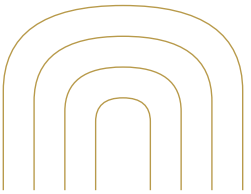
HEKHAL · READER'S EDITION



עץ חיים, שער א, דרוש עגולים ויושר — הצמצום

The Contraction

Tzimtzum

Hekhal Targum Project (machine-assisted draft; pending scholarly review)

PROVISIONAL EDITION · MACHINE-ASSISTED · NOT YET REVIEWED BY A CREDENTIALED EDITOR

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דע כי טרם שנאצלו הנאצלים ונבראו הנבראים היה אור עליון פשוט ממלא כל המציאות ולא היה שום מקום פנוי בבחי׳ אויר ריקני וחלל אלא הכל היה ממולא מן אור א״ס פשוט ההוא ולא היה לו בחי׳ ראש ולא בחי׳ סוף אלא הכל היה אור א׳ פשוט שוה בהשוואה א׳ והוא הנק׳ אור א״ס. וכאשר עלה ברצונו הפשוט לברוא העולמות ולהאציל הנאצלים להוציא לאור שלימות פעולותיו ושמותיו וכנוייו אשר זאת היה סיבה בריאת העולמות כמבואר אצלינו בענף הא׳

Know that before the emanated were emanated and the created created, a simple supernal light filled the whole of existence. There was no vacant place at all, in the aspect of empty air and void; rather, all was filled with that simple light of the Infinite. It had no aspect of beginning and no aspect of end; rather, all was one simple light, equal in a single equipoise, and this is what is called the light of the Infinite (Ein Sof). And when it arose in His simple will to create the worlds and to emanate the emanated, so as to bring to light the completeness of His acts, His names, and His

בחקירה הראשונה. והנה אז צמצם את עצמו א"ס בנקודה האמצעית אשר בו באמצע אורו ממש (אמר מאיר בערכינו אמר הרב זה וק"ל) וצמצם האור ההוא ונתרחק אל צדדי סביבות הנקודה האמצעית ואז נשאר מקום פנוי ואויר וחלל רקני מנקודה אמצעית ממש כזה [ציור] והנה הצמצום הזה היה בהשואה א' בסביבות הנקודה האמצעית ריקנית ההוא באופן שמקום החלל ההוא היה עגול מכל סביבותיו בהשוואה גמורה ולא היה בתמונת מרובע בעל זויות נצבת לפי שגם א"ס צמצם עצמו בבחי' עגול בהשוואה א' מכל צדדים והסיבה היתה לפי שכיון שאור הא"ס שוה בהשוואה גמורה הוכרח גם כן שיצמצם עצמו בהשוואה א' מכל הצדדים ולא שיצמצם עצמו מצד א' יותר משאר הצדדים. ונודע בחכמת השיעור שאין תמונה כ"כ שוה כמו תמונת העיגול משא"כ בתמונת מרובע בעל זויות נצבת בולטות וכן תמונת המשולש וכיוצא בשאר התמונות וע"כ מוכרח הוא להיות צמצום הא"ס בבחי' עיגול והסיבה הוא בעבור שהוא שוה בכל מידותיו כנ"ל. גם בפ' בא דמ"ב איתא מנא בעיגולא דאיהו י' ועיין בפ' פקודי דרנ"ח דקאמר כי היכלות ומה שבהם הם

appellations, which was the cause of the creation of the worlds, as we explained in the first branch, in the first inquiry, behold, then the Infinite contracted Himself into the central point that is within Him, at the very center of His light [editorial gloss, Poppers recension: "Meir said: in our estimation, the Rav said this; and it is readily understood"], and He contracted that light and withdrew toward the sides surrounding the central point. And then there remained a vacated place, and empty air, and an empty void, from the central point itself, like this [diagram]. Now this contraction was in a single equipoise around that empty central point, in such a way that the place of that void was round on all its sides in complete equipoise, and was not in the figure of a square with upright angles, because the Infinite too contracted Himself in the aspect of a circle, in a single equipoise from all sides. And the reason was that, since the light of the Infinite is equal in complete equipoise, it was likewise necessary that He contract Himself in a single equipoise from all the sides, and not that He contract Himself from one side more than from the other sides. And it is known in the science of measure (geometry) that there is no figure so equal as the figure of the circle,

unlike the figure of the square with its protruding upright angles, and likewise the figure of the triangle and the rest of the figures; and therefore it is necessary that the contraction of the Infinite be in the aspect of a circle, the reason being that He is equal in all His measures, as above. So too in Parashat Bo (Zohar, folio 42) it is stated, "a vessel in a circle, which is [the letter] yod"; and see Parashat Pekudei (folio 258), which says that the palaces (heikhalot), and what is within them, are circles. There is yet another reason, and it is on account of the emanated beings that He would afterward emanate within that empty and vacated place, as above. And the matter is this: when the emanated are in the figure of circles, then they will all be near to and cleaving to the Infinite that surrounds them in a single, complete equipoise, and the light and the influx that they require they will receive from the Infinite on all their sides in a single measure, which would not be so were the emanated in the aspect of a square or a triangle or the like of the other figures, for then they would have protruding angles nearer to the Infinite than their other sides, and they would not receive the light of the Infinite in a single equipoise. And at the end of the third branch it will be

עיגולים. עוד יש סיבה אחרת והוא בעבור הנאצלים אשר עתיד להאצילם אחר כך בתוך המקום החלל ההוא הריק ופנוי כנ"ל. והענין הוא כי בהיות הנאצלים בתמונת העגולים הנה אזי יהיו כולם קרובים ודבוקים בא"ס הסובב אותם בהשוואה א' גמורה והאור והשפע הצריך להם יקבלום מן א"ס מכל צדדיהם בשיקול א' משא"כ אם היו הנאצלים בבחי' מרובע או משולש וכיוצא בשאר תמונות כי אז היה בהם זויות בולטות קרובות אל הא"ס יותר משאר צדדיהם ולא היה מקבלים אור א"ס בהשוואה אחת. ובסוף ענף ג' יתבאר טעם למה הוצרך ענין הצמצום הזה ומה ענינו:

explained why this matter of the contraction was necessary, and what its meaning is.

PROVISIONAL DRAFT (PENDING SCHOLARLY REVIEW)





An orientation

This edition sets the verbatim original-language text beside a fresh English rendering and a critical apparatus: a running commentary on the passage, notes on the controlled vocabulary and the rendering chosen for each

term, and cross-references to the lexicon and to related sections. It is a provisional scholarly draft, released openly for correction and not yet reviewed by a credentialed editor.

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tzimtzum

The contraction (tzimtzum) is the hinge of the central internal-Kabbalistic dispute, and the translation does not pre-decide it. On the literal reading (tzimtzum kifshuto, the Vilna Gaon and the Mitnagdic tradition, classically R. Chaim of Volozhin, Nefesh ha-Chaim Sha'ar 3), the Infinite genuinely withdrew His light, leaving a space really empty of His manifest presence. On the figurative reading (tzimtzum she-lo kifshuto, the Hasidic and Habad tradition, R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya, Sha'ar ha-Yichud ve-ha-Emunah ch. 7), no withdrawal occurs in the

Infinite at all; the contraction is a concealment registered only from the standpoint of the creature that is to receive bounded light. Vital's doubled verb here (He contracted Himself / He contracted that light) and the residue (reshimu) named in the passages that follow are the textual hooks both readings must account for. The reader should note that Vital's text performs both and settles neither. *Gershom Scholem 1941*; *Lawrence Fine 2003*

the-vacated-space

The vacated space (makom panui / avir reikani / chalal, three near-synonyms for one referent) is kept strictly spatial in the rendering and is never conflated with ayin (the divine Nothing), which is a non-spatial apophatic name. Vital's geometry is figurative of a process in the divine life, not a diagram of physical space: the apparatus carries this frame so that no reader concludes the Infinite literally occupies and then evacuates a region of space (the symbolic-imaginal reading; Wolfson stresses that the apparent spatiality is itself meaningful, neither literal extension nor disposable metaphor). The ontological status of this space is exactly what the literal-vs-figurative dispute turns on, and, pressed toward the figurative pole, it opens the acosmism question: if the Infinite never truly withdrew and fills the space, the independent existence of the world is in some sense provisional from the divine standpoint (Habad), whereas

the literal reading secures a real ontological gap that guards against pantheism. *Elliot R. Wolfson 2005*

circle

The roundness of the contraction and of the emanated is argued on two grounds, the second of which is sod-level proof-texting (the pardes frame co-applies). First, the geometric argument: the circle is the figure of perfect equipoise (hashva'ah), so a uniformly equal light must contract uniformly, leaving a round void, and the emanated are configured as circles so as to receive the surrounding light equally on every side (a square or triangle would thrust its angles nearer the source). Second, Vital anchors this in the Zohar: the Aramaic 'a vessel in a circle, which is yod' (mana be-igula de-ihu yod) is cited from Parashat Bo (Zohar II, folio 42), and Parashat Pekudei (Zohar II, folio 258) that the heikhalot and their contents are circles. The yod here, the point/ten, prefigures the concentric igulim of the sefirot developed in the branches that follow. The circle-and-line (igulim ve-yosher) doctrine the discourse is named for unfolds from this seed. *Isaiah Tishby 1989*

editorial-gloss

The bracketed parenthetical in the source, 'Meir said: in our estimation, the Rav said this; and it is readily understood', is

NOT Vital's running prose. It is a later editorial gloss from the mem-bet ('Amar Meir') marginal apparatus associated with the standard recension (Meir Poppers, d. 1662); Luria wrote almost nothing and the system survives only through Vital's recensions (Mahadura Kama / Batra) and competing redactions, so the Etz Chaim text is a layered editorial artifact (Fine). It is retained verbatim in the source-of-record and marked here as an insertion, never translated as Vital's own voice. *Lawrence Fine 2003*

before-the-emanated

PaRDeS / pardes frame: the cause of creation invoked here ('to bring to light the completeness of His acts, His names, and His appellations') is the peshat substrate carried over from the preceding inquiry (Anaf 1), where Vital gives the classical reason, the Infinite is 'compelled' to be complete in all His actions, and the names Compassionate, Gracious, and Long-Suffering have no one to be predicated of unless there are creatures. The rendering keeps this plain-sense reasoning in the body so the cosmogonic sod (the contraction itself) has something to land on.

Editorial decisions

- **tzimtzum.** Preserve the literal-vs-figurative ambiguity in both the body and the apparatus; do not lean either way. All four secondary citations (Scholem 1941, Fine 2003, Wolfson 2005, Tishby 1989) have not yet been verified against the printed sources. *(2026-06-11)*

Manuscript variants

- **Sefaria ‘Sefer Etz Chaim’ (hebrew.grimoar.cz/vital/ec_chajim.htm), Gate 1 ch. 2**: רקני (reikani, ‘empty’) for the expected fuller spelling ריקני earlier in the same sentence; the source prints both forms. Orthographic only; no semantic consequence. Noted for source-of-record fidelity.

Colophon

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