as both an invocation of divine intervention and a means of aligning the healer and patient with higher spiritual realities. Hasidic teachings emphasize the power of prayer not just as a request but as a transformational act that elevates both the supplicant and the recipient. When applied to medicine, this suggests that prayer, mindfulness, and intentionality can create an atmosphere conducive to healing, reinforcing both the patient's faith and the healer's connection to the divine source.

Furthermore, the Kabbalistic idea of Tzimtzum can inform a healer's perspective on suffering and illness. Just as God contracts to allow for the world's existence, illness and suffering may be understood as part of a larger, often hidden, divine plan. This does not negate the necessity of medical intervention but rather frames healing as a process that operates within both physical and spiritual realms. The healer, in this view, becomes a vessel for divine compassion, mirroring God's presence in the act of care and restoration.



Compassion and Empathy in Healing

In traditions that emphasize a personal God (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), divine attributes such as mercy, love, and justice serve as models for the physician's conduct. The doctor, as an agent of divine compassion, is seen not only as a provider of medical expertise but also as a source of emotional and spiritual support. This can manifest in greater empathetic communication, where the physician views their work as an extension of divine care, leading to a patient-centered approach rather than a purely technical one.

Suffering and Divine Providence

A personal God is often associated with divine providence suggesting that suffering has meaning, whether as a test, a form of spiritual refinement, or an opportunity for growth. In this framework, the physician may engage in pastoral care, helping the patient find spiritual meaning in illness. In contrast, an impersonal or non-dualistic divine reality (as in Advaita Vedanta or Taoism) may encourage detachment, acceptance, and viewing illness as part of the greater cosmic order. Physicians influenced by these perspectives may focus on mindfulness, holistic healing, and the patient's inner journey rather than interventionist care.



Role of Prayer and Spiritual Practices in Medicine

A personal God invites prayer as intercession, where both doctors and patients may believe that divine intervention can alter the course of illness. Physicians who recognize this may integrate prayer, blessings, or religious rituals into their practice or encourage chaplaincy services. In contrast, an impersonal divine principle may lead to practices such as meditation, energy healing, or alignment with natural rhythms, emphasizing balance and inner harmony rather than supplication.

Trust and Doctor-Patient Dynamics

In religious traditions where God is perceived as personal and actively involved, patients may place higher trust in physicians who share their beliefs or spiritual worldview, seeing them as facilitators of divine healing. If the doctor and patient have differing beliefs about divine personality, it can lead to misalignments in expectations, such as whether aggressive treatment is necessary or whether a more holistic, acceptance-based approach is preferable.



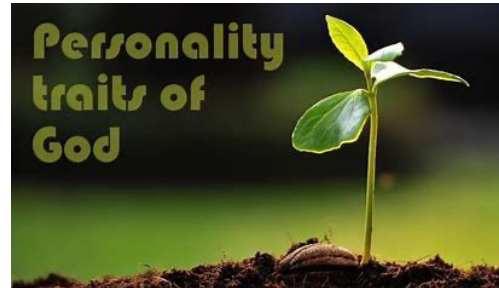
Ethical Considerations in End-of-Life Care

In traditions emphasizing a personal God, end-of-life care is often framed in terms of divine will, with some patients and families preferring life-prolonging treatments due to a belief in divine miracles. An impersonal divine framework might encourage acceptance of death as a natural process, with a focus on palliative care, spiritual equanimity, and non-attachment.

The Physician as a Spiritual Healer

In Hasidic and Kabbalistic thought, the physician is seen as a conduit of divine energy, where healing is both physical and spiritual. The idea of *Deveikut* (cleaving to God) encourages

doctors to cultivate a spiritual presence in their practice, integrating intention (*Kavanah*) into their healing work. In Eastern traditions like Taoism or Buddhism, the healer aligns with universal energies or dharmic principles, seeking to restore balance rather than fight against the natural order.



The personality of God remains a point of philosophical and theological divergence between Western and Eastern thought. Western traditions emphasize a personal, relational God, while Eastern traditions lean toward an impersonal, transcendent principle. Kabbalah, with its sophisticated metaphysics, provides a bridge between these worldviews, affirming both divine immanence and transcendence. Hasidism, through its emphasis on *Deveikut*, further develops this synthesis by presenting a model of intimate divine connection that incorporates both personal devotion and mystical self-transcendence. In the realm of healing and medicine, these ideas translate into a holistic approach in which the healer serves as both a practical and spiritual guide, employing prayer and intention as tools of divine compassion. By synthesizing the personal and impersonal dimensions of God, Kabbalah and Hasidism offer a unique theological vision that enriches both Western theism and Eastern mysticism, while also informing the practice of compassionate care in the medical field.

Conclusion

The way a physician and patient perceive the personality of God whether as personal, interactive, and responsive, or as abstract, transcendent, and impersonal shapes the approach to medicine, ethics, and healing. Understanding these perspectives allows for greater sensitivity, trust, and holistic care in the doctor-patient relationship. A physician attuned to the spiritual dimensions of healing can serve not just as a medical expert, but as a guide through the profound existential and theological questions that arise in illness and recovery.