Kerry Danner-McDonald
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Encountering Suffering: Image-Schemas and Generic Spaces in the Parable of the Good Samaritan

I. Introduction

This paper uses a cognitive model to interpret the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37. I show how doing so identifies two image-schemas important for interpretation and the faithful who seek to encounter these texts as a divine invitation. And, invitations, of course—usually but not always—evoke responses.

The two image schemas are: source-path-goal and bounded spaces. These two image schemas are so basic that they are experienced innumerable times a day. Therefore, part of the power of these passages—and any text that relies on them—is that we experience situations which replicate part of the story told in the religious text. And, thus, the feelings, sensitivities, insights, in short, the experience of hearing the story can more readily be conjured up in day-to-day life.

II. What are Image Schemas?

Image schemas are one of the most basic conceptual structures found in language, providing the bare bones of most frames[1], and, therefore, present in conceptual

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[1] Charles Fillmore, widely recognized as the father of frame semantics, writes that: a frame is "any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits." "When one of the things in such a structure is introduced into a text, or into a conversation, all of the others are automatically made available." He uses this term to include "the set of concepts variously known, in the literature on natural language understanding, as 'schema', 'script', 'scenario', 'ideational scaffolding', 'cognitive model', or 'folk theory'." See Charles J. Fillmore, "Frame Semantics," in *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*(Seoul: Hanshin, 1982). 111-137.

metaphors[2] and conceptual blending[3] as well. Images schemas are based on our spatial-relational concepts, including how we move and what we observe from the world around us. They are almost like a simple line sketch of an object in relation to other objects[4] We think with and impose such basic spatial relationships all the time. Spatial relationships function unconsciously but are evident in our speech patterns, and are fundamental to communication. For example, consider the phrase "She is in the back of the room." A person is an object in a bounded space—a room. While we "see " a person and a "room"—the spatial concept "in the back" is always in relation to us or to some landmark. It is purely conceptual based on a spatial relationship we are determining.
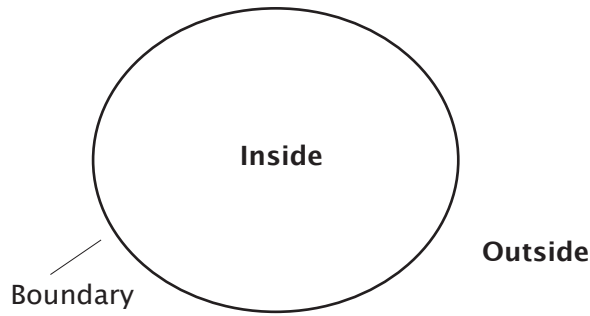
a. The Container Image Schema

The idea of a bounded space—or a container schema—comes from our experience of a real container. For example, buckets, cups, boxes, etc are all real containers. However, we can also impose the logic of a container on other experiences. So, let's begin by looking a the logic of a container:

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[2] Conceptual metaphors emerge from domains or large frames of experience. Conceptual metaphors are built on primary metaphors, which are learned early in childhood when everyday subjective experiences are conflated or correlated with sensorimotor experience. See Christopher Johnson, "Metaphor vs. Conflation in the Acquisition of Polysemy: The Case of SEE" in *Cultural, Typological and Psychological Issues in Cognitive Linguistics,* ed. M.K. Hiraga, C. Sinha, and S. Wilcox (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997).

[3] Conceptual blending will be addressed below.

[4] See See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh : The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).30ff.
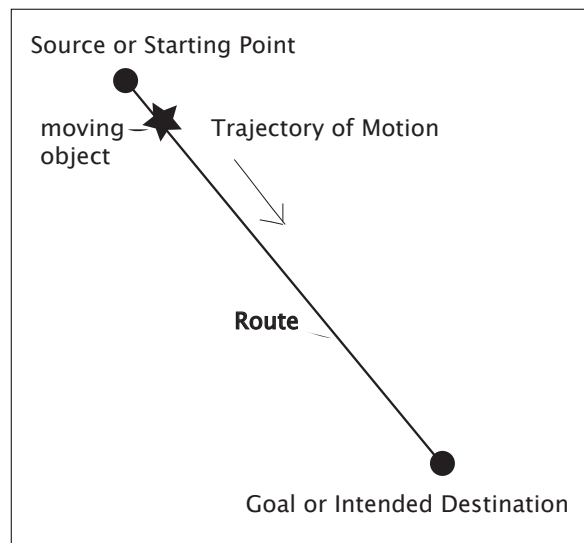
Inside

Outside

Boundary

Figure 1: Container Image Schema

There can be no inside or outside without the boundary as a reference point.[5] Image schemas can be physically present—like in a cup. An actual cup has more properties. It is of a defined size; holds a certain amount of liquid; restricts the objects within it as long as they do not exceed the capacity of the volume established by the sides and base, etc. However, we can also impose boundaries on something…like a section of text. In brief, we physically encounter the Container-Image Schema and conceptually impose it on experience countless times per day.

b. The Source-Path-Goal Image Schema

The Source-Path-Goal schema has a certain spatial logic as well. In fact, it is so basic we are often not even aware of it: The schemas are topological in that it can be expanded or shrunk to fit various starting/stopping locations.

Source or Starting Point

moving object

Trajectory of Motion

Route

Goal or Intended Destination

Figure 2: Source Path Goal Image Schema

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[5] *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 32.

Further logical extensions are also possible, including the speed of motion, obstacles, etc. We do not yet know if the same neural activity occurs when we move in such ways as when we use image-schemas in speech. But there is some evidence in computational models that this is so. [6] This topic is beyond my scope, here, however. Having laid out what image-schemas are, I now turn to what they can tell us about an encounter with suffering.

III. How the Good Samaritan Text Uses Image Schemas

As noted above these basic image-schemas are pervasive. In the section right before vs. 25, Jesus is teaching and talking to a crowd and his disciples, and then:

> (25) And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (26) He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" (27) And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (28) And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live."
> (29) But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (30) Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. (31) Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. (32) So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33) But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, (34) and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to and inn, and took care of him. (35) And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the inn keeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you

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[6] "In such [computational] models, there is no absolute perceptual/conceptual distinction, that is, the conceptual system makes use of important parts of sensorimotor system that imposes crucial conceptual structure." *Philosophy in the Flesh,* 39ff. Lakoff and Johnson point to three models: Regier's model for learning spatial relations terms; Bailey's model for learning verbs and hand motions; and Narayan's model of motor schemas, linguistic aspect and metaphor.

when I come back.' (36) Which of these three, do you think, proved
neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (37) He said, "The one
who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10: 25:37 begins by breaking the earlier narrative: "Just then a lawyer stood up to test the Jesus." It functions as a foreshadowing of the parable itself: a breaking open of a contained space. A crowd can also be perceived or conceived as an object. Clearly, a crowd is not an object—the sides move and are permeable, but we can see this scene of the story like an interruption: Jesus is teaching to a group and a lawyer stands up to test him.

The conversation between Jesus and the lawyer quickly establishes boundaries of what must be done by someone to inherit eternal life. The lawyer, wanting to shore up those boundaries asks, "And who is my neighbor?"

He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" (27) And
he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and
with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and
your neighbor as yourself."

The lawyer's response combines Deuteronomy 6:5, which is the great commandment to love God totally, and Leviticus 19:18, which warns against bearing grudges against one's neighbors and says to love one's neighbor as yourself.[7] Generally, this is thought to include those who follow God's laws, which are found in the Torah. Therefore we have first blend relevant to our purposes here.

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[7] Luke is most likely drawing from the combination of Deuteronomy and Leviticus as found in Matthew 22: 34-40 and Mark 12:28-36. See Raymond Edward Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland Edmund Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990).

The mapping in conceptual metaphor theory is one-directional, like what we saw as a container for conceptualizing a geographically spread-out group of people. Here, the container image-schema is structuring the relationship between Jews and NonJews. The

How to Inherit Eternal LIfe
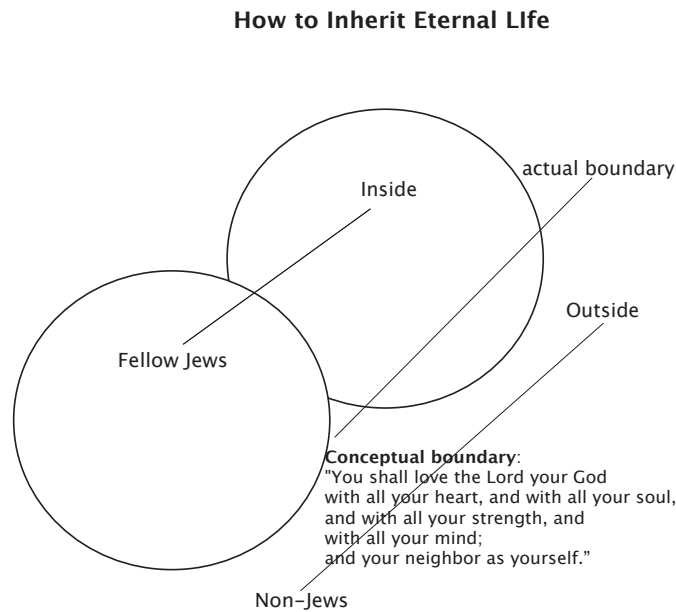
boundary is doing what is written. So, first, Jesus says, OK. You want to be "in"—yes, do this, do what is written in the law. Here we have a way of conceiving fellow Jews—as insiders.

But the lawyer who seems to want to sure up the boundaries, or, perhaps, decrease the potential weight of this last clause—to love your neighbor as yourself, asks Jesus, "who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers this in an unexpected way. In fact, in a way that will break this contained space open. He does so by creating a complex series of blends.

A conceptual blend is when there are two or more domains interact and combine, allowing a process of mental projection that is dynamic.[8] To do so, he tells a story that is heavily reliant both on blending and the second image schema mentioned above, the Source-Path-Goal Image Schema.

This story requires us to follow this basic Source-Path-Goal Image Schema—with different people filling the role of moving objects—four times. The first time: ”

> *"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead."*
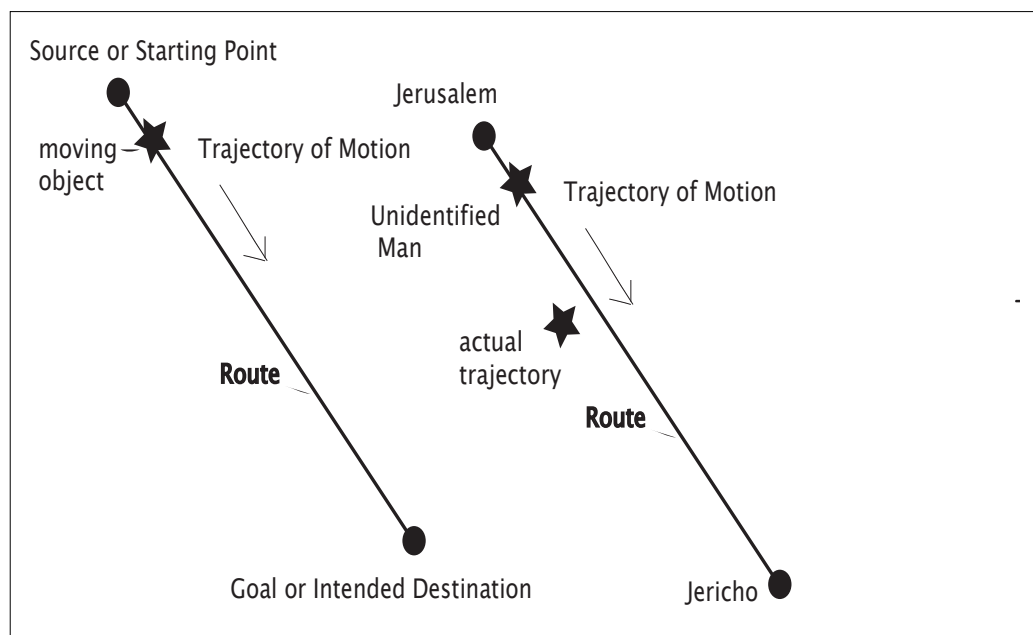
At first we have a very simple blend, where characters that Jesus speaks of "fills" in the roles of the image-schema. Then we have two more men as the moving objects—a priest and Levite in rapid succession.

[8] Gilles and Mark Turner Fauconnier, ""Blending and Metaphor"," in *Cognitive Aspects of Metaphor*, ed. Y. Shen and A. Kasher(London: Routeledge, 1995). The "spaces" to which the theory refers do not exist but are a heuristic device used to grasp how a blend results from these other domains.

"Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. (32) So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33)"

Both the priest and Levite would have been at least nominally religious and neighbors to the listeners; both see and pass by the 'half-dead' man. We are not told in the text why these men pass the robbed and beaten man. However, various interpretation suggest that it may have been out of fear of breaking religious taboos of touching corpses or blood.[9] Listeners expected to hear next something like "then a common man came upon him."[10] This would have been a familiar story to the listeners, where a regular person trumps the elite religious. Instead, the Samaritan enters the story.[11]

33) But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, (34) and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to and inn, and took care of him. (35) And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the inn keeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' (36)

A third man, a Samaritan and outsider, *sees him, has compassion, and went to him*. His trajectory changes, he interrupts his journey, taking a new route determined by an encounter of the radical suffering of another. This type of conflict with routine expectations was sure to have irritated the listeners—they expected one of their own in

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Listeners would have been familiar with a story in which an ordinary Israelite triumphs his higher-ups, see Harvey Gallagher Cox, *When Jesus Came to Harvard : Making Moral Choices Today* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004)., 155.

[11] The story functioned as a veiled parable for the original listeners/readers; the real point of the story is only disclosed after setting up a structure for the neighbor blend. For more on veiling, see Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). , 101.
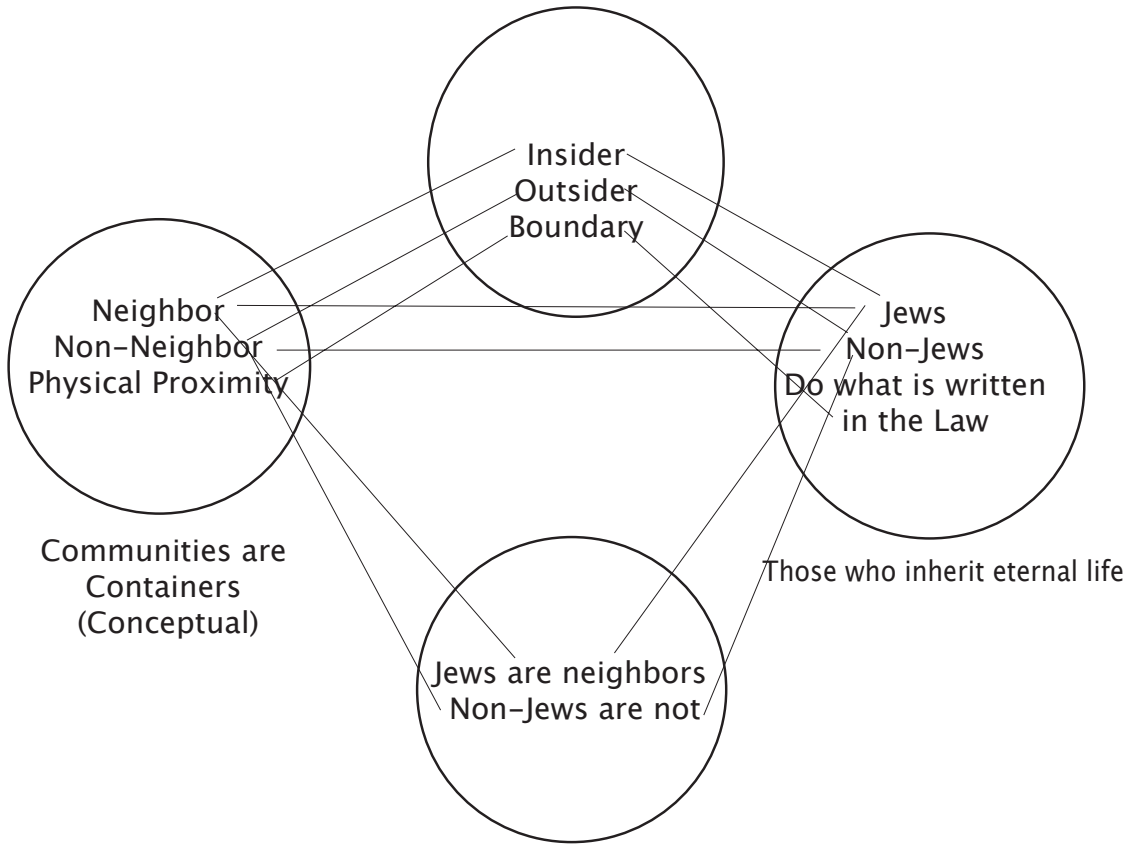
this role, not an enemy. Second, listeners would have known that the Samaritan gave generously—using his own costly resources by pouring oil and wine on the half-dead man's wounds. By paying the innkeeper, the Samaritan kept the beaten man from falling into debtor's prison. [12] This is no minor gesture.

First, then, we have the implied logic of the lawyer, probing who is my neighbor, which relied on the Container Image Schema introduced above.
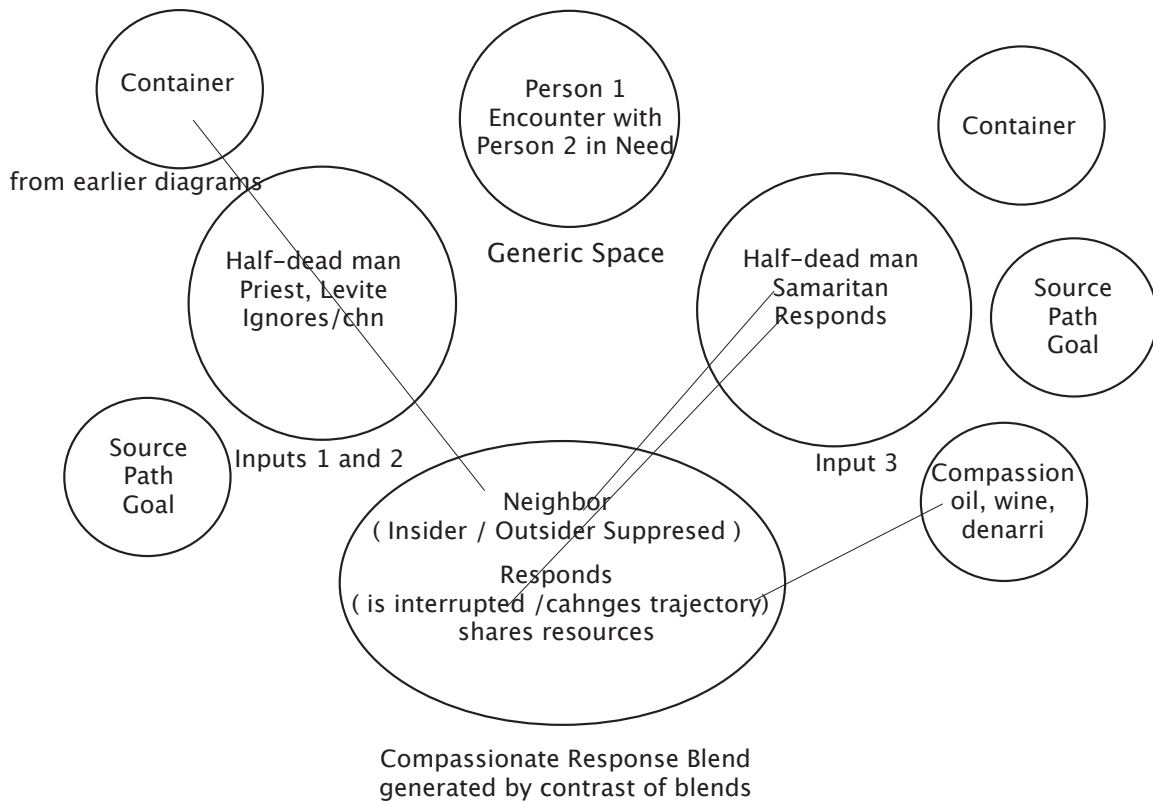
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[12] The Samaritan ensures the innkeeper that he will pay all of the beaten man's debts so that he will not end up in debtor's prison. He spends at least two denarri, what then would have been two days wages to help the beaten man. See William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2000), 90.

Implied Logic of Lawyer

Insider
Outsider
Boundary

Neighbor
Non–Neighbor
Physical Proximity

Jews
Non–Jews
Do what is written
in the Law

Communities are
Containers
(Conceptual)

Those who inherit eternal life

Jews are neighbors
Non–Jews are not

This is contrasted with the two blends reliant on the Source-Path-Goal Image Schema—one based on compassionate response, and one on avoidance.

Encounter with Suffering

Container

from earlier diagrams

Half-dead man
Priest, Levite
Ignores/chn

Person 1
Encounter with
Person 2 in Need

Generic Space

Half-dead man
Samaritan
Responds

Container

Source
Path
Goal

Source
Path
Goal

Inputs 1 and 2

Input 3

Compassion
oil, wine,
denarri

Neighbor
(Insider / Outsider Suppresed)

Responds
(is interrupted /cahnges trajectory)
shares resources

Compassionate Response Blend
generated by contrast of blends

IV. Nature of Bounded Spaces: An ever-widening circle as encounter with Human Limits, Divine Expansion

Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" (37) He said, "The one who showed mercy on him."

By asking, "who proves neighbor" we are redirected to the concept of bounded space we

discussed earlier. By and large, neighbor was understood as a kind of conceptual

imposition on an experience of a community—derived from perhaps an original

experience of living in proximity though we know at this time not all Jews live in

Jerusalem. The original addressees of this text would have understood it as a larger

concept—all those who profess Yahweh as their God. The one here who "proves to be

neighbor"—the one who loves others as they love themselves is a person outside the

conceptual boundaries of community.

Jesus' Story Says
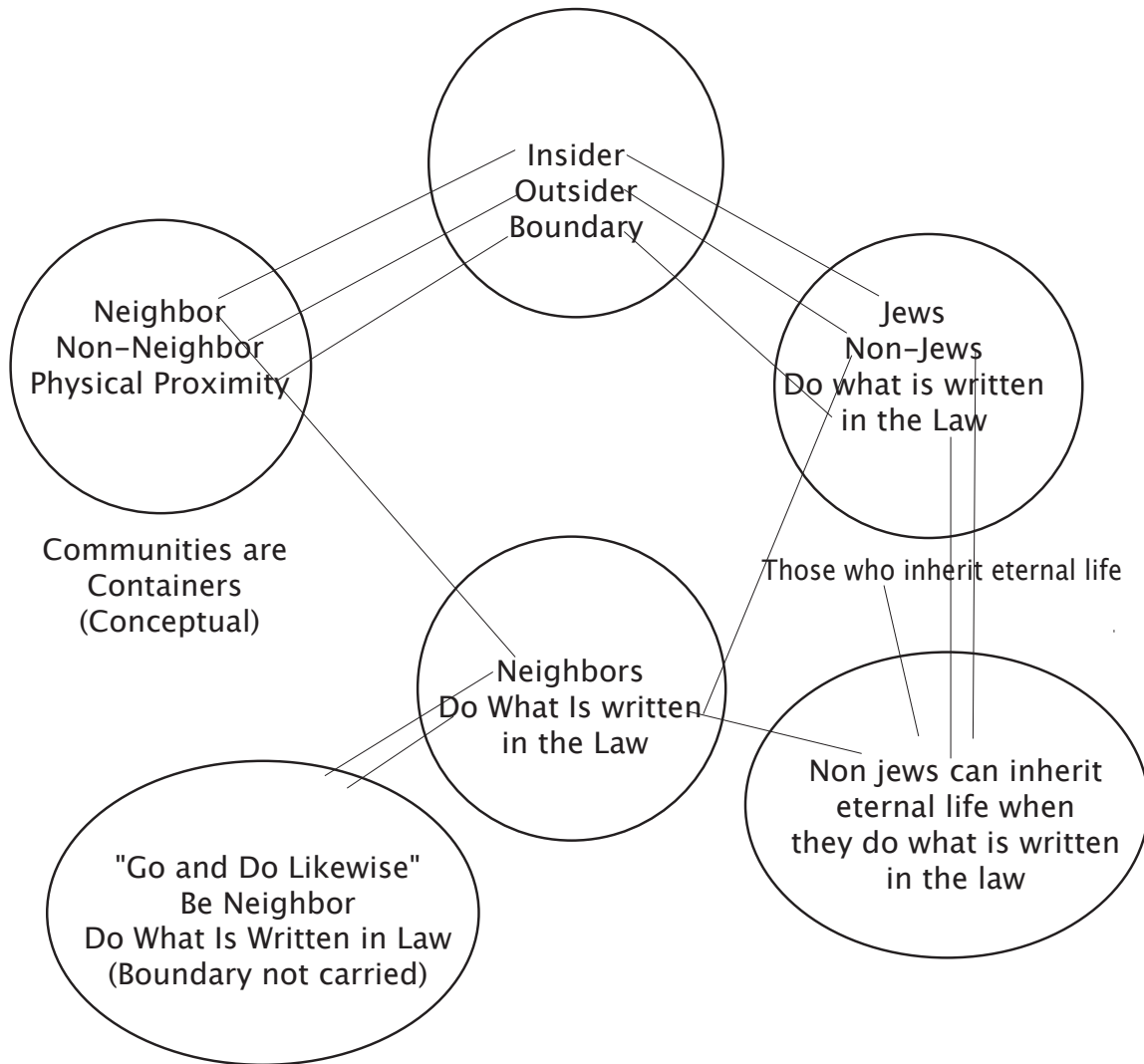
Here—the concept of neighbor is expanded from one who professes Yahweh as

their God to include the one who acts compassionately. Jesus holds up someone outside

the boundaries of the concept of neighbor as an example of one fulfilling it. By holding up the Samaritan, Jesus holds up his response to suffering as good, as divine, as that which is fitting to Yahweh. The divine response to suffering has a particular shape: disruption or delay of expected outcomes or destinations. It creates a generic 'encounter with suffering' in which the direction *Go and Do Likewise* also means, "Go and be neighbor." When we don't worry about who our neighbor is, and focus on acting neighborly, the boundary is rendered meaningless.

V. Summary: The Power of Image Schemas

When these image schemas, the Container Schema and Source-Path-Goal schemas, are engaged in a text they are extremely productive for the faithful because the structure—of expanding, breaking into or collapsing boundaries or interruption of a journey—are such basic experiences, whether these be from our actual physical experience or conceptual imposing of it on other experiences. The general domain of encounter between two persons, one in need, allows various inputs, including us, to be mapped into the roles of needy, responsive, avoider. The Scripture however is clear that the suffering, the religious, neighbors, and strangers become an invitation to radical compassion—and radical compassion has no bounds.

I suggest that these everyday but undomesticated schemas help us articulate a profound religious experience. Indeed, we become awed by the grace of God or deeply encompassed in God's love. And, this too is how we share in this predicted yet disruptive experience---we learn to go out of our way for those in great need and neither fear nor inconvenience prevent us from welcoming the most needy. This compassion interrupts

plans, breaks down boundaries, and calls all to the love of God, a love that cannot be

predicted or contained.

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