

## **Miryam's Circle Dance<sup>1</sup>**

**by Rav Kalonymous Kalman HaLevi Epstein (The *Meor V'Shemesh*)**

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kalonymous Kalman HaLevi Epstein (*Meor V'Shemesh*), *Parshat BeShallah* (first words, *od*).

## Bare Bones Literacy

### Summary:

*Miryam's Circle Dance* by Meor V'Shemesh on Parshat Beshalach presents a glorious vision of the things that will change when *woman* recovers her full stature and feminine consciousness, now matured, exerts greater influence on the world and its values.

### Vocabulary:

***dinim*** (also called *gevurot*) – These terms mean literally, severities, and refer to the dark knots of unrectified potential that are the driving force behind our universe. *Dinim* and *gevurot* are generally associated with unconscious lights.

***Hoshana Raba*** – (literally, Great Call for Redemption). The seventh (and last) day of Sukhot marked by elaborate beseechings for rain and redemption. On that day congregants circle the table that holds the Torah scroll seven times.

***lights*** – *Lights* are always equivalent to consciousness in kabbalistic writings. Each *sefira* or spark is a *light* that transmits a particular insight or capacity for awareness.

***malchut*** - The lowest of the ten *sefirot* is called *malchut* which means literally royalty and kingship. It corresponds to the physical plane and represents the final stage in light's congealing into matter.

***messianic era*** – The messianic era is a transitional time between *this* world and the next. It begins somewhere towards the end of the sixth millennium (we are now within the period of its likely beginnings) and will take us to the threshold of the world-to-come. It is the joyous stage of actualized perfection. Love of G-d, love of neighbor, and love of Torah reign.

***sefira / sefirot*** – The ten channels of Divine flow and emanation which link the Transcendent Light with Its evolving and apparently finite creation.

***Shemini Atzeret*** – (literally, Eighth Day of Closure). A holiday that immediately follows the seven days of Sukhot. The eighth day, Shemini Atzeret, is the simplest festival of the Jewish calendar. It, in itself, has no special observances beyond the standard celebratory meals that mark each holiday.

***Simchat Torah*** – (literally, Rejoicing of Torah). In the Diaspora, where each holiday lasts two days (instead of one, as in Israel), the second day of Shemini Atzeret (the ninth day of Sukhot), becomes Simchat Torah, a time of joyous celebration for the gift of Torah. The day is spent circle dancing around the Torah scrolls which are held by the congregants. In Israel, both Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah occur on the eighth day.

***Sukhot*** – (literally, Tabernacles). The fall harvest festival where Jews voluntarily exile themselves from the security of their homes, and live for a week in fragile dwellings beneath the stars, to remind themselves of the impermanence and unreliability of the material world. Special prayers are recited throughout that week and in the morning liturgy, congregants, in procession, circle the table which holds the Torah scroll.

***world to come*** – The seventh millenium and period following the messianic era that marks an entirely new state of existence where physicality dissolves and souls (with their new light bodies) experience an infinitely deepening ecstasy of relationship with G-d.

***worlds*** – refers both to the four planes of reality: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual; and to the sequential stages in creation's unfolding (see map of the Unfolding of Worlds on p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

## Synopsis

### Miryam's Circle Dance

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R. Epstein comments on a brief passage from the Torah that transpires after the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. With everyone safely secured on the other side, Moshe led the people in a hymn of thanksgiving. Immediately afterwards the Torah describes Miryam gathering the women for a celebration of music, song, and dance.

And Miryam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with circle dances. And Miryam answered them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea."<sup>2</sup>

R. Epstein builds his commentary on two hints in that passage. First he observes that the Torah presents information about the particular type of dance performed, that it was a circle dance. Second, he notes that Miryam sang her thanksgiving song in the present tense while Moshe formulated his nearly identical praise in the future.<sup>3</sup> Based on these clues, R. Epstein demonstrates that Miryam, in her dance, accessed a higher state of consciousness than did Moshe through his song. R. Epstein bases his argument on kabalistic teachings about the unfolding of worlds.

It is known that creation passed through several eras before settling into the stable and familiar form that is our world. The stage immediately preceding ours is called the *circle universe*,<sup>4</sup> while ours is the *linear world* of straight lines and hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> These terms are both technical and metaphorical. They describe their arrangement of *sefirot* (the former as concentric circles the latter as three parallel lines)<sup>6</sup>, and the divergent nature of their worldviews.

*Kaballa* explains that just as creation emerged from the depths of Divinity, so will it return there in a single cycle of extension and retraction. Its worlds will unfold downward till their endpoint of emanation and then begin a reverse course back toward their roots (and beyond). Yet, unlike a yo-yo whose motion is similar, the universe undergoes profound transformations at each stage. The creation that returns has metamorphosed by its experience. It has been fixed, actualized, cleansed, and transfigured along the way.

Nevertheless, its return route is the exact reverse of its original emanation. We are still approaching the maximum point of extension, which will be unmistakably marked by the

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 15:20-21.

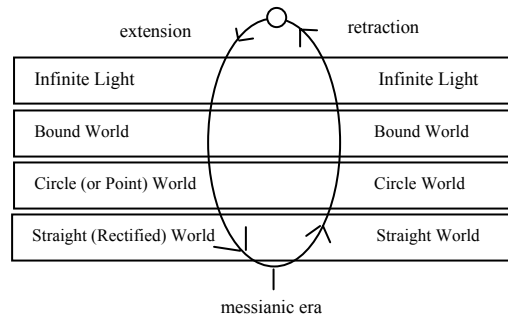
<sup>3</sup> Miryam says, "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea" and Moshe speaks nearly identical words, except in the future tense "I *will* sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider has he thrown into the sea..." (Exodus 15:1).

<sup>4</sup> Also called the *world of points*.

<sup>5</sup> Also called the *rectified world*.

<sup>6</sup> See diagram p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

messianic age, and then we will begin our journey back up to our roots.<sup>7</sup> The first stop will be



the world of circles, the stage that immediately preceded ours on the way down.<sup>8</sup>

Looking toward the future, the circle world is a more evolved and rectified state of consciousness than our present linear reality. Its lights are just becoming visible on the horizon signaling our approaching transition from this era to that. R. Epstein explores the worldviews of these two realities and the divergent psychologies that characterize each.

In the linear world everything occupies a unique position along a continuum extending from above to below. Each value imposes a hierarchy that orders the world according to its preferences. The Torah also ranks its members by the standards that it holds dear. A higher soul is one that is awake, in continuous communion, and always chooses the most spiritually productive option; a lower soul is ignorant of spiritual truths and wallows in the entangling repercussions of wrong action. This hierarchy of spiritual status marks a descending flow of enlightenment. Each person receives teachings from the level above and passes them on to the level below. Everyone is a student to those above, and a teacher to those below.

This linear world, with its multitude of intersecting hierarchies creates an encompassing network of incentives (both positive and negative) that motivate the resource demanding labor of self-improvement. Hierarchy of status defines a pecking order that keeps everyone striving to keep up with the Jones'. People occupying higher ranks become role models that inspire others to invest the effort required to obtain similar success. The whole point of the era of hierarchy is to create a context of values, inducements, constraints, and coercions that press out the full potential of each soul down to its last drop. Its straight line presents a clear direction of growth and compelling enforcements to assure forward motion.

Eventually, and hopefully quite soon, we will complete this consuming labor of self-development. All potential will be actualized, all impurities cleansed, all deprivations enriched, and all ignorance eliminated. At that point hierarchy will cease for it will have grown obsolete. Its whole point was to instigate the grueling work of self-actualization and to establish clear lines

<sup>7</sup> Leshem, HDYH, II:4:17:5 (first words, *v'achor*).

<sup>8</sup> Leshem explains that although this is technically called the World of Points, it is also correct to refer to it as the Circle World because relative to the worlds that follow, its organization is circular. "Treatise Addressing Confusions Surrounding the Circle and Linear Worlds," 3:6. This treatise appears as an appendix to HDYH.

of authority to facilitate the downward flow of teachings. Its worldview, though built on a shaky foundation of relative truths, was (and is) remarkably successful in achieving its goals. But, explains R. Epstein, its days are numbered, its truths will pass, and a new and more rectified order of consciousness will reign, called the circle world.

Just as a circle has no beginning or end and every point is equidistant from its center, so is this true for souls. Truly, it is impossible to rank them, for each is the *most* beloved in the scale of values that is its perfected virtue.

Each creature will eventually attain its full potential and shine with the unique revelation of Divine beauty that only it can manifest. The spiritual bliss of the world to come is the intensely abiding joy of finally becoming who you are. When that happens the distorting veneer of hierarchy will melt away and, behold, we will find ourselves standing in a circle with *HaShem* at its center, and we will dance together in holy celebration.

In the future the Holy One will make a circle dance for the tsadikim. He will seat Himself among them in the Garden of Eden and each one of the tsadikim will point with his finger and say, "This is our G-d for whom we have waited, that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we hoped, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation"<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup>.

In the circle world, it will be gloriously clear that every soul is equally precious and singularly beautiful in a way that cannot be ranked. Similarly, it will not anymore be possible to look to one's neighbors for guidance in serving G-d, for each person has a unique soul-specialty, and in *that* area they are the world's foremost expert. There is nowhere to look for instruction except straight from *HaShem*, who metaphorically sits at the circle's center, equidistant from all its holy points.

On that eternal day, everyone will be satiated with knowledge of G-d to the fullest capacity of their joy and all hierarchies of status will dissolve. In wonderment they will discover that on the scale of enlightenment all have become equal.

The paradigm shift goes deeper still, for R. Epstein explains that the conventions of gender in kabbala echo the physical differences between men and women. Bestowal is a masculine role; receiving is a feminine one. Consequently, in the linear scheme, the teacher is masculine in relation to the student who is influenced by him. In the circle world these hierarchical rankings between human beings will end, for no one will receive spiritual guidance from neighbors, spouses or even teachers. All will turn straight to the Holy One for inspiration, and on that day, says R. Epstein, all power disparities will cease, including the archetypal source of them all, the hierarchy of gender, with its asymmetrical distribution of authority and dependency.

All this Miryam knew and intended when she led the women in their circle dance. Miryam drew the future into the present, initiating the Jewish nation into the secret truth, promise, and yearning of the circle world: The day will come, blessed and welcomed by all, when power disparities will cease and perfect equality reign, when every soul will shine with its glory, and all will become the *most* dearly beloved of their Creator.

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<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 25:9.

<sup>10</sup> TB *Taanit* 25:9.

Miryam phrased her song in the present tense for she was actually holding that consciousness within herself as she sang and danced. The lights of the circle world are so vast that they cannot fit into the brain as an isolated organ of consciousness. They require full body participation (for example in dance), and even a collection of them in coordinated activity (in this case all women) to create a container sufficiently spacious to hold their revelations. Moshe spoke in future tense, for he knew *about* circle consciousness, and that it would eventually reign, but he could not, in the present, access that state himself.

### Full Text

## Miryam's Circle Dance

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ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן את התוף בידיה, ותצאנה כל הנשים  
אחריה בתופים ובמחולות, ותען להם מרים שירו לה' כי גאה וכו'.

And Miryam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took the  
timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with  
tambourines and with circle dances. And Miryam answered  
them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the  
horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea."<sup>11</sup>

After 210 years the Jews finally (and supernaturally) escaped from slavery in Egypt. Their renowned string of miracles culminated in the greatest wonder of all, the Red Sea parted to allow their passage while miraculously drowning the Egyptians who were following in close pursuit. When safely secured on the other side, Moshe led the nation in a jubilant hymn of thanksgiving. The Torah records the words of that song and continues at once with the verses above that recount Miryam's celebration with the women. Rav Epstein **asks** several questions **on that passage**:

יש לדקדק מה בא להשמיענו בזה שהוציאה כל הנשים ולהיכן הוציאו, גם קשה על מלת ובמחולות שנראה כמיותר,  
ובתורתנו הקדושה אינו מיותר אפילו אות אחת, עוד יש לדקדק, מפני מה אמר משה אשירה לה' שהוא לשון עתיד,  
והיא אמרה לשון הווה, שירו לה'.

1. **Why is the verse informing us that "all the women went out after [Miryam]"?** What is it teaching us by this fact?
2. **Where exactly did Miryam and the women go?**
3. It would have been enough to mention that "the women went out after her with their timbrels..." **Why must it add the seemingly superfluous detail about their dancing?** Since the Torah never wastes a letter, let alone a word, this added information must be significant.
4. **Why do Miryam and Moshe use nearly the same language when they sing to *HaShem*, yet Moshe employs the future tense ("Then I will sing..."<sup>12</sup>) while Miryam speaks in the present ("Sing to the Lord...").**

I. Questions on the Biblical passage that prompted this commentary.

II. One can only answer these questions by knowing the history and structure of the universe.

A. Sequence of creation's unfolding, particularly its transition from circles to straight lines.

B. The continued presence and influence of circles in our straight-line universe.

III. The linear world: its structure, worldview, mechanism, and purpose.

IV. The circle world: its structure, worldview, mechanism, and purpose.

V. Symbolic enactments of circle consciousness in Jewish ritual practices.

VI. The original questions now get answered by knowing that Miryam was initiating the nation into circle consciousness.

ונראה לרמז בזה על פי מה דאיתא בגמ' (תענית לא:): עתיד הקב"ה לעשות מחול לצדיקים והוא יושב ביניהם בגן עדן, וכל אחד מראה באצבעו, זה ה' קוינו לו, ופירש רש"י מחול סביב, כמו מחול הכרם.

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 15:20-21.

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 15:1.

This curious passage is alluding to a mystical teaching in the *Gemara* about the world-to-come.<sup>13</sup>

In the future the Holy One will make a circle dance (מחול)<sup>14</sup> for the tsadikim. He will seat Himself among them in the Garden of Eden and each one of the tsadikim will point with his finger and say, “This is our G-d for whom we have waited, that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we hoped, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”<sup>15</sup>

להבין הדבר נראה דהנה כשעלה ברצונו הפשוט לברוא את העולם צימצם אלקותו יתברך שמו ונעשה עיגול ואח"כ ברא את העולמות בקו הישר, וכל העולמות ממשיכין אלהותו יתברך שמו בשוה, עד שנתגשם העולם והתחיל להיות ברורי עולמות, ונעשו צימצום דהיינו בעולם העליון צימצום אלהותו מעט, ובעולם התחתון ממנו צימצום יותר, וכן עד סוף כל העולמות. ואנו משיגים אלקותו מתתא לעילא, שצריכים אנו לברר הניצוצות הקדושות ולילך ממדריגה למדריגה.

**The idea is as follows:** In the stepwise sequence of creating our universe, of crystallizing the material world out of pure undifferentiated light, creation passed through a series of consecutive stages extending from above to below. (This subject is elaborated in great detail on pages **Error! Bookmark not defined.** - **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, and summarized in the diagram called, *Map of the Unfolding of Worlds* on p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). In brief: Before *the beginning*, G-d’s Infinite Light was everywhere. Creation simply could not happen for there was no room for worlds to emerge, every nook and cranny was already filled with Presence.

**HaShem’s first step was to withdraw His light** from a circumscribed place, **creating a spherical void** now free to be filled by something else. This vacated space became the primordial womb for creation’s unfolding. Into its hollow depths **HaShem emanated a single ray** of light (from its radiant surroundings) the unfolding and dissipation of **which is the history and evolution of creation** as we know it.

This transition from Infinite Light to present reality did not happen smoothly, but rather in two trials.<sup>16</sup> **The original emanation first** formed ten **circular** and concentric channels of flow (or *sefirot*). For reasons explained, this *circle world* could not bear the subsequent influx of radiations and shattered under their strain. Instantly it was replaced by an alternative emanation of ten *sefirot* arranged along parallel lines that was built from its shards.

<sup>13</sup> TB *Taanit* 31a.

<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew word מחול (translated circle dance) is somewhat ambiguous and could also mean chorus or a generic dance. **Rashi notes the similarity of this word to a related term that means, “an unsown belt that marks the perimeter of a field” (*Kilayim* 4:1) and so defines it as a circle dance.**

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 25:9.

<sup>16</sup> Actually three, though the first is not immediately relevant to the discussion at hand. See the *Map of the Unfolding of Worlds* (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**), which includes an earlier stage that precedes the one called, *The Bound World*. Thus the actual sequence of the creation of worlds passes through three epochs: The *Bound World* (which was reabsorbed back into the Infinite Light); the *World of Points* (which shattered); and the *Rectified World* (which is the universe within which we live).

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and so they crumbled. Though our world has more sophisticated vessels, curiously its lights emanate from a lower source. Its truths are dull and time-limited compared to the resplendent and eternal awarenesses of its circular predecessor.

And still, the fulfillment of creation's purpose requires a temporary sojourn in the linear realms to develop its cisterns to maximum capacity. Vessel-stretching is the specialty of *this world*. Once this preparatory work is done and all potential actualized, creation will return to the level of circle consciousness, yet this time equipped with proper vessels to hold its scintillating lights.

The primal direction of growth, built into the fabric of creation, that steers each moment "forward" in the most cosmic sense of that word, is back up toward the circle world and the re-realization of *its* holy truths.

It is clear that the terms, *circle world* and *linear world* not only describe arrangements of *sefirot*, but present entire world views and value frames. **In the linear world** everything occupies a unique position along a continuum extending from above to below. **The terms upper and lower are determined as follows:** In the stepwise sequence of creating our universe, *HaShem* underwent a gradually intensifying series of concealments. **Step by step the Infinite Light withdrew Itself from creation and the extent of Its absence defines the hierarchy of worlds: the less concealed, the higher the world; the more, the lower. The task of human beings is to raise the shards** from the shattered circle era.<sup>18</sup> In so doing they force *HaShem* out of hiding by witnessing, despite appearances to the contrary, that there is only G-d, and that He is one. **When successful, the status of that world** jumps notches for its concealment quotient inverts. Once G-d is seen, that place becomes "holy ground," and **enters the prestigious assembly of higher worlds.**

וכל העולמות וכל הברואים הם בבחינת דבר ונוקבא בחינת משפיע ומקבל כי העולם היותר גבוה משפיע לעולם התחתון ממנו, וכן הקטן צריך לגדול ללמוד ממנו כי כל דבר שהוא בקצוות יש לו סוף וראש, ומראשו עד סופו הוא רחוק, וכל שהוא למעלה מן הסוף הוא קרוב יותר להראש, כן כל שהוא למעלה מעולם התחתון הוא קרוב יותר לאין סוף ברוך הוא ולכן הקטן צריך לגדול ללמוד ממנו עבודת השם, כי הוא משיג יותר ומשפיע לקטן ממנו

Our physical plane that is the habitation of rocks, plants, animals, and humans is now among the lowest of worlds. An opaque, leathery skin encases its lights and conceals their glow. The outer eyes report multiplicity with oneness nowhere to be found. Only a penetrating vision can tunnel through appearances and behold the pattern of unity that hides beneath.

The physical plane, with its multifarious range of life forms, actually comprises a single, cosmic hierarchy. Its scale of status calibrates as follows: The more complex an organism, the more sophisticated the soul manifesting through it.<sup>19</sup> Each level of life is a wider-angle lens that brings a new increment of consciousness into focus. Divinity, alone, possesses infinite consciousness, most simply defined as the range of a being's capacity to react and interact with its environment. The higher the creature the more expressions of awareness (and so of G-d) can

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<sup>18</sup> The detailed mechanics of this process are described on pages **Error! Bookmark not defined. - Error! Bookmark not defined.**

<sup>19</sup> Soul and consciousness are equivalent terms. There are five levels of soul and each indicates a particular capacity for consciousness.

manifest through it. Since the measure of Divine concealment defines the hierarchy of worlds, that creature obtains an eminent rank.

Since higher creatures possess more light and awareness (for that is what defines them as higher) their role is to share that spiritual bounty with those below whose way is to receive from them. The conventions of gender in Kabbalah echo the physical differences between men and women. **Bestowal is a masculine role; receiving is a feminine one. Consequently *Kaballa* personifies the higher realms as masculine in relation to those below since they impart, and the others imbibe.**

Creation began when the Infinite Light withdrew from Its center forming a hollow womb that could hold worlds. The progression of history is the undoing of that concealment, the re-illuminating of that dark void by revealing G-d's presence there. Each moment draws another trickle of Infinite Light back into the "empty" space that holds our world. This happens via the agency of *mitzvot* (and right-action) as well as through sufferings, for both are consciousness-raising experiences. Lessons are learned and wisdom absorbed from the *school of hard knocks* as surely as from the study of holy texts. And, since "*HaShem's* seal is truth,<sup>20</sup>" both, in the end, reveal G-d.

An elaborate machinery exists to package this influx of light into a form that matches the capacities of its recipients. **In the hierarchy of worlds**, each creature participates in this relay of illumination according to its position along the continuum. **Each receives a drop of light (or teaching) from the level above**, digests it, reformulates it, **and passes it on in a modified form that befits the level below it.**

In this way, through the course of time, the Infinite Light increases its presence in the lower worlds. The evolution of culture, knowledge and consciousness are the visible fruits of this gradual enlightening.

**In the world of straightness, each level draws from the one above it. Everyone has a rank in the hierarchy, which extends from above to below with a whole range of points in between. The top is closest to the Infinite Light, the bottom is farthest away.** Translated into human terms, a higher soul is one that is awake, in continuous communion, and always chooses the most spiritually productive option; a lower soul is ignorant of spiritual truths and wallows in the entangling repercussions of wrong action. Now, in the linear world, this hierarchy is real, and serves two purposes.

1. It defines a descending flow of teaching that draws the Infinite Light down, level after level, from above to below.
2. Its hierarchy of status provides incentives for the resource-demanding labor of self-improvement. *HaShem* placed each soul in the world with a unique potential and the holy chore of assuring that it gets actualized.

Self-development is a labor-intensive process. No one spends that amount of effort without very compelling inducements, both positive and negative. *HaShem* hangs a carrot in front and a fire behind to assure that the work gets done. One of His most successful motivating tools is "the rule of the Jones'." Implanted in the human soul is a natural drive to keep up

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<sup>20</sup> TY *Sanhedrin* 2a.

with one's peers, and in the *world of straightness* this is a healthy and functional tendency, especially if one's Jones's are spiritually striving folk.

Hierarchy of status defines a pecking order whereby each strives to improve his position and defend it from encroachments. Self-worth, for better or worse, is often linked to one's position on the particular hierarchy that measures success in the area of one's values and ambitions.

**People occupying higher ranks become role models that inspire effort.**

One looks at them and thinks, "Since they did it, I know it's possible. If I work hard enough there is no reason that I can't do it too."

The whole point of the era of hierarchy is to create a context of values, inducements, constraints, and coercions that press out the full potential of each soul down to its last drop. Its straight line presents a clear direction of growth and compelling enforcements to assure forward motion.

אבל לעתיד יתקן כל אחד חלק נשמתו עד שרשו, ויעלו הניצוצין הקדושים, והחיצוניות יתבטלו מכל וכל, ויופיע אז אור בהירות אלקותו בכל העולמות ויהיה העיגול והקו שוה, ולא יהיה אז בחינת דוכרא ונוקבא כי כולם בשוה ישיגו אור אלקותו יתברך שמו כמו בדבר עגול שאין ראש וסוף, ולא יצטרך עוד שום אחד ללמוד מחבירו, כמו במחול הכרם, שהוא מקו האמצעי קרוב לכל העיגול בשוה, כדכתיב (ירמיה לא, לג) ולא ילמדו עוד איש את רעהו כי כולם ידעו אותי למקטנם ועד גדולם.

**Every soul will eventually actualize its potential.** The utopian end-of-days is exactly that; **all the fallen sparks will be raised**, all the *gevurot* sweetened, all potentials actualized, **all illusions neutralized. G-d's light will shine through the world**, dissolving hierarchy **as it turns the line into a circle.**

A possible mechanism for this configurational transformation of line into circle is as follows: A circular disk (like a coin) when viewed along its edge can appear as a single line. When viewed from an angle slightly above its edge it begins to look like an oval.<sup>21</sup> Finally, when observed from above it appears as the circle that it really is. Nothing has changed except the viewer's perspective. This is a three-dimensional analogy of an infinitely more complex process taking place in our ten-dimensional world. Nevertheless, the difference between the world of hierarchy and the circular world remains a matter of perspective. An immature and narrow-minded consciousness has a constricted field of vision that perceives the universe as a line. As the mind evolves and enlightens, its perspective expands. From its now more elevated orientation the world assumes a circular form. Nothing has changed except the mind's visual field and its expanded capacity to integrate multi-dimensions of complexity.

**When that happens** the distinctions between higher and lower, giver and receiver, **masculine and feminine will cease. Everyone will know G-d in a way that is perfect and unique.** In the *world of lines*, quantity is the primary yardstick of value for it lends itself easily to comparisons. In the *world of circles*, quality is what counts, and, like apples and oranges,

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<sup>21</sup> One could even say that the *Tree of Life*, with its three parallel pillars, defines a kind of bisected oval, that provides a glimpse into a more expanded perspective of the world than ordinary (linear) vision generally allows.

qualities are not easily ranked. Each person is a unique entity, incalculably complex, intrinsically worthy, who fulfills an absolutely necessary and irreproducible function in the universe.

In the *world of hierarchy*, value is peer-referenced. Everyone looks around to see where others are aiming and what they are achieving, and then measures themselves to that. In the *circle world* where absolute value is an inalienable right and an intrinsic property of each soul, worth is completely *self*-referenced, which actually means G-d-referenced. “Am I realizing the full potential of *my* soul with its unique combination of talents and sensitivities? Am I fulfilling what G-d wants from *me*?” These are the *only* questions that will matter, and in the world-to-come their answer will *always* be yes.

Each soul will eventually attain its full potential and shine with the unique revelation of Divine beauty that only it can manifest. The spiritual bliss of the-world-to-come is the intensely abiding joy of finally becoming who you are. Deep down, this is all anyone wants. The problem is the near impossibility of knowing what that is. Our potential is not only hidden from others, it is generally hidden from ourselves as well. The remedy is our extended training period in the *world of lines and straightness*. Its mechanism is as follows: Each person looks around at the Jones’ and the beautiful things they possess, and this triggers drives, lusts, and desires inside them to acquire similar things. *HaShem* cleverly implanted a lock and key mechanism into the universe whereby a soul is attracted to exactly those beauties that resonate with some unactualized potential inside itself; as the popular saying observes, “There is no accounting for taste.” Each soul is programmed to respond to the specific “attractors” that, while laboring to possess them, it “coincidentally” realizes its own potential. In this way *HaShem* motivates the grueling work of self-actualization, leading us along *right* paths and persuading us to invest the enormous effort required to underwrite the endeavor. In the end, all will find their place around the circle’s edge and celebrate with overflowing joy the pleasure of finally becoming who they really are. There is no greater delight than this. It is the heavenly elixir of the world-to-come.

When we arrive at this stage, the distorting veneer of hierarchy (and line consciousness) will melt away, for it will no longer have a purpose. It was a temporary and utilitarian truth, though in its heyday it was the most relevant truth, for the whole point of that era was to get massive amounts of work done. Soul actualization is a labor-intensive exertion that requires the irresistible incentives provided by the web of intersecting hierarchies and status-rankings in the linear world. Still, its days will pass and we will return to the era of circle consciousness which proclaims a more exalted and eternal truth: every creature is one of a kind, uniquely fashioned to reveal a distinct facet of Divine beauty. *On its* scale of values, everyone is *HaShem’s most favored* one and **all will have become completely equal**.

In that world the baker will not look to his neighbor, the rabbi, or even to messiach, and feel less accomplished or worthy than he. Everyone will be filled to overflowing with the joy of having discovered who he or she really is. It will be absolutely clear to the baker that it would not augment his pleasure to stand in his neighbor’s more prestigious or affluent shoes, rather the opposite. It would dampen his ecstasy for he would suffer from not being true to his own soul and its Divinely ordained mission to be the best baker possible.

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For everyone, whether baker, rabbi, or housewife, it takes life times of grinding labor to accomplish one’s soul-purpose. That curious fact becomes the great equalizer, based on the well known principle that, “the reward is in proportion to the toil.”<sup>22</sup> On the scale of effort everyone comes out equal.

The **consciousness** of the-world-to-come is symbolized by a circle, a perfectly symmetrical object **that has no beginning or end**, no up or down, and each of its points is equidistant from the common center toward which it faces. Similarly **in the circle world**, it will be gloriously clear that every soul is equally precious and singularly beautiful in a way that cannot be ranked. **It will not anymore be possible to look to one’s neighbors for guidance in serving G-d**, for each person has a unique soul-specialty, and in *that* area they are the world’s foremost expert. **There is nowhere to look for instruction except straight from HaShem, who metaphorically sits at the circle’s center equidistant from all its holy points.**

On that eternal day, everyone will be satiated with knowledge of G-d to the fullest capacity of their joy and all hierarchies of status will dissolve. In wonderment they will discover that on the scale of enlightenment all have become equal.

All this Jeremiah prophesied:<sup>23</sup>

I will put my Torah in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and will be their G-d and they will be my people. **And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor** and every man his brother saying, “Know the Lord.” **For they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them**, says the Lord. And I will forgive their transgression and I will remember their sins no more.

וזהו פירוש הגמרא, עתיד הקב"ה לעשות מחול לצדיקים, והקב"ה יושב ביניהם בגן עדן פירוש לעתיד לבא ישיגו הצדיקים השגה גדולה מאוד העליון אשר אין שם בחינת דוכרא ונוקבא, ואין שום אחד מהם יצטרך ללמוד מחבירו, כי אז יתגלה אור בהירות אלקותו בכל העולמות, ויהיה עיגול עם הקו בשוה כמו מחול הכרם שמקו האמצעי הוא קרוב לכל עיגול בשוה.

This serves to explain the passage from the *Gemara* cited above:

**In the future the Holy One will make a circle dance (מחול) for the tsadikim. He will seat Himself among them in the Garden of Eden** and each one of the tsadikim will point with his finger and say, “This is our G-d for whom we have waited, that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we hoped, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”<sup>24</sup>

**In the future everyone will** be cleansed of sin and **attain full knowledge of G-d**, thereby **entering the category of tsadik**. The accumulated labor of lifetimes of striving and suffering will end in collective perfection. This path toward sainthood is equally a journey toward circle consciousness, for the knowledge of G-d acquired en route is what dissolves the illusions of hierarchy, **and will ultimately eliminate gender roles altogether**, which serve as the archetypes for all other power disparities.

If one associates the masculine role with an enlightened master who imparts knowledge, and the feminine role with an unlearned novice who receives instruction, **then gender will cease**

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<sup>22</sup> Ethics of the Fathers 5:22.

<sup>23</sup> Jeremiah 31:32-33.

<sup>24</sup> Isaiah 25:9.

**in the world to come, for no one will be learning from neighbors,** spouses or even teachers. **Truth will shine through the world,** its light as plentiful as the air we breathe, and all will have the taste buds to enjoy (and comprehend) it.

**Hierarchies will cease** and merge into the more expanded and rectified circle consciousness that will rule that new age. **Like the perimeter of a vineyard where each point is equidistant from its center,** so will all be equally close to the Infinite source of light and consciousness, the Blessed Holy One.

זוהי כוונת הקפות שאנו מקיפין בהושענא רבה ובשמיני עצרת, אנו עושים הקפות בסוד (ירמיה לא, כד) נקבה תסובב גבר, להמשיך על ידי הקפות את אור העליון אשר אין שם בחינת דבר ונקובא, וזאת היתה כונת מרים הנביאה שהוציאה כל הנשים אחריה ועשתה עמהם הקפות, בסוד נקבה תסובב גבר, כדי להמשיך אור עליון, אשר אין שם בחינת דוכרא ונקבא ולכן אמר משה, אשרירה לה' מפני שמה אמר בבחינת דוכרא ונקבא שלא הופיע עדיין אור הבהירות העליון, לכן אמרו אשירה שעדיין לא השיגו משלם השגת אלקות, לכן אמרו לשון עתיד. כשאשיג אז אשיר, אבל מרים המשיכה בהקפתה אור עליון, והשיגו אז אשר אין אפשר להשיג יותר, והוא פירוש הפסוק ותקח מרים וכו'. ותצאן כל הנשים אחריה בתופים ובמחולות פירוש עשתה עמהם הקפה כמחול הכרם, בסוד נקבה תסובב גבר, וזוהי המשיכה אור עליון, אשר אין שם בחינת דוכרא ונקבא ותען להם מרים שירו לה' פירוש שעתה השגתם השגה גדולה כל כך מה שאי אפשר להשיג יותר, לכן שירו עתה לה'.

**This circle-truth is reenacted each year on the two festivals of Sukhot and Simchat Torah.** Among the practices of those days is **the custom to dance in a circle** around the Torah. **On Sukhot** (which includes **Hoshanna Rabba**) the movement is slow **and** stately; **on Shemini Atzeret** (which includes Simchat Torah) the dance is vigorous and celebratory.

**The verse which describes the deeper symbolism of this practice reads,**

**The Lord has created a new thing on the earth, woman shall surround man.**<sup>25, 26</sup>

Its words hearken to the era described above where circle consciousness supercedes hierarchy and replaces it as the greater and more encompassing truth.

**The circle dancing** that happens on Sukhot and Simchat **Torah draws the lights of that sublime era down** into our constricted world of lines and hierarchy. For those moments **gender disparities cease** and the soul encounters circle lights. Now it knows how to orient, for having glimpsed the larger landscape, it identified the center to which it must face. With this experience the soul is primed to discriminate *holy* sweetness and *pure* teachings by their consistency with circle truths.

**All this Miryam knew and intended when she led the women in their circle dance.** Miryam drew the future into the present, initiating the Jewish nation into the secret truth, promise, and yearning of the circle world: The day will come, blessed and welcomed by all, when **“woman will encompass man.”** **The highest lights will fill the world,** insights that cannot be imagined by minds confined by hierarchy. On that day **gender disparities will cease,** and perfect equality will reign.

**Moshe phrased his celebratory song of the sea in the future tense,** (“*I will sing to HaShem...*”), **because his vision** was more limited than Miryam’s. His conceptual **mind could not** break the gender-barrier to **access the infinitely sweeter lights** that lie on the other side.

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<sup>25</sup> Jeremiah 31:21.

<sup>26</sup> Rashi actually translates this as, “Woman will turn in to a man.”

**And so he sang in the future tense, accepting that he could not, in the present, access those future truths, as if to say, “Then, when my mind has evolved to the next level, and I become able to hold those holy circle lights, then *I will sing.*”**

**Miryam, conversely, was able to touch those lights and bring them down** into the present **through her circle dance.** This exalted task required the participation of her entire body. *Circle world* lights are so intensely bright and complex that they do not fit into the delimited spaces of brain and mind. These sufficed as organs of awareness for straight-line-consciousness but no amount of upgrade will equip them to hold circle lights. Like trying to run a complex graphic program on an antiquated laptop, there is not enough space in the computer’s brains to hold the complexity of operations, to allow the images to form or move through their transformations. Similarly here, circle awareness is so vast that it takes an entire body to hold it. Each cell must participate in the effort and share in the load. The final “knowing” is a visceral experience where awareness permeates every limb and organ in the body. It is this body-based feature that makes these truths ecstatic.

...Every mouth shall offer thanks to You; every tongue shall vow allegiance to You; every eye shall look toward You; every knee shall bend to You; every erect spine shall prostrate itself before You; all hearts shall fear You, and each of my internal organs and kidneys shall sing praises to Your name, as it is written: “All my bones shall say: *HaShem*, who is like You?<sup>27</sup> ...Let all my internal organs bless His holy Name<sup>28,29</sup>”

Through her dance Miryam attained a visceral state of knowing the highest and most mysterious truths of the universe, and from inside that knowing she rejoiced, “*Now I sing...*” **All that we will discover in our eternally deepening journey toward knowledge of G-d, Miryam knew then. This is what the Torah teaches when it describes her celebration:**

**And Miryam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with circle dances.** And Miryam answered them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea.”<sup>30</sup>

**When Miryam gathered the women to dance in a circle (like the untiled ground surrounding a vineyard), she embodied, as a physical reality, the abstract and incomprehensible concept of “*woman surrounding man.*”** In that moment the lights of that truth actually descended below and imparted their secret knowledge to all present. In the deepest recesses of soul, all understood that hierarchy is an illusion **and that gender disparities, their primary expression, must eventually cease.**

**Miryam answered the women in the present tense, “Sing, *now*, to the Lord...” for in that moment she apprehended and embodied circle truths, the highest secrets of the universe. She merited to sing her song in the present tense, while even Moshe (the greatest prophet that every lived), could only know those words as distant truths.**

<sup>27</sup> Psalms 35:10.

<sup>28</sup> Psalms 103:1.

<sup>29</sup> Standard Liturgy, Shabbat morning prayers, *nishmat kol chai*, which appears at end of the section called, *pesuki d’zimra*.

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 15:20-21.

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### DEBRIEFING

## **Miryam's Circle Dance** **by *The Meor V'shemesh***

### What do we know?

1. The *circle world* is not just a particular arrangement of *sefirot*, but an entire worldview and value frame. It regards every soul as a unique entity, incalculably complex, intrinsically worthy, which fulfills an absolutely necessary and irreproducible function in the universe. In the *circle world*, every soul is *equally* beloved to *HaShem* and there is no hierarchy of greatness between them.
2. The hierarchies and rankings of the *linear (rectified) world* are time-limited and partial truths. The non-hierarchical, circle perspective will ultimately prevail as the final word.
3. Our sojourn in the *linear-rectified world*, laboring beneath its yoke of narrow judgements and partial truths, serves an absolutely critical function. By pressing out the full potential of each soul, it prepares light-vessels that will, for the first time in the history of the universe, be able to absorb and integrate *circle-world* consciousness.
4. Miryam's *circle world* lights were brought down through dance, and in particular, a circle dance. It is known that in the higher states of consciousness described by kabbala, the entire body becomes an instrument of awareness. Their state of "knowing" permeates every cell and cannot be confined to the organs of brain and mind. Similarly here, the vessel that Miryam employed to draw circle lights into the world possessed two features:
  - a) It required bodily participation, in the form of dance.
  - b) It needed to be a collective effort. No individual can stretch sufficiently to contain circle consciousness fully. A proper vessel for this purpose must integrate the capacities of a multitude of souls, in this case, the women.
5. Miryam and the women were able to access these lights of higher consciousness while Moshe, the greatest prophet that ever lived, could not.

### Logical Implications and Speculations

1. The fact that Miryam and the women were able to access these lights of higher consciousness while Moshe, the greatest prophet that ever lived, could not implies that the particular knowledge that comes from the *circle world* may be more accessible to women than men.
2. What does one do with this information? How does one balance the conflict of perspective between the *linear* and *circular worlds*? Wisdom requires:

- a) An awareness of both orientations, and a true appreciation of their respective merits.
  - b) An understanding of their sequence of applicability, and the position of one's own generation along that timeline. It seems that we are currently in the linear phase of history, though fast approaching the era when circular truths will begin to take precedence.
  - c) It is said about the perspectives of Hillel and Shammai,<sup>31</sup> "these and these are true words of the living G-d yet the opinions of Hillel should be followed as practical *halacha*" in this period of history (except with minor exceptions). Similarly here, wisdom requires that one affirm both truths and yet lean toward *linear-world* values when making practical decisions. Yet, also here, one must recognize exceptions to the rule, situations that call for the emphasis of circle values in their practical decision. (The very capacity to contact the unique features of a moment and identify it as an exception is itself a *circle-world* skill.)
  - d) Kabbala teaches that in the messianic period Shammai's opinions will become more relevant than Hillel's and we will rule according to his conclusions.<sup>32</sup> Similarly in the transition from lines to circles, wisdom requires that one be attuned to this shifting, and make decisions accordingly.
3. Why is the *circle era* considered an unrectified world on the way down (and so it shattered) while on the way up it is a *super*-rectified world, even more so than our present universe, that is actually titled *the rectified world*?

As explained, circle consciousness includes the appreciation of each soul as an absolutely perfect, unique, and intrinsically worthy entity. This awareness has a different affect on souls as they are "coming down" versus going up.

On the way down, souls are just bundles of potential waiting to be actualized. If circle consciousness were to rule, a soul, even in its unactualized state, would be appreciated as already perfect, "as just fine the way it is." There is not much incentive to engage in the grueling labor of self-development when the message from every direction is, "You're so beautiful. You are already perfect exactly the way you are." Consequently the danger in a world where circle values rule, is that growth and actualization will not happen, for there is nothing to be gained by the effort. One is already basking in unconditional positive regard.

Consequently on the way down, the circle world was unrectified, for the urgent mission of soul-actualization could not happen to its full extent within an exclusively circular frame.

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<sup>31</sup> Hillel and Shammai were the two most illustrious sages of their time ( $\cong$  40 BCE) and they generally arrived at opposite conclusions both on matters of law and philosophy. Concerning them the *Gemara* teaches, "A voice from heaven announced, 'These [opinions of Hillel] and these [contradictory opinions of Shammai] are both true words of the living G-d but the practical law follows Hillel'" (TB *Eruvin* 13b). Interestingly, the positions of Hillel could be characterized as more compatible with circle consciousness, the opinions of Shammai with a more linear world view. Perhaps the decision to follow Hillel's conclusions was an affirmative action to include circle perspectives in an era that would be primarily linear. The fact that Shammai's orientation will gain prominence in the messianic time (see paragraph d that follows) is perhaps the same pattern. To assure that the circle era includes the linear and to counterbalance its polarity, Shammai's stricter and seemingly narrower opinions will apply.

<sup>32</sup> *HaMikdash Melekh, Parshat Bereshit*, 17b; R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, LT, Num. 54b-c.

And so it shattered, to be replaced by the *rectified, linear world* of hierarchies and coercive growth incentives. With all its failings; its half-truths, and narrow-minded judgements, the work gets done, potential does get actualized, and the results speak for themselves.

Gradually, throughout the entire six-millennium history of the *rectified world*, circle consciousness (via the *partzuf woman*) has been slowly infiltrating the larger cultural milieu. The seven-stage sequence outlined by the *Ari* describes this progression.

At first circle values were hardly visible, and only recently have they built a momentum and accumulated a substantial presence. Now, in this post-modern era of democracy, psychology, new age spirituality, and human rights awareness, circle lights are fast approaching their full stature, and exerting a profound impact on the conceptual paradigms of contemporary history.

Once our potential has been actualized, and humanity has become the best they can possibly be, the most rectified perspective and the truest attitude is that informed by circle values. Every soul really is the best and most beloved. Each fulfills an absolutely unique and critical function and shines with incomparable beauty. It is impossible, to rank them, silly even, for there are as many standards of excellence as there are souls. Each sits at the top of the scale that measures *its* specialty.

The purpose of the-world-to-come is different from *this world*. *Here*, now, is the work-phase of history. *There*, will be the reaping of reward, the ecstasy of an ever deepening relationship with *HaShem*. The expanded vision of the circle-world is exactly what will facilitate the full realization of our individual and collective beauty, enabling us to enter a deeper level of intimacy with *HaShem* and not shatter from the force of His Infinite Light.

Furthermore, circle consciousness on the way up, is actually an integration of both linear *and* circular paradigms that together form the vessel that can hold infinite blessing.

4. The *sefira* of *malchut* (and its *partzuf woman*) can be characterized as a splinter of light from the *circle era* that dropped into the rectified world, and as it fell it imploded, until it hit bottom as a densely compacted knot of unactualized potential. The seven stages of woman's development become the path by which this splinter of circle light reconstitutes itself and integrates its profound awareness into the linear world which it eventually supplants as the prevailing ideology.
5. In the *Ari's* seven-stage sequence of *woman's* development, the latter stages describe a phase whereby *woman* comes into her "brains." It is clear that *woman's* brains will be different from *man's* for their specialty is circle truths. All disciplines and areas of study will benefit from incorporating the enriched and expanded perspective of circle awareness into their thought patterns and problem-solving paradigms.