

On the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant

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The Ternary Projection

The Divine Immanence articulates itself through the “triple immanent principle”: Principle-Essence-Substance.¹ This is reflected or realised in the ternary, Essence-Substance-Manifestation. Manifestation, in turn, is comprised of the “three worlds” of the microcosm: earth, midspace, heaven. The symbolisms of both the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant suggest the triple immanent principle through that which they contain. In the former case the triple immanent principle is expressed by the three sons of Noah. In the latter case this is expressed by ‘the gold jar containing the manna, Aaron’s branch that grew the buds, and the tablets of the covenant’ (Heb.9:4). Similarly each of these Arks express the microcosmic “three worlds,” which is to say that they are *imagines mundi*. The Ark of Noah expresses the “three worlds” by the three “decks” of the Ark (Gen.6:16) and the division of “all living things” into “birds,” “animals” and “every kind of creature that creeps along the ground” (Gen.6:20). With the Ark of the Covenant, the “three worlds” are expressed horizontally by the three main divisions of the Temple (the Portico, the Great Chamber and the Sanctuary), and vertically by the three “storeys” of the Temple (1Kgs.6:8).

¹ Leo Schaya refers to the “triple immanent principle,” *Shekhinah-Metatron-Avir*: the *Shekhinah* is the presence of divine reality in the midst of the cosmos; *Metatron*, the active aspect of the *Shekhinah*, is the principle form from which all created forms emanate; *avir*, the ether, is the passive aspect of *Shekhinah*, its cosmic receptivity, which gives birth to every created substance, whether subtle or corporeal. The triple immanent principle, *Shekhinah-Metatron-Avir*, in its undifferentiated unity, constitutes the spiritual and prototypical “world of creation”: *olam haberiya* (see *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, p.68).

Divine Immanence: Principle, Essence, Substance; Essence, Substance, Manifestation. These are the two complementary ternaries by which, through which and in which creation comes about. However, in describing these there can be a confusion arising from the fact that both of these ternaries can be expressed by the same three symbolic forms: a point, a vertical line “descending” from this point, and a horizontal line, being a limit to the vertical line.



In the first case the point is the Principle; Essence is then represented by the vertical line, expressing what we might call the Divine Activity or Divine Power, Essence *in actu* (the Divine Ray; the *Fiat Lux*); the horizontal line represents the “reflective” surface or passive Substance (the Waters) upon which Essence “acts.” In this symbolism Manifestation is implied by the meeting point of Essence and Substance.

In the second case the point is Essence, inasmuch as this is extrinsically identifiable with the Principle, which it intrinsically implies; the horizontal line remains Substance; however, in this symbolism the vertical line represents the union of Essence and Substance, that is to say, Manifestation. There is a certain crossover between these symbolisms for in the first case what represents Essence *in actu*, which is to say Principial Being, in the second case represents Manifestation, which is to say, Being *qua* cosmological Existence.²

² For a discussion of these ideas in relation to the Chinese tradition see Guénon, *The Great Triad*.

Unity, Polarisation and Limitation. Unity is represented by the point—Origin and Centre—,³ intrinsically implying Transcendence (*ad intra*) and extrinsically expressing Immanence (*ad extra*). As Keith Critchlow remarks, ‘The point of emergence does not necessarily reveal its causation either in the field of its emergence ... the point represents a unitary focus of conscious awareness; in the physical world it represents a focal event in a field which was previously uninterrupted.’⁴ The point implies the bi-unity, Essence-Substance. The externalization of the point signifies the diremption and thus polarisation of these principles, and this is expressed by the “line-path.” Critchlow: ‘The line-path can be taken as representing the point “externalizing” itself. A line, i.e. when a point has moved outside and away from its original position, symbolises the polarity of existence’⁵. This “line-path” is symbolically vertical, where this implies the dual movements “downwards,” away from the Source, and “upwards,” returning to the Source. On the one hand this line is infinite in virtue of participating in the Unity. On the other hand this line is limited by virtue of departing from the Origin. This limitation is figured by the horizontal line, which delimits the descending extension of the vertical line. The horizontal line extends indefinitely.

The symbolisms being considered here concern what might be called the “projection” of Immanence. This idea of a ternary projection is born out by the symbolisms of both the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant. With the account of Noah this is expressed by his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth (Gen.6:11), who are precisely the “projection” or “extension” of Noah. Here the three sons can be considered either inasmuch as they exist in the Ark (*in potentia*) or, and this is more to the point being considered, inasmuch as they emerge from the Ark after the Flood (*in actu*). Regarding the symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant the projection outwards is expressed, as noted, by the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place and the court, or, by extension, the Sanctuary, the Great Chamber and the Portico. However, the ternary under consideration may also be

³ The concepts of the Origin and the Centre are fundamental in traditional thought. Amongst the multitude of possible references mention might be made here of the following, all especially pertinent to the subject at hand: Guénon, *Man and his Becoming According To The Vedānta*, 1981, Ch.3; *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Chs.74-76; *The Lord of the World*, 1983, Ch.7; and *Symbolism of the Cross*, 1975, passim.; Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 1987; Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 1974, pp.12-17.

⁴ Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns*, 1976, p.9.

⁵ Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns*, 1976, p.9.

found, *in potentia* expressed by the contents of the Ark: the Tablets of the Law, the pot of manna and Aaron's rod (Heb.9:4; cf. Ex.25:16; Ex.16:34; Nm.17:25).



The Sons of Noah

As it is written, 'The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth—Ham being the father of Canaan' (Genesis 9:18). The sons of Noah: *Shêm* (שׁם; "name"), *Châm* (חם; "hot"), *Yepheth* (יפת; "expansion"). Immanence is the expression or "name" of the Divine Reality; this symbolism is explicit with the Hebrew *Shêm* ("name"). It is informative here to recognise the correspondence between Shem and *Metatron*, the angel of the Name of God.⁶ This correspondence is reinforced by the identification of Metatron with the priest-king Melchizedek, mentioned in *Genesis* 14:18, with the Midrash identifying Shem with Melchizedek.⁷

On the one hand we might say that the Name is the Principle—"In the beginning was the Word."⁸ Meister Eckhart: 'This is in the Greek: "In the principle was the Word".'⁹ On the other hand the Name is the Divine Influence—"through whom all things came into being"—who, as Meister Eckhart remarks, is identical with the *Fiat Lux*: 'First note that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," [is] contained in the words: "And God said, "Let there be light..."'¹⁰ 'The word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world' (Jn.1:9).

The Principle or Essence is, according to a certain symbolism, identical with Heaven; note, then, the close relationship between the words *Shêm* (שׁם) and *shâmayin* (שׁמַיִן),

⁶ B.T. *Hagigah*, 15a; B.T. *Sanhedrin*, 38 a; B.T. *Avodah Zarah*, 3b.

⁷ *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Genesis*, 8, 16. *Genesis Rabba*, 44 recounts Gen.14:18 yet says that it was Shem 'who was now priest of the most high God and ruled at Salem under the name of Melchizedek' (cited in Rappoport, *Ancient Israel Vol.1*, 1995, p.260). See also *Jerusalem Targum* Gen.14:18 cited in Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 1995, p.236.

⁸ For examples of this idea in the various traditions of the world see Perry, *A Treasury of Traditional Wisdom*, 2000, pp.1031-1036.

⁹ Meister Eckhart, *Comm. Jn. 4* (Colledge & McGinn, 1981, p.123). 'In its principle,' i.e. *in principio*. As Bernard McGinn notes, the Latin *principium* means both "beginning" and "principle," a semantic ambiguity that Eckhart plays with throughout his treatment of John (see n.8).

¹⁰ Meister Eckhart, *Comm. Jn. 4* (Colledge & McGinn, 1981, p.123).

meaning “heaven.” *Shâmayin* derives from the unused root *shâmayim* (שמ״ים), which is the dual form of the singular *shâmeh* (שמה; “sky”). The shift in the finals is informative: *Shâmeh* (the “sky”) has as its final a *he*, which is symbolically a “window”; the sky is a window through which one “sees”—in the sense that intimated realities are “seen”—the Unmanifested Heaven. *Shâmayim* has as its final a *mem*, symbolically “water,” which evokes the passive potentiality of the Unmanifested Principle. *Shâmayin*, “heaven,” has as its final a *nūn*, symbolically a “fish,” which evokes the active potentiality or the creative principle of Heaven.

Shâmayin, “heaven,” is almost identical—differing basically by the inclusion of a *yod*—to the word *shâman* (שמן), a primitive root that means “to shine,” recalling, of course, that Heaven is the source of the Divine Light. *Shâman* (“to shine”) gives rise to the word *shemen* (שמן), meaning “oil,” especially that of the olive, the allusion being that oil or grease is used to polish and thus to make shine. This connection is not unrelated to the meaning of *Shêm* as “name.” As we read in *The Song of Songs*, ‘your name is an oil poured out’ (1:3). According to Rabbi Gikatilla, the symbolism of “oil” is that of ‘the essence of all the Spheres [the *Sefirot*]’¹¹. He cites the vision of Zechariah of the two olive trees from which flow “golden oil” through the two golden “openings” or “tubes” (Zc.4:12). These two olive trees and subsequent two openings express the symbolism of duality,¹² through which the Essence flows forth to enlighten the world, which, moreover, is expressed in Zechariah’s vision by the “seven lamps” (the seven onto-cosmological “directions”) that are fed by this oil.¹³ Furthermore, these seven “lamps” are identical with the “seven eyes of Yahweh” that are on the “stone” (Zc.3:9),¹⁴ where this “stone” is the creative Essence. The *Zohar* presents an account of how the Holy One created the world by throwing down a “precious stone” from beneath the throne of His glory that sank into the “deep” or “abyss.” This stone is called *even shetiyah* (“foundation

¹¹ Rabbi Gikatilla, *Gates of Light (Sha’are Orah)*, 1994, p.314.

¹² Again, these two trees are ‘the two anointed ones in attendance on the Lord of the whole world,’ which the are said to be Joshua and Zerubbabel, the spiritual and temporal powers respectively, prefigured by Melchizedek, who holds both powers in his single being, and who is thus the *coincidentia oppositorum*.

¹³ These are the six principle directions of spheroid space, with the seventh direction being that of the centre: both origin and point of return, beyond temporal-spatial conditions and thus “at rest”; this explains the cosmogonic symbolism of the six days of creation and the “day of rest.”

¹⁴ See *The Greater Holy Assembly*, Mathers (tr.), *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, 1991, p.187.

stone”).¹⁵ It is said that it became lodged in the abyss ‘from the upper to the lower worlds, and from it the world was founded’: ‘One edge of the stone became lodged in the deeps, and another in the realms above. And there was another edge, a supernal one, a single point, which is in the middle of the world, and the world expanded from there, to the right and to the left, and upon all sides, and it is thus sustained by this central point.’¹⁶ In the Lower World this is the foundation stone of the Temple, which stands at the central point of the Holy of Holies. In the language of the Kabbalah this “stone” is said to be a symbol of the *Shekhinah* (the Divine Presence),¹⁷ symbolised by light and identified with Metatron, the angel of the Name of God.¹⁸

‘Your name is an oil poured out’: this “oil” is none other than the Word, the Divine Light of the *Fiat Lux*, poured out on creation. In this context note that the word for the “window” of Noah’s Ark, *tsôhar* (צהר; “a light”), derives from the primitive root, *tsâhar* (צהר; “to glisten”)—used only as a denominative of *yitshâr* (יצהר; “oil”, as producing light; figuratively, *anointing* oil). One thinks of the term *messiah* as meaning “the anointed one.” This web of meanings is further complemented by the word *shâma* (שמע; “to hear”), demonstrating the relationship between light and sound.¹⁹ Moreover, this word differs principally by its final, *ayin*, which is symbolically an “eye” or “fountain,” from which the “Waters of Life” pour out.

Rabbi Dr. I. Rapaport observes the equivalence between the Hebrew word *shêm* and the Akkadian word *suma*, which had the meaning of “offspring” or “child.”²⁰ Here again there is a connection to Metatron, who is known as *na’ar* (“boy” or “lad”) because of his

¹⁵ Guénon is right to distinguish between the symbolism of the “black stone” and the “foundation stone” (*Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Ch.50), insofar as the first is celestial and the latter terrestrial. He does, however, continue to recognise that there is one case in which there is a certain connection between the “black stone” and the “cubic stone”: ‘this is where the cubic stone is not one of the “foundation stones” placed at the four angles of a building, but rather the *shethiyah* stone at the very centre of its base, corresponding to the point of impact of the fallen “black stone,” just as, on the same vertical axis but at its opposite extremity, the “corner stone” or “summit stone” ... corresponds to the initial and final “celestial” position of the same “black stone”’ (p.212).

¹⁶ *Zohar* I, 231a-231b; II, 222a-222b.

¹⁷ Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar Vol.2*, 1991, p.571, n.76.

¹⁸ *Zohar* II, 65b-66b.

¹⁹ *Tsôhar* can also be compared to *tsâhal* (צהל), which means “to gleam” and by transference, “to sound.”

²⁰ Rabbi Rapaport, *The Hebrew Word Shem and Its Original Meaning*, 1976, passim.

cyclic regeneration.²¹ This alludes to the complementary currents (*catabasis* and *anabasis*) of the vertical axis; that is to say, the potentiality of the “child” manifests itself in the form of the “adult,” who must then return to the child state to regain its perfection.²² ‘In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it’ (Mk.10:15, Lk.18:17).

As a final remark on the name *Shêm*, observe that the name Noah, *Nôach* (נח), means “rest,” this from the primitive root, *nûwach* (נח; “to rest”); thus the connection to the creative Centre envisaged as the point of rest or seventh point. *Shem*, as the expression of Noah, should, from a certain perspective, be thus associated with the number eight, and in fact this is the case with the Hebrew word for “eight” being *shê mîynîy* (שמיני). Note, then, that the essential “oil” flows forth through the “fifty gates” of the sefirah *Binah*, where, as Rabbi Gikatilla reveals, these ‘can be eight or fifty.’²³ This “oil” is the divine Mercy, which flows as a river,²⁴ through the power of which all creation is manifested. In this context it should be noted that the Hebrew word *kol* (“all”) has the numerical value of 50.²⁵

Châm (“hot”): from this, *chammâh* (חמה; “the sun”), where the sun is a well-recognised symbol of the Centre. We might well remark that the difference between *Châm* and *chammâh* is the final *he*, which as noted in the case of *shameh*, is symbolically a “window”; as the sky is a “window” to Heaven, likewise the sun is a “window” to the central Principle. *Châm*, as the sun, suggests the point or Essence identified with the Principle, but the sun is known by its infinite rays, which each act as the Divine Ray and *axis mundi* for the “world” that they illumine; in this sense we have *chammân* (חמן), which word means “a sun-pillar” (the Hindu *skambha*). This word has as its final a *nūn*, which, as in the case of the word *Shâmayin*, implies an active expression of the Principle, that is Manifestation; moreover, the ideogram for the final *nūn* (ן) expresses the idea of a pillar or axis. Both *Shem* and *Châm* contain the dual sense of the point and the vertical

²¹ See Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar Vol.2*, 1991, p.626-29.

²² This is the *Rebis* of the alchemists.

²³ Rabbi Gikatilla, *Gates of Light (Sha'are Orah)*, 1994, p.314.

²⁴ Rabbi Gikatilla, *Gates of Light (Sha'are Orah)*, 1994, p.245.

²⁵ See Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, pp.19-20, in particular n.8.

line, interchangeable to the extent that they either express the Principle or Essence *in actu*.

Yepheth (“*expansion*”), from the primitive root *pâthâh* (פָּתַח; “to *open*”), corresponds to the horizontal line of the above schema, for it is this that expresses the expansion of the vertical axis upon the horizontal axis. The horizontal expansion of the Divine Ray is equally the limitation and reflection that allows the *Fiat Lux* to be known as such; in this sense note the connection between *Yepheth* (יָפֶת) and *yâpha’* (יָפַע), which is a primitive root meaning “to *shine*.”

On the one hand we have *Shem, Châm, Yepheth*: Principle, Essence, Substance, and on the other hand, *Shem, Châm, Yepheth*: Essence, Manifestation, Substance. Now, insomuch as these principles may be envisaged as interchangeable they express a metaphysical reading and must be thought of primarily in respect of their unified principle within the Ark. However, the Noah narrative is chiefly cosmological and in this regard the three sons have a precise order: Shem, Ham, Japheth, which is attested to by tradition (Gen.5:32; 6:10; 10:1). Here we have our second ternary: Essence, Manifestation, Substance. However, this ternary is still anterior to creation *per se*. When considering the relationship of the three sons and cosmic existence a further symbolism is needed and this is found precisely in the account of Noah’s drunkenness and the actions of his sons. Thus, *Genesis* 9:18: ‘The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth—Ham being the father of Canaan.’ Ham is not mentioned again in this narrative with Canaan effectively replacing him; furthermore, Canaan is here given as the youngest son (Gen.9:24), the order becoming Shem, Japheth, Canaan. We have suggested that Ham expresses the principle of Manifestation; Canaan, the “son” of Ham, expresses the realisation of Manifestation, and this is none other than Creation. The change in the order further suggests the idea of Canaan as a resultant of the principles embodied by Shem and Japheth. Shem, Japheth, Canaan: Essence, Substance, Manifestation (Creation).

Canaan or *K^ena'an* (כנען) means “*humiliated*”; this evokes the sense in which Creation is a “Fall”—thus the Christian *contemptus mundi* and the negative connotation of the Hindu *Māyā* envisaged as “illusion.” *K^ena'an* derives from the primitive root *kāna'* (כנע); “to *bend*”), thus “to bend the knee” and hence “to humiliate.” Furthermore, this implies the sense of “humbling” oneself; in this respect we recall Christ’s *kenosis* (Ph. 2:6-11), his “emptying himself,” which corresponds, as I have shown elsewhere, to the “withdrawal” of the *tsimsum*.²⁶ *Philippians* 2:8: ‘he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on the cross.’ Christ’s being “humbler yet” implies a first “humbling,” so to speak, and this is none other than His (the Unmanifest Word’s) taking “the form of a slave” (Ph.2:8), accepting limitation, which is to say, becoming the manifested; for to say manifestation is to say limitation. To this verse 10 adds: ‘so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee in the name of Jesus’. This echoes Is.45:23: ‘All shall bend the knee to me’. In both it is the case that Manifestation, which is on the one hand “All” (the “lesser Absolute”), and on the other hand the “three worlds” (heaven, earth, underworld; alternatively, heaven, midspace, earth), must “bend the knee,”²⁷ must be “humiliated” or “humbled,” precisely so that it may *be*.

The Hindu term *Māyā* connotes both a negative and a positive sense. Note, then, the Hebrew word *chānan* (חנן), which, like *kāna'*, is a primitive root meaning “to *bend*,” the difference being that *chānan* connotes the idea of bending down to an inferior, and thus the positive sense of “to *favour* or *bestow*.” The act of creation implies God’s “bending” down, which is both an act of humbling and of bestowing favour; one thinks of Michelangelo’s famous image of the creation of Adam. A connection presents itself here that is pertinent in its suggestiveness: St. Luke records of the annunciation that the angel Gabriel greeted Mary with the words: ‘Rejoice, you who enjoy God’s favour! The Lord is with you’ (Lk.1:28). The Greek word here for “favour” is *charis* (χάρις), but the

²⁶ See Scott, ‘Withdrawal, Extinction and Creation: Christ’s *kenosis* in light of the Judaic doctrine of *tsimsum* and the Islamic doctrine of *fana'*, *Sophia* 7.2, 2001, pp.45-64. pp.45-64; revised and republished in *The Essential Sophia*, (ed.) S.H. Nasr & K. O’Brien, 2006, pp.58-77.

²⁷ The Hebrew word for “knee” is *berek* derived from *bāarak*, primitive root meaning “to *kneel*” and by implication “to *bless*”; in this connection note the Islamic term *al-barakah*, the blessing or spiritual influence, and the similarity here to the word *barzakh*, inasmuch as it is precisely in the mystery of the isthmus that existence is “blessed” with its very being.

Evangelist could not have been ignorant of the Hebrew *chânan*, which for that matter, is related to the Hebrew *chânâh* (“to *incline*”; “to *decline*”, especially of the slanting rays of the evening sun); and this is the root of the name Hannah or *Channâh* (“favoured”), which in turn is the Hebrew origin of the name Anna, who, according to the *Protevangelium of James*, was the mother of Mary. In a sense the symbolisms of the names Anna and Mary are interchangeable.²⁸

Regarding the meaning of the word *chânan* as “to *bend*,” this is also the meaning of the root of the Hebrew word *qesheth* (קשׁת), that is “bow” or “rainbow”: ‘I now set my bow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth’ (Gen.9:13). The rainbow is generally considered as expressing the union of heaven and earth,²⁹ and this “union” is none other than Manifestation.³⁰ Furthermore, the root in question is *qâshâh* (קשׁה; “to be *dense*”), where Manifestation implies the sense of solidification or becoming “dense”; and this in turn derives from the original sense of the primitive root *qôwsh* (קוּשׁ; “to *bend*”), which in turn connotes the idea of “bending a trap or snare,” and thus *yâqôsh* (קשׁוּ; “to *ensnare*”); this being precisely the negative role of Manifestation as implied by the Hindu term *Mâyā*, the “web of seeming.”³¹

The word *chânâh* further connotes the sense of “to *pitch* a tent” and thus “to rest in a tent.” In the *Zohar*, the “Opening of the Tent” is equated with the *Shekhinah*.³² The “tent” is the meeting place of God and man, Rabbi Gikatilla remarking that ‘through the medium of this *Ohel Moed* (tent) one is spoken to [by YHVH]’; he further says that the ‘Aramaic root for *Ohel* is *misSHKaNa*, which is the essence of [and shares the root of]

²⁸ According to Epiphanius, Jesus had two sisters, the name of the first being either Mary or Anna and the second being Salome (*Ancor.* 60; *Pan.* 78.8; cited Schneemelcher (ed), *New Testament Apocrypha Vol.1*, 1991, p.472). In the first case there is identification between that from which Jesus “comes forth”; in the second case we have Salome who the *Protevangelium of James* says was one of the midwives at Jesus’ birth, that is, that which “brings forth.”

²⁹ See Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p.783.

³⁰ Guénon remarks that ‘the rainbow seems to have been above all connected, in a general way, with the cosmic currents by which an exchange of influences between heaven and earth operates much more than with the axis along which direct communication between the different states is effected’ (*Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, pp.263-64).

³¹ Oldmeadow, ‘Sankara’s Doctrine of *Mâyā*’: *Asian Philosophy*, Vol.2, No.2, 1992, p.133.

³² Rabbi Gikatilla, *Gates of Light (Sha’are Orah)*, 1994, p.30.

*Shekhinah*³³. The word “*mishkan*” denotes the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the desert being the transitory model of the fixed Temple. This “tent,” is analogous to the “veil” of cosmic existence. In the Shi`ite symbolism of the Muslim tradition, the “Tent of Adam” is the celestial model of the terrestrial *Ka`bah*: ‘The Tent symbolises the Supreme Intellect, the Nous, identified with the Muhammadian Light (*al-nûr al-Muhammadi*).’³⁴ This again demonstrates the connection to the symbolism of “light,” and thus the *Shekhinah*. Moreover, the Hebrew word *’ohel* (לֹהֶל) derives from the primitive root *’ahal* (לָהַל) meaning “to be clear,” “to shine.”



Rest

The sense by which *chânâh* means “to rest in a tent” recalls the name Noah (*Nôach*; נֹחַ; “rest”), which requires a more detailed understanding of the symbolism of “rest.” The Principle is the first point of onto-cosmological existence, while remaining unaffected by cosmological conditions; it is the principle of space and time without being of space or time. From a primarily cosmological perspective one can say that this is the primordial point from which cosmological existence expands or emanates. Considered vertically, existence expands “downwards.” This symbolism emphasizes the idea of rank and order, where that which is first is “highest” or situated at the “head.” Considered horizontally, existence expands “outwards,” where the first is “central” or anthropomorphically at the “navel.” From another perspective, primarily metaphysical, the Principle is continuous through all levels of existence, situated, as such, at the “heart.” These two perspectives coincide in the general symbolism of the Centre, which is both the first point of emanation and the continuous living heart.

‘The centre’ says Adrian Snodgrass, ‘symbolises the progenitive Source whence the manifested world deploys. It is the spaceless and timeless Origin of space and time, the One that produces plurality. The centre is the similitude of unitary Being, wherein the virtualities of spatial extension and temporal duration are contained in a state of

³³ Rabbi Gikatilla, *Gates of Light (Sha`are Orah)*, 1994, p.30.

³⁴ See Snodgrass, *Architecture, Time and Eternity Vol.2*, 1990, pp.419-422.

inseparable fusion, and whence they are actualized by a projection into separativity'³⁵. René Guénon says that the Centre remains beyond the spatial condition, of which it is the principle.³⁶ This is to talk of the “naked” or “unconditioned” Centre from which the first point emerges as a conditioned and conceptual “reflected Centre.” To be precise, it is this conditioned or created Centre that is the “first” point inasmuch as the “unconditioned Centre” remains beyond any such qualification. At the same time the unconditioned Centre and the conditioned Centre are the one Centre. This echoes the Christian doctrine of the *Logos*, both uncreated and created. Snodgrass again:

Because the geometric point-centre is formless, dimensionless and without duration it is an adequate symbol of primordial Unity, the Principle of manifestation. The radiation of the worlds from the centre is a realisation, a bringing in to existence, of virtualities lying dormant within Unity: it is a procession from Unity to multiplicity, from the imperishable One to perishable plurality. It is a disintegration and division of the One into the many: activating itself, the One spreads out and scatters its light into the opacity, and there “rests in a wavering refraction which appears other than itself.”³⁷

To say that the Divine Light “rests” in a “wavering refraction” is to say that it “rests by changing.” The state of rest permeates manifestation by virtue of being at its very heart, while nevertheless remaining shrouded in the illusion of activity or the “veil.”

‘On the seventh day God had completed the work He had been doing. He rested on the seventh day after all the work He had been doing. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy’ (Gen. 2:2, 3). In Judaic tradition this “time of rest” is the Sabbath or *shabbath* (שַׁבָּת; “*intermission*”), which word derives from the Hebrew word *shabath* meaning “to repose” in the sense of “a *cessation*” of activity. This is also the sense of the word *nirvāna*, which means “extinction of breath or of disturbance,” and of the Islamic term, *fanā* (“extinction”). The symbolism of the Sabbath day is further extended to that of the Sabbath Year (Lev.25:1) and this to the idea of the Jubilee, which is based on the period of seven sabbatical years or seven times seven years, that is forty-nine years. The Jubilee itself is the fiftieth year (Lev.25:8-12), where the number fifty, as noted, expresses the totality and completion of created existence.

³⁵ Snodgrass, *Architecture, Time and Eternity Vol.1*, 1990, p.58.

³⁶ See Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, 1975, Chs.16 & 29.

³⁷ Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, 1985, p.21-22.

This connection between the number seven and the idea of rest is again fleshed out in the account of the Ark of Noah, which came to “rest” on the mountains of Ararat in the “seventh” month of the Flood (Gen.8:4). Here one must recognise that Noah and his Ark are essentially identical. *Nûwach* (נוח; “to rest”) should then be compared to the word *nâveh* (נוה), which as an adjective means “at home” and as a noun, “a home,” specifically, “a home of God,” that is “a temple.” The homologues of “vehicle” (the Ark of Noah) and “house” (the Temple) here coincide in the unity of the Centre. It is interesting to compare *nûwach* with the name *Nôwd* (נוד), which is “Nod, the land of Cain” (Gen.4:16). These words differ by their finals, respectively, a *heth*, which has the numerical value of eight and symbolically expresses a “fence,” and *da’leth*, which has a numerical value of four and symbolically expresses a “door.” The relationship between “fence” and “door” is essentially complementary. The name *Nôwd* derives from *nûwd* (נוד; “to nod,” the head, i.e. “to waver”); this recalls the “wavering refraction” of the Divine Light, as it “rests in change.” Figuratively *nûwd* means “to wander,” and this is the same meaning as the Hindu and Buddhist term *samsāra*.³⁸ To say that the Centre (transcendent and at rest) is identifiable with immanent flux, is, to say that *Nirvāna* is *Samsāra*;³⁹ from another perspective, this is to recognise that complementarities (“fence” and “door”) are resolved in the unity of the *coincidentia oppositorum*.⁴⁰

The Centre is both the first and the seventh, and these are one. In fact this symbolism involves a simultaneous reading of two distinct perspectives in light of their eventual union in the single Reality. In the first case, to call the Centre the first is to consider it from the perspective of the Principle. Thus starting from the Centre as “one,” then the six directions will be counted, so to speak, as two through seven. In this sense the number seven expresses the Centre *ad extra*. In the second case, to call the Centre the seventh

³⁸ As translated in Coomaraswamy & Sister Nivedita, *Hindus and Buddhists*, 1994, p.394. *Samsarati* = “wander”, in the sense of trans-migration. On “transmigration” see Coomaraswamy, ‘On the One and Only Transmigrant’: *Selected Papers Vol.2*, 1977.

³⁹ Nāgārjuna observes that ‘There is nothing that distinguishes *samsāra* from *nirvāna*’ (*Madhyamakakarika*, xxv. 19-20). As Eliade remarks, ‘This does not mean that the world (*samsāra*) and deliverance (*nirvāna*) are “the same thing”; it means only that they are undifferentiated’ (*A History of Religious Ideas Vol.2*, 1981, p.225; see §189).

⁴⁰ See my ‘Notes on the mystery of the *coincidentia oppositorum*’, Sacred Web 9, 2002, p.11-35; (amended introduction) in Sacred Web 10, 2002, 209-214.

implies that one starts from the perspective of Manifestation, whereby the six directions are considered as one through to six with the Centre, the point of reintegration or return, thus being the seventh. Here the number seven expresses the Centre *ad intra*. In the final analysis both perspectives resolve in Unity. However, one may say that in the first case the emphasis is on the radiation of the Principle and in the second case the emphasis is on the contraction of Manifestation. In the first case rest is “hidden” beneath the veil of existence, comprised of the six directions of symbolic space, and symbolised by the number seven. In the second case rest is the “hidden treasure” at the Centre of existence, again, from this second perspective, symbolised by the number seven.

One can take each of these symbolic schemas a step further if one so wishes and in fact various traditional perspectives do. Thus in the first case, which takes the number seven as indicating the radiation of the Principle, one can talk of the contraction of Manifestation back to the Centre-Principle as an eighth “step,” so to speak. In this case the eighth is the first viewed “anew,” to use the language of Christianity.⁴¹ The second case takes the number seven as indicating the Centre as the point of return, where one can say that this Centre has two levels, created and Uncreated. Here the number seven, influenced as it is by the number six, the number of creation, places an emphasis on the created and creative Centre; the Uncreated Centre can then be symbolised by the number eight. In the first case eight is the Perfection of the manifested world; in the second case eight is the Uncreated Harmony that allows this Perfection. Yet again, this is summed up by saying that *Nirvāna* is *Samsāra*.

The above schema might be challenged on the grounds that the distinction inherent in the Centre between created and Uncreated equally exists in the first case, that is, where we started our symbolic numerations with the Centre being one. The Centre, it might then be argued, should therefore be numbered both one and two, as in the second case it is numbered seven and eight. This is only partially correct. The distinction of the Centre into created and Uncreated does indeed exist here. However, as this perspective proceeds from the Principle we must begin with the Uncreated, for which the number one is not

⁴¹ ‘Look, I am making the whole of creation new’ (Rev.21:5).

symbolically adequate. Instead we must begin, so to speak, with the metaphysical zero. Therefore the Centre is, in this case, zero and one. One might then question the symbolic adequacy of the number eight to express the Uncreated, given that we have denied the adequacy of the number one. To this it can be answered that the major difference in each of the above cases is the initial perspective and that inasmuch as the second case starts from the point of view of Manifestation this necessitates the use of “number,” rather than zero,⁴² to express the Uncreated, which is to say that it must use the language that is appropriate to it.⁴³

Both seven and eight express the notion of “rest.” This is born out in the Hebraic Scriptures, which not only talk of the seventh day as the “day of rest” but also say that ‘The first and the eighth day will be days of rest’ (Lev.23:39). This symbolism is then found in the account of Noah in the eight human occupants of the Ark. This is recognised and stressed in the Christian tradition in the two letters of Peter (1 Pt.3:20-22 and 2Pt.2:5). Noah is undeniably principal among the inhabitants of the Ark, but at the same time, St. Peter also refers to Noah specifically as the “eighth person.”⁴⁴

The idea of rest is also found with the symbolism of the Ark of the Covenant, which is the abode of the Divine Presence or *Shekhinah*. In the Islamic esoteric tradition the *Shekhinah* corresponds to the *al-Sakīnah* (“Great Peace”), which Guénon says carries the same meaning as the *Pax Profunda* (“Great Peace”) of the Rosicrucians. He again sees this as analogous to the “Tranquility” with which the Hindu Yogī unites to “possess” the unconditioned Self (*Ātman*).⁴⁵ For the Christian this is the ‘peace of God, which passeth all understanding’ (Ph.4:7).

⁴² Zero, strictly speaking, is not a number but the possibility of number (see Coomaraswamy’s essay, ‘*Kha* and Other Words Denoting “Zero,” in Connection with the Indian Metaphysics of Space’: *Selected Papers Vol.2*, 1977).

⁴³ Even here one notes the obvious connection between the zero and the number eight (8)-as it appears in al-Banna al-Marrakushi’s form of the “Arabic” numerals-which one might say is like the zero placed against a mirror; and this is just so, for eight expresses the harmony of the Uncreated realised in the mirror of Creation.

⁴⁴ 2 Pt.2:5 following *The Parallel Bible* (1886). The *New Jerusalem Bible* has ‘Noah, the preacher of uprightness, along with seven others’.

⁴⁵ See Guénon, *Man and his Becoming According To The Vedānta*, 1981, respectively, p.172, n.2 & p.173, citing Shankarāchārya’s *Ātmā-Bodha*.

Rest is respite from the activity (hence, distinctions), in reality “illusory,” of spatio-temporal conditions, which is to say that the symbolism of rest coincides with the symbolism of “nakedness.” It is written: ‘Noah, a tiller of the soil, was the first to plant the vine. He drank some of the wine, and while he was drunk, he lay uncovered in his tent’ (Gen.9:20, 21). The state of “drunkenness,” viewed positively and from a principally symbolic position, is a state of indistinction, a return to the primordial Unity. St. Cyprian of Carthage says, ‘the chalice of the Lord inebriates us as Noah drinking wine in *Genesis* was also inebriated ... the inebriation of the chalice ... is not such as the inebriation coming from worldly wine ... actually, the chalice of the Lord so inebriates that it actually makes sober, that it raises minds to spiritual wisdom, that from this taste of the world each one comes to the knowledge of God’⁴⁶. Noah is the “seed” (*quinta essentia*) planted in the “soil” (*prima materia*) from which springs forth the “vine” (*axis mundi*); the “wine” made from this vine is itself none other than the conduit of the *quinta essentia*, so that Noah’s “drunkenness” (*gnosis*) signifies the state of his union with the Divine Essence—in a sense, his union with himself;⁴⁷ and this occurs in the heart of his tent (*Shekhinah*), “uncovered” and “naked.” Thus, cosmologically speaking, this passage refers to the transcendent Essence at the heart of Immanence. Noah enters a state of naked unity with the Divine Essence; within the Divine Immanence (*Shekhinah*), which is the principle of diversity, rests the naked unity of the Divine Transcendence.

It is written, ‘When Ham, father of Canaan, saw his father naked, he told his two brothers outside. So Shem and Japheth took a cloak, put it on their shoulders and walked backwards, and so covered their father’s nakedness; they kept their faces turned away, so that they did not see their father naked. When Noah woke from his drunken sleep, he learnt what his youngest son had done to him, and said: “Cursed be Canaan, slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.” And he continued: “Bless, O Lord, the tents of Shem;

⁴⁶ St. Cyprian from Hamman (ed.), *The Mass: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, 1967, cited in Urban, ‘*Oblatio Rationabilis*: Sacrifice in East and West’, *Sophia*, 2002, p.183.

⁴⁷ Wine is the blood or essence of the grape; by extension to the cosmological plane, wine is a symbol of ontological Essence; from another perspective wine is *gnosis*. One might say that these two readings are identical for, as Nasr remarks, ‘The essence of things is God’s knowledge of them’ (*Knowledge and the Sacred*, 1981, p.21, n.61).

may Canaan be his slave. May God extend Japheth's bounds, let him dwell in the tents of Shem, may Canaan be their slave.'" (Gen.9:22, 23).

Ham's "transgression" may be likened to the "sin of Adam," the "sin" of the knowledge of good and evil, or, of distinction. Likewise the cloak that covered Noah's nakedness corresponds to the "tunics of skin" given to Adam and Eve, and the "cursing of Canaan" (Gen.9:25) to the expulsion from the garden. It is Ham, father of Canaan, who sees his father "naked" and tells his two brothers outside. According to the symbolism under consideration, Ham represents the principle of Manifestation, which is to say Immanence, and this is to say *Shekhinah*. As the principle of Manifestation Ham is none other than Essence, in the sense in which *Châm* may be identified with the Divine Sun, and this explains his "seeing" his father in this state, which is to say that this is a matter of identity; but Ham is also Immanence as such, symbolised by the "tent" (*Shekhinah*), which is to say he represents the recognition of this state within Manifestation. His brothers, Shem and Japheth remain "outside" Manifestation in the manner that ontological Essence and Substance are "outside" Manifestation.

Ham tells his brothers of their father's nakedness whereupon they took a cloak and, "without looking upon him," covered their father's nakedness. This is to say, that the coming together of Essence (Shem) and Substance (Japheth) brings forth the *pargod* (the cosmic "curtain"),⁴⁸ symbolised by the "cloak," which veils cosmic existence. The word translated variously as cloak or garment is *simplâh* (שמלה; "a dress", especially "a mantle"); *Strong's* conjectures that this comes "through the idea of a cover assuming the shape of the object beneath", with this deriving from the word *cêmel* (סמל) meaning "to resemble" or "a likeness"—'God created man in the image of Himself.' To say Man is to say Creation; the veil of creation is the "image" or "likeness" of its Source. We might further remark on the fact that the word *simplâh* contains the name Shem (שם-לה), which it might be said to veil. This sense is also found with the "tents of Shem" which are "bound" by the extension of Japheth.

⁴⁸ On the *pargod*, the "curtain" or "mirror" of the *Shekhinah*, see Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, pp.65-66.



The Three Worlds

The “three worlds” are symbolically figured in the accounts of both the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant, and again with the accounts of the tabernacle and the Temple. The Ark of Noah is constructed, in conformity with God’s commands, with ‘lower, second and third decks’ (Gen.6:16). Here the “three worlds” are contained *within* the Ark, expressing the virtuality of onto-cosmological existence during the Flood. Moreover, these three “decks” or “storeys,” from *ma‘alah* (מעלה; “*elevation*”), imply a verticality that is proper inasmuch as in this state—the state of virtuality during the intermission of the Flood—the “three worlds” are more closely influenced by the triad, Essence, Substance, Manifestation. The idea of three ascending “worlds” is further implied by the division of “all living things” into “birds,” “animals” and “every kind of creature that creeps along the ground” (Gen.6:20), which demonstrates three successive vertical distinctions being from what is most upper to what is lower. These divisions can be compared respectively to heaven, air and earth, where we keep in mind that “birds” commonly refer to the angelic realm,⁴⁹ and that “animals,” by virtue of being “elevated” upon their legs, are thus placed in the “air” or in midspace.

The word translated variously as “decks” or “storeys” (*ma‘alah*) derives from *‘âlâh* (עלה; “to *ascend*”), which as *‘ălâh* (עלה) means “a *holocaust*,” that is, a “burnt offering.” In the context of the story of Noah one thinks immediately of the “burnt offerings on the altar,” which Noah offered to Yahweh after disembarking from the Ark (Gen.8:20). This altar prefigures the altar of the tabernacle. The three “decks” of the altar of the Ark are explicit in the Vedantic symbolism of the Fire Altar, where they are the three “Self-perforates” (*svayamātrnnā*), which, as Ananda Coomaraswamy remarks, represent earth, air and sky.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ezk.31:6; Ps.104:12; see Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Ch.9.

⁵⁰ See Coomaraswamy, *‘Svayamātrnnā: Janua Coeli’: Selected Papers Vol.1*, 1977.

With respect to the tabernacle, and beginning from what is most “outer” and moving to what is most “inner,” that is from earth to heaven, the “three worlds” are expressed by, the court,⁵¹ the Holy Place, and the Most Holy or the Holy of Holies (see Ex.26-27). Leo Schaya remarks,

These three hierarchic aspects of the universal dwelling place of God have their image here below in the tripartite division of the sanctuary: the “divine” Holy of Holies, the “heavenly” Holy, and the “earthly” outer court. Here the vestibule of the temple symbolises the “earthly paradise.” Here below God dwells in the darkness of the Holy of the Holies, for “above” also His absolute essence rests in eternal invisibility, from out of which His shining being and its indwelling [*Shekhinah*] reveal themselves. The light of His indwelling radiates from His Holy of Holies to the Holy and shines upon the seven-branched candlestick, just as God descends from His infinity in order to sit in state above the seven heavens as Lord of the worlds, in the radiant crown of the seven all determining, all illuminating aspects of His countenance. Finally, the outer court, like the whole earth, serves as a “footstool for His feet.”⁵²

By extension to the Temple the “three worlds” are the Portico (*ulam*); the Great Chamber (*hekal*); and the Sanctuary (*debir*) (see 1Kgs.6; cf.Ezk.40 & 41). With the Ark of Noah the “three worlds” are static or simultaneous *within* the Ark. They are, so to speak, vertically superimposed upon each other. In comparison the accounts of the tabernacle and Temple show the “three worlds” as successive horizontal stages surrounding or veiling the Ark, expressing the fact that cosmic existence is here being considered *in actu*, or in respect to its extension along a horizontal plane of Existence. With the Ark of Noah the “three worlds” exist “internally,” the Ark therefore being the “container.” With the tabernacle and the Temple the “three worlds” must be seen as

⁵¹ The Hebrew here is *chatser* (חצר; “to surround”). This primitive root is directly related to the word *chatsorer* (חצור; “to trumpet”), which suggests two relevant connections. The first is the capture of Jericho achieved by circumscribing or “surrounding” the city with the Ark of the Covenant seven times accompanied by the blowing of seven trumpets (Jos.6:6-16). The second is the connection to the word *yobel* (יבל; “a blast from a trumpet), where *yobel* is ‘the state of supreme illumination and identity, of total union with God’ (Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, p.135).

⁵² See Schaya, ‘The Meaning of the Temple’ in Needleman (ed), *The Sword of Gnosis*, 1974, p.363. The “footstool” is a symbolic cognomen of the cosmic manifestation of Immanence: ‘Thus speaks Yahweh: The Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool’ (Is.66:1); King David declared: ‘I have set my heart on building a settled home for the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, for the footstool of our God’ (1Ch.28:2). ‘I have set my heart’ says King David, which is as if to say, this is where my Heart will be “set.” Schaya remarks that the “footstool” is none other than the “foundation stone” of the *Zohar* (*Vayehi* 23.1a), which ‘is made up of fire (spiritual light), water (subtle substance) and air (ether, the quintessence of the corporeal elements)’. Schaya: ‘The divine “footstool” or “foundation stone” is none other than the revelation of the supreme tri-unity here below’ (*The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, pp.101; see also p.104).

either contracting into the Ark or emanating from it, depending on the perspective adopted. The emphasis here is on the Ark as Centre or Heart.⁵³ Furthermore, Manifestation *in actu* proceeds not only along the horizontal plane but also demonstrates, at its level, a symbolic verticality. Thus we read, ‘The entrance to the lowest storey was at the right-hand corner of the Temple; access to the middle storey was by a spiral staircase, and so from the middle storey to the third’ (1Kgs.6:8). The verticality of the Temple is in proportion to its vicinity to the Centre. This symbolism, displayed by the Temple, is epitomized by the symbolism of the ziggurat.⁵⁴ From a purely terrestrial perspective one can also see that the horizontal and vertical expansion of the Temple expresses the three dimensions of spatial existence.

The symbolism of the heart is informative here. According to the Hindu tradition *Brahman* is said to dwell in the smaller ventricle (*guhā*) of the heart (*hridaya*); to be more precise, it is the cavity (*dahara*) that is here in question as the symbolic “location” of *Brahman*.⁵⁵ Here again there is a three-fold symbolism: *hridaya*, *guha*, *dahara*. The “cavity” or “emptiness” of the *dahara* speaks of the Unmanifested at the heart of manifestation. Similarly, it is precisely in the “empty space” between the wings of the *cherubim* that man meets God (Ex.25:22). In his commentary on the *Chāndogya Upanishad*, Śankarācārya teaches that this space that fills the nothingness is *ākāśa* (ether) and furthermore that this is called *Brahman*: ‘*Brahman* is like space because of unembodiedness, and because of the similarity of subtleness and all-pervasiveness.’⁵⁶ *Ākāśa* is the same with the “Ether in the Heart”⁵⁷ of which Guénon says that it is, ‘the primordial element from which all the others proceed being naturally taken to represent

⁵³ ‘Neither My earth nor My heavens contain Me, but I fitted into the believing heart’ (*hadīth qudsī* cited by Ibn al-‘Arabi, *Kernel of the Kernel (Lubbu-l-Lubb)*, 1981, p.42). Ibn al-‘Arabi explains this *hadīth qudsī* as follows: ‘The heart is a pearl which looks at God. / The heart is the place of manifestation of the Name and the Named. / The heart is a falcon, or a bird of marvel. / The heart is the being of the Ipseity of God.’

⁵⁴ See Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa*, 1985, II. 19; Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p.1145. Eliade: ‘When the pilgrim climbs [the temple or ziggurat], he is coming close to the centre of the world, and on its highest terrace he breaks through into another sphere, transcending profane, heterogeneous space, and entering a “pure earth”’ (*Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1958, p.376). “Pure earth”: that is, the primordial state or the Garden of Eden, which is of course, the Heart. When the desire for union with the Divine becomes perverted to a lust for the power of the gods the ziggurat becomes the Tower of Babel.

⁵⁵ See *Chāndogya Upanishad* 8.1.1.

⁵⁶ Śankarācārya commentary on *Chāndogya Upanishad* 8.1.1.

⁵⁷ See Guénon, ‘The Ether in the Heart’, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Ch.75.

the Principle.’ He adds, ‘This ether (*Akaśā*) is the same as the Hebrew *Avir*, from the mystery of which gushes forth the light (*Aor*), which realises all extent by its outward radiation’⁵⁸. This recognises the connection between *ākāśa* and the *Shekhinah* with respect to the relationship *Shekhinah-Metatron-Avir* and the symbolic association of the *Shekhinah* with light. The *Fiat Lux* determines the measure of the cosmogenesis by the radiation of light (*Aor*), which is the “visual” expression of *avir* or *akaśā*. As Guénon remarks, *ākāśa* not only fills space but also, via its measure, determines it, and thus is space.⁵⁹ Both the Judaic and Hindu symbolisms present a hierarchical ternary that reflects the triadic nature of the universal dwelling place of God, the *mishkan* (dwelling) of the *Shekhinah*: onto-cosmological Existence.



The Contents of the Tabernacle

According to St. Paul, the Ark of the Covenant holds ‘the gold jar containing the manna, Aaron’s branch that grew the buds, and the tablets of the covenant’ (Heb.9:4). The Ark of the Covenant principally expresses the receptacle of Divine Immanence in efficient mode, which is to say that the emphasis here is necessarily on the ternary Essence, Substance, Manifestation.

The Tablets of the Law: on the one hand these are the Divine Word, identical to the Divine Name (Shem); on the other hand the Tablets of the Covenant are the “Word made flesh” or stone, as it is, and this suggests the idea of Substance; of course the symbolism of “stone” and “*the stone*” involves the identification of Substance and Essence. The Hebrew word *lûwach* (לוּחַ), translated as “tablet,” derives from the root *lûach* (לָחַ; “to glisten”); one notes the obvious comparison between *lûach* (“to glisten”) and *shâman* (“to shine”). Again, in the context of the symbolism of the “stone,” one thinks of the word *Lûwz* (לוּז): ‘Jacob took the stone he had used for a pillow, and set it up as a pillar,

⁵⁸ Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, p.297. Guénon notes ‘This is the *Fiat Lux* (*Yehi Aor*) of *Genesis*, the first affirmation of the Divine Word in the work of creation—the initial vibration which opens the way to the developments of possibilities contained potentially in the state ‘without form and void’ (*thohu va bohu*), in the original chaos’ (n.13).

⁵⁹ See Guénon, *RQ*, 1995, Ch.3; *Symbolism of the Cross*, 1975, Ch.4.

pouring oil over the top of it. He named the place Bethel, but before that the town had been called Luz' (Gen.28:18-19). This recalls Sg.1:3: 'Your name is an oil poured out.' Between *lûwach* and *Lûwz* there is a shift in finals from *heth*, "a fence or enclosure" and the eighth Hebrew letter, to *zayin*, "a sword" and the seventh Hebrew letter. This symbolism is that of the "wall of Paradise" and the "fiery sword"; this pertains to the *coincidentia oppositorum*, and thus it is specified that there were *two* tablets (Ex.31:18).

A further connection arises if we instead move from *heth*, the eighth letter, to *teth*, the ninth Hebrew letter, which is associated with the symbolism of the "serpent." This gives us *lûwt* ("to wrap") and from this, *lôwt* ("a veil"), suggesting the substantial veil of the *paragod*; moreover, the inclusion of the serpent in this symbolism suggests the serpent in the Garden, which is, in a sense, the seed of the Fall and thus of cosmological existence as such. *Lôwt*: this is also the name Lot, and this is not unconnected, for it is Lot who survived the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to be the seed of his generations, just as Noah does with the Flood.

The jar of manna: 'Moses then said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put in it a full homer of manna and store it in Yahweh's presence, to be kept for your descendants." Accordingly, Aaron stored it in front of the Testimony' (Ex.16:33-34). On the one hand manna is "bread" (Substance); on the other hand manna is *nogah*, the divine Light (Essence).⁶⁰ As Schaya remarks, 'The pure and redemptive light symbolised in the Talmud by "manna," is called *Nogah*, "brightness," in the Kabbalah.'⁶¹

Furthermore, the Hebrew word *mân* (מן) is formed by the union of a *mem* (the passive "water") and a *nûn* (the active "fish"). This word means literally "a *whatness*," a name which is thought to have been derived from the question the Israelites asked when presented by Moses with this food: 'What is that? (*mân hu*)' (see Ex.16:15). Without in any way trying to suggest an etymological connection that does not exist, let us simply

⁶⁰ Daniel Matt observes that the *Zohar* considers *manna* as a product of divine emanation (Zohar *The Book of Enlightenment*, 1983, p.246).

⁶¹ Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, p.94.

remark that the term “Quiddity,” used in reference to the Essence, comes from the scholastic *quidditas*, “what-it-is.”⁶²

The “jar,” like the kabbalists urn, is a homologue of the Ark. The word “jar” is in Greek, *stamnos* (σταμνος; “a jar or earthen tank”), from the base *stao* (στω; “to stand”); this is likewise the base of *stasis* (στασις; “a standing position”), which means, by implication, “existence.” Again, *stao* is also the base of *stauros* (σταυρος; “a stake or post, as set upright”), which suggests, by implication, the Cross of Christ. As Guénon has observed, the cross is the expression of the realisation of Universal Man, where the cross ‘very clearly represents the manner of achievement of this realisation by the perfect communion of all the states of the being, harmoniously and conformably ranked, in integral expansion, in the double sense of “amplitude” and “exaltation”.’⁶³

The Hebrew word translated as “jar” is *tsintseneth* (צִנְצְנֵת; “a vase”),⁶⁴ from *tsên* (צֵן; “a thorn”). The Christian symbolism of “thorns” is primarily that of the negative aspect of Manifestation, so that ‘the seed sown in thorns’ represents the ‘worry of the world and the lure of riches’ (Mt.13:22). In this connection, and recalling the destruction of the world by fire, St. Paul says of the ‘field that grows thorns’ that it ‘will end by being burnt’ (Heb.6:8). Now, the jar (Manifestation) contains or “surrounds” the manna (the Principle; Essence-Substance) in the same way that the circumference surrounds the Centre, and this evokes the image of the crown of thorns placed upon Christ’s head (Mt.27:29; Mk.15:17; Jn.19:2). Here the head of the Divine Man is none other than the Centre, being identical also to the Heart; the crown of thorns forms a circumference to this Centre. Moreover, the royal symbolism of the crown is not affected by the mockery guise as the majestic Glory of God. Furthermore, the sense of the idea that the Centre and “everywhere” is expressed by the derivation, suggested by *Strong’s*, of the Greek word for “thorn” (*akantha*; ακανθα), from the word *akmēn* (ακμηνη), which in turn is akin

⁶² The technical term translated as “what-it-is” (*quod quid est*) depends on Aristotle, e.g. *Metaphysics* 1.8 (988b29).

⁶³ Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, 1975, p.10.

⁶⁴ The ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for the heart is a vase; see Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Ch.5 in which he discusses in some detail Charbonneau-Lassay’s article ‘The Ancient Iconography of the Heart of Jesus.’

to *akē* (ακη; “a *point*”); this is to say, that the “circumference” of thorns is made up of individual thorns, which are each “a point,” reflective of *the Point*, the Centre.

It is written, ‘Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, “Tell the Israelites to give you a branch for each of their families, one for each family: twelve rods. Write the name of each on his branch; and on the branch of Levi write Aaron’s name, since the head of the Levite families must have a branch too. You will then put them inside the Tent of meeting in front of the Testimony, where I will make myself known to you.”’ (Num.17:16-20 [1-5]). By the sprouting of his branch was Moses confirmed as leader of the Israelites, while Aaron and his line were chosen as the guardians of the sanctuary. ‘Moses went to the Tent of the Testimony and there, already sprouting, was Aaron’s branch, representing the House of Levi; buds had formed, flowers had blossomed and almonds had already ripened’ (Num.17:23-24 [8-9]).

The Hebrew word translated as “branch” or “rod” is *matteh* or the feminine *mattâh* (מטה; “a *branch*,” as *extending*). This derives from the primitive root *nâtâh* (נטה; “to *bend*”), recalling our earlier comments on this meaning. Again, note that the difference here is a shift from a *nūn* to a *mem*. Moreover, this is especially to bend “downwards” with the word *mattâh* also meaning “*downward, below or beneath*.” To this we can add that the word *muttâh*, also from the root *nâtâh*, means “*expansion*,” recalling the meaning of the name *Yepheth*. The symbolism here is of the horizontal expansion commensurate to the vertical descent; that is, the triangle apex upward, found again with the pyramid and the mountain, both of symbols of Manifestation.

Mattâh, in the sense that it means “downwards,” derives from the primitive root ‘*avar* (עור; “to *blind*,” through the idea of a *film* over the eyes), which is to say “a *veil*”; moreover this is also ‘*owr* (“*skin*” or “*hide*”), as in the “*tunic of skins*” with which Yahweh clothed Adam and Eve on expelling them from the Garden (Gen.3:21). At the same time this derives from the root ‘*uwr* (“to be *naked*”), which shows again that the naked Transcendence rests “beneath” (*mattâh*) the veil of Immanence.

Aaron's blossoming rod expresses Manifestation in all its fructuous glory. This symbolism is again found with the miracle of Joseph's rod signalling his betrothal to Mary (*The Protevangelium of James* 9.1). According to this account, a dove came forth from Joseph's rod and flew on to his head. This alludes to *Matthew* 3:16 and the baptism of Christ.⁶⁵ Of course, as St. Peter says, baptism corresponds precisely to "traversing the waters" of the Flood (1Pt.3:21), and this recalls the dove that signalled the end of the Flood. The image of a rod that bursts into flowers, usually lilies, is also an attribute of St. Mary the Virgin.⁶⁶ This symbolism is again found with the blooming of Christ's Cross at the Crucifixion.⁶⁷ And, according to popular legend, the staff of St. Christopher—who carried Christ across the Waters and is thus a homologue of the Ark—blossomed into a palm-tree when Christ planted it on the shore after their crossing the Waters.⁶⁸

The account of Aaron's rod comes just after the rebellion and punishment of Korah. We are told here that Aaron 'stood between the living and the dead' (Num.17:13 [48]), an image that portrays him with one foot in either realm, a bridge between worlds. In the story of the betrothal of Joseph and Mary, Joseph is especially reminded of the punishment of Korah if he should not obey God's command to accept Mary. In a sense, just as Aaron, and with him the priestly caste, act to bring man to God and God to man, so too does Joseph act to bring the Virgin Mother and Child to mankind. Guénon has remarked on the curious fact that it was a "Joseph" who possessed the "oracular cup" (Gen.44:5) and a Joseph, of Arimathaea, who possessed the Grail.⁶⁹ Note that it is another Joseph, husband of Mary, who possessed, so to speak, Mary, herself a well known symbol of the Grail and the vessel of the blood of Christ.

The symbolism under consideration is that of Aaron's rod, and this requires us to consider the name Aaron or 'Ahārōwn (אהרֹון). According to *Strong's*, this word is of uncertain derivation, but let us note the striking comparison here to the Hebrew word,

⁶⁵ See Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1991, p.430.

⁶⁶ "Flowering rod" in Metford, *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend*, 1983, p.101.

⁶⁷ "Cross, legends of the" in Metford, *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend*, 1983, p.76.

⁶⁸ As per Mershman, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. III Online Edition. See also "St. Christopher" in Metford, *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend*, 1983, p.67-8.

⁶⁹ Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, pp.198-99.

'*ârôwn* (ארון) or '*ârôn* (ארן), which is the word translated as “ark,” as in the Ark of the Covenant. This word means “a box” and is derived from the primitive root '*ârâh* (ארה; “to pluck or gather”). In this connection one thinks of Guénon’s treatment of the symbolism of the “gathering of what is scattered”: the “scattering” or dis-membering of the primordial Being, which is the passage from unity to multiplicity, and the consequent “gathering,” that is, the return to unity.⁷⁰ To gather that which is scattered, says Guénon, ‘is the same thing as “to find the lost Word”’⁷¹. Recall, then, that both the Ark of Noah and the Ark of the Covenant contain “the Word.” This “gathering” is the “rememberment” of Christ—“do this is remembrance of me.” All of this is to observe once again that the Ark constitutes the point of retraction of multiplicity to unity.

The name '*Ahârôwn* differs from the word '*ârôwn* only by the inclusion of a *he*. This suggests the idea whereby Aaron might be seen as a “window” through which the principle of the Ark is to be seen. In fact this is in perfect accord with the symbolism at hand. Firstly, Moses—who was “plucked” from the waters⁷²—is analogous, at the appropriate level, to Noah, and thus, like Noah, is an expression of the Ark; secondly, Moses and Aaron, as “brothers,” must be seen as two aspects of the one principle. Moreover it is perfectly in accord with Scripture to say that it was “through” Aaron that Moses acted. Manifestation is none other than the “act-uality” of the Ark, and this “activity” is symbolised by the vertical axis; thus the symbolism of the “rod of Aaron.”⁷³



⁷⁰ See Guénon, ‘Gathering What Is Scattered’: *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Ch.48.

⁷¹ Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, p.207.

⁷² Popular etymology gives the Hebrew name *Môshel* from the root *mâshâh*, “to draw out.” The *New Jerusalem Bible* rejects this on the grounds that the Pharaoh’s daughter did not speak Hebrew, but this is simply another case of being ignorant of the symbolic import of the Scriptures for the sake of appearing historically accurate. This qualification is not to ignore the analogous stories of infants drawn from water, such as Agade of Mesopotamia, but simply to stress that Truth is Truth wherever it is found and that it cannot but appear in almost identical forms.

⁷³ Note the account of Aaron’s death “on the frontier of Edom” where Aaron was “gathered to his people” (Nu.20:22-29); see my ‘Remarks on the cosmogonic symbolism of Edom and Eden’, *Vincit Omnia Veritas*, 2007, forthcoming. It is hard to deny the connection between '*Ahârôwn* and '*ârôwn* considering the insistence placed on it in this passage.

The Anointing Oil

It will not be out of place to conclude these observations with a few words about the symbolism of the “anointing oil.” Oil is synonymous with the Divine Name and with Essence. At the same time Essence is “almost synonymous in practice” with Substance;⁷⁴ thus it is not surprising to find that Shinto tradition regards oil as the symbol of the primeval undifferentiated state, the primordial Waters being here “oil.”⁷⁵

The ingredients of the “holy anointing oil” that consecrates the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle and all its accessories, and finally Aaron and his sons (Ex.30:26-31), are given in the scroll of *Exodus*: “Yahweh spoke further to Moses and said, “Take the finest spices: five hundred shekel of fresh myrrh, half as much of fragrant cinnamon, two hundred and fifty shekels of calamus, five hundred shekels (reckoning by the sanctuary shekel) of cassia, and one hin of olive oil’ (Ex.30:22-24).

Myrrh or *môwr* (מור) means, in the first case, “*distillation*,” evoking the idea of the alchemist’s *coagula*, and again the sense of the Hebrew *qâshâh* (“to be *dense*”); in the second case, this means “*bitter*.” Recall that myrrh was presented to the baby Jesus by the Magi (Mt.2:12), symbolising the coming into created existence of the Divine Principle;⁷⁶ moreover, the gift of myrrh to the baby Jesus was seen by the Church Fathers to symbolically prefigure the bitterness of the Passion. *Môwr* derives from the root *mârar* (מרר), which is also the root of the name Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, and, in turn, the root of the name Mary.

Cinnamon, *qinnâmôwn*, (קנמון) from the unused root, “to *erect*.” One thinks of Jacob erecting—“setting up as a pillar”—the stone upon which he slept. The related word calamus, *qâneh* (קנה) means “a *reed*” and by resemblance, “a *rod*” recalling this symbolism. Moreover, this derives from the primitive root *qânâh* (קנה; “to *erect*,” in the

⁷⁴ Schuon, *In the Face of the Absolute*, 1989, p.53.

⁷⁵ Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p.715.

⁷⁶ The gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh again express the three aspects of Immanence. Myrrh we have discussed; gold is a common symbol of the divine Essence; and frankincense, which derives from the Hebrew *l' bôwnâh* (from “*whiteness*”), implies firstly purity and light (the *Fiat Lux*) and secondly the idea of “*smoke*,” which, by way of the smoke of the sacrifice, is an axial symbol. Similarly, the Church Fathers see these as symbols of the royalty (gold), divinity (frankincense) and Passion (myrrh) of Jesus.

sense of “to *create*”). Cassia, *qiddâh*, (קידה) from the root *qâdad* (קדד; “to *shrivel*,” in the sense of “to *contract* or *bend*,” as in deference). Finally, the olive oil, which, as discussed, means “*illuminating*” from an unused root indicating *brightness*, among its other symbolic meanings.