

ETZ HACHAYYIM

TREE OF LIFE

of

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Recorded by Chayyim Vital

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ETZ HACHAYYIM Tree of Life

The Work of the Chariot edition of the *Etz HaChayyim* was published in 1972. The following translation is the first of its ten “Branches.” The texts used as a basis for the Work of the Chariot translation displayed some disparities in the opening section of the first branch. Rather than devise a composite, the translator chose to run both of them in parallel fashion, until the texts became the same.

Tree of Life

Branch Number One

Know that before any emanations or creatures were fashioned there was an Upper Light (*Or Elyon*) that simply permeated all Existence, and there was no empty place, in the sense of atmosphere, merely space. However, everything was imbued with Infinite Light (*Ayn Sof Or*), to which there was no beginning nor yet any end; all was Light permeating everything evenly. This is called the Infinite Light (*Ayn Sof Or*).

And when He wished to create worlds and cause emanations, to bring into being His perfect works, names and attributes--which was the reason for the creation of the worlds, as is explained in Branch One, Part One--He then contracted (*Tzimtzum*) Himself into the middle point, in the very center. He contracted that Light and removed Himself far to the perimeter round the midpoint, so that in that very midpoint there remained an empty place and air and a void.

This contraction was on one level around that empty midpoint in such manner that the space was a completely even circle all round, with no square angular protrusions, since the Infinite also contracted Itself and became circular comparatively on all sides. The reason for this is that the Infinite Light was symmetrical with a complete symmetry, so that it felt compelled to contract itself on all sides. And it is known that

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Line of Light and the Contraction

Bear in mind, that before the emanations were emanated, and the creatures were created, the Upper Simple Light (*Or Elyon*) had filled the entire Existence. And there was no empty space whatsoever, namely as empty atmosphere, a hollow, or pit. For everything was filled with that Simple Boundless Light (*Ayn Sof Or*), and there was no such part as head, and no such part as tail. That is, there was neither beginning nor end, for everything was simple or smooth Light balanced evenly and equally in one likeness or affinity, and that is called the Endless Light.

And when, in His simple and smooth Will, the desire arose to create the world and to emanate the emanations, to bring to light the perfection of His deeds and His Names and His appellations--which was the cause of the creation of the world--behold He then contracted (*Tzimtzum*) Himself in the middle point which is in Him, precisely in the middle, He contracted the Light. And the Light has withdrawn to the sides around the middle point, and there has remained an empty space, atmosphere, and a vacuum surrounding the exact middle point. And the Light has withdrawn to the sides around the middle point.

And behold, this contraction was equally balanced around that middle empty point in such a manner that the vacuum was circular and in complete balance and

geometrically there is no figure of such symmetry as the circle--certainly not the rectangle, with angles jutting out, nor the triangle, nor any other figure.

He was therefore compelled to contract Himself to the shape of a circle, there being no symmetry greater than that of a circle. In the *Zohar Parashah Bo*, "a vessel in the circle which is Yod" (see also *Parashath Pekudei* of R. Nachman where it is stated that the hall and their contents are circular).

There is a further reason: that is, for the sake of the emanations which in the future will come forth in the place of that empty void space. The point is that the circular emanations are all close to the Infinite which completely and evenly encircles them, and the light and abundance which they require are drawn equally from all sides of the Infinite. This would not be so if the emanation were square or triangular or any other shape, for if one side or angle protruded beyond the others, they could not receive the Infinite Light equally. At the end of Branch III is given an explanation of why this limitation was necessary, as well as of the whole subject.

This limitation was necessary in order to reveal the innermost root of the laws, so as to give the attribute of the law later in the worlds, and this power is known as the Hard Light.

Note by Chayim Vital:

In my opinion, the middle point of the Infinite was the root of the law that was later revealed to be lower, and whence was made the place that is as a vessel. From what surrounds that point there is extended the outer worlds, whereas from the remainder of what surrounds it is extended the inner world. It is enough for us not to sin and to be warned not to believe that there, at that point, was the revelation of judgment. May God forbid!

sameness all around.

It was not in the shape of a cube, which has straight angles, because the Boundless also withdrew His Light in a circular form equally on all sides. This is due to the fact that the Endless Itself is equal. That is, since the Endless Light is in complete omniparity, it follows that It must contract Itself in omniparity on all sides.

It is a well-known fact that in mathematics, or geometry, a sphere or circle is the most balanced and uniform figure. This is not true of the cube with its angles, or of the triangle or of any other form that might be considered. It was therefore necessary for the middle point to be contracted in the form of a circle. And behold, after the contraction mentioned above, It drew from the Endless Light one line (*Kav*) direct from His circular Light from above downward, and it gradually descended by evolution into that hollow or vacuum.

The Upper Head of the line was extended from the Endless Himself, and it contacted Him. Verily, the end of that line below did not contact the Endless Light. The line was drawn and extended below, and in that vacuum He emanated, created, formed, and made all the collective worlds.

Prior to the four worlds, there was only the Endless, in the form of "HE IS ONE," in a wondrous concealed unity, for it is beyond the power or capacity of even those angels who are near Him to conceive of it. They have no conception of the Endless, blessed be He. There is no intellect created which could conceive of Him, since He has No Place, and No Boundary, and No Name.

Now, after this contraction, when there still remained space and empty void air in the middle of the Infinite Light--as written above--then there was a place where the emanations, the creatures, the things made and formed, could be. There then extended a straight line (*Kav*) from the Infinite Light, direct from its circular light, downwards into this space. The upper part of the line extended from the Infinite Itself and touched it but, below, this line did not touch the Infinite Light, and the path of this line extended straight downwards to the Infinite Light. From that space He brought forth emanations, created, formed, and made all the worlds, this line being like a thin pipe through which Light is spread out and extended from the waters of the Upper Light of the Infinite to the worlds where there is air and space.

We shall now clarify somewhat the matter of the qabalist's investigation into how there is a Head inside the Finite among the Sefiroth. Indeed, as the top end of that line touches the Infinite Light on the upper side, and does not extend downwards and underneath to where Infinite Light encompasses the worlds, without being attached to it, then both the Head and the end are just right. For if the two ends received the abundance of the Infinite, then both ends would be equal Heads, so that there would be neither an upper nor a lower aspect. And likewise if the Infinite extended round on all sides of the place of the space, there would be neither upwards nor downwards, neither front nor back, east nor west, north nor south. But as the Infinite Light extends through one line and through a minute pipe, it is just right that there is up and down, front and back, east and west, as will be explained in this branch in our explanatory notes.

And lo, as the Infinite Light extends in a direct line in the midst of space, it does not extend and disperse immediately to the bottom; but rather, slowly, slowly. That is, at the beginning, the line of the light started to flatten out; and at the beginning of this spreading out of the line in all directions--in the mystic meaning--it dispersed and extended and became a sort of wheel, completely round and detached from the Infinite Light, which imbues it from all sides. If it becomes attached it returns to its previous condition, it disappears in the Infinite Light, and its strength is NOT (לא) seen at all, and all becomes Infinite Light as it was at first. The circle is therefore close to that of the Infinite and not attached to it. The only main connection, or joining of the circle of the emanation with the Infinite that causes the emanation, is by means of the abovementioned line through which the light descends and extends from the Infinite, influencing the circle.

And the Infinite surrounds and encompasses it on all sides, being but an iota removed from it on all sides, for that also is of a round, encompassing aspect, as mentioned before, so that the illumination by the Infinite of those receiving the emanations must come through this line only.

For if the light spread round on all sides, the recipient of the emanations would be like the giver Himself, that is, limitless and boundless. Furthermore, even that line, too, is very narrow and fine and does not make a wide connection, so that the light extended to the emanated is in fixed amounts and measures. Because of this, the emanated is called the Ten Attributes (*Yod Middoth*), and the Ten Counts (Sefiroth), to show us that there is a fixed amount and measure and a limited number, which does not apply in the case of the Infinite. As it is written in the *Sefer HaZohar (Parashath Pinechas)*: "The thirteenth command is the reading of the *Shema*... but It has no measure or specific Name in the way that every Sefirah has a specific name for its measure, its boundary and its limit." And since the line is thin, they will receive abundance only to the extent it is required, as they are the recipients of emanations, rather than the givers of emanations.

And behold, this first circle, most closely attached to the Infinite, is known as the Crown (*Keter*) of Primordial Man (*Adam Kadmon*). After it, the line is extended and continued this way, then coils round in a circle and becomes circle number two within circle number one. This is known as the circle of Wisdom (*Hochmah*) of Primordial Man. The line then extends downwards again, coiling round to become a third circle within the second. This is known as the circle of Understanding (*Binah*) of Primordial Man. In this way, the circles are made one within the other, up to the circle number ten, known as the circle of Kingdom (*Malkuth*) of Primordial Man. Here is revealed the nature of the ten Sefiroth, which were emanated by way of the ten mystic concentric circles. All this is an aspect of the ten Sefiroth, which automatically includes all aspects of all the worlds; but in fact it is explained--and it is a simple explanation--that many kinds of worlds were emanated, created, formed, and made a million or a billion times over, all being equally in the middle of the empty space already referred to, with Nothing outside it.

And behold, each world has its own ten Sefiroth. And each individual Sefirah in each world is composed of ten distinctly separate Sefiroth. Each one is in the form of a circle, one inside the other, and one after the other, endless and innumerable; one inside the other like the layers of an onion, like a picture of wheels, as mentioned in the book of contents. The author perceived all these circles together, through the aforementioned thin line extending from the Infinite, passing along and descending, extending from circle to circle to the absolute end of them all; and through this line the light and abundance required for each one of them. Here is clearly explained and revealed the nature of the ten circles of the ten Sefiroth.

We now come to explain the second aspect of the ten Sefiroth, namely the Light of Righteousness, in form like three lines in the shape of the Supreme Man. This route then proceeds from the top downwards, where the circles extend. The line extends directly from the top downwards, from the extreme tip of the summit of the highest circle of them all to the very lowest point of the bottom of all the circles. It extends from the top downwards, enclosing the ten Sefiroth in the mystic similitude of the upright man standing upright and comprising 248 limbs imagined from the ten Sefiroth, both in totality and each Sefirah separately--of the ten without end in the same form as the ten Sefiroth which are as circles.

This aspect, number two, is termed "the image of *Elohim*," and the text refers to it in the words (*Torah B'reshith* 1:27): "***And Elohim created Man in His image, in the image of Elohim,***" and almost all of the *Sefer HaZohar*, and the *Tikunim HaZohar* are concerned with this second aspect alone, as is indicated elsewhere.

So both explanations are tenable, for there are two aspects, circular and linear, both being equally valid, both the Word of the Living *Elohim*. In this way there are several dictums which appear to be contradictory and which are settled with reference to the order and position of the ten Sefiroth. This is explained in both these two aspects. In the first, the aspect of the ten Sefiroth in the form of concentric circles, it is quite obvious that the largest of these circles, encompassing all the others, is the wheel of the Crown, which is more closely attached to the Infinite than the others, and is therefore more excellent and laudable.

But the second wheel, known as Wisdom has a space between it and the Infinite, which is the wheel of the Crown, so that its degree of superiority is one less than that of the Crown. Similarly, the wheel of Understanding is double the distance away from the Infinite, that is two wheels away, so in grade it is inferior to Wisdom. Thus, the nearer to the Infinite is the world's circle in space, the more superior it is and the greater its excellence, down to this world, which is in the very center of all the circles, within the void space mentioned above. It is far removed

from the Infinite, farther than all other worlds, so that it is so material, so mundane, that it has no peer, being the middle of all those circles. Understand this well.

There is also a second reason, connected with the first. As has been explained, the line extending from the Infinite stretches then to form a circle, expanding further downwards and circling up to the very last of all the circles. And the first circle at the beginning of the line is superior to, and more excellent than all circles below it, as it comes from the top of the line, and furthermore it is illumined, being in the highest place--the highest circle of all, known as "Upward." The circle next inside is middle and center--the lowest of them, illumined from the bottom of that line, is known as "downward" [Note: see *Sefer Yetzirah*, Chapter 1].

In Branch III, concerning the ten circles of the world of points, it will be explained how the aspect of the ten Sefiroth of the circles is linear, though circular, apart from the aspect of the ten Sefiroth of Righteousness (*Yosher*), which is in the form of Man. And there is the end of the circles--there it will be explained how in the ten Sefiroth the circles are justified right, and left, and center, as they are like concentric circles. Also in the second aspect of Righteousness, which is pictured as Man, appear right and correct, upward and down ward, front and back; for it is clear that that which is nearest the beginning of the line should be the head, lower down the body, and still lower the feet; and so on and so forth in great detail. In Branch III will also be explained the nature of the ten circles of Primordial Man. This matter is explained therein: every world is of circular aspect, concentric like the layers of an onion. The first aspect is suggested in the *Zohar* in a number of places, especially in *Parashath Vayiqra*, p.9-10, how even heaven and earth are as layers of an onion, one inside the other. Similarly, in *Parashoth B'reshith* p.19, "All were required by the Holy One, blessed be He, with which to create the world and perfect it--the brain at the center, with layers surrounding it, all worlds likewise, one within the other, so that each one surrounds the next." Although from there the order seems reversed, so that the most inward was the brain and the next layer was something lesser, if you would but open the eyes of your mind you would understand and see that this article speaks of our ideals, and from the perspective of where we are who live in this low world. And that the nearest to us is the layer surrounding our ideal part, the brain--and within that is the wheel that turns round about it, and beyond that another wheel, that is the brain of another wheel, and so on, so that we find the Infinite is the inmost of all emanations and the central brain of all. All emanated are as layers round this and the wheel nearest to us is the outermost of them all, the other shell or layer. The aspect of the worlds themselves is not so however. The innermost is the outer shell, and surrounding the rest is the brain--but with our eyes what we see first is the outer layer which is the wheel nearest to us. And as it gets farther from us and surrounds all the other wheels, this is known as "internal in our estimation," and is called "brain," everything being below it.

In this article, aspect two, which is known as the picture of a man as a "right" creature, will be understood: this embraces a few worlds, as mentioned in the *Zohar*, *Parashath Toledoth* p.134. As a person is separated into various layers and all exist, grade upon grade, each improving on the other, and all of one body, so with the world. In Chapter IV, we shall explain how all these aspects make up the diagram of the picture of man, this inside the other, to the end of all the grades. It will be clearly understood there, as they are one inside the other, this being brain and the outer shell. So we see the second aspect in the ten Sefiroth, first the circular aspect and then the aspect of rectitude as the appearance of Man.