

# SEFER YETZIRAH 1.13



**משנה י"ג:** בירר שלש אותיות מן הפשוטות בסוד שלש  
אמות אמ"ש וקבעם בשמו הגדול וחתם בהם ששה קצוות. חמש  
רום ופנה למעלה וחתמו ביה"ו. שש חתם תחת ופנה למטה וחתמו  
בהי"ו. שבע חתם מזרח ופנה לפניו וחתמו בוי"ה. שמונה חתם  
מערב ופנה לאחוריו וחתמו בוה"י. תשע חתם דרום ופנה לימינו  
וחתמו ביו"ה. עשר חתם צפון ופנה לשמאלו וחתמו בהו"י:

1.13: He chose three letters from among the Elementals [in the mystery of the three Mothers Alef Mem Shin] And He set them in His great Name and with them, He sealed six extremities. Five: He sealed "above" and faced upward and sealed it with Yud Heh Vav. Six: He sealed "below" and faced downward and sealed it with Heh Yud Vav. Seven: He sealed "east" and faced straight ahead and sealed it with Vav Yud Heh. Eight: He sealed "west" and faced backward and sealed it with Vav Heh Yud. Nine: He sealed "south" and faced to the right and sealed it with Yud Vav Heh. Ten: He sealed "north" and faced to the left and sealed it with Heh Vav Yud. (*Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation*)

1.13: IT selected three letters from the plain ones, in mysterious counsel with the three mothers aleph-mem-shin, and IT placed them in ITS Great Name, and sealed/completed with them six extremes. Five: IT sealed/completed height and turned ITS attention to ascent and sealed/completed it with yud-hey-vav. Six: IT sealed/completed below and turned ITS attention to beneath and sealed/completed it with yud-vav-hey. Seven: IT sealed/completed east and turned ITS attention to front and sealed/completed it with hey-yud-vav. Eight: IT sealed/completed west and turned ITS attention to behind and sealed/completed it with hey-vav-yud. Nine: IT sealed/completed south and turned ITS attention to the right side and sealed/completed it with vav-yud-hey. Ten: IT sealed/completed north and turned ITS attention to the left side and sealed/completed it with vav-hey-yud.

*(Doc Benton translation)*

As we will soon see, the letters *aleph*, *mem*, and *shin* are known as the *three mother letters*, and they correspond to *air*, *water*, and *fire*. This is because the Hebrew word for *air* is *avir* (*aleph-vav-yud-resh*), the Hebrew word for *water* is *myeem* (*mem-yud-mem*), and the Hebrew word for *fire* is *aish* (*aleph-shin*). Also, to follow our pattern of three, *water* and *fire* are opposites and *air* is the substance that mediates between the two.

The most sacred name for *God* in Hebrew is spelled *yud-hey-vav-hey*, and the letters *yud*, *hey*, and *vav* are called father letters. We have *aleph* corresponding to *yud*, *mem* corresponds to *hey*, and *shin* corresponds to *vav*. Furthermore, with three letters, such as *yud*, *hey*, and *vav*, six different permutations are possible, and these are used to define and seal the six directions. And by sealing we mean completing and establishing a boundary that will define 3-dimensional space.

There are variations from one ancient text to another regarding the order in which the permutations are presented, but the arrangement given in the passage above, which I've taken from the *short version* of the *Sefer Yetzira*, is, in my opinion, the best in that it represents a gradual transition from spirit to matter, from perceived holiness to concealed holiness. To understand the translation, you have to know that *God* is often referred to in mystical literature as the *King* (represented by *yud*, the first letter in *God's* name) and the creation is referred to as the *Daughter* (represented by *hey*, the second and last letter in *God's* name). Additionally, the letter *vav* is a connective that in Hebrew grammar is the word "*and*," and thus, it represents joining or union.

Hence, a permutation such as *yud-hey-vav* can now be interpreted as “*King-Daughter united*,” a union between opposites with nothing intervening. The complete list of interpretations and a table showing the permutations used in the other major versions of the text are given on the next slide.

## THE SIX DIRECTIONS

Direction	<i>Assembler</i>	<i>GRA</i>	<i>Short</i>	<i>Long</i>	<i>Saadia</i>
Up	YHV	YHV	YHV	HYV	YHV
Down	YVH	HYV	YVH	YVH	YVH
East	HYV	VYH	HYV	VYH	HVY
West	HVY	VHY	HVY	VHY	HYV
North	VYH	YVH	VYH	YVH	VYH
South	VHY	HVY	VHY	HVY	VHY



*Yud-hey-vav: King-Daughter united.* The *King* and the *Daughter* are one, and there is no separation between them. Maximum oneness and holiness. Above.

*Yud-vav-hey: King and Daughter.* The *vav* now creates separation between the *King* and the *Daughter*, but the permutation still begins with the *King*. One level down in holiness. Below.

*Hey-yud-vav: Daughter-King-united.* The *Daughter* and the *King* are together, but the *Daughter* appears first. The focus now is not on spirit, but on the creation as indicated by the first letter *hey*, and again, there has been a decrease in the perception of holiness. The *King* is partially obscured by the *Daughter*. One more level of decrease in the degree to which the *King* is revealed. East.

*Hey-vav-yud: Daughter and King.* The *vav* once again creates separation between the *Daughter* and the *King*, and the *King* appears last while the *Daughter* appears first. Holiness is even more concealed. Another decrease in holiness by one level. West.

*Vav-yud-hey: United King-Daughter.* This time neither the *yud* nor the *hey* appears first. The focus is on relationships between things as indicated by the leading letter *vav*. Again, holiness has been obscured by one more level. South.

NOTE: Since *vav* represents the word “and” in Hebrew, it establishes a connection or relationship between two objects, A and B.

*Vav-hey-yud: United Daughter-King.* In our final direction, the *vav* appears first and the *yud* appears last. Thus, the *King* is hidden or obscured to the utmost as one would expect in the far north where life can be harsh and the bounty found in the south is no longer present. Minimum revealed holiness. North.

The letter *yud* begins the permutations on the up-down axis, the letter *hey* begins those on the east-west axis, and the letter *vav* begins the permutations found on the north-south axis. Since these father letters correspond to *aleph*, *mem*, and *shin*, this also tells us that the up-down axis corresponds to *aleph*, the east-west axis corresponds to *mem*, and the north-south axis corresponds to *shin*. Thus, the three mother letters define 3-dimensional space. Also, don't forget that the up-down axis is the axis of *spirit*, the east-west axis is the axis of the *earth* or *creation*, and the north-south axis is the axis of *relationship*. *Air, water, and fire*.