

## 4.1 THE REALMS OF CREATION

MYSTICS HAVE DESCRIBED THE LORD'S CREATION as a vast hierarchical system, spanning a multitude of heavens, the lower reflected, projected or emanated from the higher. Within the heart of all, and permeating everything through the divine creative power, lies the eternity of God Himself. At the 'periphery' is the physical world of gross matter, of the mind made physically manifest. Between are realms or heavens of increasing spirituality, where – in the lower heavens – the mind in a subtle form is still prevalent. These are the regions or heavens of the higher or greater mind, the highest point of which has been called the universal mind.

Many mystics, from different times and cultures, have consistently spoken of realms that equate to what in the English language have been called the astral and causal regions. Together with the physical universe, these comprise three worlds, existing within the realm of the greater mind. Within these realms are found the heavens and paradises – as well as the hells and infernal regions – of most of the world's religions.

Some mystics have also spoken of higher spiritual regions beyond the realms of the mind, between the uppermost borders of the greater or higher mind and the eternity of God. Like God Himself, all these worlds lie within. They are realms of being and are travelled – not in space – but in consciousness.

Terms describing this hierarchy of creation are found in this section, including those terms used for hell and some terms used for the physical universe. Some other terms for the physical universe are found in Section 6.2. Terms for the universal mind are in Section 6.1. Terms for eternity or the eternal realm are in Section 2.1.

**KEY ENTRIES: aṇḍa, heavens, mānsarovar, regions, saḥans dal kanwal, ta'ayyun.**

**‘olam ha-briah** (He) *Lit.* world or realm (*‘olam*) of creation (*briah*); According to the Kabbalists, *briah* is the region directly below that of *‘olam ha-aẓilut* (world of emanation).

In the *Zohar*, *‘olam ha-briah* is also called *‘olam ha-merkavah*, the realm of the chariot or throne of glory, a reference to the inner palaces or seven *hekhalot* regarded as the spiritual goal by Jewish *Hekhalot* mystics of antiquity. It also corresponds to the ‘supernal garden of Eden’, a metaphor for the spiritual regions, used by the Jewish mystics.

See also: **‘olam**.

**‘olam ha-merkavah** (He) *Lit.* world or realm (*‘olam*) of the chariot (*merkavah*).

See also: **merkavah** (<2), **‘olam ha-briah**.

**‘olam ha-yeẓirah** (He) *Lit.* world (*‘olam*) of formation (*yeẓirah*). According to Kabbalist cosmogony, *‘olam ha-yeẓirah* is the third world or realm below the highest *‘olam* of *aẓilut* (world of emanation). In the *Zohar*, it is said to be the abode of the angels, led by *Metatron*, the chief archangel. It probably corresponds to the astral realm in more modern terminology, and is the level directly above the physical world.

See also: **‘olam**.

**orchard** See **gardens**, **nut orchard** (6.2), **pardes**.

**outer darkness** Hell; also, the physical universe; an early Judaic and Christian term. The gnostic author of the *Gospel of Philip* explains his understanding of Jesus’ use of the term in a passage where he talks of the inner and the outer man; the inner man being the soul, the outer man, the physical body. He is referring to the soul incarnate in this world when he speaks of

the inner and the outer and what is outside the outer.

*Gospel of Philip* 68, NHS20 pp.176–77

What lies “outside the outer” is the physical universe itself, in which the physical body lives. He then adds:

Because of this, the Lord (Jesus) called corruption, “the outer darkness”: there is not another outside of it.

*Gospel of Philip* 68; cf. NHS20 pp.176–77

The physical universe is the lowest or outermost region of creation: “There is not another outside of it.” Corruption is another term commonly used for this world in the sense that everything here is impermanent and changing, tending towards destruction, decay and death. It is also the world where nothing is what it seems to be. Everything is fraudulent, illusory and corrupt.

There is corroboration of this interpretation of “outer darkness” in a number of places in the allied literature of the period. The early-third-century Christian teacher, Origen, suggests that it refers to life in “this coarse and earthly body” beyond “the reach of any light of understanding”:

The ‘outer darkness’ too is, in my judgment, not to be understood as a place with a murky atmosphere and no light at all, but rather as a description of those who through their immersion in the darkness of deep ignorance have become separated from the reach of any light of understanding.... Perhaps, the ‘gloom and darkness’ should be taken to mean this coarse and earthly body.

*Origen, On First Principles II:10.8; cf. OFP p.145, WO1 p.144*

This understanding brings the meaning of some of Jesus’ parables into sharper focus. In the parable of the wedding feast, when all the poor people are invited to come in off the street, there is one who arrives without a “wedding garment”. And not only is he refused entry, but is bound “hand and foot” and “cast ... into outer darkness”:

And when the king came in to see the guests,  
he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:  
And he saith unto him,  
“Friend, how camest thou in hither  
not having a wedding garment?”  
And he was speechless.

Then said the king to the servants,  
“Bind him hand and foot, and take him away,  
and cast him into outer darkness;  
There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

*Matthew 22:11–13, KJV*

This seemingly harsh treatment is actually a statement of the reality as described by mystics. The king (the Lord or Master) invites everyone to a wedding feast – to mystic union with the Lord. All people in this world are invited by virtue of their having a human form. The human form itself is an invitation to seek God, something unavailable to other forms of life here. But the garment that all souls require in order to consummate this divine

marriage is that of the soul's true spiritual purity. This must be sufficiently in evidence at the time of death, otherwise the soul is sent back into this world, into "outer darkness", where there is a great deal of suffering and misery of all kinds – "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The same expression is used by Jesus in the parable of the servants who are entrusted with a certain number of "talents", or sums of money. Two of the servants increase the wealth assigned to them, but the third simply hides it, doing nothing profitable with it. The wealth with which they are entrusted is the human form, given to all human beings – servants of the Lord – at the time of their birth. Some make use of this wealth for its true purpose of seeking God, while others do nothing profitable with it. Hence, the lord says to the servant who makes a profit:

Well done, good and faithful servant;  
 Thou hast been faithful over a few things,  
 I will make thee ruler over many things:  
 Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

*Matthew 25:23, KJV*

He is taken back to God, while concerning the other, he says:

Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness:  
 there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

*Matthew 25:30, KJV*

He is returned to this world of outer darkness.

It is worth observing that the expression, "the outer darkness", is a favourite of whoever compiled and edited Matthew's gospel. The same parables in Luke and Mark do not use this phrase. It is therefore possible that Jesus never used the term at all, and that the gospel compiler has given these parables an apocalyptic touch of his own.

See also: **hell, Pit, Sheol.**

**pad(a)** (S/H/Pu) *Lit.* place, abode, home; region, station, stage; state, status, position, rank, office; used extensively in Indian mystic literature to refer to the various realms of creation, almost always with a qualifying adjective, as for instance, *sat pad* (true home), *mukti pad* (the place of liberation), *asat pada* (realm of untruth, this world), *pūraṇ pad* (perfect abode), *uttam pad* (supreme abode) and so on.

**paradise** A term derived from the Greek, *paradeisos*, in turn derived from the Persian, *paridaiza*, meaning ‘an enclosure’, hence, ‘an enclosed garden’. Thus, in the *Septuagint*, the early Greek translation of the Bible (c.300 BCE), the ‘garden of Eden’ is translated as the ‘paradise of delight’.

‘Paradise’ is used variously in mystic literature. Sometimes, it refers to the heavenly regions to which good souls hope to go after death. At other times, it refers to eternity.

See also: **bihisht-u dūzakh, firdaws, gardens, heavens, jahannam, mansions, oka-vusú, pardes, sab’ samāwāt, svarga, vaikunṭha, ywy mará ey.**

**paraloka** (S), **parlok** (H/Pu) *Lit.* the other (*par*) world (*lok*); the next world, the hereafter, the beyond, heaven; the future state; the life following the present one; a common Indian expression for the hereafter. It is the manner in which this life is lived that determines where the soul goes after death. Speaking metaphorically of man’s selfish existence, Nāmdev says:

O sinner, by highway robbery and others’ house-breaking,  
 thou fillest thy belly.  
 Thou hast practised the ignorance,  
 wherewith infamy shall go with thee to the beyond (*parlok*).

*Parmanand, Ādi Granth 1253, MMS*

But Sūrdās puts the other side of the picture. Those who are truly devoted to the Lord are already in “heaven (*parlok*)”:

Seeing the Lord’s vision, they are freed of sin,  
 and obtain all the things.  
 Gazing on the Lord’s beauteous face,  
 they have nothing to do with any other affair.  
 Forsaking the sable and beauteous Lord,  
 he who desires anything else is like a leech on the body of a leper.  
 Sūrdās, the Lord has taken my soul in His hand,  
 and has blessed me with this heaven (*parlok*) of His.

*Sūrdās, Ādi Granth 1253, MMS*

See also: **afterlife, al-ākhirah.**

**parbrahm** (H), **pārbrahm** (Pu) *Lit.* beyond (*par, pār*) *Brahm*; in the terminology of Swāmī Shiv Dayāl Singh and some other Indian Saints, the realm above

*trikuṭī* or *Brahm*, the universal mind; also called *daswān dwār* (tenth door) and *sunṅ* (void), where the soul becomes free from all coverings of mind and body:

Two stages below *sat lok* (true realm) is the region of *sunṅ* or *daswān dwār*, where the *surat* (soul) made its first stop in its descent from *sat lok*, and thence came down into *brahmāṇḍ* and *piṇḍ* (the physical universe)... When the soul reaches this region, after freeing itself from the five *tattvas* (elements), the three *guṇas* (attributes), and the three bodies – gross, subtle and causal, then it becomes fit for *bhakti* (devotion) of the Lord, and from here, with the force of divine love, proceeds to *sat lok*, and then to the *Rādhā Swāmī* region.... In this region also, groups of *haṃsas* (lit. swans, pure souls) dwell in bliss and all manner of delights, and live on the water of immortality.... This is also called the *pārbrahm* region.

*Swāmī Shiv Dayāl Singh, Sār Bachan Prose 1:13, SB pp.10–11*

Mahārāj Sāwan Singh describes the experience of the soul in *pārbrahm*:

*Pārbrahm* is the shrine where the spirit has a bath of purification and becomes immaculate. It has now transcended the three bodies – physical, astral and causal – and is neither black nor white. Its light is now the light of twelve suns. This sounds incredible to us in this world where the light of one sun is enough to dazzle us with its glare. Actually, however, on this material plane the soul is like an incandescent lamp thickly wrapped in several coarse covers, which create an impression of darkness. In *pārbrahm*, the *ātman* (soul) is without any coverings and is, therefore, radiant and effulgent.

*Mahārāj Sāwan Singh, Discourses on Sant Mat 1, DSM p.24*

*Pārbrahm* has also been used to include *mahā sunṅ* (great void), a vast expanse of great darkness lying between *daswān dwār* and *bhanwar guphā* (rotating cave), the realm on the edge of eternity. Speaking of *achint dīp* (carefree island) and *sahaj dīp* (peaceful island) as realms within *mahā sunṅ*, Kabīr writes:

In *parbrahm*, there is an eight-petalled lotus;  
To the right is one with twelve petals,  
where *achint (dīp)* is situated;  
To the left is the ten-petalled *sahaj (dīp)*;  
Thus are these lotuses.

There are five *Brahms*, encased in eggs,  
and all five are called *nihacchar* (beyond the imperishable);

Four regions are hidden there,  
 where prisoners (souls) dwell, exiled by the Lord.

*Kabīr, Shabdāvālī 1, Bhed Bānī 22:20–21, KSS1 p.66*

*Pārbrahm* also has a general sense as transcendent, common in descriptions of God, a usage in which it frequently appears in the *Ādi Granth*.

See also: **pārbrahm** (2.1).

**pardah-i ẓulmat** (P) *Lit.* the veil (*pardah*) of darkness (*ẓulmat*); in Sufi terminology, a region of great darkness in which the water of life (*Āb-i Ḥayāt*) is to be found. Some Indian mystics have also described a similar region, generally known as *mahā sunn*, which the soul has to cross on its spiritual journey.

See also: **mahā sunn**.

**pardes** (P/He) *Lit.* orchard. Like gardens, meadows, pastures and other similar terms, *pardes* was used by Jewish mystics for the inner regions. The word is derived from the old Persian (*paridaiza*), through the Greek (*paradeisos*, paradise), having the original meaning of an enclosed area of land and, hence, an enclosed garden or orchard.

The sole biblical occurrence of *pardes* is in the *Song of Songs*, where the lover is describing the Beloved:

Your shoots form an orchard (*pardes*) of pomegranate trees,  
 the rarest essences are yours:

Nard and saffron,  
 calamus and cinnamon,  
 with all the incense-bearing trees;

Myrrh and aloes,  
 with the subtlest odours.

Fountain that makes the gardens fertile,  
 well of living water,  
 streams flowing down from Lebanon.

*Song of Songs 4:13–15, JB*

The Beloved is being described using a number of terms that were also used for the creative Power, including the Tree of Life, the Fragrance, the Living Water and so on. Using the symbolism of worldly love, the divine Beloved is being depicted as the creative Power itself.

Indicating the mystical interpretation given to both *pardes* and the *Song of Songs*, the phrase “orchard of pomegranates” was used by Moses Cordovero as the title of his book, *Pardes Rimmonim*, summarizing and methodically explaining the teachings of the Kabbalah.

*Pardes*, as a term for the spiritual realms traversed during the inner journey, is well known to students of Jewish mysticism through a Talmudic *midrash* (interpretive story) that was used to warn people of the dangers of trying to enter the inner realms unprepared:

Four men entered the garden (*pardes*): Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aḥer (Abuyah), and Rabbi Akiva.... Ben Azzai glimpsed and died.... Ben Zoma looked and became demented.... Aḥer cut the shoots.... Rabbi Akiva merged in peace.

*Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 14b*

The story relates the experience of four rabbis who set out upon the inner spiritual journey, and is symbolic. The account continues with Rabbi Akiva warning the other sages not to be deceived by a vision of shining marble plates, which may appear to be water; they are an illusion that guards the gate of the sixth palace within, encountered by the soul prior to entering the seventh palace where the Lord in His glory sits on His throne.

Rabbi Akiva is portrayed in the story as having entered in peace and returned in peace. The verse from *Song of Songs* is quoted in relationship to him: “The King has brought me to his chambers,”<sup>1</sup> where the “chambers” are interpreted as the inner realms.

Ben Azzai, it is said, “glimpsed and died”, illustrating the line from the *Psalms*: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”<sup>2</sup> Although it is commonly interpreted to mean that Ben Azzai died a physical death as a result of the intensity of his spiritual experience, it may actually mean that he attained union with God. As many mystics have said, for the soul to attain union with the Divine, it is necessary to ‘die while living’ – to pass through the experience of death while still living in the body.

The third sage, Ben Zoma, went insane, since he could not integrate the spiritual life with the material. Perhaps he became confused by the vision of the marble plates.

The fourth, Elisha ben Abuyah, who suffered from doubt and confusion, perceived an inner duality in creation and subsequently lost his faith in God. To “cut the shoots” is an obscure expression, variously interpreted. Some say it means that he cut himself off from the one God of his tradition, and thus withered spiritually, like the cut shoots of a plant. His experience is described in the *Sefer Hekhalot (Book of the Chambers)*, where it is said that he saw the angel *Metatron* sitting on the throne of glory, surrounded by the divine powers of all nations. Thinking mistakenly that *Metatron* was

a power equal to God himself, he declared, “There are two powers in heaven.” Looking at the celestial realms from the human level, Elisha made the error of assuming that the power whom he had first encountered in his inner ascent was the Lord of the entire creation. In fact, he was only an intermediate lord or ruler. Elisha did not understand that his experience did not contradict his understanding of one God.

*Pardes* has also been understood as a symbol of the *Torah*, the Hebrew Bible, which was believed to be the Tree of Life or the way back to God, containing many hints of the true inner teaching. Jewish mystics even used the word *pardes* as a mnemonic for the four levels on which the *Torah* could be understood. As generally understood, P stands for *pshat*, or the literal level. R stands for *remez*, the level of allusion, hint or allegory. D stands for *drash*, the level of interpretation based on legend, symbolism and *aggadah* (Talmudic homilies). S stands for *sod*, the secret or esoteric, mystical meaning of the *Torah* as the Tree of Life, the inner spiritual journey back to God. Only a rare few would ever be taught the highest (*sod*) level of meaning.

Some of the mystics understood the *sod* level to be the path of permutation and combination of the letters of the *Torah* to reveal hidden, holy ‘names’ of God. Through concentration on these names, they would have ecstatic experiences and inner visions of higher realms, which they described as entering *pardes*.

See also: **gardens, Torah** (3.1).

1. *Song of Songs* 1:4.
2. *Psalm* 116:15.

**pasture(s)** See **gardens**.

**pātāl(a), pātāl(a) lok(a)** (S/H/Pu) *Lit.* place (*lok*) of *pātāla*, the name of one of the seven nether regions, described as being ‘below’ the earth and populated by serpents (*nāgas*) and demons; sometimes, the collective name of all seven; the subterranean regions; the third of the three worlds (*triloka*) of heaven (*devaloka*), earth (*mṛityuloka*) and the nether worlds (*pātālaloka*), according to Hindu mythology. The seven nether regions, in descending order, as described in the *Vedāntasāra* are:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Atala*            The abode of *yakshas* (nature spirits).
2. *Vitala*           The abode of an underworld people.
3. *Sutala*           The domain of Mahābālī, previously, by virtue of his