

Weaving the symbolism of light

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God guides towards His Light whomever He wants.
God gives symbols for men. God knows everything.
(*Surah 24: Light*)

According to a well-known universal symbolism, "light" expresses the distinction of creation from the "darkness" of non-distinction or primeval chaos. In India and China, as in the Book of *Genesis*, the first work of creation is the separation of light and dark. Prior¹ to this separation, light and dark abide as the creative principle in a bi-unity, fused but not confused, corresponding to the principal progenitive pair: Essence and Substance.² In practice this pair or complementarity is "almost synonymous"³ given complementarism is essentially a correlation between two terms.⁴ Symbolically, Essence and Substance are respectively the active and passive principles: male and female, communicative and receptive, positive and negative, right and left, above and below, and, light and dark.

Light tends to express a positive affirmation while darkness carries the negative sense of chaos. However, the symbolism of darkness also belongs to the mystical experience of the *via negativa* where it expresses the essence of the Godhead

¹ "Prior" in a logical rather than chronological sense, for, of course, this is "before" the distinction of time.

² René Guénon observes, 'It is true that Being is beyond all distinction, since the first distinction is that of "essence" and "substance" or of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*; nevertheless *Brahma*, as *Īshwara* or Universal Being, is described as *savishesha*, that is to say as "implying distinction," since He is the immediate determining principle of distinction' (*Man and his becoming According To The Vedānta*, Oriental Books Reprint, New Delhi, 1981, p.164). In this context Whitall Perry notes the Vedantic doctrine of *bhedābheda* or 'Distinction without Difference' (*The Widening Breach Evolutionism in the Mirror of Cosmology, Quinta Essentia*, Cambridge, 1995, p.15).

³ Frithjof Schuon qualifies this description by adding that they 'differ in that substance refers to the underlying, immanent, permanent and autonomous nature of a basic reality, whereas essence refers to the reality as such, that is, as "being," and secondarily as the absolutely fundamental nature of a thing. ...The notion of essence denotes an excellence which is as it were discontinuous in relation to accidents, whereas the notion of substance implies on the contrary a sort of continuity' (*In The Face Of The Absolute*, World Wisdom Books, Indiana, 1989, p.53, n.1).

⁴ Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, Luzac & Co. Ltd., London, 1975, p.28.

insomuch as it is beyond apprehension by the human reason.⁵ In this sense, darkness has a positive connotation, as evident in the formula of the *Song of Songs*: 'I am black, but beautiful' (Sg.1:5). This apophatic symbolism is alternatively expressed by a super-abundance of light such that it constitutes the "blinding" of the discursive mind, as with the light that blinded Saul upon the road to Damascus (Ac.9:4-9). The blackness of the "beloved" in the *Song of Songs* derives precisely from being "burnt" by the "Sun" (Sg.1:6).

In the final analysis the distinction between light and dark is the "illusion" of duality. The "dark" Substance, the *materia prima*, is from a certain perspective identical with the "light" Essence. This sense of ambiguity is recognized in the Greek word *ousia*, and again, in the symbolism of the letter *ayn*, that each connote the ideas of "substance" and "essence."⁶ At the level of Substance, the Greek word *khaos*, the "void" of Hesiod's theogony, has the double meaning of "primordial abyss" and "indeterminate matter;" 'it is' says Frithjof Schuon, 'neither nothingness pure and simple nor a substance preceding the creative act, but together with the demiurge, the first content of creation; the active demiurge being the center, and its passive complement, the periphery. This two-fold demiurge constitutes the creative power in the midst of creation itself.'⁷ The "active demiurge," identical with ontological Essence, is mythologically most often recognised in the figure of the blacksmith, whose creative prowess involves precisely the co-use of fire (Essence) and water (Substance). In the Pre-Socratic tradition, primordial Substance is expressed alternatively by Water (Thales) and Fire (Heraclitus). In the pre-creational state, says Jalal-ud-din Rumi, 'we were one like sunshine...and we were clean like water.'⁸ What is being described in both instance is the sense of undifferentiation, formlessness, potentiality, purity and unity.

The expansion of light within and upon darkness expresses the "measure" of Creation.⁹ This corresponds to the production of "order," the manifested universe,

⁵ This notion is found in most mystical writings and is particularly well known from the Christian writings of Dionysius the Areopagite.

⁶ On *ousia* see Titus Burckhardt, *Alchemy*, Penguin, Baltimore, 1974, p.36, n.3; on *ayn* see again Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, 1976, p.62, n.1.

⁷ Schuon, *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, World Wisdom Books, Indiana, 2000, p.52-53.

⁸ M. G. Gupta (tr.), *Maulana Rum's Masnawi*, M G Publishers, Agra, 1995, I, 834.

⁹ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity & The Signs of the Times*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1972, p.39.

from “chaos,” in the sense that chaos is opposed to order. Strictly speaking chaos is the indefinite, in the Platonic sense, and the ordered cosmos is the definite.¹⁰ Space *per se* is not a construct of the ordered cosmos but corresponds precisely to the virtuality of chaos, and in this, to the potentiality of Substance. In this sense it is a mistake to talk, as is often the case today, of space as being infinite. Space is indefinite; the Infinite properly refers to that which is Beyond-Being. Guénon observes that this production of order is assimilated in all traditions to an “illumination” (the *Fiat Lux* of *Genesis*). He says that “chaos” is the ‘potentiality from which as starting-point manifestation will be “actualized,” that is to say, it is in effect the substantial side of the world, which is therefore described as the tenebrous pole of existence, whereas Essence is the luminous pole since it is the influence of Essence that illuminates the “chaos” in order to extract from it the “cosmos”’¹¹.

This imagery returns us to the ambiguity of the Essence-Substance complementarity, for we might well say that the “ordered” cosmos, our existential world, is none other than chaos illuminated; what was once hidden is now seen, but it is still “chaos.” It is the Absolute that contains true order in the sense of perfection; cosmic “order,” or the Relative, is in comparison chaotic. Nevertheless, the cosmos constitutes a contingent “order” in keeping with its nature as the reflection of the Absolute.

The “diremption”¹² of light and dark gives rise simultaneously to a polar and an axial symbolism: “polar” in that the progenitive principles now appear as two distinct poles, and “axial” in that their polarization corresponds to the extension of a central axis that jointly holds apart and unifies the productive poles of the cosmos. This axial symbolism, which is the movement from a “point” (Skt. *bindu*) to a line, can then be recognized in both Essence, as a vertical “exaltation” and in Substance, as a horizontal “amplitude.” Combined this symbolism is expressed thus ⊥. This expresses the sense of “weightlessness” of light as opposed to the expansive “heaviness” of darkness. The vertical exaltation corresponds to the “Celestial Ray” or

¹⁰ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity & The Signs of the Times*, 1972, p.38.

¹¹ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity & The Signs of the Times*, 1972, p.38.

¹² The technical term “diremption” differs from “separation,” in that it implies the extension of biunity into the two “connected” poles, in other words the movement from a point to a line (see A. Snodgrass,

“Divine Ray,” the *Buddhi* of Hindu doctrine, and again, the *Fiat Lux*.¹³ The vertical Ray is infinite inasmuch as it “originates” from the Infinitude of the Unmanifest. The horizontal “amplitude” is the indefinite plane of reflection of the vertical Ray, in the manner of the *Fiat Lux* being reflected in the waters of chaos, or the concentric ripples of a stone dropped in water. In the final analysis the horizontal amplitude is a continuation of the vertical exaltation. As Guénon remarks, “The “Celestial Ray” passes through all the states of the being and ... marks the central point of each of them by its trace on the corresponding horizontal plane’¹⁴.

This image of a stone dropped upon water can be found in the *Zohar* (I, 231a-231b; II, 222a-222b). The Holy One, it is said, created the world by throwing down a “precious stone” from beneath the throne of His glory that sank into the “abyss.” This stone is also “axial”: ‘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.’ In the language of the Kabbalah this “stone” is said to be the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Immanence, which is, moreover, represented as Divine Light. Isaiah Tishby notes that the expulsion of the *even shetiyah* or “foundation stone” into the abyss corresponds to the ‘light of the *Shekhinah* spreading through the lower worlds as far as the abyss.’¹⁵

The “stone fallen from the sky” constitutes the symbolism of the *lapsit exillis*.¹⁶ This symbolism is connected with that of the Grail, which as tradition says, was fashioned by Angels from an emerald that dropped from Lucifer’s forehead at the time of his fall from heaven.¹⁷ This image of Lucifer’s stone bears comparison with the planet Venus as it is the Morning Star or Lucifer’s Star (Vulg. Lucifer = “brightness”). This is the Star of Light, *Tcholban*, as the ancient Turks called it, the

Architecture, Time and Eternity Studies in the Stellar and Temporal Symbolism of Traditional Buildings 2Vols., Sata-Pitaka Series, New Delhi, 1990, Vol.1, p.60).

¹³ See Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, 1975, Ch.24; *Man and his becoming*, 1981, Ch.20.

¹⁴ Guénon, *Symbolism of the Cross*, 1975, p.105.

¹⁵ I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* An Anthology of Texts 3 Vols (tr.) D. Goldstein, Oxford Uni. Press (for The Littman Library), Oxford, 1989, Vol.2, p.571, n.77.

¹⁶ See Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols* The Universal Language of Sacred Science, Quinta Essentia, Cambridge, 1995, Ch.46.

¹⁷ See Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, p.18.

“Shining” or “Dazzling One.” The Church Fathers identified the fall of the Morning Star as told of in *Isaiah* 14:12 with that of Lucifer’s fall from heaven. This is commonly seen as the same star that St. John speaks of as falling into the waters (Rev.8:10; 9:1), the star called Wormwood (“bitterness”). The ancient Mexicans dreaded the Morning Star as the bringer of disease and death.¹⁸ In his *Mysterium Magnum* Jacob Boehme adopted the positive symbolism of Venus associating it with the Divine Light of God. The alternative appearances of Venus as the Morning Star and the Evening Star have made it a basic symbol of death and rebirth.

According to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Aphrodite (Venus) was born from the waters when the seed of Ouranos (Uranos) was scattered upon them after his castration by Cronos. This is the symbolism of the “god-slaying”¹⁹ which again demonstrates the fall of the Essential seed upon the Substantial waters. The ancient Romans attributed the emerald to Venus.²⁰ Alchemists regarded the emerald as the stone of Mercury where Mercury is both alchemically and mythologically associated with the “intermediary world” as the axial link between Heaven and Earth. In St. John’s vision the Ancient of Days sat on a throne ‘and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald’ (Rev.4:3). The association of the spectrum of the rainbow with light is obvious. The rainbow is also a well-known “bridge” between Heaven and Earth.²¹ The emerald that fell from Lucifer’s forehead signifies a creative and creating link from Heaven to Earth, and signified the loss of immortality that resides in Eternal Unity. The Grail, into which this emerald was carved, contains the blood of Christ, the “draught of immortality” that “re-opens,” so to speak, this link in an ascending manner from Earth back to Heaven.

The myth of the fall of Lucifer and of Lucifer as the “bearer of light” is associated with the negative notion of cosmogenesis. Thus the Cathars regarded Satan as the demiurge. In this connection Prometheus, in the Greek tradition, is both demiurge and “bringer of light” or, as it is, fire. Prometheus’ gift of fire to mankind is viewed negatively by Zeus. Fire or light is in both instances most readily associated with

¹⁸ Chevalier J. & Gheerbrant A., *Dictionary of Symbols* (tr.) Buchanan-Brown J., Penguin, Middlesex, 1996, p.926.

¹⁹ The dismemberment of Ouranos in Greek mythology, the murder and dismemberment of Osiris in Egyptian mythology, the sacrifice of Prajapati in the Vedic tradition, etc.

²⁰ Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p.352.

“knowledge.” The notion of the “light of understanding” as opposed to the “darkness of ignorance” is common. The negative connotations associated with the gaining of knowledge are found in the story of Eden. However, as Marco Pallis observes, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil are but the one tree.²² Similarly the Chinese patriarch Hui Neng taught: ‘The common run of mankind regards enlightenment and ignorance [light and darkness] as two different things. Wise men who achieved the inward reality know that they are of the same nature.’²³

Mention of the demiurge recalls our earlier allusion to Hephaestus who, like Lucifer, was also flung from heaven like a “falling star” (*Paradise Lost* Bk.1, 745). Hephaestus is also the “cup-bearer” of Olympus, this being the cup containing the ambrosial nectar, the “draught of immortality” as with the Grail.²⁴ Guénon observes the etymological identification of the Hindu *amrita* with the Greek *ambrosia*. Like the dual symbolism of Venus, *amrita* is both the source of life (*a-mrta*) and that of death (*mrta*), a symbolism that Alain Daniélou observes as expressed in all traditions as the oneness of love and death (*a-mor* and *mor-tis*).²⁵ This connection is evident in Greek mythology in the love affair of Aphrodite and Aries. Now *amrita* is, as Guénon says, identical with the Vedic *soma*, the fructifying sap of the “World Tree.” In this context Guénon considers *soma* as identical with the sap of the *Haoma* tree of Zoroastrian tradition, also called *haoma*. This is, to be exact, the white *Haoma* tree, just as *soma* and the analogous symbols of milk and semen are all white. The symbolism of the colour white entails its amalgamation of the spectrum. White is also one of the two colours of Christ along with red, which informs the blood of the Grail and is also the colour of fire. On this point we should recall that the symbolism of the Hindu Agni (fire), who corresponds to Hephaestus, is closely bound with that of *soma*.

The Greek ambrosia, inasmuch as it was distinguished from “nectar,” is a food rather than a drink, so that it is a question of a “food of immortality” rather than a

²¹ See Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Chs.65, 66.

²² Pallis remarks: ‘from the view point of ignorance, the Tree of Life *becomes* the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; regarded from the view point of true knowledge, the Tree of Becoming (as it might just as well be called) *is* the Tree of Life’ (‘Is there a Problem of Evil?’ from J. Needleman (ed), *The Sword of Gnosis*, Penguin, 1974, p.238).

²³ Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p.602.

²⁴ On The “draught of immortality” see Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Ch.55.

draught. This is found in the Biblical symbolism of the Tree of Life and its fruit. Again, this is found with the Biblical *manna*, which is associated with light. Leo Schaya remarks: ‘The pure and redemptive light symbolized in the Talmud by “manna,” is called *Nogah*, “brightness,” in the Kabbalah.’²⁶ Whether “food” or “draught,” it is, as Guénon remarks, ‘always a product of the tree or the plant, a product that contains the concentrated sap which is in a way the very essence of the plant.’²⁷ In this context he notes that the Sanskrit word *rasa* means both “sap” and “essence.” A further pattern emerges from this symbolism when we consider the *apsarases*, the “essences of the waters” (Skt. *ap* = “water”–*rasa*). In the *Ramayana* they are presented as “beautiful women” born out of the cosmogonic “churning of the ocean” (1.45.31), a description that immediately recalls Aphrodite. Daniélou says that these are the ‘unmanifested potentialities, the possible worlds, which exist in the Divine Mind but may never come to exist physically.’²⁸ Their name is also explained as “moving on the waters” (*ap-sarini*)²⁹ which reminds us of the Spirit (*ruach*) on the waters (Gen.1:2). The work of the Spirit is here analogous with the *Fiat Lux*.

In Islam the word for spirit, *Er-Ruh*, is basically identical with the word for Light, *En-Nur*. *En-Nur* comes from the same root as the Hebrew word *ur* (“light”) which as “Ur of the Chaldeans” is the birthplace of Abraham. According to the Sefirotic system of Kabbalah, Abraham corresponds to *Chesed* or Mercy, which is described as “Infinite Light.” *Ur* is again the root to the name *Uriel* (“light of God”), the archangel said to be the medium by which the knowledge of God came to man (Num. R. ii.10). Uriel stands at the gate of Eden with the “fiery sword” which is another way of saying that from the first point or centre (Eden) comes the Divine Ray or radii (the fiery sword). *Uriel* stands as the key-holder to the three hundred and sixty-five lights that came from ‘the light that emerges from the supernal, innermost secluded and concealed *hashmal*’ (*Zohar* II, 78a-78b). Obviously these lights are associated with the light of the solar year, as are the twelve fruit or “Suns” of the Biblical Tree of Life, as Guénon points out.³⁰ The *hashmal* is both the fiery creatures of Ezekiel’s

²⁵ A. Daniélou, *The Gods of India Hindu Polytheism, Inner Traditions*, New York, 1985, p.17.

²⁶ L. Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah* (tr.) N. Pearson, Allen & Unwin, N.J., 1971, p.94.

²⁷ Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, p.226.

²⁸ Daniélou, *The Gods of India*, 1985, p.304.

²⁹ Daniélou, *The Gods of India*, 1985, p.305.

³⁰ Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, p.226.

vision (1:4) and the mystery of which they symbolise.³¹ The *hashmal*, says Tishby, is the sefirah *Tiferet*, the “centre” or “heart” of the lower seven “cosmological” sefiroth.³² *Tiferet* synthetically contains the other six sefiroth in the same manner that white light contains the “six” principle colours of the rainbow.

The *Zohar* further says here that this light ‘is comprised of two lights, and they are one. The first light is a white light, which the eye cannot apprehend, and this is the light that is stored up for the righteous... The second light is the sparkling light that flashes with a red color. ... and because it is comprised of two it is called “twins” (*Genesis* 25:24).’ White is the purity and synthesis of the spectrum, the beginning and the end; moreover, insomuch as it is light *per se*, white is the principle of colour without itself actually being colour. Again, as Guénon shows, white is the seventh “colour” of the rainbow, indigo representing a modern deformation on traditional understandings.³³ White is the principle and synthesis of the six colours (red, orange, violet, yellow, blue, green) just as the centre, the seventh direction, is the principle and synthesis of the six spatial directions. This is again the seventh day of Creation, the day of “rest” (*Gen.*2:2). The red light is the cosmogonic irradiation of this principial light. Thus it is spoken of as “sparkling.” Here again is the symbolism of the white semen and the red menses, as Clement of Alexandria has discussed (*Paedagogus* I.48.1-49.4). This white light is firstly the light of Divine Mercy, *Chesed* (Abraham), but as a synthesis and perfection of the Great Work it is the Divine Heart, *Tifereth* (Jacob).³⁴

Tishby considers the *Zohar* to be referring to Jacob alone in reference to the “twins,” however, this symbolism is bound with that Jacob and Esau, whose name is said to come from him being born ‘red, altogether like a hairy cloak’ (*Gen.*25:25). Esau is associated with the Kings of Edom who, as Leo Schaya says, represent in the Kabbalah ‘the imperfect or unbalanced state of creation preceding its present state—the latter being an ordered manifestation of the *Fiat Lux*’³⁵. This description recalls that of the *apsaras*. Now Esau (red), the older twin, precedes Jacob (white), however, the

³¹ See *Zohar Hadash, Yitro*, 38a & d.

³² These are the sefirah from *Chesed* down to *Malkuth* excluding the supernal triad of *Kether-Chokmah-Binah*.

³³ See Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, p.236, n.3.

³⁴ See *Zohar* III, 215a-215b.

above section of the *Zohar* talks of white as the first light. This merely constitutes a shift in perspective from the cosmological to the metaphysic point of view, or to put this another way, an inversion proper to the “law of inverse analogy.”³⁶ We might also add to our earlier observations on Venus that, in Aztec tradition, Quetzalcoatl, who was represented by the planet Venus, was called “Precious Twin.”³⁷ This symbolism of twins as it is associated with light is best expressed in the relationship of the Sun and the Moon. On this point, the Sun through its fiery nature, is associated with red, while the moon is white. But, by inverse analogy, the Sun, as the source of pure light, is white, while the moon, in its association with blood, is red.

Now the word *nogah*, mentioned above, bears a marked resemblance to the name Noah, which name means precisely “rest,” as in the seventh day. The relationship between Noah and the rainbow need hardly be mentioned. Furthermore, we find here the release of the black-red raven, which remains “outside” the Ark, and the release of the white dove, which returns to the Ark in the manner of beginning and end. Of course the dove is a well-known Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit and associated with the Divine Light. To this we can add that the dove, in Greek tradition, is also Aphrodite’s bird.

The vertical “flow” of the *Fiat Lux* is again expressed by the “river” that flowed out of Eden (Gen.2:10). This river divides and becomes four rivers. The first river describes a vertical “line” whereas the four rivers represent the four principle directions of the horizontal plane of the “face of the waters.” The first river flows from the principial point, symbolically the letter *ayn* which expresses the idea of a “fountain” gushing forth as with Plotinus’ *Fons Vitae*. *Ayn* also means an “eye;” the “eye of the needle” or symbolic “Sundoor.”³⁸ This is the divine Eye through which

³⁵ Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, p.156, n.1.

³⁶ Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity & The Signs of the Times*, 1972, p.186; *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Chs.52 & 53; *The Great Triad*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1994, Ch.7. This law follows the oft-quoted Hermetic aphorism, “As Above So Below”. See also Schuon, *Treasures of Buddhism*, World Wisdom Books, Indiana, 1993, p.84, n.2; *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, Perennial Books, London, 1987, p.106, n.1; *Language of the Self*, World Wisdom Books, Indiana, 1999, pp.35-6, where he refers to “direct” and “inverse” analogy.

³⁷ Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 1996, p.1064.

³⁸ See A. Coomaraswamy, ‘Svayamatrma: Janua Coeli’ and ‘Symplegades’, *Selected Papers Vol.1* ‘Traditional Art and Symbolism’, (ed.) Roger Lipsey, Princeton University Press, Surrey, 1989. Either of these two amazing essays can be consulted for insights into the symbolism being discussed in this paper. Rather than rehearsing them, I have chosen to try to simply “flesh out the picture” a bit further.

the creative Light flows “out.” In accord with the “law of inverse analogy” the human eye is a receptacle through which light, as we perceive it, flows in. In this connection, the *apsaras* are said to be the daughters of Vision (*Kasyapa*).³⁹

According to Kabbalah this first river is called *Yobel*, which literally means “a blast from a trumpet” expressing a sense of emanation through the cosmogonic sound, the Word, analogous to the *Fiat Lux*. *Yobel* is also the same as the angel Yahoel, the first of the “Seventy Names of Metatron.” Metatron, the “word of God,” is, like Uriel, said to have been the deliverer of knowledge to mankind.⁴⁰ In Christ, who is both the Word and the “light of the world” (Jn.8:12), the connection between sound and light is clear. Again, in his *Mathnawi*, Rumi writes: ‘But when that purest of lights threw forth Sound which produced forms, He, like the diverse shadows of a fortress, became manifold.’⁴¹

Sound and light each manifest through vibration, both physically and symbolically. Thus Robert Lawlor refers to the primal waters, the Egyptian Nun, as the “primordial vibrational field,” *nada* in Hindu tradition.⁴² Lawlor further remarks upon the creative power of the *vesica piscis*, which may be recognised in the path of a vibrating string or line, and visually suggests the eye, the mouth and the opening of the vagina. Returning to the symbolism of the stone dropped in water, this vibration is seen in the production of waves, the *amplitude* proper. The waves constitute the movement that distinguishes the “creating” waters from their “resting” state.

The *Zohar* talks of how the Holy One created the world by merging light with darkness (*Zohar, Terumah* 164b): ‘He brought them together and harmonized them, and when they were united as one, he stretched them out like a curtain.’⁴³ In Kabbalah this “curtain” is called *pargod*; it is the “cosmic veil,” the Hindu *Māyā*.⁴⁴ The symbolism of the “curtain” is the same as that of a symbolic “garment” which recalls Esau’s “hairy cloak.” The symbolism of the veil or garment is again found in the explanation of the manifestation of the *Shekhinah*. As Schaya observes, ‘The

³⁹ Daniélou, *The Gods of India*, 1985, p.305.

⁴⁰ In *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (15.4) Metatron (Yahoel) is portrayed as Abraham’s spiritual teacher.

⁴¹ Gupta (tr.), 1995, I, 835.

⁴² R. Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry* ‘Philosophy and Practice’, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989, p.22.

⁴³ See Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, p.74.

shekhinah,...wraps itself in *metatron*, its active and spiritual manifestation...and in *avir*, its cosmic and substantial receptivity,...The *shekhinah* then unites the spiritual radiation of *metatron* with the subtle manifestation of *avir*, and by this forms the heavens.’⁴⁵ *Avir*, which corresponds to the Platonic *ether* and the Hindu *akasha*,⁴⁶ is the “mysterious” veil—the interface or isthmus (the Islamic *barzakh*)⁴⁷—through which the Divine Light or *Avr* is realized. This symbolism is likewise relevant to the Vedantic tradition. As Schuon remarks, ‘the term *māyā* combines the meanings of “productive power” and “universal illusion;” it is the inexhaustible play of manifestations, deployments, combinations and reverberations, a play with which *Ātma* clothes itself even as the ocean clothes itself with a mantle of foam ever renewed and never the same.’⁴⁸ Schuon’s use of the imagery of the “ocean foam” recalls the birth of Aphrodite and the *apsaras*.

There remains an almost infinitely expanding web of homologous symbols that could be woven into this “coat of many colours,” not the least of which include the symbolism of weaving, of the spiders web, of hair and, of course, of the Sun with its infinite rays of light.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the examples presented herein go some little way to weaving together a small section of the symbolic veil through which we are afforded, in a manner protective to our “eyes,” the otherwise blinding Light of the Divine.

⁴⁴ See K. Oldmeadow, *Sankara’s Doctrine of Māyā*, Asian Philosophy, Vol.2, No.2, 1992.

⁴⁵ Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*, 1971, p.75.

⁴⁶ See Guénon, *Fundamental Symbols*, 1995, Ch.75.

⁴⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr remarks that the *barzakh* is the *intellectus materialis*, or *al-`aql al-hayulani*, which with respect to the intelligible forms acts as *materia prima* (*An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Thames and Hudson, Great Britain, 1978, p.269).

⁴⁸ Schuon, *Logic and Transcendence*, Harper & Row, New York, 1975, p.89.

⁴⁹ These symbolisms are treated in depth throughout the excellent works of Guénon and Coomaraswamy.