



*“Words from the Heart  
Enter the Heart”*

## BAMIDBAR > Korach

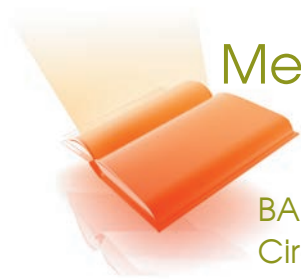
By Rabbi Simon Jacobson

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June 24, 2011

Korach

**Why Do We Need a Rebbe?  
Circles and Squares**



## Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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### ABSTRACT

“Why do we need a Rebbe?” is the question that Korach posed 3322 years ago to Moses, and is the question many people ask today 17 years after *Gimmel Tammuz*.

The answer then and now is that left on our own, without a Rebbe, we have no direction, no passion, no connection ... left on our own, we gravitate to self-interest, survival and self-preservation, all of which takes us off course in fulfilling our divine life mission.

In an entertaining comparison of two personality types – the “square” and the “circle” – we discover how the Rebbe helps us resolve one of the great life questions: Can we ever hope to balance our loftier, spiritual pursuits with our mundane, tangible realities? Can we bridge our transcendental needs and our struggle for material survival – or are the two destined to remain perpetually at odds?

Korach (in this week’s reading) and the scouts (in last week’s reading) personified two extremes – spiritual insulation and material immersion, which are also reflected into two personality types: the circle and the square.

Some people are squares, others circles. A square (according to Webster) is “a person who is conventional or conservative in taste or way of life.” Or a person who is very linear and limited and cannot see “out of the box” ... The circle, by contrast, is a personality that thrives on the abstract and intangible. “Circular” personalities are exciting, spontaneous, flexible. But they are also not necessarily grounded; you never know where they stand.

We all would like to have spouses/friends who embody the best of both worlds ... who are reliable, steady, solid ... straight shooters ... yet also fun, enchanting, adventurous. But is that possible? Aren't the two personality types diametric opposites? How then can we expect to fuse them together?

The Rebbe teaches us how to balance these two antithetical poles - reaching for heaven, keeping your head in the clouds, with your feet firmly planted on the ground. And this was something that Korach was lacking, as we learn in this week's Torah reading.

This is a two part sermon/class:

PART I: "Reconciling Two Personality Types" examines the square and circle through the eyes of this week's Torah reading, with a focus on leadership.

PART II: "The Mystical Understanding of a Jewish Wedding" examines the square and the circle through the eyes of Kabbalah with a focus on marriage.

**The second part contains material usable at a wedding ceremony.**

## WHY DO WE NEED A REBBE? CIRCLES AND SQUARES

### PART I:

#### RECONCILING TWO PERSONALITY TYPES

### 1. Men and Women (Joke)

A man is walking along the seashore when he comes upon an interesting looking old bottle. As he attempts to brush the dirt from it, a genie pops out.

The genie says, "Look, I'm really busy and only have time to grant you one wish, so make it good."

The man muses, “Well, I’ve always wanted to go to Hawaii, but I’m deathly afraid of flying, and I’m scared to sail on boats. I want you to make a long bridge that extends from California to Hawaii.” The genie says, “I don’t know about that. That’s a mighty big order, even for a genie. What would your second wish have been?”

“Well,” says the man, “I’d like you to tell me everything I need to know to understand women.” To which the genie immediately replies, “Did you want that to be two-lane or four-lane?”

It’s true – to men, women are incomprehensible, and vice versa. We’ve all heard that “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus,” which is one way of understanding people. But there are many other dichotomies.

We can divide people into left brain and right brain, into passive and proactive, into calculating and intuitive, into Type A (the high-strung) and Type B (the easy-going).

And today, I want to add a new dichotomy to the mix: circles and squares.

## 2. The Square Personality

Some people are like squares. Others like circles.

Webster’s Dictionary defines a square as “a person who is conventional or conservative in taste or way of life.” But we use the term today far more liberally. A square is often used in a derogatory way – as in “oh, that guy is so square” – signifying a person who is very linear and limited and cannot see “out of the box” ... a person who is bound by structured rules and schedules, and disturbed by anything spontaneous, different or fresh.

In Israel, such a person is called a *Yekke* from the word *Yacket*, which is the Israeli way of pronouncing *Jacket*. Not as in straight-jacket (though that would fit) but in reference to Jewish immigrants from Germany who were known to constantly wear jackets even on informal occasion. They tended to be straight-laced or square.

Here is an example of a *Yekke* joke:

A *Yekke* decides to take the train from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He books his trip weeks in advance and tells the travel agent, "There's only one thing I care about. I should be facing the same direction as the train is moving."

On the day of the trip, he arrives at the station an hour before departure (in true *Yekke* style). But when he boards the train, he is dismayed to find that his seat is facing in the wrong direction – toward the back of the train.

As soon as he gets to Jerusalem, he calls his travel agent to complain. The agent apologizes several times, and says, "Why didn't you ask the person sitting opposite you if he'd be willing to switch seats?"

"I would have," said the *Yekke*, "but I was out of luck. The seat opposite mine was empty."

### 3. The Circle Personality

The circle, by contrast, is a personality that thrives on the abstract and intangible. "Circular" personalities are exciting, spontaneous, flexible. But they are also not necessarily grounded. You never know where they stand. For all the monotony of a "square," you can depend on him. His coordinates are defined, and you can identify where he stands at any given location and time. A circle, on the other hand, has no beginning and no end, no top and no bottom.

In Israel, a circle personality defines most of the country. Unlike the *Yekke*, who is always early, the Israeli is always late. Events are scheduled accordingly. "Concert starts promptly at 7" really means "the orchestra will arrive at 7:30." Or, "the *chuppah* is set for 8 sharp" really means "if you leave your house then, you will still stand around for a half hour." It has gotten so bad, that a Knesset meeting set for Monday morning begins Tuesday afternoon.

In the world of colors, the square is black and white, perhaps even a bit gray. The circle is colorful, kaleidoscopic, ever-changing.

We all would like to have spouses/friends who embody the best of both worlds ... who are reliable, steady, solid ... straight shooters ... yet also fun, enchanting, adventurous. But is that possible? Aren't the two personality types diametric opposites? The straight line - the square - is reliable and consistent precisely because he or she is a square. And the spontaneous one is that way precisely because he or she is circular. How then can we expect to fuse them together?

#### 4. More Than Personality Types

Circle and square define much more than personality types. Many foundational principles of life can be understood and appreciated in terms of the circle and the square.

Eastern and Western thought, for instance, can be distinguished, in certain ways, as the difference between "circular" thinking and "linear (square)" thinking. A strong feature of Western philosophy lies in its rigid logic. This mathematical structure stands in stark contrast to Eastern philosophies, where logic and definitions are actually dissuaded, while abstraction and paradoxes are embraced. Wisdom is to be found by *transcending* - that is, by getting beyond our logical tools and experiencing a higher reality.

Both sides of the brain can also be compared to the square and the circle. The left-brain processes experiences as localized events, itemized, detail by detail. The right-brain thinks in terms of everything being part of a unified field of energy.

#### 5. In Science (Optional)

In science, too, Newtonian physics is often compared to the "billiard ball effect." The laws of the nature work like clockwork, absolutely predictable and deterministic. No matter how many times you hit a billiard ball, if you do so each time in the same exact way, with the exact same speed, angle and motion, its effect will always be the same.

Quantum mechanics, on the other hand, is ruled by states of “probability” instead of “certainty” ... by laws of “indeterminacy” and principles of “uncertainty.”

These ideas so disturbed Einstein that he dismissed them, saying that “G-d doesn’t play dice with the universe.” To which Neils Bohr purportedly replied: “Don’t tell G-d what to do.”

“Square” thinking distinguishes between a subject and an object, an observer and that which is being observed. “Circle” thinking sees them as one, an underlying unity connecting all the dots.

## 6. The Right Approach

So, the big question is which is the right approach? Both have legitimacy, both work, both have helped us develop extraordinary technologies. And if both have their virtues and both are necessary, how can such two opposites ever meet?

Just as the question looms about relationships, whether we can find a person with both “circle” and “square” qualities, the same can be asked about East and West, left and right, classic and quantum physics, defined pieces or one unified whole, and many other applications.

Was Kipling right when he wrote: “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”? Or is that not true?

For an answer, let us look to the Torah.

## 7. Parshat Shelach

Last week [in *Parshat Shelach*], we read how Moses sent out scouts to reconnaissance the Promised Land – to figure out how best to enter it – and they returned with a terrible report, driving fear into the entire nation.

The scouts were circular souls. As free spirits, who had been enjoying the spiritual closeness to G-d in the desert, they were unwilling to enter a land where they would have to fight and labor. They saw this overwhelmingly material world as a “land that consumes its inhabitants.”<sup>1</sup> Instead, they preferred to remain in their spiritual oasis, divinely protected in the wilderness from all the harsh elements.

They were, of course, gravely mistaken, and their sin brought on severe consequences that persist to this very day. But the error was not in their intentions; they were driven by the “circular” energy of the spirit, which in itself is noble and sublime.

However, it was also selfish. The purpose of existence is not to remain in the lofty worlds of circles and mystical spheres, but for the soul to descend into the “square” and defined universe, a material world of structure, governed by the linear elements of time and space.

For the purpose of all life is to infuse this “square” world with the boundless spirit of the “circle.”

## 8. Parshat Korach

In this week’s Torah reading [*Parshat Korach*] we read about the opposite phenomenon, which also produced disastrous results.

Korach was a square. Or at least, that’s how he presented himself. After witnessing the debacle of the scouts, and seeing how they were so wrong with their circular approach to life, wanting to remain removed and insulated from the material universe, Korach advocated the other extreme. We must enter the land of the “squares,” and play by their rules.

“Who needs leaders?” Korach argued, “when the entire nation is holy and G-d is amongst them.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Numbers 13:32.

<sup>2</sup>Numbers 16:3.



But Korach was also terribly wrong. Squares can't survive without circles, just as circles can't prevail without squares. Living in a material world, we can easily get distracted and lose our way without a spiritual compass. Therefore, we must always remain connected to our souls and to our spiritual leader, who helps us navigate and keep our heads looking upward. Just as the scouts erred by choosing spirit over matter, Korach erred by choosing matter over spirit, thereby suggesting that we do not need a soul and spiritual guide and can find G-dliness on our own.

Indeed, each of the three Hebrew letters comprising the name *Korach* are square shaped: *kuf*, *reish*, *chet*, each one with its own distortion of the symmetrical square letter *heh* (taken from G-d's name):

*Kuf* is a square with a protruding left leg. *Resh* is a square without a left leg. *Chet* is a closed square, with no release point. The only way a square can survive is either to be completely closed (like a closed *mem*), or through a spout of self-nullification, the *heh*, which has a balanced left leg, with a space between it and the roof of the box.

[But] Korach was too invested and too firmly grounded in the world of the squares to appreciate the circles. Wealthy, powerful, shrewd, well-connected – Korach had mastered the “square” game. While the scouts were not ready and not willing to enter the material land, Korach was all too ready and all too willing. He had it all worked out.

True, the scouts sinned in their wish to remain spiritual and not enter the material. But Korach's answer, presenting the other extreme, was equally problematic.

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<sup>2</sup>Numbers 16:3.

## 9. That Will Not Do

The Rebbe Rashab had a student who later entered the world of business. He manufactured galoshes in Eastern Europe where unpaved roads made them a valuable commodity, and he became quite wealthy. After a time, he came to visit the Rebbe Rashab, who took one look at him and seeing his total immersion in work, said, "I've seen feet in galoshes, but I've never seen a head in galoshes." The Rebbe saw that this man was living and breathing his business; his head, heart and spirit was totally invested in his materialistic pursuit.

Korach invested in and wanted materialism too much – and that will not do. It is, therefore, no surprise that the very earth/materialism Korach worshipped ended up consuming him and his cronies, exactly as the scouts had warned: materialism is "a land that consumes its inhabitants."

We must enter the land, but with trepidation. We must engage the world, but with a measure of detachment. We must immerse in daily pursuits, but never too much. Even on earth, we must reserve a space for heaven. Even with our feet firmly planted on the ground [in galoshes], we must keep our head in the skies, looking up, yearning, aspiring ... but never becoming too comfortable in this "square" land.

We were all sent here, *against* our soul's wishes. As we are taught in the *Ethics of the Fathers*: "Against your will you are born, against your will you live."<sup>3</sup> Our soul's natural inclination is to reach upward. Spirit ascends unto spirit. In the words of King Solomon: "The spirit of the animal descends downward," as does the animal's eyes, however "the spirit of man ascends upwards."<sup>4</sup>

Our souls are like flames, as the Book of Proverbs teaches, "The soul of a human being is the flame of G-d."<sup>5</sup> And like a flame, our souls gravitate upwards, always rising, forever licking the air above. Were in not for the grounding wick, the flame would expire in its upward reach.

<sup>3</sup> Avot 4:22.

<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastics 3:21.

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 20:27.

Even as we enter the “square” dimension of existence, we must never forget that we come from a greater place. We live here, occupy space and time on this material plane, but we come from beyond.

## 10. Why Do we Need Spiritual Leaders?

This explains Korach’s error in asking, “Who needs leaders, when the entire nation is holy and G-d is amongst them?”

Korach failed to (fully) understand the deceptively seductive nature of existence and its power. There is no doubt that “the entire nation is holy” and G-d can be found everywhere. The problem is that material life conceals the Divine within, and we can too easily convince ourselves that we and our myopic perceptions are “it.” Our self-contained experience and self-interest can become so intense that we can deceive ourselves into thinking that “me and nothing else” exists. So while in truth G-dliness is the soul of all existence and the “entire nation is holy,” we can be totally unaware of it.

Here lay Korach’s mistake – in his pompous overconfidence that material beings in a material world will be holy without the soul consciousness and without soulful connection provided by spiritual leaders. We need leaders to help us become G-d-centered instead of being self-centered.

## 11. Who is a True Leader?

Korach also erred in his understanding of the nature of a true leader. In his mind a leader meant a powerful person who serves as a human intermediary between G-d and the people, between the Torah’s truth and its students. He thought that a leader is defined by his strengths – his wisdom, his charisma, his wealth, all the qualities necessary to lead a large group of individuals.

A true leader is precisely the opposite. He is defined not by what he is, but by what he is not. The single most important quality of a true leader is: *bittul* – humility. (“Moses was the most humble among all people on earth.”<sup>6</sup>) He is invisible, and therefore becomes a vehicle for G-dliness ... he is a living example and the epitome of how G-d wants a person to be.

“Deifying” individuals is anathema to Judaism for it is idolatry, pure and simple. We only worship G-d and G-d alone. The greatness of a *Tzaddik*, a Rebbe, a Moses lies not in the power of the individual, but in the power of G-d that is working through that person. Indeed, there cannot be even the slightest tinge of individual ego or personality that gets in the way and does not allow the inherent G-dliness to shine through.

## 12. Moses in Each Generation

And the reason we need a Moses figure in each generation<sup>7</sup> is because we, as individuals, are consumed and overwhelmed by material life ... we have our egos and personalities that get in the way of accessing G-d and the Torah’s truth. We need a selfless leader, a teacher to guide us and show us the way to access our souls and G-d. And when he guides us, he does not show us how he accesses G-d, but how we have direct access to G-d through our divine souls.

The true leader, in other words, is not an intermediary that stands in the way between us and G-d – his selflessness and humility allow him to be a *transparent channel* in helping us connect to G-d in our own unique way. A true teacher does not teach his own truth, he teaches a higher truth, and he makes it clear that it belongs to the students as much as it belongs to the teacher. The true teacher has no ego. He recognizes at all times that he is merely a messenger passing on truth from a greater place.

<sup>6</sup>Numbers 12:3.

<sup>7</sup>See Zohar III 273a. Tikkunei Zohar 69.

Indeed, the greatest title of a Torah scholar is not *chacham*, a wise person, but talmid *chacham*, the student of a wise person.

### 13. Korach's Error

Korach did not get that. He did not understand (or chose to not understand) the true nature of a leader – one who is totally humble and selfless. For leadership is not about power and ambition; it is about humility and selflessness. And that is the reason that we can trust a true leader, and the reason G-d trusted Moses.

When G-d chose Moses to be the leader of the Jewish people, Moses strongly resisted: “I am a man of no words”<sup>8</sup> was one of the many arguments that Moses offered. G-d replied: “Who then gives a man the mouth to speak if not I.”<sup>9</sup> G-d essentially chose Moses precisely because he did not want the job, and because he would not speak his own words, only the words of G-d.

This type of leader was completely new to Korach and his men. No one had ever met a leader like that. So they challenged the very concept based on their limited experience. But, as a result of their argument, we gain a new understanding of the nature of a true leader. We owe Korach a great debt for serving as a vehicle for this Torah lesson, which clarifies for us the role of a true vs. true leadership.

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<sup>8</sup>Exodus 4:10.

<sup>9</sup>Exodus 4:11.

## 14. The Rebbe

Korach's story offers us a very relevant message today.

I submit that many of us are simply skeptical about a true leader – a Rebbe – because we never met one. The so-called “leaders” around us – political, business, sports, entertainment – are essentially nothing more than good administrators, or people driven by aggressive ambition that led them to climb the leadership ladder. I am not even addressing the rampant corruption surrounding leaders that we are all aware of and reminded of continuously.

I (and many of my colleagues), however, had the distinct privilege and honor to meet such a leader. A G-dly man entirely dedicated to a higher cause. His name was Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. But he was known as simply *the Rebbe* – the leader.

Humility defined his personality. He was a man in whose presence you felt not him, but yourself – you felt that you belong, that you matter and have an indispensable contribution to make in this world.

With all the current upheaval in a world that is rapidly changing right before our eyes, the void of true leadership is glaringly obvious. From the Rebbe, I learned how to access my own soul. I learned how to access the Torah and thousands of years of history and scholarship, in order to understand our lives today and the forces reshaping our geo-political as well as our psycho-spiritual landscapes.

From the Rebbe I learned how to love every Jew unconditionally, even those I may not agree with all the time. I learned how to teach values without being judgmental or condescending. I learned the dignity – the true dignity of every one of you, of every one of your family, of every soul in earth. And how each of us is absolutely necessary and indispensable in the scheme of things. I learned that we do not know – nor is it our role to define -- whose soul is greater than another.

Were it not for the Rebbe I would not be standing here today. Nor would I know what to say and have become part of this wonderful community.

On *Motzei Shabbat*, Parshat Korach, Saturday night of Tammuz 3 5754 (June 12, 1994), Korach's challenge to Moses manifested itself. And since then, we have all been challenged to understand the role of a Rebbe-leader in our lives.

In the last seventeen years – and especially in the last year – the world has changed dramatically, with many more changes to come. We are desperately in need of true leadership – and there is no question that G-d would not challenge us without providing us with the necessary tools. Even as Korach questions the role of leader, the continuing Torah reading provides us with the power to find the answer, that yes, we need a leader, and yes, Moses is G-d's chosen leader.

I turn to my Rebbe and his teachings – explaining the times in which we live from a Torah perspective – to make sense of the unsettling events surrounding us today, whether it is personal, collective and global. And I find enormous strength and clarity in the Torah vision.

I turn to the Rebbe as a soothing circle in a square and angular world, surrounding us in its embrace, empowering us to nurture the structured “box” of material life.

We each are challenged today to answer Korach's argument. If we do not want to be left floundering amidst countless questions in an increasingly confusing world, it behooves us to turn to Moses and his teachings for hope and direction. We need to discover the selfless leader that can help us see through the haze.

Oh, how we are in need for such a leader today...

## 15. The Final Analysis: Square Meets Circle

So to return to our circle/square analogy...

In the final analysis, the Torah – through the stories of Korach and the scouts – teaches us that we need to merge both the circle and the square. We cannot escape into a spiritual oasis. We must enter and engage this

material world. But at the same time we cannot allow ourselves to become submerged and consumed with material life and forget the mission for which we were sent here – to sublimate and spiritualize the physical and transform it into a divine home.

Therefore, in every one of our activities, we need to balance both extremes – keep our feet on the ground with our heads looking upward.

Even as we travel through our lives on earth we must always remember that we were blessed with wings that allow us to soar. These are the wings of our soul that allow us to rise above the earth and touch the heavens and beyond. Like Korach, each of us can forget this truth. We may convince ourselves that we can find G-d within our material indulgences. For without spiritual leaders and guides, it is very easy to forget how to fly, or even worse: that we have wings and the power to fly. The saddest thing to see is a person lose their innocence and then lose the confidence in their ability to soar, when we become resigned and give up on our hopes and dreams.

Yes, we have been sent here. We could not remain sheltered in the circular world of spirit. But even as we fulfill our mission in the material world, we always retain our desire to break out of the “square box” and rise toward transcendence.

We enter the square, but remain a circle.

But with dedication and humility, we can join the two together. Amen.



**PART II:  
THE MYSTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF  
THE JEWISH WEDDING**

**This part can stand alone with sections #1 thru #6 as introduction.**

**16. The Metaphysical Point of View**

Now, let examine the circle and the square from the metaphysical point of view.

In its core root, these two archetypes and two central approaches to life were formed by the spiritual gradations of the earliest primordial stages within the cosmic order. The chief work of the Kabbalah, the Zohar, refers to the circle and the square as two dimensions of divine energy:<sup>10</sup>

One dimension of energy the Zohar calls *iggulim* (“spheres”), describing an all encompassing energy, the “infinite light,” which, like a circle, is boundless. Its purpose is to maintain the divine integrity within existence, and infuse in us a sense of awe and humility. This opens us up to reach beyond our own limited self-interest and allows us to assimilate a perspective beyond our own limited faculties.

The second dimension of energy the Zohar calls *yosher* (“straight line”), describing a specific, finite energy, which defines the parameters of existence (like the square). Its role is to give us individuality and shape our personalities. This allows us to fully integrate any deeper experience into our beings (and not annihilate them).

Now perhaps there are circumstances when the main focus has to be on the line/square, while, in other instances, the converse is true. However, regardless which is primary, what is absolutely clear is that we are charged with integrating both elements – the square and the circle. The circle is needed to transcend and experience the infinite. The square is needed to ground the process in the finite structure.

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<sup>10</sup> Zohar I 5b.

## 17. Jewish Wedding

Still, the question remains: How is it possible to synthesize such two opposites?

This question can be answered by first gaining a better understanding of the circle/ square dynamic.

One place where circles play a vital role is in a Jewish wedding ceremony. Two circles mark the ceremony: the *chupah* (canopy), which encompasses both bride and groom in its all-surrounding embrace; and the spherical wedding ring placed on the bride's index finger.

According to Torah law, marriage entails two distinct stages:

- 1) The first stage, called *kidushin*, is the betrothal, when two people commit to each other, establishing a formal and exclusive connection. They have sanctified their union and bound themselves to each other. However, they are still two distinct individuals.
- 2) The second stage, *nisuin*, is when they actually become one entity - they become elevated to a higher state of being. Instead of two, they are now one.

Stage one is traditionally achieved through the wedding ring. Stage two is accomplished through the *chupah*, encircling both bride and groom.

The wedding ring is a legal commitment, represented by a monetary exchange. But it still is only a ring on a finger; a small gesture, not an all encompassing commitment. The *chupah*, on the other hand, covers and surrounds bride and groom completely - embracing their entire bodies and beings.

## 18. What Distinguishes Them?

The Tzemech Tzedek<sup>11</sup> wonders about the difference between these two circles marking a wedding ceremony.

In mystical terminology the circles represent the level of *makif*, a transcendent energy that surrounds, but does not fully enter. Since both the wedding band and the chupah are circular, what, asks the Tzemech Tzedek, distinguishes between them?

He explains the difference with the imagery of the square and the circle. Though in the general cosmic structure the circle precedes the square, the energy first surrounds then permeates, yet when we break it down into finer detail, the “circle-square” structure repeats itself continuously throughout the process.

The first initial circle proceeds to evolve into a “line” (*yosher*), which in turn conceives a new circle, followed by another square and circle, ad infinitum.

By way of example, think of the transmission process from teacher to his students. Initially the ideas are “over the students’ head,” surrounding but not yet fully entering their grasp. Then, as the students acclimate themselves to the ideas, they assimilate, integrate and internalize them, and the circle becomes, in effect, a square, entering the “box” of the students’ mind.

But these same ideas (which have been internalized in a square for the advanced students) remain over the head of less advanced students.

And so it goes, level after level, in which the square/internalized energy on a level above remains a removed circle, hovering above the level below. “The internal (*penimiyos*) of a higher level becomes the transcendent (*makif*) of the lower level.”

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<sup>11</sup> *Ohr HaTorah Berocho*, p. 1845.

## 19. Two Types of Circles

We thus have two types of circles: 1) a circle that precedes and is higher than a square; and 2) a circle that is lower and follows a square.

Visualize a large circle, which contains a square within it, stretched to the edges of the circumference, and then a smaller circle inside the square, and another smaller square inside the circle. Keep going as far as you imagine, you will grasp a certain picture of the inner workings of existence and of our beings.

Using this imagery, the Tzemech Tzedek explains the difference between the two stages in marriage:

The first circle is a “relative circle” – it is only a circle compared to the levels beneath it. This is the circle of the wedding band. The circle of the *chupah* is an “absolute circle” – one that totally encompasses and equalizes all those that stand under the *chupah*, i.e. everything inside the circle.

## 20. Two Components of Healthy Relationship

What is the psychological and personal application of this concept? Why do we need these two stages and what is the difference between them?

These two stages – two circles and the box in between – capture the two components necessary in a healthy and enduring relationship.

Love is a deceptively simple word. What the elaborate wedding process teaches us is the inner engineering of love. By understanding it, we can make it work better, identify the areas that need reinforcement, and those that may be hurt and need healing.

Love actually consists of two overriding dimensions: 1) closeness and intimacy – that is, internalization of the relationship; and 2) a dimension of mystery and awe – that is, a surrounding type of aura of your partner that remains beyond you.

Eliminate (or compromise) one of these two dimensions and the vitality and passion in the relationship will wither. For a relationship requires both the circle and the square – the transcendent energy and the internal one.

For a relationship to thrive you need to always feel respect and be humble before your soul-mate. If you take your spouse for granted or you feel you “own” him/her, the relationship will ultimately erode. On the other hand, if there is only respect and no closeness and integration, that too is a red flag.

A healthy relationship is a constant dance balancing both poles. As one great rabbi once told a couple not getting along: “If you are close when you should be distant, you will be distant when you should be close.”

## 21. Two Dimensions of the Circle

Breaking it further down, the circle *itself* divides into two dimensions. For if a relationship consisted only of the two elements, closeness and awe, the two would possibly never converge. Ultimately, the goal in a full relationship is the unification not just of the two people but also of their “circular” and “square” dimensions.

And this is achieved by the so-called “relative circle.” From one perspective the relative circle is actually a square, but from another perspective, it is a “circle.”

## 22. In Psychological Terms

In psychological terms:

You sense mystery in your beloved, but in time you gain entry and can somewhat internalize it and grow in the process, only to discover – like the shedding petals of a flower – new and hitherto deeper mysteries lying within.

The wedding ring serves this role, to remind you of the ungraspable “circle” in your spouse, but also to tell you that with devotion you can access its power.

The *chupah* serves the role of reminding you that there are always new mysteries, and that ultimately there is a dimension that transcends both of you.

### 23. The Element of Mystery (Optional Story)

There is a very interesting custom in a Jewish wedding.<sup>12</sup> Before the ceremony, the groom goes to the room where his bride is waiting and covers her face with a veil. He then leaves her and goes to wait for her under the *chupah*.

The traditional explanation for this is that he is checking to make sure he has got the right bride. Why? Because Jacob was the victim of a last-minute switch by his father-in-law, who substituted Leah, the older of his two daughters, for Rachel, the one Jacob loved. Jacob discovered the deception after he consummated the marriage with Leah, in the dark. Although not happy with being swindled, Jacob decided to accept his fate nevertheless, and later also married Rachel.

But if today’s groom were indeed checking the bride to make sure he got his beloved, shouldn’t he *uncover* her face and escort her personally to the ceremony, never taking his eyes off her?

But he doesn’t do that. He covers her and walks away. So there must be more to it.

Indeed there is. All this is a ceremony acknowledging the mystery of marriage.

Leah represented the woman of mystery whom Jacob was meant to marry. Rachel represented the revealed one, the choice he made.

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<sup>12</sup> *Endless Light* by Rabbi David Aaron, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997, p. 37.

When you get married, the truth is that although you think you are marrying the spouse of your choice, there is bound to be an element of mystery. Later, you will discover that you ended up also with Leah, who is the side of your spouse you never knew you were getting. And this is exactly what you need.

In Jacob's case, Leah proved to be exactly what he needed – the source of enormous blessing to him, the mother of ten of his twelve sons, and in the end, she was the one with whom he was buried.

## 24. The *Chupah* and the Ring

When a new couple stands under the *chupah*, they are in effect declaring exactly that – we submit to the ultimate mystery that hovers above us like the canopy over our heads.

And this is also how they unite the two opposites of the circle and the square – through the *chupah's* transcendent power. For the *chupah* equalizes everything inside its “circle,” elicits a sense of utter humility, a suspension of self and self-interest.

Yet, love cannot remain a hovering circle. It must also enter their beings and affect their lives. When the bride and groom look at the wedding ring, it reminds them of the “circle” entering life, affecting one finger (a line), and traveling onward.

Slowly, one step at a time, the circle energy permeates, only to reveal another circle. And so it goes in a healthy relationship. Two people embark on one journey – a perpetual journey, that brings them close as “one flesh,” while also exposing them to the secrets beyond.

## 25. Ultimate Secret: *Bittul*

Humility (or self-nullification) called *bittul* in Hebrew is the ultimate secret to enduring success and to all lasting relationships. When the two people in a relationship both have *bittul* and are driven not merely by personal gain (“what is in it for me?”) but by a vision that is beyond them both (to build and home and family, to generate an energy in this world that transcends their immediate needs), this opens them up to receive the full blessing and benefit that comes from the “great circle,” which transcends all ups and downs and all gradations, changes and vicissitudes in life.

With *bittul*, they transcend the very difference between the infinite “circle” and the defined “square,” so that the circle and the square can come together. When each partner feels that “it’s not all about me” and my personality, but we have a mission to accomplish together, then their differences become their assets: complementary forces driven to achieve a higher goal. At the same time, the love becomes internalized, infusing them with warmth and nurturing, nourishing their souls and bodies to thrive and grow.

So remember the secret to enduring and healthy relationships: *bittul*. Go beyond yourself and you will find true and everlasting love. If you are a circle learn and appreciate the virtues of the square. If you are a square learn and appreciate the virtues of the circle. Each has something to give. Each has something to learn. Each is an equal part of a mysterious drama that is conceived in the cosmos but plays itself out on earth.

In such a world, with such an attitude, a circle and a square can indeed marry and enjoy a happy life together. Living happily ever after. Amen.