

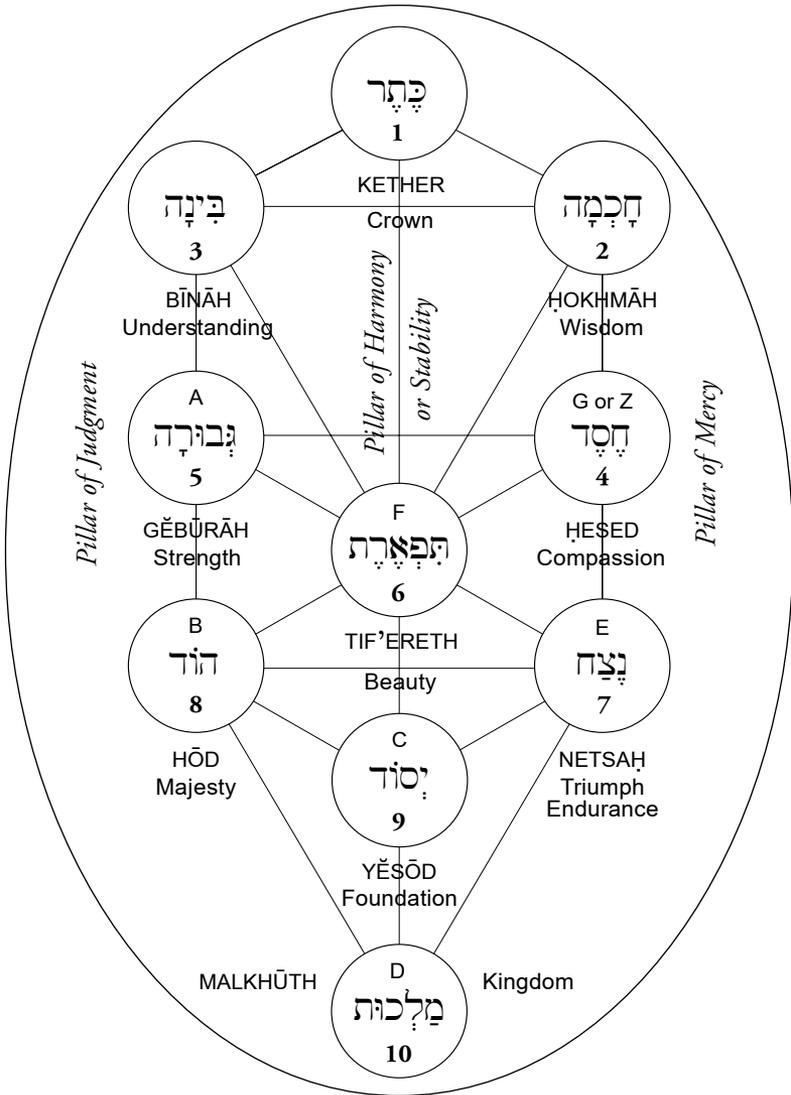
How the One Becomes the Many

QABBĀLĀH DEALS IN LARGE PART with the doctrine of emanation. It describes in pictorial fashion a tree of life (*'ēts ḥayyim*) formed of ten emanations or *sēfirōth* issuing forth from the Boundless (*'ēin sōf*). *Sēfirāh* means “number” or “emanation” — the concept of the universe being established in and on numbers is found also in the doctrines of Pythagoras, while the image of a cosmic tree is common to many cultures.

The *Sēfirōthal* Tree is a symbol of man, atom, star, or any other hierarchy. It depicts the Qabbalistic method of describing the series of emanations that the One or divine monad of any being unfolds from within itself in assuming full imbodiment. The *sēfirōth* represent the Jewish way of describing the various aspects of universal manifestation.

'Ēin sōf (without boundary or limit) is equivalent to the Sanskrit *parabrahman* (beyond Brahman). From it issue at karmic intervals universes great and small. The Boundless itself has no attributes, but so subtle was the Qabbalistic mind that it conceived the Boundless as containing a series of “concealed *sēfirōth*.” While completely unmanifest, these nevertheless exhibit *in potentia* a three-in-one or a

אֵין סוֹף EİN SÖF Boundless



The Sefirōth Tree

one-in-three garment of nonbeing: *'ayin*, “no-thing-ness,” the darkness of pure nonbeing, which produced *'ēin sōf*, “boundless” expanse of space; and the union of these two brought forth *'ēin sōf 'ōr*, “boundless or limitless light,” the primal light of pre-manifestation.*

When the Boundless or *'ēin sōf* wished to exhibit an aspect of itself, this three-in-one veil of nonbeing contracted or, as the *Zohar* phrases it, “concentrated its essence” into a single point: the boundless expanse condensed into the one primordial point (*nēqūdāh ri'shōnāh*, also called *nēqūdāh qadmā'āh*), which point they called Sēfirāh, primal number or emanation. Having thus “concentrated” its divine essence in Sēfirāh, it again expanded and a universe of tenfold character unfolded into manifestation. This process of contraction and expansion is called *tsimtsūm* (tension) and the resulting “expanded or smooth point” is called *nēqūdāh pēshūṭāh*. The universe so produced is the sēfirōthal tree of life. From Sēfirāh, called likewise Kether the Crown, issued forth in time and space nine lower sēfirōth or emanations of graduated spiritual and material texture.

This emanational procession is described again and again in the *Zohar*, as in the following passages:

When the Hidden of all the Hidden, willed to manifest Itself, It first made a point (Kether, the first Sephirah . . .), shaped it into a Sacred Form (*i.e.*, the totality of all the Sephiroth, the Adam Illa-ah, or Adam Qadmon) and covered it with a rich and splendid garment, that is the universe.

— *Zohar* 1:2a, Myer, *Qabbalah*, pp. 280-81

*See Mathers, *Kabbalah*, pp. 20-1 and diagram.

The Aged of the Aged, the Unknown of the Unknown, has a form, and yet no form. He has a form whereby the universe is preserved, and yet has no form, because he cannot be comprehended. When he first assumed a form (in Sephirah, his first emanation), he caused nine splendid lights to emanate from it. — *Zohar* 3:288a, quoted in *Isis Unveiled* 2:214

Various are the ways in which the Boundless is portrayed as emanating a succession of sēfirōthal trees: at one time the sēfirōth are described as sparks from the central fire; also as ten vessels into which the life-stream from ʿēin sōf flows; and still again as a series of concentric spheres. They all attempt to describe the indescribable: the issuing forth of finite entities from “the infinite bosom of Duration,” to quote from the “Book of Dzyan.” From this archaic manuscript H. P. Blavatsky used seven stanzas as the foundation of her masterwork, *The Secret Doctrine*.

It is intriguing to observe the close similarity of fundamental tenet between the Stanzas of Dzyan and the doctrine of emanation found in Qabbālāh. HPB states that these stanzas

give an abstract formula which can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to all evolution: to that of our tiny earth, to that of the chain of planets of which that earth forms one, to the solar Universe to which that chain belongs, and so on, in an ascending scale, till the mind reels and is exhausted in the effort. — *SD* 1:20-1

The same may be said of the fundamental doctrines of Qabbālāh: they can be applied analogically to the evolution of man, planet, solar system, or galaxy.

To quote now a few ślokas from the Stanzas of Dzyan as an aid to understanding the Zohar:

Darkness alone filled the boundless all, for father, mother and son were once more one, and the son had not awakened yet for the new wheel, and his pilgrimage thereon (1:5).

Alone the one form of existence stretched boundless, infinite, causeless, in dreamless sleep; and life pulsed unconscious in universal space, throughout that all-presence which is sensed by the opened eye of the Dangma (1:8).

The hour had not yet struck; the ray had not yet flashed into the Germ; the Matripadma [Mother-lotus] had not yet swollen (2:3).

The last vibration of the seventh eternity thrills through infinitude. The mother swells, expanding from within without, like the bud of the lotus (3:1).

The vibration sweeps along, touching with its swift wing the whole universe and the germ that dwelleth in darkness: the darkness that breathes over the slumbering waters of life (3:2).

Darkness radiates light, and light drops one solitary ray into the mother-deep. The ray shoots through the virgin egg; the ray causes the eternal egg to thrill, and drop the non-eternal germ, which condenses into the world-egg (3:3).

Behold, oh Lanoo! The radiant child of the two, the unparalleled refulgent glory: Bright Space Son of Dark Space, which emerges from the depths of the great dark waters (3:7).

Where was the germ and where was now darkness? Where is the spirit of the flame that burns in thy lamp, oh Lanoo? (3:8)

It expands when the breath of fire is upon it; it contracts when the breath of the mother touches it. Then the sons

dissociate and scatter, to return into their mother's bosom at the end of the great day, and re-become one with her; when it is cooling it becomes radiant, and the sons expand and contract through their own selves and hearts; they embrace infinitude (3:11).
— *SD* 1:27-30

Turning to Qabbālāh we discover the same ideas. “Darkness alone filled the Boundless All” recalls *ʾayin*, “no-thing,” filling all the spaces of space — that condition of no-thingness where the seeds of future *ṣēfirōthal* trees of cosmic lives are still sleeping in darkness. From *ʾayin*, darkness or nothingness, comes *ʾēin sōf*, limitless or boundless fields of infinitude: the “one form of existence” that stretches “boundless, infinite, causeless, in dreamless sleep.” *ʾĒin sōf*, the mystery of mysteries, is called in the *Zohar* the “closed eye” because the lives sleeping therein do not perceive what is “sensed by the opened eye of the Dangma [initiate],” which “opened eye” in Qabbālāh is termed Kether, the Crown or first emanation. As the *Zohar* states:

When the Unknown of the Unknown wished to manifest Itself, It began by producing a point; as long as that luminous point had not gone out of Its bosom, the Infinite was still completely unknown and diffused no light.

— 1:2a, Myer, p. 127

The luminous or light point, however, does periodically “appear through its energy,” for the seeds of future worlds cannot remain forever within the closed eye of *ʾēin sōf*. The vibration of the incoming universe or *ṣēfirōthal* tree quickens the sleeping seeds, and the “Light that was wrapped in Darkness,” as the *Zohar* phrases it, floods the

expanse. 'Ēin sōf has become 'ēin sōf 'ōr: infinite space has become infinite light. “Bright Space Son of Dark Space” as the Stanzas of Dzyan express it: the primordial quiver of manifestation, which is the source and forerunner of later multiplication and consequent division of the One into the many. We may here conceive of darkness as pure spirit, and light as matter.

“The ray shoots through the virgin egg” — precisely the bursting forth of that “luminous point” of Qabbālāh into Kether, and from Kether, the first Sēfirāh, into the nine inferior lights, until a complete tenfold sēfirōth tree of lives is unfolded.

“It expands when the breath of fire is upon it; it contracts when the breath of the mother touches it” is a precise description of tsimtsūm. Qabbālāh states that when the Divine, the Holy, wishes to send forth or emanate a ray from itself through the “closed eye” of 'ēin sōf into the “eye, opened” of Kether, by a mysterious process of will (*rātsōn*) it “concentrated its essence” into a single point, and this concentration of power and energy is called tsimtsūm, signifying the “contraction” and subsequent expansion characteristic of manifestation.

Through tsimtsūm, the primordial point expanded, and a second point (“smooth or expanded point”) was produced, which in turn by a continuing process of tsimtsūm brought forth the succeeding sēfirōth. As the *Zohar* describes it, the primordial point

was an inner light which had no limit so that could be known, its pureness, thinness (subtlety) and clearness, un-

til it expanded itself through itself; and the expansion of this point made a palace to envelope that point. Its (the palace's) light cannot be comprehended because of its immense pureness and yet it is not so thin (subtile) and clear as that first point, which is hidden and concealed. The palace which is the garment to that hidden point, its light (is also) unlimited, although it is not so pure and clear as that first point which is hidden and concealed. That palace expands itself outwardly from its first light, and that expansion is the garment to that palace, of which its inner is subtile and clear; and from here, (each) farther spreads itself one in another, and envelopes itself, one in another, until it is found, (that) one is a garment to the other, and the other still to another; . . . — 1:20b, Myer, p. 381

This primordial point — *nēqūdāh qadmā'āh*, otherwise Kether, the first *sēfirāh* — expands and makes “a palace,” i.e., produces from within itself the next *sēfirāh*; that second *sēfirāh*, while a “palace” or “envelope” or garment to the first *sēfirāh*, itself becomes the “inner light” to the succeeding *sēfirāh*; which in its turn is both “palace” to the second *sēfirāh* and “inner light” to the fourth *sēfirāh*; and so the process continues throughout the tenfold tree. The same takes place with the four Adams (see ch. 7), where each succeeding Adam functions both as prototype to the one below, and reflection of the one above; at one time transmitter of the light, at another a receiver.

In the *Zohar* the “inner light” is called *būtsīnā'*, a word meaning “light” or “candle,” frequently found in the phrase *Būtsīnā' dēQardīnūthā'*, translated by Myer (p. 381) as “the brilliant inner Light” which “came out from the Hidden of

Hidden, from the Head of the Ain Soph” (1:3). Or again, the *Zohar* has:

Come, See! At the time it came up in the Will of the Holy, Blessed be He! to create the world, He brought forth from the *Botzeen-ab Qardinuthah* [*Būtsīnā’ dēQardīnūthā’*], *i.e.*, the very inner light (of the heart) a knot (or, chain) and lighted (emanated) the darkness from it and let it down Below. The darkness lighted in a hundred different ways and paths, small and great, and made the House (Tabernacle or Temple, Below. Rev. xi, 19; xv, 5, 6, 8; xvi, 1.) of the world.
— 1:172a, Myer, p. 385

Several additional names are used by the Qabbalists for both Kether and ’ēin sōf. No term was ever satisfactory, for how could the finite mind, no matter how reverent or disciplined in esoteric thought, ever describe that which has neither attribute, form, nor color? They compromised, therefore, by giving ’ēin sōf various suggestive titles, each an attempt to portray an aspect of the infinite. These titles, however, were quite as often used to describe the first manifestation from ’ēin sōf — Kether, the Holy Ancient — as a seed or point. Careful study of the context usually enables one to detect to which of the two these terms apply.

Some of the titles given in the *Zohar* to ’ēin sōf, and often to Kether, are: the Ancient of the Ancient Ones (‘*attīqā’ dē’attīqīn*); Ancient of all the Ancient Ones (‘*attīqā’ dē-kol ‘attīqīn*); Hidden of the Hidden Ones (*ṭēmīrā’ diṭēmīrīn*); Concealed of the Concealed Ones (*sithrā’ dēsithrīn*); Oldest of the Oldest (*sābā’ dēsābīn*); Archaic Oldest of the Oldest, or Eternal Ancient of the Ancients (‘*attīqā’ sābā’ dēsābīn*);

Holy Ancient One (‘attīqā’ qaddīshā’); and Unknown of all the Unknown Ones or Hidden of all the Hidden Ones (sēthīmā’ dē-kol sēthīmīn).

All of these titles selected from different books of the *Zohar* revolve around one thought: the utterly unknowable and hid character of the Boundless. As the *Zohar* (2:42-3) says: “This first Sefirah is sometimes called the Infinite (Ayn Sof), sometimes the Supreme Crown (Kether Elyon), and sometimes the No-Thing (Ay-yin) or the Place (Mokom) [māqōm]. . . . we must take care not to confound it [‘Ayin] with the Ancient of Ancients [‘attīqā’ dē‘attīqīn], that is to say, with the Ayn-Sof Himself, before whom the most dazzling light is but a shadow.”*

How does the Qabbalistic description of the coming into being of the universe harmonize with that of *Genesis* in the Tōrāh? The standard English translations are deceptive. For example, the first word in the Bible is *rē’shīth* — “beginning, headship,” “the most excellent or highest of a series,” “wisdom” — prefixed by the preposition *bē*, meaning “in, through,” or “by means of.” The beginning of *Genesis*, then, may quite correctly be translated “by wisdom,” or “by means of wisdom,” or “by or in a multitude,” as G. de Purucker does in *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy* (2nd ed., pp. 98-102). HPB maintains that:

Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, Chalcidius, Methodius, and Maimonides, on the authority of the *Targum* of Jerusalem, the orthodox and greatest authority of the Jews, held

*Franck, *Kabbalah*, p. 99n33 and pp. 158-9; cf. also Mathers, *Idrā’ Rabbā’*, pp. 21, 23; and Ginsburg, p. 89.

that the first two words in the book of *Genesis* — B-RASIT [bĕrē'shīth], mean *Wisdom*, or the *Principle*. And that the idea of these words meaning “*in the beginning*” was never shared but by the profane, who were not allowed to penetrate any deeper into the esoteric sense of the sentence.

— *Isis Unveiled* 2:35

The fathers . . . dreaded above all to have the esoteric and true meaning of the word *Rasit* [rē'shīth] unveiled to the multitudes; for if once the true sense of this sentence, as well as that of the Hebrew word *asdt* . . . were understood rightly, the mystery of the Christian trinity would have crumbled, carrying in its downfall the new religion into the same heap of ruins with the ancient Mysteries. — *Ibid.* 2:34

In his *Fundamentals* (p. 99), Purucker translates the word *'elohīm* in the first verse of *Genesis* as plural: “in a host (or multitude) the gods [*'elohīm*] formed (made) themselves into the heavens and the earth.” *Genesis* 1:2 is usually translated “And the earth was without form, and void.” The two words (*tobū* and *bohū*) for the primeval chaos preceding the appearance of the manifestation, are similar in meaning. *Tobū* signifies that which lies waste, without inhabitants or other manifested activity; and *bohū* signifies empty or void. Thus together they mean “uninhabited void,” which corresponds to the Greek *Χάος* (chaos), the homogeneous condition of our solar system or galaxy before manifestation began. Purucker’s literal translation of the first verses of *Genesis* continues:

“And darkness upon the face of the ethers. And the rūahh (the spirit-soul) of the gods (of *Elohīm*) (fluttered, hovered) brooding.” . . .

And said (the) Elohīm (the gods) — light, come-into-being! and light came-into-being. And saw (the) gods the light, that (it was) good. And divided Elohīm between the light and between the darkness. And called Elohīm the light day, and the darkness called they night. And (there) came-into-being eve, and (there) came-into-being morn. Day one. — *Fundamentals*, p. 100