

Text 4: *Liqqutim Chadashim*, Chayim Vital (1500's-1600's, disciple of Cordovero and Isaac Luria):

When the infinite, divine flowing energy wished to create this material universe, it withdrew its presence. At first Ein Sof [Infinity] filled everything. Now, still, even an inanimate stone is energized by it; otherwise the stone could not exist at all – it would disintegrate. The energy 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 [empty space] in the middle, surrounded on all sides by the energy of Ein Sof, empty there in the middle. The energy 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 So the withdrawn energy merged with the rest, and in the middle remained a pocket of vacuum. Then one frequency of the divine energy – like a drop in the ocean – was extracted. Descending into the vacuum, it transformed into a mass of shapeless matter, surrounded in every direction by the energy of Ein Sof. Out of this mass came energized matter. For in its simple desire to realize its intention, the divine energy of Ein Sof re-energized the matter with a ray of the energy which had been withdrawn – not all of the energy, because if it had all returned, the original state would have been restored, which was not the intention.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 (*golem*) and then puts his hand inside the mass to shape it. So the divine flow put its hand into the shapeless mass of matter: that is, a ray of energy returned into it. As this energy began to enter the mass, vessels were formed which were combinations of matter and divine energy. The first vessel, Keter, could contain the energy, but almost immediately the other vessels, not having Keter's capacity, started to break. As the ray of energy continue to enter the vessels, they exploded, shattering. Their spiritual essence – the energy – ascended back to the mother's womb, while the shattered vessels became our universe.

Still today our universe requires the inflow of divine energy, even though the energy can never exist in its pure form in our universe of matter. It's like when you sit in the shade: though the sun does not shine on you directly, it illuminates the shaded area. Otherwise all would be dark. Just like this, the energy of Ein Sof illuminates the world of creation indirectly: without it, we could not exist at all.

Questions to Discuss:

- If "Torah" is a word that describes the underlying structure of the universe, then how is the book/scroll of the Torah also the Torah?
- Take the following verses from the Siddur:

Friday Night Kabbalat Shabbat Service: אֹרֶךְ לַצַּדִּיק אֹרֶךְ לִצְדָקָה *Light is stored for the righteous (tsaddik). (Ps.97).*

Ma'ariv Barkhu: *Barukh Ata Adonai, who brings on the dusk (literally: mixes mixtures [of light and dark].*

Shacharit Barkhu: *Barukh ata Adonai, eloheinu melekh ha'olam, who fashions light and creates darkness, who is doing shalom and creating everything.*

Shabbat Morning continuation of the Barkhu is El Adon, a piyyut of all the various words for light emanating.

What would these lines from the prayerbook mean to you if you were a mystic who believes the passages above?

- *How might **you** pray these lines differently now?*
- *How can you make sense of the statement that our entirely reality is “living in the shade” where God is the light?*