SEFER YETZIRAH 1.3



משנה ג': עשר ספירות בלימה במספר עשר אצבעות חמש כנגד חמש וברית יחיד מכוון באמצע במילת הלשון ובמילת המעור:

1.3: Ten sefirot of nothingness in the number of ten fingers, five opposite five with a singular covenant precisely in the middle in the circumcision of the tongue and in the circumcision of the membrum.

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

1.3: Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint in number. Ten fingers, five against five, and a unifying alliance oriented in the middle in the cut of the tongue and in the cut of the flesh.

(Doc Benton translation)

The fundamental pattern in the created universe is always that of two opposites connected by an intermediary that allows dynamic communication and interchange to occur. In the human body, a natural anatomical division is five fingers opposite five on the hands. As for the tongue, it can be thought of as either the intermediary between the left and right hemispheres of the brain (it expresses the result of the coordination of the two), or as the intermediary between the brain and the outside world. In the *Talmud* we read about the difficulties involved in controlling the tongue.

"Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Joseph ben Zimra, 'What is the meaning of, "What shall be given to you, and what shall be done more to you, you deceitful tongue (Psalm 120:3)!" The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the tongue, "All members of the human body are standing, you are lying. All members of the human body are outside, you are guarded inside. Not only that, but I surrounded you with two walls, one of bone and one of flesh. What shall be given to you, what shall be done more to you, you deceitful tongue!""" (B. Arachin 15b)

Hence, circumcision of the tongue refers to the need for control and restraint in one's speech. Similarly, one could think of the male sexual organ as physically being another "tongue," and it serves as the intermediary between the opposites of male and female during sexual union. Furthermore, the text suggests that the male organ also needs to be constrained and controlled. And what do we gain by such control? Freedom! Through regulation of our thoughts and desires, we gain the power to make our own decisions rather than becoming a slave to our immediate whims. Furthermore, the text suggests at this point that the intermediary between the two opposites is always to serve as a control or regulatory mechanism between the energies of the two poles.

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32)

"Ben Zoma said, 'Who is wise? He that learns from every man. ... Who is mighty? He who subdues his evil inclination. ... Who is rich? He that rejoices in his lot. ... Who is honored? He that honors every one of his fellows."

(Pirkei Avot 4:1)