

SEFER YETZIRAH 3.2



משנה ב': שלש אמות אמ"ש סוד גדול מופלא ומכוסה וחתום
בשש טבעות ויצאו מהם אויר מים אש ומהם נולדו אבות ומאבות
תולדות:

3.2: Three Mothers: Alef Mem Shin A great, mystical secret covered and sealed with six rings And from them emanated air, water and fire And from them are born Fathers, and from the Fathers, descendents.

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

3:2 Three mothers aleph-mem-shin, a great and wondrous secret, covered and sealed with six rings, and out of them air, water, fire, and from them originated fathers (yud-he-vav), and from fathers, consequences.

(Doc Benton translation)

From three objects you can make six permutations, and these permutations represent the six directions. These directions, in turn, define our 3-dimensional world, and the perception of this world covers and hides the true nature of reality. Note, too, that in previous times a ring was used to impress a wax seal upon a document. Thus, the rings mentioned in the passage above refer to the six seals defined by the six directions. Additionally, the three mother letters *aleph*, *mem*, and *shin* represent *air*, *fire*, and *water*, and from these come the three father letters of *yud*, *hey*, and *vav*, which are the letters of the most sacred name for *God*.

Thus, that which is beyond perception creates a finite world through the pattern of three, through the process of two opposites and communication between them. And in this world we turn the inconceivable into the conceived concept of the *Father God* whose name is spelled out by using the *father letters*, and from this *God* image, we have consequences.

It is interesting to note that the *mother letters* precede the *father letters*, and so it is in many cultures where the universe is born of the *mother* and not the *father*. In the *Sefer Yetzira*, the actual order seems to be that first there is the *Unknowable* state that is beyond the subject/object dichotomy, and this is followed by the *mother letters* which are then followed by the *father letters*. The precedence of the *feminine* over the *masculine* is also hinted at in the very spelling of the most sacred name for *God*, *yud-hey-vav-hey*. This name ends in the letter *hey*, and in Hebrew this letter ending usually indicates a *feminine* word.

However, to some this might seem to be a heretical doctrine that even hints at goddess worship, and thus, all the more reason to hide the authorship of the *Sefer Yetzira* and to limit its distribution. In later *Kabbalah*, however, on the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* we find this order reversed with the *male* principle preceding the *female* as we go from the formless top of the tree to the *male right side* and then to the *female left side*. By placing the male principle first, later *Kabbalah* seems to be following the pattern of *Genesis* where *Adam's* creation comes before *Eve's*.

However, another argument for the *feminine* preceding the *masculine*, aside from the fact that women physically give birth, is the fact that the male has a penis, and as we learned in verse 1.3, the sexual organ of the male is symbolic of the connecting link or interaction between gender opposites. Thus, you cannot have the *masculine* and *interaction* without already having the *feminine*, and therefore, it is not possible for the *masculine* to come before the *feminine* (according to this argument).

In *Genesis Rabbah 1:15* there is an intriguing argument about which was created first, *heaven* or *earth*, and this argument can also be seen as symbolic of a discussion on whether the *masculine* preceded the *feminine* or vice-versa. The final conclusion is that both were created simultaneously, and this is true up to a point. In other words, opposites are always created in pairs without one coming before the other, and this is the case in both particle physics and in metaphysics. This is also yet another explanation of why the *Torah* begins with the letter *bet* which represents the number two. The created world appears with a minimum of two things, not one.

However, even though opposites are created simultaneously, interaction between opposites happens afterwards, and since the male sexual organ represents an interaction occurring between those opposites, the text wisely has the feminine coming before the interactive masculine, i.e. female before interaction.

All of the above is sometimes experienced by those who have progressed far with meditation. For those who have been fortunate enough to experience transcendence of the subject/object dichotomy, they may realize that as they come back to their base state of consciousness that the first thing to pick up again is the separation of *Oneness* into a subject observing a vast sea of nothingness as its object. At this point, there is still no movement or thoughts or interaction between the two. That is something that begins later. In other words, first there is the *One* followed by the *female/male* pair, and finally there is the interaction between the two.