

Sefer Yetzira 1:5 — The Ten Directions (Omek / עֶמֶק)

Correspondence of the Ten Depths to the Ten Sefirot

According to the Arizal · Ra'avad · Isaac the Blind · Ramak (Cordovero) — based on Aryeh Kaplan's commentary

ספר יצירה א:ה

עשר ספירות בלימה

מדתן עשר שאין להם סוף

The Text (Sefer Yetzira 1:5)

עשר ספירות בלימה מדתן עשר שאין להם סוף
עמק ראשית ועמק אחרית עמק טוב ועמק רע
עמק רום ועמק תחת עמק מזרח ועמק מערב
עמק צפון ועמק דרום
ואדון יחיד אל מלך נאמן מושל בכלם ממעון קדשו עד גדי עד

Ten Sefirot of Nothingness — their measure is ten which have no end: a depth of beginning (omek reishit) and a depth of end (omek acharit); a depth of good (omek tov) and a depth of evil (omek ra); a depth of above (omek ma'alah) and a depth of below (omek matah); a depth of east and a depth of west; a depth of south and a depth of north. The singular Master — God, faithful King — rules over all of them from His holy abode, forever and ever.

Background

The opening chapter of Sefer Yetzira (Book of Formation) describes ten Sefirot as defining a five-dimensional space, each dimension formed by a pair of opposite 'depths' (omek). These ten directions are not merely geometric — they correspond to the ten divine emanations that structure all of reality.

Later kabbalists mapped these directions onto the classical ten Sefirot, but disagreed — sometimes sharply — on the correct assignments. The spatial six (above/below, east/west, north/south) show moderate agreement; the temporal and moral pairs (beginning/end, good/evil) are where the major disputes lie.

Aryeh Kaplan's critical commentary (Sefer Yetzira in Theory and Practice, Weiser 1997, pp. 60–79) synthesizes four of the most important authorities and presents their systems side by side.

The Four Authorities

Arizal —

R. Yitzchak Luria (1534–1572), Safed. His system is recorded by his disciple R. Chaim Vital in Etz Chaim. The Arizal makes the most distinctive assignments, especially placing Keter at 'Good' and Malkhut at 'Evil'.

Ra'avad —

R. Avraham ben David of Posquières (c. 1125–1198), Provence. One of the earliest Kabbalistic commentators on Sefer Yetzira. Assigns the beginning/end pair to Keter/Malkhut and places the moral pair at Chokhmah/Binah.

Isaac the Blind —

R. Yitzchak Sagi Nehor (c. 1160–1235), son of Ra'avad. Generally follows his father's framework but with distinctive emphases drawn from his broader teachings on Ayin and Machshava.

Ramak —

R. Moshe Cordovero (1522–1570), Safed. His Pardes Rimmonim is the systematic synthesis of all earlier Kabbalah before the Arizal. His spatial assignments often align with Ra'avad.

The Ten Directions — Sefirot Correspondence Table

Sefer Yetzira 1:5 · Kaplan commentary, pp. 60-79

Direction (Depth)	Hebrew (עמק)	Arizal R. Yitzchak Luria (Etz Chaim)	Ra'avad R. Avraham b. David of Posquières	Isaac the Blind R. Yitzchak Sagi Nehor (c. 1160-1235)	Ramak R. Moshe Cordovero (Pardes Rimoni)
		TEMPORAL PAIR — BEGINNING / END			
Depth of Beginning	עמק ראשית	Chokhmah	Keter	Keter	Keter
Depth of End	עמק אחרית	Binah	Malkhut	Malkhut	Malkhut
		MORAL PAIR — GOOD / EVIL			
Depth of Good	עמק טוב	Keter	Chokhmah	Chokhmah	Chokhmah
Depth of Evil	עמק בע	Malkhut	Binah	Binah	Binah
		SPATIAL PAIRS — ABOVE/BELOW, EAST/WEST, SOUTH/NORTH			
Depth of Above	עמק מעלה	Chesed	Netzach	Chesed	Netzach
Depth of Below	עמק מטה	Gevurah	Hod	Gevurah	Hod
Depth of East	עמק מזרח	Tiferet	Chesed	Tiferet	Chesed
Depth of West	עמק מערב	Yesod	Gevurah	Yesod	Gevurah
Depth of South	עמק דרום	Netzach	Tiferet	Netzach	Tiferet
Depth of North	עמק צפון	Hod	Yesod	Hod	Yesod

Sefirot colour key: Keter Chokhmah Binah Chesed Gevurah Tiferet Netzach Hod Yesod Malkhut