

## The Four Worlds

FAR FROM TEACHING THE EXISTENCE of one Adam as sole progenitor of humanity, Qabbālāh distinguishes four Adams or humanities, existent on and appropriate to four ‘ōlāmīm (worlds or planes). These Adams range in quality of character from the spiritual or first Adam, the ’Ādām Qadmōn of the *Zohar*, to the lowest or most material, the terrestrial Adam of *Genesis*. Four worlds or planes gradually decreasing in spirituality are described as four extensions or manifestations of the primeval Heavenly Adam.

‘Ōlām (singular of ‘ōlāmīm) is from a Hebrew verb signifying originally “to conceal, to hide,” with a philosophical extension of meaning of “hidden time,” or an age whose birth and death are “concealed” from profane knowledge, but during whose existence spiritual beings “live and move and have their being.” In brief, ‘ōlām is a world or condition of being in which entities, human or other, pass a certain portion of time, and thus undergo in space a number of experiences. It is similar in conception to the Sanskrit *loka*, and identic with the Gnostic *aion*.

‘Ōlām is the old word for “eternity,” often misunderstood to mean forever and ever without end. Originally

it did not connote endless duration; on the contrary, the *Zohar* regards it as a defined period of time during which entities manifest in one or another condition of being — hence a world or sphere.

The four Adams are conceived of not as distinct from the ‘ōlāmīm, but rather as their consciousness side. So intimately related are they to one another that the ‘ōlāmīm are often termed the Adams, while the four Adams are just as frequently called the four ‘ōlāmīm. When viewed from the standpoint of the *entities* who inhabit and inform these worlds or planes, they are called the Adams; when considered as the *worlds* on and in which entities evolve, they are called the ‘ōlāmīm. Further, each of the Adams has its own sēfirōthal tree of life in and through which it experiences the tenfold qualities of consciousness.

Thus three streams of emanational energy issue forth from the Boundless, ’ēin sōf: (a) the tenfold sēfirōthal tree of lives, (b) the four ‘ōlāmīm, and (c) the four Adams. Correlating these with the theosophical philosophy, and taking as an instance the manifestation of a planetary chain: (a) the sēfirōth would correspond to the varying states of consciousness of the seven (or ten or twelve) globes of such a chain; (b) the ‘ōlāmīm to the lokas and talas or the four cosmic planes or worlds on and in which the globes or sēfirōth function; and (c) in the human context, the four Adams correspond to the four root-races or humanities of our present planetary life cycle or round of existence. Such correspondences are not hard and fast. Generally speaking, the three Zoharic emanations appear to be the Qabbalistic way of describing what theosophists understand by globes,

planes of being, and root-races, each of them distinct, yet intimately related and mutually interdependent like the sides of a triangle.

The four worlds or ‘ōlāmīm are considered as four emanations or productions of ’ēin sōf, the Boundless which, “as *it* could not be made manifest, was conceived to emanate manifesting Powers. It is then with its *emanations alone that human intellect has to, and can deal*” (SD 2:41). The Qabalistic names for these four emanations are:

(1) ‘ōlām hā-’atstsīlōth, “world of junction or condensation,” sometimes called ‘ōlām has-sēfirōth, “world of emanations or numbers.” It is the highest of the four worlds, the junction point between realms of utter spirit above and the increasingly material ‘ōlāmīm below. As the prototype or spiritual pattern of the lower worlds, it is the emanator of the other ‘ōlāmīm.

(2) ‘ōlām hab-bēri’āh, “world of production or creation,” the vehicle or shell of ‘ōlām hā-’atstsīlōth, receiving the spiritual energies from above and manifesting them in less fullness than its prototype. This world of production or creation in turn becomes the prototype of the next world in succession.

(3) ‘ōlām hay-yētsīrāh, “world of formation,” acts as a vehicle for the creative forces of the second ‘ōlām, manifesting them in still decreasing plenitude of spirituality. Nevertheless, this third world acts as prototype to our earth, the lowest of the four ‘ōlāmīm.

(4) ‘ōlām hā-’āsiyyāh, “world of action and labor,” the field of earthly existence, is the fourth world. It is the vehicle of the third sphere, and hence manifests in still less

fullness the splendor of spirituality. This world has also been called *‘ōlām haq-qēlīppōth*, “world of shells or rinds,” indicating that on our earth only the rinds or shells of reality manifest, while the qualities of the human spirit find themselves in varying degree at home in the upper ‘ōlāmīm.

It is interesting that the three lower ‘ōlāmīm are called by names whose roots all mean “to form,” yet each word embodies shades of meaning sufficiently different to indicate that form on the plane of *bērī’āh* would be of an intellectual or ideative character, while form on the plane of *yētsīrāh* would be more material, though not as material as that of the lowest world of *‘āsiyyāh*. The roots also imply that form on the plane of *yētsīrāh* acts more on the astral world, while that of *‘āsiyyāh* has more to do with the condensation of physical matter.

Ginsburg, in his *Kabbalah*, writes about the four ‘ōlāmīm:

The different worlds which successively emanated from the *En Soph* and from each other, and which sustain the relationship to the Deity of first, second, third, and fourth generations, are, with the exception of the first (*i.e.*, the World of Emanations), inhabited by spiritual beings of various grades. . . . the first world, or the Archetypal Man, in whose image everything is formed, is occupied by no one else. The angel METATRON, (מטטרוֹן) [*Mēṭaṭrōn*], occupies the second or *the Briatic World* (עוֹלָם בְּרִיאָה) [*‘ōlām bērī’āh*], which is the first habitable world; he alone constitutes the world of pure spirits. He is the garment of שְׁדַי [Shaddai], *i.e.*, the visible manifestation of the Deity; his name is numerically equivalent to that of the Lord. (*Sohar*, iii, 231 *a.*)

He governs the visible world, preserves the unity, harmony, and the revolutions of all the spheres, planets and heavenly bodies, and is the Captain of the myriads of the angelic hosts who people the second habitable or *the Jetziratic World* (עולָם יְצִירָה) [‘ōlām yětsīrāh], and who are divided into ten ranks, answering to the *ten Sephiroth*. Each of these angels is set over a different part of the universe. One has the control of one sphere, another of another heavenly body; one angel has charge of the sun, another of the moon, another of the earth, another of the sea, another of the fire, another of the wind, another of the light, another of the seasons, &c. &c.; and these angels derive their names from the heavenly bodies they respectively guard. — pp. 108-10

Each of the four ‘ōlāmīm is held by the *Zohar* to have its locus in the individual human being, each corresponding with one of the four basic principles of the human constitution. Hence nēshāmāh, spirit, is believed to manifest without hindrance in ‘ōlām hā-’atstsīlōth; rūah, spiritual intelligence, finds similar freedom in ‘ōlām hab-bērī’āh; nefesh in ‘ōlām hay-yětsīrāh; and gūf, the shell or container of the preceding spiritual, intellectual, and psychic breaths, is in ‘ōlām haq-qēlīppōth.

These ‘ōlāmīm do not manifest as descending layers from ’ēin sōf, or like the steps of a ladder, one below the other, but surround one another, as the sheaths of the human constitution may be said to envelop the pearl of nēshāmāh:

As in the human organism, the Neshamah the thinking mind, which has its seat in the brain; is surrounded by the Rua'h, a spirit which dwells in the heart; and this by

the Nephesh, the life spirit permeating the entire body; and finally all of these are covered with flesh, skin, bones, and then clothing, so in the construction of the universe, the Makrokosmos, in the highest Sephirothic world, the A'tzeel-oothic, is surrounded by the B'ree-atic world, that of Creation or Emanation, the Soul and expressed Will of the Deity; this by that of Ye'tzeer-ah or world of Formation, *i.e.*, the Life Force, and this finally by the world of Action, A'seey-ah, the world of Corporeity, which is the shell or cover.  
— *Zohar* 1:20a, Myer, p. 292n

Speaking of the heavens or other earths, the process of emanation is described as follows:

And all the heavens are one above the other, like the layers of an onion, and some Below and some Above, . . . And the Lower earths where do they come from? They are from the chain of the earth and from the Heaven Above.

— *Zohar* 3:9b, 10a, Myer, pp. 415-16

On each of these worlds a complete tenfold tree of life is emanated. While each *sēfirōthal* tree is patterned after the universal plan, nevertheless it manifests its own characteristic energy appropriate to the 'ōlām on which it unfolds. This is alluded to in allegorical fashion:

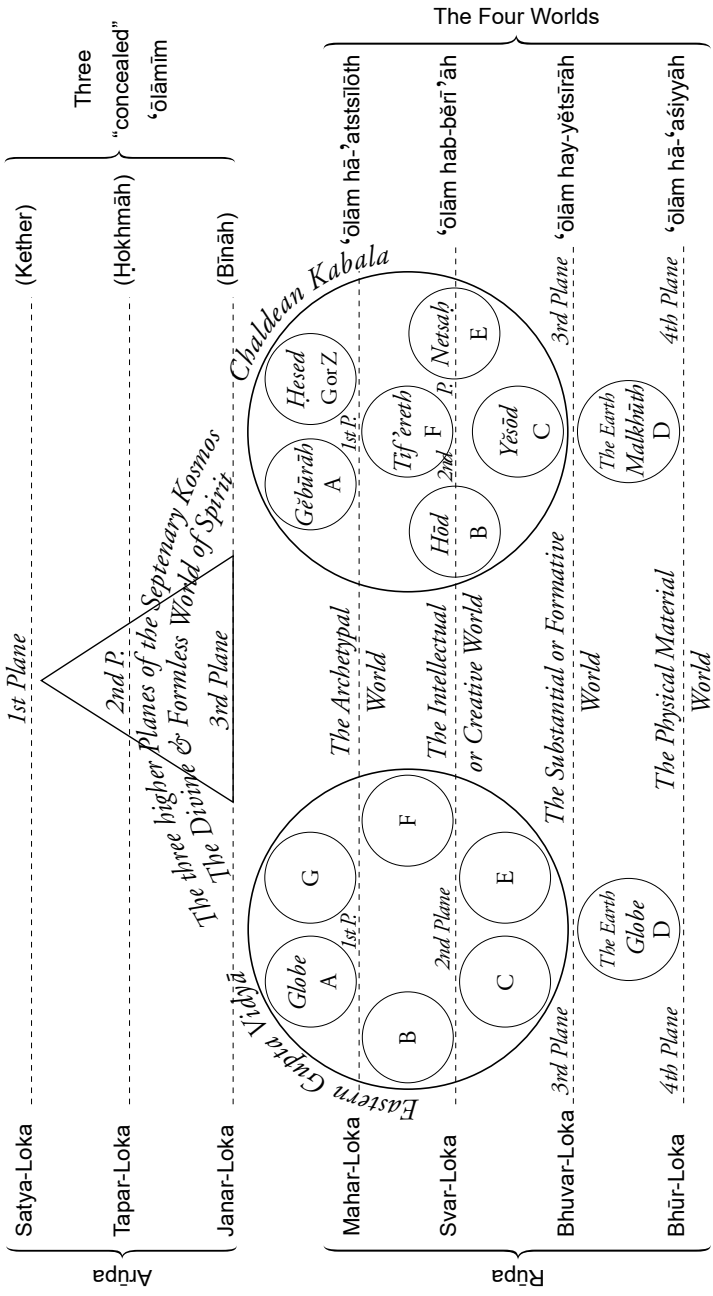
And there come out from it [any particular world or 'ōlām] different creatures differing one from the other. Some of them in garments (skins), some of them in shells (*Q'lipboth*) like the worms which are found in the earth, some of them in red shells, some in black, some in white, and some from all the colors.  
— *Zohar* 3:10a, Myer, pp. 416-17

The different colors are reminiscent of the Stanzas of Dzyan

(SD 2:20), in which the various human races are termed moon-white, yellow, red, and black — not that the beings manifest on any ‘ōlām are *physically* red or white, or any other color, but that such colors suggest varying qualities of development.

Thus (a) each of the four worlds emanates or manifests a sēfirōthal tree *in harmony* with the specific quality of the ‘ōlām; or (b) viewing the matter from the consciousness side, each of the sēfirōthal manifestations conditions the quality of a particular ‘ōlām. It is the old problem of deciding whether, in theosophical terminology, the worlds or globes condition the quality of their kingdoms of evolving beings, or whether the lives themselves determine — because emanating the worlds from themselves — the quality and character of such worlds. The latter view is perhaps closer to the esoteric conception, hence we may just as accurately say that each of the four sēfirōthal trees in the last analysis emanates or develops its corresponding ‘ōlām as its field of action during manifestation.

The following diagram reproduced from *The Secret Doctrine* shows HPB’s comparison of the Eastern Gupta-Vidyā (secret wisdom) with the Chaldean Qabbālāh. We have here seven cosmic planes, three of which remain unnamed and undefined because they are of so spiritual and ethereal a quality as to be incomprehensible to our terrestrial intellect. In modern theosophical literature these three higher planes are called *arūpa*, “formless” (a Sanskrit word meaning without a body or form *as we understand it*). But they are just as real and vital in the consciousness of those supernal beings who inhabit and vivify those spheres as our earth is



Adapted from *The Secret Doctrine* 1:200



to us. Regarding these invisible spheres, HPB writes: “The three upper are the three higher planes of consciousness, revealed and explained in both schools only to the Initiates, the lower ones represent the four lower planes — the lowest being our plane, or the visible Universe” (*SD* I:199). These three upper planes, in which the supernal triad of Kether, Ḥokhmāh, and Bīnāh are dominant, cannot be reached by the ordinary consciousness, as the individual “must awaken the three ‘seats’ to life and activity. And how many are capable of bringing themselves to even a superficial comprehension of *Atma-Vidya* (Spirit-Knowledge), . . .” (*ibid.*).

For convenience, on the right side of HPB’s diagram we have added the Qabbalistic terms for the ‘ōlāmīm — the four ‘ōlāmīm corresponding with the four manifested planes; and on the left we have placed the lokas in one manner of describing them. Note that the names of the three higher unmanifest lokas are given in Sanskrit literature, and that we do not have the names of the three higher “concealed” ‘ōlāmīm. But we do have the names of the three higher sēfirōth — Kether, Ḥokhmāh, and Bīnāh — and we may presume that these upper “concealed” ‘ōlāmīm were originally known to the initiates who transmitted the ancient Qabbālāh from which its modern child, the Hebrew Qabbālāh, is derived. *The Secret Doctrine* gives a hint of this: “First comes En-Soph, the ‘Concealed of the Concealed,’ then the *Point*, Sēphira and the later Sēphiroth; then the *Atzilatic* World, a *World of Emanations* that gives birth to three other worlds . . .” (2:111). We are dealing here with the four lower or manifest planes, the field of the four ‘ōlāmīm.

Studying HPB's diagram further, we note the distribution of the seven manifest globes of a planetary chain (as an instance in point of the seven manifest qualities of any being, whether a sun, planet, man, or atom) on the four manifest 'ōlāmīm, two by two on the three higher manifest 'ōlāmīm, and one — the lowest, our earth — on the fourth and most material of the planes.

Further, the globes as thus distributed on the 'ōlāmīm are correlated each to a particular sēfirāh: the seven lower or manifest sēfirōth corresponding to the seven globes on and in the four cosmic planes. At the same time, on each of the 'ōlāmīm a tenfold sēfirōthal tree of life is manifested, which illustrates another facet of this multifaceted conception. What HPB is suggesting in this diagram is that on any specific plane or 'ōlām, *one aspect of consciousness only is dominant at any one time*, all other aspects of the sēfirōthal tree being present in potential, but manifesting in *minor* degree.

An old work by the seventeenth-century Jesuit Athanasius Kircher contains an interesting diagram of the sēfirōthal tree which indicates that within each sēfirāh there are ten sub-sēfirōthal powers.\* The more modern Qabbalists, however, seem to ignore this point.

If for every sēfirāh of the manifested 'ōlāmīm we find a corresponding 'ōlāmīc power, we may conclude that for every *sub*-sēfirāh there must be a *sub*-'ōlām. Further, each 'ōlām must then contain *in potentia* the other sub-'ōlāmīc qualities. The following from an article based on Knorr

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\*Cf. *Oedipi Aegyptiacus*, 1652.

von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata* (*Kabbalah Unveiled*) confirms this thought:

Each of these four worlds is sub-divided into four, and then we read of the Aziluth [ʿAtstsilōth] (or Abia) of Aziluth, the Briah [Bērīʿāh] of Aziluth, the Jezirah [Yētsīrāh] of Aziluth and the Asiah [ʿAsiyyāh] of Aziluth; and similarly in the case of the other three.

— “The Kabbala and the Microcosm – I,” by Montague R. Lazarus, *The Theosophist*, Sept. 1887, p. 769

Hence, ʿōlām hā-ʿatstsilōth is called such not because this ʿōlām alone is present, but because of the four ʿōlāmīc qualities existent there, the ʿatstsilōthic power is dominant. Precisely the same with the other ʿōlāmīm: each quality is dominant in its own sphere, while the other three sub-ʿōlāmīm are more or less recessive.

The following diagram may help clarify these nuances of Qabbalistic thought. We note the four ʿōlāmīm or planes of consciousness descending in serial order from the spiritual, through the second and third, until the world of physical matter, our earth, is reached.

The second ʿōlām we will now examine in detail. Here we have ʿōlām hab-bērīʿāh expanded into four *sub*-ʿōlāmīm, correlated to the *sub*-sēfirōth of the sēfirāh native to this ʿōlām (Tifʿereh), as well as the corresponding *sub*-global aspects of globe F of the earth-chain, coeval with Tifʿereh. From this threefold correlation, some interesting points develop:

(a) The three highest sēfirōth — above the seven manifested sēfirōth on the four manifested planes — imply three

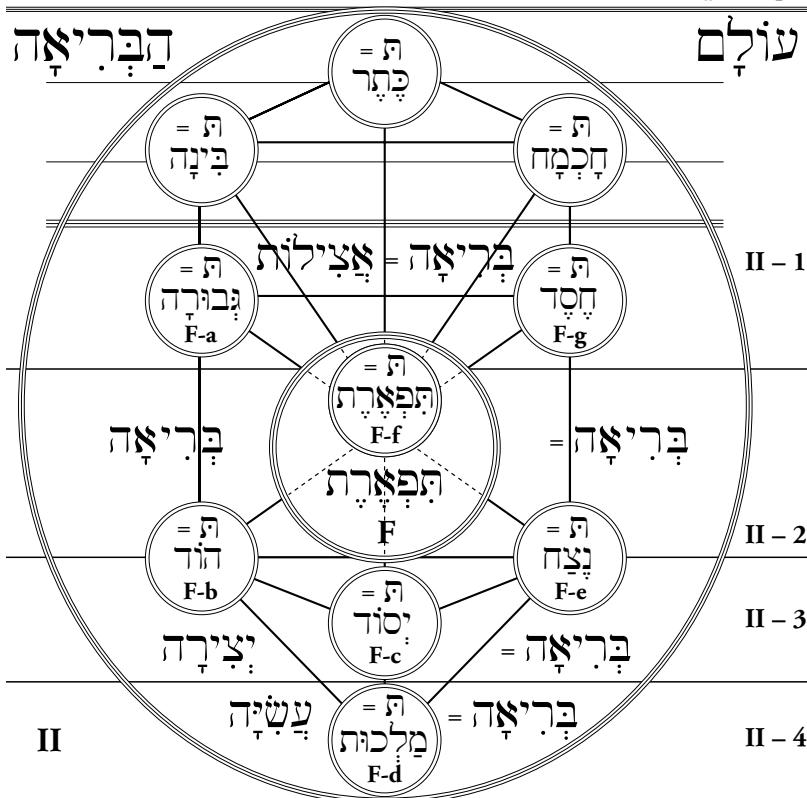
I

# עולם האצילות

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| I | — | 1 |
| I | — | 2 |
| I | — | 3 |
| I | — | 4 |

הבריאה

עולם



II

III

# עולם היצירה

|     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| III | — | 1 |
| III | — | 2 |
| III | — | 3 |
| III | — | 4 |

IV

# עולם העשיה

|    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| IV | — | 1 |
| IV | — | 2 |
| IV | — | 3 |
| IV | — | 4 |

Sub-‘Ölāmīm

higher planes on which to function, i.e., three higher “concealed” ‘ōlāmīm on and in which the three highest of the sēfirōth function;

(b) the three highest sēfirōth similarly suggest three higher globes of a planetary chain. From this we may conclude that ‘ōlām hab-bērī’āh expands to contain: (1) three concealed or superspiritual ‘ōlāmīm; (2) three concealed or superspiritual global qualities; and (3) three concealed or superspiritual sēfirōth.

The existence of these three subfactors within this second manifested cosmic plane points out that *within every ‘ōlām* there must likewise exist the same series of concealed or superspiritual sub-‘ōlāmīm, sub-sēfirōth, and sub-global characteristics — a veritable hierarchy of “concealed” divinely spiritual powers, the inner unrevealed source of the manifested ‘ōlāmīm.

The sub-‘ōlāmīm of the world of Bērī’āh have already been described; the sub-sēfirōth and sub-globes correlated to them are:

| Sub-‘ōlāmīm         | Sub-sēfirōth    | Sub-globes |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Bērī’āh-’Atstsilōth | Tif’ereth-Ḥesed | F-g        |
|                     | " -Gēbūrāh      | F-a        |
| Bērī’āh-Bērī’āh     | " -Tif’ereth    | F-f        |
|                     | " -Hōd          | F-b        |
| Bērī’āh-Yēsīrāh     | " -Netsah       | F-e        |
|                     | " -Yēsōd        | F-c        |
| Bērī’āh-’Asīyyāh    | " -Malkhūth     | F-d        |

In this regard, we quote a few lines from a medieval manuscript of Ḥayyim Vital, the most beloved and important disciple of Isaac Luria, which presents the procession of the ‘ōlāmīm and sēfirōth as sparks of scintillating light coming forth from ’ēin sōf:

The Ten Sephiroth of A'tzeel-ooth [’Atstsīlōth] have scintillated and brought forth the Ten Sephiroth of B'ree-ah [Bērī’āh], and from the energy of these Ten of B'ree-ah, sparkled forth the scintillations of the World Ye'tzeer-ah [Yētsīrāh], and through these, the Ten Sephiroth of the World A'seey-ah [’Aśiyyāh] were sealed . . .

— *’Ēts Ha-Ḥayyim*, “Tree of Life,”  
fol. 253, col. 2, Myer, p. 331