

## LESSON TWO LURIANIC KABBALAH

Welcome to 16<sup>th</sup> century Tzefat! (sometimes written in English as Safed)

Some key terms in Lurianic Kabbalah:

**TZIMTZUM – withdrawal, contraction**

**SHEVIRAT HA-KELIM – the breaking of the vessels**

**TIKKUN – repair**

**ADAM KADMON – the macro-being**

TEXT ONE --- Anonymous commentary from a manuscript, 13<sup>th</sup> c. Provence.

How did He produce and create this world? Like a man who gathers in and contracts (**metzamtzem**) his breath (alternate reading: contracts Himself), so that the smaller might contain the larger, so He contracted His light into a hand's breadth, according to His own measure, and the world was left in darkness, and in that darkness He cut boulders and hewed rocks.

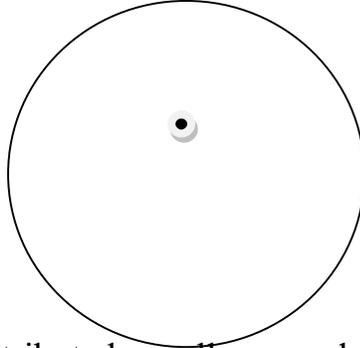
TEXT TWO --- Chayyim Vital, *Etz Chayim*, *Sha'ar EgoLim v'Yosher*, p. 27

Know that before emanations began or any creatures were created, there was a supernal light filling all being. It was simply everywhere. There was no empty space. You might think of it as thin air or ether. Yet from this simple light of **Ein Sof**, all being issues. It has neither beginning nor end. Everything was this one, simple equally distributed light. And this light is called **Ein Sof**.

There arose in His simple will the desire to create worlds and produce the emanations, in order to bring about God's perfect works and Names and attributes, and this thought was the reason for the creation of everything...

Whereupon the **Ein Sof** contracted itself, leaving only a point within the center of the actual light. But the light was (also) withdrawn toward the edges that

surrounded the central space. What now remained was an empty ether, void of everything, extending from the point in the center (to the edges), like so:



This tzimtzum was distributed equally around that empty central point in such a way that this emptiness was completely circular. There were neither corners nor angles. The **Ein Sof** contracted itself so that it was a perfect circle. This is because the light of the **Ein Sof** needed to be perfectly circular, equidistant in all directions.

As we know from geometry, there is no form more perfect than a circle. But this is not the case with the form of a square, which has protruding angles, or with a triangle and other similar forms. Therefore the self-contraction of the **Ein Sof** necessarily had to be a perfect circle...

There is another reason that has to do with the emanations that in the future were intended for that empty space, as we have mentioned above. The idea is that the emanations would be in the form of circles. In that way all would be equally close to and joined with **Ein Sof** surrounding them all equally. And they could receive from **Ein Sof** the light and the shefa they require, from every direction, equally. (Again,) this would not be the case were the emanations square or triangular or the like, since they have irregular, protruding corners, which would mean that some parts would be closer than others and would then be unable to receive the light of **Ein Sof** equally at the same time...

And thus, after the tzimtzum mentioned above, there then remained an empty space, an ether void in the middle of the light of **Ein Sof**. Now, at last, there was a place able to receive the emanations...which could draw down the light of **Ein Sof**, a single, straight line of light.

TEXT THREE --- Chayyim Vital, Likkutim Chadashim, pp. 17-23.

When the supernal emanator wished to create this material universe, It contracted (tzimtzem) Its presence...At first **Ein Sof** filled everything; it is known that even an inanimate stone is illuminated by It; otherwise the stone could not exist at all; it would disintegrate. The illumination of **Ein Sof** clothes itself in garment upon garment...

At the beginning of creation, when **Ein Sof** withdrew Its presence all around in every direction, It left a vacuum in the middle, surrounded on all sides by the light of **Ein Sof**, empty precisely in the middle...The light withdrew like water in a pond displaced by a stone. When a stone is dropped in a pond, the water at that spot does not disappear; it merges with the rest...

So the withdrawn light converged beyond, and in the middle remained a vacuum. Then all the opacity and density of judgment within the light of **Ein Sof**--like a drop in the ocean--was extracted. Descending into the vacuum, it transformed into a Golem...surrounded in every direction by the light of **Ein Sof**. Out of this mass emanated the four worlds: emanation, creation, formation, and actualization. For in its simple will to realize Its intention, the emanator reilluminated the Golem with a ray of the light withdrawn at first – not all of the light, because if it had all returned, the original state would have been restored, which was not the intention...

To fashion pottery, the potter first takes an unformed mass of clay and then puts his hand inside the mass to shape it, as it is written: *Like clay in the hands of the potter* (Jer. 18:6). So the supernal emanator put Its hand into the amorphous mass, that is, a ray of light returned from above...As this light began to enter the mass, vessels were formed. From the purest light, **Keter**; next, **Chokhmah**; then **Binah**; and so on through all ten sefirot...Since **Keter** was the purest and cleanest of all the vessels, it could bear the light within it, and it was not broken at all. But **Chokhmah** and **Binah**, though more translucent than those below, were not like **Keter**. Not having its power, their backs broke, and they fell from their position...As the light descended further, six points appeared, six fragments of what had been one point of light. Thus the vessels shattered...Their spiritual essence, the light, ascended back to the mother's womb, while the shattered vessels fell to the world of creation...

When the light emanated once again--repaired, arrayed anew--it extended only to the end of the world of emanation. "Emanation" denotes this extension of the light of **Ein Sof** during the time of regeneration. Emanation consists of five visages.

These visages are reconfigurations of the points of light, capable now of receiving the light, so that no shattering occur, as at first...Below these visages the light of **Ein Sof** appears only through a screen. As when you sit in the shade: though the sun does not shine on you directly, it illuminates the shaded area. In a similar manner, the light of **Ein Sof** illuminates the world of creation through a screen, indirectly...

TEXT FOUR --- Solomon of Lutzk, second introduction to **Maggid Devarav L'Ya'akov**, pp. 9-11

The first thing one has to know is that God fills all worlds, that no place is empty of Him, and that He is in all worlds, etc. That this is so can be observed from experience. For in all things there inheres the vital energy of the Creator, blessed be He. It is obvious that things have taste or smell or appearance or love; that is, there are things which are loved, or feared, or are beautiful, and so on with regard to the other attributes. Now if one strips away the material aspect of things to consider solely the spiritual aspect in itself--the taste or the smell, etc.--it becomes quite obvious that this is not something tangible or apprehended by the senses but by man's vital force, by his soul. It follows that it is a spiritual thing, the energy of the Creator which resides in this material thing just as the soul resides in the body. And so it is in connection with all things and all forms of motion. As the author of **Chovot ha-Levavot** (The Duties of the Heart) wrote: "All your movements depend on the Creator's will." In all things there are sparks of spiritual energy which come from the Creator, blessed be He, Who is the Bundle of Life, the Light of Life, the Fountain of Life, and the Life of Life, and from Him, blessed be He, is derived the vitality of all, from the highest of the high down to the lowest below. This is the meaning of "He concentrated (**tzimtzem**) His Shekhinah," i.e., "He resides among creatures below." Every spark is taken from its own world. For example, when something is loved, that love is taken from the world of love. That is, it is obvious there is a source and root from which love is taken for everything that has love.

In order to make this slightly more comprehensible, we should notice that the idea of the root of love is nothing else than the divine energy concentrated, as it were, so that it is experienced in the category of love. For it is obvious there are other forms of energy and spirit which are not experienced in the category of love but in other categories: fear, beauty, etc. All these, as above, are pure energy and spirit, but each is experienced in a different way from the others, since it has been concentrated into a different concentration, i.e., a different experience. But in their

inner essence they are all the same, as above, all pure energy and spirit, since they are all derived from a single root in which there is no multiplicity at all.

This is why the **Tikkunei Zohar** says: “And through it all supernal forms are seen,” namely, apprehension is through the divine **tzimtzum**, as above. The feminine form is used (i.e., “it” is actually bah, “through her”) for it (**tzimtzum**) is in the category of the female in relation to what is even higher, the Root of Roots. And he who understands will understand. That is why they (the sefirot) are called **olamot** (“worlds”), because the Creator’s energy is hidden (**mit’alem**) and concentrated into one particular form of experience. They are also called “measures” (**middot**) because they are experienced in a measured way, i.e., in this way and not in another. But in reality each one of them includes all the others. For emanation began in the Root of Roots because of His lovingkindness, in order to benefit His creatures. He needed, therefore, to concentrate of Himself, as it were, no more than a thin line and spark into each quality. But this is from the energy and splendor of the Creator Himself, blessed be He, as it is written: *And breathed into his nostrils (the breath of life; Gen. 2:7)*. Whoever blows out his breath, blows it out from his very self.

It was theoretically possible for it to continue ad infinitum, as in the verse, *a great voice that did not cease* (Deut. 5:19), but this would not have brought about the purpose intended so that, for His splendor to be revealed, it was necessary that it be measured. Yet these matters are extremely profound and the most elaborate exposition is required if we are to see how the principle operates in each world. *For one higher than the high watches, and there are those higher than they* (Eccl. 5:7)...

TEXT FIVE --- Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch; **Maggid Devarav Ya’akov**, p. 18a

*Draw me, we will run after you* (Song of Songs 1:4). A parable: A father sees his son playing childish games with his companions. The father goes up to them and allows the child to see him. When the child sees his father he leaves his games and runs to his father, shouting: “Father!” When the father sees the child is running to him, he walks away, and then the child calls out even louder, “Father! Father!” and runs quickly toward him until he reaches his side. Now when the father first allowed his child to see him, it was so that the child would leave his childish games and run to him. The father is greatly pleased that his child is clever enough for nothing to matter so much to him as his father’s love. But when the father notices

that the child has left his childish games behind him, he pretends to ignore the child so that the child should have an even greater distaste for the childish games and yearn all the more to be near to his father. When that happens, the father's joy is even greater and great feelings of compassion stem from it, in addition to the joy the child has. It follows that the great joy the father experienced and the resulting joy of the child would not have been possible were it not for the father's **tzimtzum** when he pretended to walk away...when we attach ourselves to things down below and to temporal pleasures, we are as nothing to Him. But when we have the strongest distaste for worldly pleasures when we compare them to our love for Him, we cause, as it were, great joy to God, blessed be He.

TEXT SIX --- Shneur Zalman of Lyady, **Tanya**, *Sha'ar Ha-Yichud v'ha-Emunah* ("Gate of Unity and Faith"), ch. 7, pp. 313-319

...it is possible to understand the error of some, scholars in their own eyes, may God forgive them, who erred and misinterpreted in their study of the writings of the **ARI** (i.e., Luria), of blessed memory, and understood the doctrine of tzimtzum, which is mentioned therein literally: that the Holy One, blessed be He, removed Himself and His essence, God forbid, from this world, and only guides from above with individual providence...Now, aside from the fact that it is altogether impossible to interpret the doctrine of **tzimtzum** literally, for then it is a phenomenon of corporeality, concerning the Holy One who is set apart from such things many myriads of separations *ad infinitum*, they also did not speak wisely...The Holy One, blessed be He, however, contracted the light and life-force in order that it should be able to spread forth from the "breath of His mouth,"...

TEXT SEVEN --- Arthur Green (b. 1941), Seek My Face, Speak My Name, pp. 65-66.

In seeing ourselves as living in need of partnership with another for true fulfillment (a man without a wife is called "half a body" by the Zohar), we represent, in human form, the search of the eternal One. This is yet another way in which we are "God's image," though here the likeness is shared with other living creatures as well. To say it differently, the testimony that God is One requires the presence of an other.

But how can there be such an other if life is naught but an infinite coloring of varied manifestations of the One? The God who is all can have no other. Here the

divine light has to hide itself that it might be revealed. It withdraws itself from being in order that it might be seen, in order to allow for us to exist as “other,” so that we might see and bear witness to it. This paradox of divine self-withdrawal is what the Jewish sages call **tzimtzum**...In order to be God’s “other,” we have to be all that the eternal One is not: transitory, corporeal, mortal. God, as it were, seeks out an opposite--and a partner--in us.