

KABBALAH CLASS



A SELF-PACED GUIDE FOR THE SERIOUS STUDENT

By

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**DEDICATED TO
MY BELOVED SUSAN**



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CHAPTER 1

BEGINNINGS

“It is an exceedingly difficult matter, and no person can fathom it.”

(Genesis Rabbah VI:8)

Why is this book on *Kabbalah* different from all other books on *Kabbalah*? Well, there are a lot of differences. For one thing, everything I talk about is based on personal experience and not just book knowledge. However, at the same time you will also find many textual references and excerpts liberally scattered throughout this book. In this regard, this book is also (hopefully) a good introduction to the larger body of rabbinic and mystical Jewish literature. Additionally, this book is in many respects two books in one. The primary book is the narrative that I am writing now just from memory and from my own experiences. The secondary book is comprised of all the supporting texts from the *Talmud*, *Midrash Rabbah*, *Sefer Yetzirah*, *Bahir*, *Zohar*, and other important source materials. These textual references not only add support to my own arguments, they also introduce the reader to the incredibly wonderful world of rabbinic thought and logic. In general, the supporting texts will be indented and italicized, and because this work is essentially two books in one, there are several ways to read it. One could simply read the narrative from beginning to end, or one could read my writings along with the quotations from rabbinic literature side by side. Either way, I hope it will be a good experience for you.

The term *Kabbalah* comes from the Hebrew verb “to receive,” and it came into use probably sometime between the 11th and 13th centuries. Consequently, many people use it to refer to the writings and trends of Jewish mysticism from that time on. I, however, will use the term to refer to the entire corpus of Jewish mysticism. On the one hand, this is simply for convenience, but on the other hand, this is also a reminder that *Kabbalah* did not just appear out of nowhere in the 13th century with the publication of the *Zohar* by Rabbi Moses de Leon. Instead, the roots of modern *Kabbalah* extend back to the very early days of Jewish mysticism and rabbinic thought, and part of what I want to do is to trace this development over time, and show you what portions of earlier strands of thought are important for understanding the later strands.

As a scholar, I am admittedly not the best in the world. I know an awful lot more than the average person about the literature of *Kabbalah* and Jewish mysticism, but at the same time, certainly a lot less than the world’s top academic scholars. However, the understanding of any mystical tradition also depends upon personal experience, and that is what can level the playing field and make this book a little bit more unique. Direct mystical experience is not generally found within the confines of the classroom. It happens in its own time. Furthermore, from time to time I will also draw upon my knowledge of math and science in order to provide more contemporary explanations for the concepts of *Kabbalah*. There are many places in rabbinic literature where it is remarkable how the ancient sages correctly guessed the nature of the universe even though their arguments were different from those of modern scientists. Nonetheless, the parallels can be fascinating.

One tool that we will frequently make use of in this book is the ancient art of *gematria*. This is essentially Jewish numerology. In ancient Judaism, the alphabet is also the number system, and, hence, every letter has a numerical value. This has led to a very intriguing way of exploring text by creating equivalences between words that have the same numerical value. In this regard, the word *Kabbalah* has the same numerical value ($kuf + bet + lamed + hey = 100 + 2 + 30 + 5 = 137$) as the Hebrew word *motzah* ($mem + vav + tzaddi + aleph = 40 + 6 + 90 + 1 = 137$) that I render as “utterance” in the well-known passage from *Deuteronomy* that “*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every utterance that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*” This, to me, expresses the essence of *Kabbalah*. The entire subject, in a nutshell, is devoted simply to understanding that which *God* has uttered and that gives life to those that receive it. That is all. That is the whole thing that we are trying to understand. How this universe works and how *God* did it.

“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every utterance that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” (Deuteronomy 8:3)

And finally, all I can say is that I hope you enjoy this work. It covers many important trends from the past two thousand years of Jewish mysticism. It doesn’t cover everything, but then again, no book can. However, it does cover what I consider the basics for someone who might want to take a series of classes on *Kabbalah* in order to get a thorough introduction. It is a compilation of many of the things I’ve learned and experienced over the years, and in that regard, I should also mention that I never consider

Kabbalah to be a done and finished deal. For over two thousand years people have created new *Kabbalah* and added their own insights to what those before them have learned. Likewise, I try to do the same, and I hope my experiences can also provide some valuable insights for you. Enjoy!



Christopher P. Benton

CHAPTER 2

WISDOM AND THE JOY OF RABBINIC LITERATURE

“I bear witness and warn you concerning two things: That none of those who descend to the Merkaba (the chariot) succeed to descend except only he who has these two qualifications: He who has read the Bible and studied mishnah (the oral law), midrash (interpretive discussions), halakhot (the law) and aggadot (ethical stories), and the explanation of halakhot as to what is forbidden and permitted; and he who has fulfilled all that is written in the law and keeps all warnings of statutes and of judgments and of laws that were declared to Moses on Sinai.”

(Hekalot Rabbatai, Chapter XX)

So many people who are interested in *Kabbalah* want to immediately jump into the *Zohar*, that voluminous work of midrashic mysticism and *Bible* commentary that was composed in the 13th century. However, to do so is, in many ways, a grave error. Those who do so and who are so enamored of the *Zohar* tend to forget that none of this stuff sprang up overnight. Instead, there was a gradual progression and development of mystical thought in Judaism, and the ideas of the *Zohar* have their basis in earlier rabbinical ideology. Furthermore, as you read the *Zohar* and other medieval works of Jewish mysticism, you find frequent references to the *Wisdom Literature* of the *Bible* as well as a few other books. The *Wisdom Literature* generally includes the *Book of Job*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Proverbs*, *Song of Songs*, and various *Psalms*. This is the literature that often addresses the problems and inequities in life as well as various other aspects of the human condition. Add to this list *Genesis*, *Ezekiel*, and *Isaiah*, and you have a fairly complete account of

those works that are most frequently referenced by the later mystical writings. You also have what I consider a bridge between *Torah* and the mystical explanations of the universe that were developed later.

If I had to make a list of all of what one should know something about before jumping into *Kabbalah*, it would certainly include the following texts:

- *The Bible* – In Judaism, the Jewish *Bible* is known as the *Tanach*, which is an acronym for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* (prophets), and *Ketuvim* (writings).
- *The Talmud* – There were two *Talmuds* written, but the one that is usually referenced is the one that was constructed in ancient Babylonia. The *Talmud* consists of the *Mishnah* (the Oral Law) and the *Gemara* (rabbinical commentary on the *Mishnah*). The *Talmud* also contains discussions on *halachah* (the law, literally ‘the way’) and *aggadah* (moral stories and parables). References to chapters or ‘tractates’ from the *Babylonian Talmud* are prefaced by the letter ‘B.’ for ‘Babylonia.’
- *The Midrash* – The word *midrash* means ‘interpretation,’ and for me, the *Midrash Rabbah* collection is even more phenomenal than the *Talmud*. Whereas the *Talmud* is arranged by topic such as festivals, civil law, etc., the *Midrash Rabbah* collection is more a line-by-line commentary on books in the *Bible*, and much of the folklore of current Judaism and *Kabbalah* finds its origin and explanation in the *midrash*.

The better our understanding of the above literature, the deeper will be our understanding of *Kabbalah*. Now, below are a few of my favorite strands of thought from this literature that have been carried forward into either later *Kabbalah* or mainstream Judaism.

The Incredible Book of Ecclesiastes

The book of *Ecclesiastes*, in my humble opinion, is both one of the most remarkable and most misunderstood books in the *Bible*. Probably the most misconstrued passage for English readers of the text is the often repeated phrase, “*vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*” I have met more than one person who simply thinks that this is an admonition not to be overly vain about one’s appearance. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The real meaning of this passage is far deeper. The translation “*vanity of vanities, all is vanity*” comes directly from the Latin Vulgate “*vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas,*” while the original Hebrew says “*havel havelim, hachol havel.*” The Hebrew word *hevel* means steam or vapor. It refers to something lacking in substance. It is akin to us saying today that something is nothing but hot air. Thus, more appropriate translations would be “*futility of futility, all is futile*” or “*vapor of vapors, all is lacking in substance!*”

“The words of Kohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Futility of futilities, said Kohelet, futility of futilities; all is futile.”

(Ecclesiastes 1:1-2)

There are passages in the *Bible* that link this Hebrew word for *vapor* to the word for *shadow*, and this leads to yet an even deeper understanding of the passage. The ancient rabbis now begin to think in terms of shadows that have substance versus shadows that are lacking in substance. For instance, the shadow cast by a cloud or a flock of birds is seen as lacking in substance since these shadows are caused by ephemeral conditions. However, the shadow cast by something like a tree or a mountain that can symbolize permanence does have substance. Two things are now going on here. First, the emphasis on shadows suggests that the reality we perceive is in some sense just a pale image of some other more substantial reality¹. And second, those things which are reflections of eternity have substance while those things which reflect merely passing conditions are lacking in substance. Apply this to your own life for a minute. What has real substance in your life? What really matters in life? Love? Wisdom? And what has no real substance in your life? Moments of anger as you drive along the highway? Getting the last cookie on the plate? See what I mean?

“For who knows what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spends as a shadow?”

(Ecclesiastes 6:12)

“Man is like a breath (la-hevel); his days are like a passing shadow.”

(Psalm 144:4)

¹ One cannot help but notice a similarity here between what the rabbis are thinking and Plato’s allegory of the *Cave of Shadows*.

“If life is like the shadow cast by a wall, there is substance in it. If it is like the shadow cast by a date-palm, there is substance in it! David came and explained, “His days are as a shadow that passes away (Psalm 144:4).” Rav Huna said in the name of Rabbi Aha, “Life is like a bird which flies past and its shadow passes with it.” Samuel said, “It is like the shadow of bees in which there is no substance at all.”

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah I:3)

The opening words of *Ecclesiastes* identify the speaker as a *son of David* and a *king of Jerusalem*, and so everyone automatically assumes we are talking about *Solomon*. However, the speaker in *Ecclesiastes* is never referred to by that name. Instead, he is referred to as *Kohelet* or *The Kohelet*. In English translations this name is often translated as “*the teacher*” or “*the preacher*.” However, if we examine the word in Hebrew, then it seems to be related to the verb *hikahel*, to assemble. This makes sense because it is said that *Solomon* was able to assemble the teachings of Torah in ways that made it easy for people to understand.

“And because Kohelet was wise, he also taught the people knowledge. He pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs (Ecclesiastes 9:12).”
He pondered the words of the Torah and he investigated the meanings of the words of the Torah. He made handles for the Torah, so that it would be easy for the people to grasp.”

(Song of Songs Rabbah I:8)

One of the more important and more mysterious passages in *Ecclesiastes* is “*He has put a world/eternity/enigma in their heart so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)*” As the middle part of this rendering indicates, there is one word in the verse that is rather difficult to translate. The word in Hebrew is *ha-olam* which can mean either *the eternity* or *the world*. However, in the text the word is misspelled. It is written without the usual letter *vav*, and this allows the word to be read as *heh-eh-lame* which means *hidden*. Furthermore, *olam* (*ayin-lamed-mem*) as spelled in the text has a *gematria*², a numerical value, of 140. This is the same as the numerical value of *hikahel* (*hey-kuf-hey-lamed*), the verb “to assemble” from which the appellation *Kohelet* is derived. Consequently, the meaning of *Ecclesiastes 3:11* can now be greatly expanded. We could say that it means that there is something hidden within our hearts that assembles all of time and space for us, and by creating such a world for us, *God* is necessarily concealed. All of these ideas find greater elaboration in later *Kabbalah*.

As we have mentioned, *Wisdom Literature* often addresses the real problems and inequities of mankind. In many ways, the formula found in the *Torah* is rather simplistic. Do good and live, or do bad and die³. However, in real life we often see the good suffer while the evil prosper.

² The word *gematria* comes from a Greek word for “measure,” and it has the same word origin as our more familiar term *geometry*.

³ See *Exodus 15:26* and *Deuteronomy 5:30, 7:12-15, 8:1, 28:58-62, & 30:16*

“All this have I seen in my days of vanity: there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his evil doing.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:15)

How do we explain this? The book of *Ecclesiastes* tries to explain this by saying that the ups and downs of life are part of a natural, cyclic ebb and flow of things, and these fluctuations are lacking in substance.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:1)

“That which has been is what shall be; and that which has been done is what shall be done; and there is nothing new under the sun.”

(Ecclesiastes 1:9)

Fortunately, *Ecclesiastes* also proposes a solution. Focus on what is really important in life. Focus on the task and the joy that is before us in this present moment, find satisfaction in your work, and joy with the wife you love.

“There is nothing better for a man than he enjoy food and drink and find satisfaction his work.”

(Ecclesiastes 2:24)

“And also that it is the gift of God that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:13)

“Behold that which I have seen; it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun during the number of the days, which God gave him, because that is his portion.”

(Ecclesiastes 5:17)

“And I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry; for this will go with him in his labor during the days of his life, which God gives him under the sun.”

(Ecclesiastes 8:15)

“Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.”

(Ecclesiastes 9:7)

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity, which he has given you under the sun, all the days of your vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in your labor in which you labor under the sun.”

(Ecclesiastes 9:9)

One more thing about Ecclesiastes. It's written out of order. Someday when you have the time, make a copy of the text, and then cut it up into the separate verses that comprise it. Next, identify major themes in the text, and group the verses together by theme. If you do that, you'll get a much better understanding of what the text is trying to say.

The Book of Job

The *Book of Job* also deals with the seemingly capriciousness of life. At the start of the tale, *Job* is happy and prosperous, but then through no fault of his own, his fortunes change as both his finances and his health suffer. The text even raises the question of whether *God* is even just, and then it also gives us an answer. *God* is just, but at the same time, *God's* justice is often beyond our comprehension, and in telling us this, the text also reminds us that ultimately *God* is very different from us. We cannot do what *God* does, and we cannot always understand the nature of *God's* justice.

"Then the Lord answered Job from the stormy wind, and said, Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now your loins like a man; for I will demand of you, and you will answer me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding. Who determined its measures, do you know? Or who has stretched the line upon it? Upon what are its foundations fastened? Or who laid its corner stone, When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth, as if it had issued from the womb, When I made the

cloud its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, Thus far shall you come, but no further; and here shall your proud waves be stayed? Have you commanded the morning since your days began; and caused the dawn to know his place that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it. It is changed like clay under the seal; and they stand like a garment. And from the wicked their light is withheld, and the uplifted arm shall be broken. Have you entered into the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in the recesses of the depth? Have the gates of death been opened to you? Or have you seen the doors of deepest darkness? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Declare if you know it all.”

(Job 38:1-18)

Another lesson from *Job* that becomes very important in later *Kabbalah* is that the creation of this world involves *God* putting boundaries upon things. This is explained also in *Genesis Rabbah* where the rabbis state that one of the meanings of the appellation *El Shaddai* (*God Almighty*) is “*the God who says enough (dai)*.” This is also a reference to the limits that *God* puts upon every element of the creation so that it does not continue expanding to infinity. Furthermore, in *Job 26* we read that He “*hangs the earth upon nothing*.” The word that is often translated as “nothing” is *belimah*. This is the only place in the *Bible* where this word occurs. However, *belimah* appears to also be related to the verb *balam*, to restrain. Thus, this verse could be translated as He “*hangs the world upon restraint*.” This interpretation is supported by the verses that follow that

explicitly discuss the boundaries that *God* places upon creation. The bottom line: In order for a finite world to exist, every component must be finite.

“He stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth upon nothing/restraint. He binds up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not torn under them. He closes in the face of his throne, and spreads his cloud upon it. He has surrounded the waters with bounds, at the boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. He stirs up the sea with his power, and by his understanding he struck Rahab. By his wind he has made the heavens fair; his hand slew the fleeing serpent. Behold, these are but parts of his ways; but how terrifying is the thing that is heard of him! And who can understand the thunder of his power?”

(Job 26:7-14)

“R. Ila'a said: The world exists only on account of the merit of him who restrains himself in strife, for it is written: He hangs the earth upon belimah (restraint).”

(B. Chullin 89a)

“R. Nathan commented in R. Aba's name, and R. Berekiah in R. Isaac's name: I am El Shaddai, ‘God Almighty’ (Genesis 17:1). It was I who said to the earth, ‘dai’ (enough), and to the world ‘dai’. For had I not said ‘dai’ to the heaven and ‘dai’ to the earth, they would have continued to extend even until now.”

(Genesis Rabbah V:8)

The Blueprint for the Universe

At the very beginning of *Genesis Rabbah*, we find a discourse that declares that the *Torah* existed before the creation and was essentially the blueprint for creation. This is a teaching that has become part of the mainstream folklore of contemporary Judaism. Additionally, notice how this declaration elevates the *Torah* even further beyond that of being simply a set of divinely given laws. As usual, though, we have to ask ourselves what is the agenda? Why did the ancient rabbis feel compelled to argue that the *Torah* has an even more exalted status? My best guess is that this occurred as a response to Christianity which was gaining ground and beginning to usher in another round of persecution against the Jews. So how does this work? Think about it. In Christianity, Jesus is the carpenter and, as such, he is a builder of new things. However, what is even more important than the carpenter? The blueprint!

“Rabbi Oshaya Rabbah commenced his exposition thus: Then I was by Him, as a nursling (amon); and I was daily all delight (Proverbs 8:30). ‘Amon’ means tutor; ‘amon’ means covered; ‘amon’ means hidden; and some say, ‘amon’ means great. ‘Amon’ is a tutor, as you read, As an omain (nursing father) carries the sucking child (Numbers 11:12). ‘Amon’ means covered, as in the verse, Ha’emunim (they that were clad-i.e. covered) in scarlet (Lamentations 4:5). ‘Amon ‘ means hidden, as in the verse, And he concealed (omen) Hadassah (Esther 2:7). ‘Amon’ means great, as in the verse, Are you better than No-amon (Nahum 3:8)? which is rendered, Are you better than Alexandria the Great, that

was situate among the rivers? Another interpretation: 'amon' is a workman (uman). The Torah declares: 'I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He.' In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world, while the Torah declares, IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED, BEGINNING referring to the Torah, as in the verse, The Lord made me as the beginning of His way (Proverbs 8:22)."

(Genesis Rabbah I:1)

The Many Worlds Interpretation of Rabbinic Literature

There are a few ways in which *Genesis Rabbah* argues that there were other worlds before this one. One way is that the text notes that early in *Genesis* it is written "there was evening" and not "let there be evening." This implies that time already existed before the creation of the universe that we know. Otherwise, if time were being created for the first time (no pun intended), then the text should have read "let there be evening." Or in other words, let evening exist! But of course, it doesn't say that, and so the rabbis concluded that time was already in existence. Furthermore, they continued their argument by stating that other worlds existed before this current one. However, the balance between mercy and justice was not quite right, and so those earlier worlds were destroyed. And as happens frequently, a verse from *Ecclesiastes* was used to justify this.

The appropriate question to ask now, however, is why did the rabbis want to conclude that there were multiple worlds? Again what was their agenda? My theory is that the rabbis wanted to show that only *God* is unchanging and eternal and that everything else is subject to the cycles of time as described in *Ecclesiastes*. Otherwise, if the universe was just as eternal as *God*, then one could argue that the universe should be worshipped! I suspect that it was just this sort of conclusion that the rabbis wanted to avoid. If other universes have lived and died before this one, then surely this one is also going to exist for only a finite amount of time.

“AND THERE WAS EVENING. R. Judah b. R. Simon said: ‘Let there be evening’ is not written here, but AND THERE WAS EVENING: hence we know that a time-order existed before this; R. Abbahu said: This proves that the Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them until He created this one and declared, ‘This one pleases Me while those did not please Me.’ R. Phinehas said: This is R. Abbahu's reason: And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31): this pleases Me, but those did not please Me.”

(Genesis Rabbah III:7)

“R. Tanhuma commenced: He has made every thing beautiful in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Said R. Tanhuma: The world was created when it was due, and the world was not fit to be created earlier. R. Abbahu said: Hence we learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them

until He created these (heaven and earth), and then He said: 'These please Me; those did not please Me.; R. Phinehas said: 'The proof of R. Abbahu's statement is: AND GOD SAW EVERY THING WHICH HE HAD MADE AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD.'

(Genesis Rabbah IX:3)

It is amazing to me that doctrines such as parallel worlds and multiple universes have now, more or less, become part of mainstream physics. Consequently, once again modern science is reaching a conclusion similar to that of the ancient rabbis. However, their motivations for doing so are entirely different. On the one hand, physicists simply follow mathematics and their ingenuity to come up with the best possible explanations for their many observations, and if such logic leads to the supposition of multiple universes, then so be it! The rabbis, on the other hand, had their own agenda, and yet quite frequently, their conclusions dovetail with those of modern science.

As a final note, the doctrine of multiple universes is yet another of those early rabbinic theories that will undergo elaboration and mutation in later *Kabbalistic* literature, but remember that its origin is found in the earlier rabbinic writings of *Genesis Rabbah*.

Light is Sown for the Righteous

Light is a very mysterious thing in both the *Bible* and in modern science. In science, experiments have shown that matter can never travel faster than the speed of light, and

this means that time and space often have to bend to make it so. This is the cornerstone upon which *Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity* rests. In the *Bible*, light is equally mysterious as we read in *Psalm 104* that *God* is wrapped in light. By the way, *Psalm 104* is like a *CliffsNotes* version of the whole of creation. Read it! Paradoxically, we also read that *God* has made darkness his secret place. Thus, this tends to generate the image of an unknowable *God* that is enveloped by an inconceivable darkness that is surrounded by an easier to comprehend light.

In *Genesis*, we read that light is created on the first day, but this results in an obvious problem since the stars and the sun and the moon aren't created until the fourth day. So how did the rabbis deal with this? They decided that the light on the first day was a spiritual light that is stored away for the righteous. Furthermore, we read in the *Zohar* that when we study *Torah*, a thread of this light enters us through the top of our skull. For me, this is that little tingly sensation I get in my brain as it engages in activity and suddenly goes "Aha," when it gets a really good insight.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with glory and majesty, Who covers himself with light as with a garment; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain."

(Psalm 104:1-2)

“He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion around him was dark with waters and thick clouds of the skies.”

(Psalm 18:12)

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And a wind from God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.”

(Genesis 1:1-3)

“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years; And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth; and it was so. And God made two great lights; the large light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night; and he made the stars. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.”

(Genesis 1:14-20)

“And God said: Let there be light and there was light (Genesis 1:3)? That still does not connote joy, he replied, since the world was not privileged to make use of that light. R. Judah said: By the light which was created on the first day man could have seen from one end of the world to the other; but when the Holy One, blessed be He, foresaw the wicked, He hid it away for the righteous, as it is written, ‘But the path of the righteous as the light of dawn, that shines more and more unto the perfect day (Proverbs 4:18).’”

(Genesis Rabbah 42:3)

“Light is sown for the righteous.”

(Psalm 96:11)

“Whenever the Torah is studied by night, a little thread of this hidden light steals down and plays upon them that are absorbed in their study, wherefore it is written, ‘The Lord commands His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me (Psalms 42:9).’”

(Zohar Vol II:149)

In the Beginning

One could write a whole book on just the first few verses of *Genesis*! There is just so much to say. However, we will confine ourselves to just a few instructive stories. One such story is a legend from ancient times that the world was created with the Hebrew

letter *bet*, ב. This is a natural thing to say because the very first letter of the *Torah* is *bet*. Also, since the glyph for *bet* is closed on three sides, the rabbis used this shape to give us a warning that we are not to focus on what's below (what happens when we die), what's above (in the heavenly realms), or what's behind us, i.e. what there was before the creation. Instead, our job is to focus just upon what is in front of us. In other words, we're here to do the task that is at hand. What we need to know and what we need to work on are basically right in front of our eyes. In later *Kabbalah*, however, it was said that the world was created with a *bet* because it stands for *bracha*, a blessing.

Another lesser known tradition is that the world was created with the letter *hey*, ה. The rationale here is that the letter *hey* is like the sound created when we expel a breath, and that takes no effort. Likewise, for *God* the creation of the world was just as effortless. The text reference for this argument is the phrase *when they were created* from *Genesis* 2:4. This phrase can also be read in Hebrew as *with 'hey' they were created*, and in a traditional *Torah* scroll, the letter *hey* in this passage is written smaller to perhaps emphasize this interpretation.

“IN THE BEGINNING (BE-RESHITH) GOD CREATED (Genesis 1:1). R. Jonah said in R. Levi's name: Why was the world created with a bet? Just as the bet is closed at the sides but open in front, so you are not permitted to investigate what is above and what is below, what is before and what is behind.”

(Genesis Rabbah I:10)

“WHEN THEY WERE CREATED—BEHIBBARAM (Genesis 2:4). R. Abbahu said in R. Johanan's name: He created them with the letter hey. All letters demand an effort to pronounce them, whereas the hey demands no effort; similarly, not with labor or wearying toil did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world, but by the word of the Lord, and the heavens were already made (Psalm 33:6).”
(Genesis Rabbah XII:10)

Another story of creation that becomes prominent in later *Kabbalistic* literature is that the world was created out of opposites, fire and water. This is based on a passage in *Ecclesiastes* that says the *God* made one thing opposite another.

“Also, this against this made Elohim.”
(Ecclesiastes 7:14)

“AND THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH WERE FINISHED. How did the Holy One, blessed be He, create His world? Said R. Johanan: The Lord took two balls, one of fire and the other of snow, and he worked them into each other, and from these the world was created.”
(Genesis Rabbah X:3)

Two opposing stories of creation that are found in rabbinic literature are that *God* created the world with ten utterances and the story that *God* created the world with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. These two views are reconciled in one of the very

early works of *Kabbalah*, the *Sefer Yetzirah*⁴. The ten utterances refer to the ten times that we read “*And God said*” at the beginning of *Genesis*. Well, actually there are only nine times that this phrase explicitly occurs, but you can see why the rabbis would want to argue that it is really ten. After all, there are the Ten Commandments, ten generations from Adam to Noah, ten generations from Noah to Abraham, and ten miracles and plagues that occurred in Egypt. Ten is obviously a very important number, and so to arrive at ten utterances the rabbis argued that *In the beginning* was also a creative utterance.

“With ten utterances was the world created.”

(Pirkei Avot 5:1)

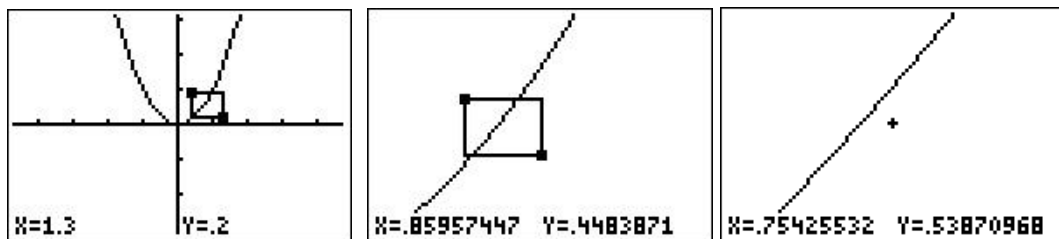
“R. Johanan said: The ten utterances with which the world was created. What are these? These are the expressions ‘And God said’ in the first chapter of Genesis. But aren’t there only nine? — The words ‘In the beginning’ are also a creative utterance, since it is written, By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth (Psalm 33:6).”

(B. Megilah 21b)

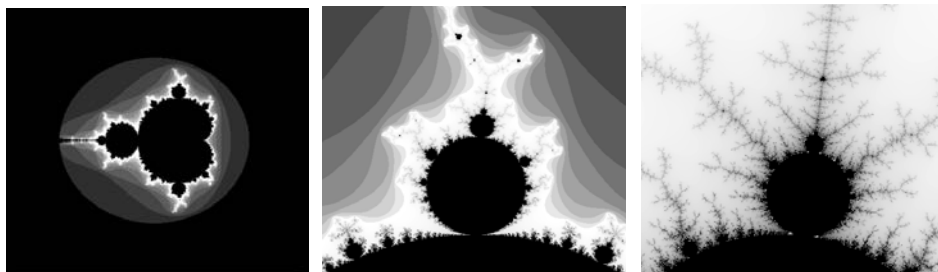
The other side of the coin, though, is the doctrine that the world was created not with ten utterances, but with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and it is equally easy to see how this doctrine is derived because, after all, it is language that constructs for us the world as we understand it, and language is composed of words and words are composed of letters.

⁴ The *Book of Formation*

Thus, letters are to the words that describe our worldview as prime numbers are to the rest of the counting numbers in mathematics. They are the building blocks from which all else is composed. Some may argue that the world exists whether we have language or not, but most will agree that it is difficult for us to experience something if we do not have a name for it. A recent case in point is the mathematical concept of a “fractal.” In mathematics, a fractal is a curve that is infinitely wiggly. This means that as we magnify it, we find more twists and turns at each level of magnification. This is the way that things are in nature, but it is not the way, however, that most of the curves we study in mathematics behave. For example, if we take a standard smooth curve such as a parabola and magnify it over and over, then the result tends to resemble a straight line. Not so with fractal curves! Each level of magnification of a fractal reveals more and more detail.



Magnification of a smooth curve



Magnification of the Mandelbrot Set

Fractal curves have always been around us in nature, but it wasn't until mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot coined the term in the seventies and taught us how to see these curves that we were finally able to perceive them. To see something, we have to have a word for it, and these words are created from letters. Thus, the letters of the alphabet create our world!

“Rab Judah said in the name of Rav, ‘Bezalel knew how to combine the letters by which the heavens and earth were created.’”

(B. Berachot 55a)

In quantum physics, all matter has both a wave nature and a particle nature. When we try to observe a bit of matter and its location, it acts like a particle that exists at a single point in space. However, when we aren't observing it, it appears more as a wave that extends to infinity in all directions and blends and combines with other waves. The two viewpoints are in many ways contradictory to one another, and, yet, that is what our observations of reality tell us is so.

In a rabbinic literature, there is a similar metaphor that can be found of this wave versus particle dichotomy. For example, it is said that when Adam was first created, he extended from one end of the universe to the other. In this respect, Adam was like a wave. However, as soon as he sinned, he was diminished in stature. In other words, Adam became like a particle localized in space. We experience this same dichotomy with ourselves. There are times when we are like the wave, and we feel expansive and

connected with everyone we know. And then there are other times when we feel contracted and completely isolated from the rest of the world. That is when we are in what I like to call our particle mode. Most conventional physicists would not go so far as to say that the wave-particle duality is responsible for our own feelings of expansion and isolation, but I can't help but suspect it does, and that is my working hypothesis. Either way, there are times when we need to be in our wave mode and experience ourselves as connected to others and the world and as a part of a community, and then there are other times when we need to enter our particle mode so that we can be sharp and focused and accomplish the great task at hand.

“R. Joshua b. R. Nehemiah and R. Judah b. R. Simon in R. Eleazar's name said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He created him extending over the whole world.”

(Genesis Rabbah XXIV:2)

“Rab Judah said that Rab said: The first man extended from one end of the world to the other, for it is said: ‘Since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from one end of heaven to the other’; as soon as he sinned, the Holy One, blessed be He, placed His hand upon him and diminished him, for it is said: ‘And he laid his hand upon me.’”

(B. Chagigah 12a)

“A light burns above its head and it (a baby in the womb) looks and sees from one end of the world to the other, as it is said, then his lamp shined above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness. . . . It is also taught all the Torah from beginning to end, for it is said, And he taught me, and said unto me: Let thy heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments and live (Proverbs 4:4) As soon as it sees the light, an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth and causes it to forget all the Torah completely, as it is said, Sin couches at the door (Genesis 4:7).”

(B. Nidah 30b)

Another aspect of the creation of man is that *God* created people with two inclinations in their hearts, the inclination toward good and the inclination toward evil. The former is called the *yetzer hatov* and the latter is called the *yetzer hara*. This doctrine in rabbinic literature is justified by *Genesis* 2:7 where it says, “*Then the Lord God formed man.*” The word for *formed* in Hebrew is *vayyitzer*, and it is spelled in this verse with two consecutive occurrences of the letter *yud*. This repetition of *yud* is then taken as symbolic of the two inclinations that man is created with. In *Genesis Rabbah*, it explains this very succinctly.

“VAYYITZER: two formations, the good and the evil.”

(Genesis Rabbah XIV:4)

As long as we are talking about the beginning of things, we should probably point out that reality is not what you think it is. Over approximately the past hundred years the revelations of relativity and quantum physics have shown us that many of our common beliefs about the world are flat wrong. In fact, they are just as erroneous as the belief that many humans once held that the world is flat. In particular, the average person's notion of time is not correct. According to *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*, time does not flow like a river that is the same for everyone, and there is no universal "now" that connects things. Instead, everyone exists in their own unique time and space frame of reference, and as a consequence, it can be argued that all of spacetime exists simultaneously. Interestingly, the rabbis also came to the conclusion that everything must exist at once, but once again, they were driven by a different agenda. In their case, they wanted to argue that *God*, unlike man, can see both present and future at once (hence, implying that all things exist at once). Nonetheless, it is once again interesting to see ancient rabbis coming to the same conclusions as modern physicists, even if their methods are totally different.

"AND GOD SAW EVERY THING THAT HE HAD MADE, AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD. R. Johanan and R. Simeon b. Lakish each commented thereon. R. Johanan said, 'When a mortal king builds a palace, he can only take in the upper stories with one look and the lower stories with another, but the Holy One, blessed be He, casts but a single look at the upper and the lower portions simultaneously.' R. Simeon b. Lakish said, 'BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD

implies this world, AND BEHOLD implies the next world. The Holy One, blessed be He, cast but one look at this world and at the future world together.’”

(Genesis Rabbah IX:3)

The Downside to Creation

Creation is a good thing, right? Well, yes and no. On the one hand, it is written that *God* always desired to enter into a partnership with humans, but on the other hand, you can't create a world of multiplicity without at least concealing the original unity of *God* with all things. In fact, we'll read later on in the *Zohar* how everything is really still in perfect unity with *God*, that it is only the divisions made by our minds that conceal this fact. For now, though, we have our toys and all the delectable enjoyments of life, but the price we pay is the loss of oneness with paradise. In *Genesis Rabbah*, the rabbis explain this downside as the reason why “*It is good*” is not written at the conclusion of the second day of creation.

“R. Samuel b. Ammi said, ‘From the beginning of the world's creation the Holy One, blessed be He, longed to enter into partnership with humans.’”

(Genesis Rabbah III:9)

“Why is ‘it was good’ not written in connection with the second day? ... R. Hanina said, ‘Because in it a schism was created, as it is written, AND LET IT DIVIDE THE WATERS.’ R. Tabyomi said, ‘If because of a division made for the

greater stability and orderliness of the world, “it was good” is not written in connection with that day, then how much the more should this apply to a division which leads to its confusion!’”

(Genesis Rabbah IV:6)

The Five Souls

In *Genesis Rabbah*, the great rabbinic commentary on *Genesis*, the rabbis note that there are five different names for the soul. This is important because in later *Kabbalah* this develops into the doctrine that there are five souls for each person. The first is the *nefesh*. This is the lowest level that everyone is born with and the soul that keeps us alive. However, the main concern of the *nefesh* is itself. It is like a little kid that is always saying me, me, me! It's selfish, selfish, selfish! As it says in *Genesis 8:21*, “*Man's heart is evil from his youth.*” The second soul is the *ruach*. I think of it as a moral soul that enters us around the age of responsibility. Suddenly, we can understand the difference between right and wrong, and we can be held accountable for our actions. Additionally, we begin to become more aware of others and we develop *rachamim*, compassion, for other living beings. The third soul is the *neshamah*, and it is that part of us that is always spiritually connected. Some people are able to really embrace their *neshamah* and incorporate it into their lives, but there are probably many more that live their lives at a much lower level of enlightenment. The last two souls are so big that they cannot be contained within the body. The *chayah* is the living soul, and it represents an even higher state of spiritual evolution than the *neshamah*. It can surround our physical being, but it

can't be contained within it. As I often say, blessed are those who can reach this level of understanding and have communication with this very evolved part of one's being! And finally, the last soul is the *yechidah*. This is the part of us that is always connected with *God* and that has never left that original unity.

“THE BREATH OF LIFE. It has five names: nefesh, neshamah, hayyah, ruah, yehidah. Nefesh is the blood: For the blood is the nefesh (life, Deuteronomy 12:23). Ruah: this is so called because it ascends and descends: thus it is written, Who knoweth the ruah (spirit) of man whether it goes upwards, and the ruah of the beast whether it goes downward to the earth (Ecclesiastes 3:21)? Neshamah is the breath; as people say, His breathing is good. Hayyah (living) because all the limbs are mortal, whereas this is immortal in the body. Yechidah (unique): because all the limbs are duplicated, whereas this is unique in the body.”
(Genesis Rabbah XIV:9)

White Fire and Black Fire

Another piece of ancient rabbinic text that has become part of modern Jewish folklore is that the *Torah* is comprised of black fire written on white fire. To some, in modern times, this is also a message that the silent, unmanifest part of reality (the white fire) is just as important as the more visible parts of reality (the black fire). However, in more ancient times it appears that this doctrine was developed just to explain a piece of text in *Deuteronomy* where it says, *“From His right hand went a fiery law for them.”*

“R. Simeon b. Lakish said, ‘The scroll which God gave to Moses was of white fire and its writing of black fire. It was itself fire and it was hewn out of fire and completely formed of fire and given in fire, as it says, “At His right hand was a fiery law unto them (Deuteronomy 33:2).”’”

(Song of Songs Rabbah V:15)

“Resh Lakish said, ‘When Moses wrote the law he acquired a lustrous appearance. How did this come about?’ Resh Lakish said, ‘The scroll that was given to Moses was made of a parchment of white fire, and was written upon with black fire and sealed with fire and was swathed with bands of fire, and while he was writing it he dried his pen on his hair, and as a result he acquired a lustrous appearance.’”

(Deuteronomy Rabbah III:12)

Justice and Mercy

Yet another ancient doctrine that has been incorporated into both the folklore of mainstream Judaism and *Kabbalah* is that the name *Elohim* (*God*) represents *God’s* justice while the name *Adonai* (*Lord*) represents *God’s* attribute of mercy. This is based upon passages where *God* is dispensing justice while being referred to as *Elohim* and other passages where *God* is being merciful and is addressed as *Adonai*. This practice is pretty much a given in both mainstream and mystical Judaism, so you want to know it!

“Wherever the Tetragrammaton (Lord/Adonai) is employed it connotes the Attribute of Mercy, as in the verse, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious (Exodus 34:6), ... Wherever Elohim (God) is employed it connotes the Attribute of Judgment: Thus: You shall not revile Elohim- God (Exodus 22:27); the cause of both parties shall come before Elohim-God (Exodus 22:8).”

(Genesis Rabbah 33:3)

“When I am judging created beings, I am called Elohim, ... When I am merciful towards My world, I am called "Adonai", for "Adonai" refers to the Attribute of Mercy, as it is said: The Lord, the Lord (Adonai, Adonai), God, merciful and gracious (Exodus 34:6).”

(Exodus Rabbah III:6)

“For this reason did the Attribute of Justice seek to attack Moses, as it says: And Elohim spoke unto Moses (Exodus 6:2). But when God reflected that Moses only spoke thus because of Israel's suffering, He retracted and dealt with him according to the Attribute of Mercy, as it says: And he said unto him: I am Adonai (Exodus 6:2).”

(Exodus Rabbah VI:1)

“Said the Holy One, blessed be He: ' If I create the world on the basis of mercy alone, its sins will be great; on the basis of judgment alone, the world cannot exist. Hence I will create it on the basis of judgment and of mercy, and may it then

stand!’ Hence the expression,’ THE LORD GOD (Adonai Elohim) (Genesis 2:4).”

(Genesis Rabbah XII:15)

The Hidden Righteous Ones

You might recall from *Genesis* the story of how *Abraham* argued with *God* over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. As part of his argument, he claimed that if there are even a few righteous men left in the town, then the whole place must be spared for their sake. And *God* agreed. This story has led to the belief that in order for the world to exist, there have to be a minimum number of righteous people on the planet at all times. This idea is really not all that farfetched when you think about all the great advances that have been made by just a handful of people. For instance, calculus was discovered independently by just two people, Newton and Leibniz. Relativity was discovered by one person, Einstein. And all the great religions of the world were started by just a very few great individuals. Thus, much of what the rest of us enjoy is due to the efforts and breakthroughs of a very small portion of humanity, and, hence, we depend upon that small proportion for many of our great leaps forward. In *Proverbs* we read that *the righteous is an everlasting foundation*, and in the *Talmud* the rabbis conclude that a minimum of thirty-six righteous individuals are the foundation of the world. These are known in Hebrew as the *lamed-vav tzaddikim* or the *tzaddikim nistarim*, the hidden thirty-six righteous ones. As a consequence of a derivation found in the *Talmud*, the number thirty-six is today a symbol for righteousness.

“The righteous is an everlasting foundation.”

(Proverbs 10:25)

“The world never has less than thirty-six righteous men who are vouchsafed a sight of the Shechinah every day, for it is said (Isaiah 30:18), Happy are they that wait ‘lo’ (for Him) and the numerical value of ‘lo’ (lamed-vav) is thirty-six.”

(B. Sukkah 45b)

Like Water, Like Torah

One metaphor that everyone should know is that water is a symbol for *Torah*. You could base this connection on a passage in *Deuteronomy* where it says that “*My doctrine shall drop like rain,*” but instead the prooftext usually given is from *Isaiah 55* where it says, “*Let all who are thirsty come and drink.*” I used to wonder why the rabbis chose the proof passage from *Isaiah* rather than *Deuteronomy*, but then it occurred to me that, as is often the case, when the rabbis quote a single verse, they really want you to read the whole chapter. It’s just like we might quote the date of some ominous event, and that is enough to invoke all the critical things that happened at that time. In this case, all of *Isaiah 55* is pretty phenomenal and definitely a must read! Again, this is one of those symbols that has been carried further into current Judaism, and in the *Midrash Rabbah* collection they even have a very wonderful discourse on all the many ways in which *Torah* is like water.

“My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.”

(Deuteronomy 32:2)

“Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters.”

(Isaiah 55:1)

“The words of the Torah are compared to water, to wine, to oil, to honey, and to milk. To water: Ho everyone that thirsts, come you for water (Isaiah 55:1). Just as water stretches from one end of the world to the other, as it says, To him that spread forth the earth above the waters (Psalm 136:6), so the Torah goes from one end of the world to the other, as it says, The measure thereof is longer than the earth (Job 11:9). Just as water is a source of life for the world, as it says, A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters (Song of Songs 4:15), so the Torah is a source of life for the world, as it says, For they are life unto those that find them and health to all their flesh (Proverbs 4:22); and it is also written, Come ye buy and eat (Isaiah 55:1) Just as water is from heaven, as it says, At the sound of His giving, a multitude of waters in the heavens (Jeremiah 10:13), so the Torah is from heaven, as it says, I have talked with you from heaven (Exodus 20:19). Just as the downpour of water is accompanied by loud thundering, as it says, the voice of the Lord is upon the waters (Psalm 29:3), so the Torah was given with loud thundering, as it says, And it came to pass on the third day when it was morning that there were thunder and lightning (Exodus 19:16). Just as water

restores the soul, as it says, But God cleaved the hollow place which was in Lehi and there came water; and when he had drunk... he revived (Judges 15:19), so does the Torah, as it says, The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul (Psalm 19:8). Just as water purifies man from ritual uncleanness, as it says, And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean (Ezekiel 36:25), So the Torah cleanses an unclean man of his uncleanness, as it says, The words of the Lord are pure words (Psalm 12:7). Just as water cleanses the body, as it says, He shall bathe himself in water (Leviticus 17:15), so the Torah cleanses the body, as it says, Thy word is purifying to the uttermost (Psalm 119:140). Just as water covers the nakedness of the sea, as it says, As the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9), so the Torah covers the nakedness of Israel, as it says, Love covers all sins (Proverbs 10:12). Just as rain water comes down in drops and forms rivers, so with the Torah. A man learns two halachahs today and two tomorrow, until he becomes like a flowing stream. Just as water has no taste unless one is thirsty, so the Torah has no taste unless one labors at it. Just as water leaves a high place and flows to a low one, so the Torah leaves one whose spirit is proud and cleaves to one whose spirit is lowly. Just as water does not keep well in a vessel of silver or gold but in the commonest of vessels, so the Torah resides only in one who makes himself like a vessel of earthenware. Just as with water a great man is not ashamed to say to a lowly man, ' Give me a drink of water,' so with the words of the Torah, a great scholar must not be ashamed to say to a lesser one, 'Teach me one chapter, or one statement, or one verse, or even one letter.' Just as with water, if one does not know how to swim in it, he will be drowned, so with the words of

the Torah, if one does not know how to thread his way in them and to instruct in accordance with them, he will ultimately come to grief. Said R. Hanina of Gesarea: Seeing that water is conducted not only to gardens and orchards, but also to baths and privies, am I to say that it is the same with the words of the Torah? Not so, since it says, For the ways of the Lord are right R. Hama b. 'Ukba said: Just as water makes plants grow, so the words of the Torah nurture everyone who labors over them as they require."

(Song of Songs Rabbah I:19)

Seventy Interpretations

Another item that everyone who studies *Torah* should be aware of is that there are meant to be multiple interpretations for every passage in *Torah*, more specifically, seventy interpretations. There are at least two ways in which this number is derived. One is from a passage in *Jeremiah* that says that the word of *God* is like a hammer that splinters a rock into several pieces. From this, the *Talmud* concludes that every word that came from *God* was split up into seventy languages for the seventy nations that were felt to exist at that time. This, of course, is just a stone's throw (no pun intended) from saying that there are seventy interpretations of every passage in the *Torah*. This doctrine is finally made more specific in the *Midrash Rabbah* where *Torah* is first likened to wine, and since the numerical value of the Hebrew word for wine is seventy, the final conclusion is that every verse in *Torah* has seventy meanings.

“Is not my word like a fire? says the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock into pieces?”

(Jeremiah 23:27)

“The School of R. Ishmael taught: And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces. Just as a hammer is divided into many sparks, so every single word that went forth from the Holy One, blessed be He, split up into seventy languages.”

(B. Shabbat 88b)

“ONE SILVER BASIN (MIZRAK) was brought as a symbol of the Torah which has been likened to wine; as it says, ‘And drink of the wine which I have mingled (Proverbs 9:5).’ Now it is customary to drink wine in a mizrak (basin), as you may gather from the text, ‘That drink wine in bowls--mizreke (Amos 6:6).’ On that account, he brought a ‘MIZRAK OF (WEIGHT) SEVENTY SHEKELS, AFTER THE SHEKEL OF THE SANCTUARY (Numbers 7:19).’ Why? As the numerical value of yayin (wine) is seventy, so there are seventy modes of expounding the Torah.”

(Numbers Rabbah 13:15-16)

God Can and Can't be Known

Paradoxically, in the *Bible* we find *God* presented both as a being that is like us and as a being that is totally different from us and beyond our comprehension. Probably most

familiar is the statement in *Genesis* that we are made in the image of *God*. Also familiar is the opening of the *Holiness Code* in *Leviticus* where it says that we shall be holy because *God* is holy. Both of these passages point to a similarity between us and *God*.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female He created them.”

(Genesis 1:26-27)

“For I am the Lord your God; you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.”

(Leviticus 11:44)

However, the other side of the coin is that we are not the same as *God* and we can never fully understand what *God* is. Again, in *Genesis*, *God* tells Moses that no one can see the face of *God*, and, thus, *God* will show Moses his backside as he passes. This has been interpreted as meaning that while we cannot see *God*; we can see the effects of *God*'s existence. This is reminiscent of the difficulty that occurs in trying to understand our conscious awareness. In many ways both the body and the mind appear to be machines, and we can reduce functionality by damaging any part of the machine we wish. However, we have not, yet, been able to explain how conscious awareness can arise from a machine.

Also, scientists have never been able to isolate consciousness to a single part of the brain, and while we have never been able to observe consciousness directly in same way that we look at, for example, a chair, we, nonetheless, experience the effects of our consciousness awareness at every single moment of our lives.

In *Isaiah*, we are told explicitly that *God's* thoughts are not our thoughts and *God's* ways are not our ways. Similarly, in *Job*, *God* highlights in a very dramatic discourse that there are fundamental differences between *God* and *Job*. These passages speak of our inability to ever fully comprehend *God*. This view is highlighted further in *Genesis Rabbah* where *Rav Huna* tells us that all we can comprehend are but parts of *God*; never the entire thing. And this is a motif that is further elaborated upon in the *Zohar*. However, as with many *Kabbalistic* concepts, its origin is found in earlier *Biblical* and rabbinic literature.

“You can not see my face; for no man shall see me and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand upon a rock; And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by; And I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

(Exodus 33:20-23)

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than

your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and returns not there, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be that goes out of my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

(Isaiah 55:8-11)

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding. Who determined its measures, do you know? Or who has stretched the line upon it? Upon what are its foundations fastened? Or who laid its corner stone, When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth, as if it had issued from the womb, When I made the cloud its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, And prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors.”

(Job 38:4-10)

“Lo, these are but parts of His ways; and what blemish of aught is heard of Him! But the thunder of His mighty deeds who can understand (Job 26:14)?” Rav Huna said: “Whatever things you see are but parts of the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says: ‘Lo, these are but parts of His ways.’”

(Genesis Rabbah XII:1)

As a final note, I've never been fully comfortable with the term *God* for the very reason that *God* is incomprehensible, and, yet, my very use of the term suggests it is something that I can, indeed, comprehend. Thus, I often prefer somewhat vaguer and less anthropomorphic terms for *God* such as the *Life of the Worlds*⁵.

That's it for this chapter! In the next chapter, we'll prepare to explore some of the earliest forms of Jewish mysticism.

Exercise #1

Read! The more you know about the *Bible*, rabbinic literature, and *Wisdom Literature*, the better you will be able to understand where *Kabbalah* is coming from. I would begin by reading some of the *Wisdom Literature* found in your *Bible*. Remember that it is in many ways the bridge between later Jewish mysticism and *Torah*. It helps raise the issues and questions that *Kabbalah* then tries to answer. Also learn something about the *Talmud*. The best and easiest introduction to *Talmudic* thought that I can think of for beginners is *Everyman's Talmud* by A. Cohen. Another good resource is *Ein Yaakov* by Rabbi Yaakov ibn Chaviv. This book contains all the stories (*aggadot*) and ethical teachings of the *Talmud*. Also important to have in your library is the *Midrash Rabbah* collection published by Soncino Press. This ten volume series consists of a line-by-line commentary by the ancient rabbis on books of the *Bible*, and many of the key ideas of later Jewish mysticism have their origin in this work. And finally, for research I find the *Soncino Classics Collection* on DVD-ROM indispensable. This software package

⁵ *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:9

contains the *Bible*, *Talmud*, *Zohar*, and *Midrash Rabbah* collection in both Hebrew and English ready for your computer. It allows you to find relevant passages and cross-references by doing simple word searches. For text study, it's the best!

Exercise #2

From *Ecclesiastes* we learn that much of our reality is like hot air or a shadow with no substance. Thus, for this exercise, make a list of those things in your life that have substance and those things that don't. It'll really help you clarify what's important in life.

CHAPTER 3

ENTERING THE GARDEN

“One commandment leads to another.” (Pirkei Avot 4:2)

In both the *Talmud* and *Song of Songs Rabbah* we find a succinct story that for centuries has been taken as a warning regarding the dangers of mystical endeavors. Four rabbis enter a garden (*pardes*). They are *Rabbi Akiba*, *Ben Azzai*, *Ben Zoma*, and *Elisha ben Abuya*. The garden, in this case, is a metaphor for some dangerous mystical journey. Furthermore, only *Rabbi Akiba* survives unscathed. Of the others, *Ben Azzai* dies, *Ben Zoma* goes crazy, and *Elisha ben Abuya* becomes a heretic and thereafter is referred to as *Acher* (other).

The word that is translated as *garden* in this passage is *pardes* which would translate more properly as *orchard* or *citrus grove*. Also, it should be noted that our English word *paradise* is derived from *pardes*. Hence, we can interpret this story in terms of our travelers entering into some mystical realm that can accurately be described as a perilous journey to *paradise*.

“Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the ‘Garden’, namely, Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Acher, and Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Akiba said to them, ‘When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, do not say, water, water! For it is said: “He that speaks falsehood shall not be established before my eyes.”’ Ben ‘Azzai looked and died.

Of him Scripture says: 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.' Ben Zoma looked and became demented. Of him Scripture says: 'Have you found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for you, lest you be filled therewith, and vomit it.' Acher mutilated the shoots. Rabbi Akiba departed in peace."

(B. Chagigah 14b)

"Four entered the Garden, Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elisha ben Abuya, and Rabbi Akiba. Ben Azzai peered into the mysteries and became demented; and of him it is said, 'Have you found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for you (Proverbs 25:16).' Ben Zoma peered and died, and of him it says, 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15).' Elisha b. Abuya began to 'lop the branches.' How did he 'lop the branches?' When he entered a synagogue or house of study and saw children making progress in the Torah, he uttered incantations over them which brought them to a stop; and of him it is said, 'Suffer not your mouth to bring your flesh into guilt (Ecclesiastes 5:5).' Rabbi Akiba entered in peace and came out in peace."

(Song of Songs Rabbah I:27)

The cast of characters in this story is also quite important. *Rabbi Akiba* is one of the giants of the *Talmud*. According to legend, when he began his studies at age forty he did not even know the alphabet. However, he got better, and he became renowned as both a scholar and a sage with deep mystical knowledge.

“When Moses ascended on high he found the Holy One, blessed be He, engaged in attaching crowns to the letters of the alphabet. Said Moses, ‘Lord of the Universe, Is there anything lacking in the Torah such that these additions are necessary?’ He answered, ‘There will arise a man, at the end of many generations, Akiba b. Joseph by name, who will derive law after law from each little mark’. ‘Lord of the Universe’, said Moses, ‘Permit me to see this man.’ He replied, ‘Turn around’. Moses went and sat down in the eighth row of a class and listened to Rabbi Akiba’s discourses upon the law. Not being able to follow the arguments, he was ill at ease, but when they came to a certain subject and the disciples said to the master ‘Whence do you know it?’ and the latter replied ‘It is a law given unto Moses at Sinai,’ he was comforted. Thereupon he returned to the Holy One, blessed be He, and said, ‘Lord of the Universe, You have such a man and yet You give the Torah through me?’ He replied, ‘Be silent, for that is My decree.’”

(B. Menachot 29b)

The next two characters are *Ben Azzai* and *Ben Zoma*. Neither was a rabbi even though they were both known for their wisdom. They are both referred to in rabbinic literature as *talmide hakamim*, disciples of the wise. *Ben Azzai* was well known for his piety, and it is said that when he died the assiduous students of the *Torah* ceased (*B. Sotah 49a*). He is also well remembered for his teaching that fulfilling one commandment leads to another, and likewise, one transgression leads to another.

“Ben Azzai Said, ‘Hasten to fulfill even an easy commandment, and flee from all transgression, for one commandment leads to another commandment, and one transgression to another transgression. And the payment for a good deed is a good deed, and the payment for a sin is a sin.’”

(Pirkei Avot 4:2)

If *Ben Azzai* was esteemed for his saintliness, then his companion *Ben Zoma* was just as well regarded for his wisdom. In fact, it is said that wisdom will come to whoever sees of *Ben Zoma* in a dream.

“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)

However, as the story of the garden indicates, *Ben Zoma* lost his mind, and in *Genesis Rabbah*, the great rabbinical commentary on *Genesis*, we read a sad account of how *Ben Zoma* loses all of his marbles shortly before dying.

“It once happened that Simeon ben Zoma was standing wrapped in speculation, when Rabbi Joshua passed and greeted him once and a second time, without his answering him. At the third time, Ben Zoma answered him in confusion. ‘What means this, Ben Zoma!’ exclaimed Rabbi Joshua, ‘Whence are the feet?’ From

nowhere, Rabbi,' replied Ben Zoma. 'I call heaven and earth to witness that I will not stir hence until you inform me whence are the feet,' Rabbi Joshua urged. 'I was contemplating the Creation,' said Ben Zoma, 'And I have come to the conclusion that between the upper and the nether waters there is but two or three fingerbreadths, for it is not written here, AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD blew, but HOVERED, like a bird flying and flapping with its wings, its wings barely touching the nest over which it hovers.' Thereupon Rabbi Joshua turned to his disciples and remarked to them, 'The son of Zoma has gone.' But a few days elapsed and the son of Zoma was in his eternal home."

(Genesis Rabbah II:4)

The final figure in our story is Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya who, after his encounter with '*the garden*,' became a heretic and, henceforth, is simply referred to as *Acher*, or *other*. In the story, itself, it says that he *mutilated the shoots* which was a figure of speech for heresy in those times. In particular, it is said that *Elisha ben Abuya* was enamored with the study of Greek philosophy and that this caused him to question many *Torah* teachings. An account of this is found in the *Talmud* in tractate *Chagigah*.

"But what of Acher? — Greek song did not cease from his mouth. It is told of Acher that when he used to go from the schoolhouse, many heretical books would fall from his lap."

(B. Chagigah 15b)

Still, *Abuya* never abandoned *Torah* entirely, and he is specifically remembered for two things. First, he was the teacher of *Rabbi Meir*, one of the great scholars of the *Talmud*, and second, as are his companions, he is also quoted in *Pirkei Avot* (*Chapters of the Fathers*) regarding the importance of learning *Torah* as a child.

“Elisha ben Abuyah said, ‘He who learns as a child is like ink written on new paper, but he who learns as an old man is like ink written on used paper.’”
(*Pirkei Avot* 4:20)

This one quote of *Elisha ben Abuyah* in *Chapters of the Fathers* may also be a criticism of his colleague *Rabbi Akiba* who did not begin his studies until he was forty.

If we return for a moment to our initial piece of *Talmudic* text, we find the very prescient statement that “*When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, do not say, water, water! For it is said: ‘He that speaks falsehood shall not be established before my eyes.’*” This seems to be a warning not to fall into delusion as a result of one’s mystical journey, and such a pitfall is often observed in individuals today both on small levels and on more grandiose levels. Self-delusion seems to run rampant in religion in all generations. In some respects, perhaps all religious dogma is error or delusion and a misinterpretation of deeper mystical experience. On the individual level, it may make little difference whether a cherished religious belief is factual or not, but on a group level errors get magnified and all too often lead to prejudice, wars based on religious ideology, or to ritual suicides instigated by cult leaders. Nonetheless, whether we like it or not, incorrect

or incomplete understanding is often the first step of any learning experience, and it is difficult not to fall into some degree of error.

In the version of the *pardes* story found in *Song of Songs Rabbah*, the ancient rabbinical commentary on *Song of Songs*, we find some notable changes with respect to the *Talmud's* version. There are both obvious and subtle differences in this version of the story. First, it is clear that the roles of *Ben Azzai* and *Ben Zoma* are now reversed. It is now *Ben Azzai* who goes crazy and *Ben Zoma* who dies. Also, there is no reference or warning regarding the seriousness of falling into delusion. Additionally, I like the translation '*lop the branches*' better than '*mutilated the shoots*' because the *Torah* is often referred to as a *Tree of Life*, and this metaphor more accurately depicts the destruction of its limbs. However, the point I wish to focus on is one that is a little more subtle. Namely, the very last statement that *Rabbi Akiba* entered in peace and left in peace. In Hebrew the word *shalom* for peace is related to the word *shalem* for wholeness. Thus, peace is not merely a lack of conflict but rather a state of wholeness and completeness. And how do we find peace and wholeness in Judaism? Simply through studying *Torah* and its commandments. A prooftext for this is found in *Proverbs* where it says that all the paths of the *Torah* lead to peace (wholeness).

"My son, forget not my Torah, but let your heart keep my commandments."

(Proverbs 3:1)

“Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.”

(Proverbs 3:17)

Thus, the path to peace and wholeness in *Judaism* is through *Torah* and the commandments, and so before beginning any mystical endeavor one must be certain of having a good foundation that will help protect one from harm.

According to tradition, there are 613 commandments. This specific number is derived in the *Talmud* from the fact that the Hebrew letters of the word *Torah* have a numerical value of 611 coupled with the belief that two commandments were given directly by *God* while the rest were transmitted indirectly through Moses ($2 + 611 = 613$).

“And all the people saw the thundering, and the lightning, and the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they were shaken, and stood far away. And they said to Moses, Speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

(Exodus 20:15-16)

“Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses, three hundred and sixty-five negative precepts, corresponding to the number of days in the year, and two hundred and forty-eight positive precepts, corresponding to the number of bones in man's body. Said R. Hamnuna: What is the text for this? It is, Moses commanded us Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob, ‘Torah’ being

in letter-value, equal to six hundred and eleven, 'I am' and You shall have no other gods' not being counted, because we heard them directly from the mouth of God.”

(B. Makkoth 23b)

In *Pirkei Avot 2:1* we read that one should be just as careful with a “light” commandment as with a grave one because we do not know the reward involved with each one. Furthermore, we read in *Deuteronomy 4:2 & 13:1* that we should be careful neither to add nor subtract anything from the commandments. Nonetheless, that did not prevent the rabbis of the *Talmud* from trying to reduce the 613 commandments to a few basic principles such as “charity is equivalent to all other commandments combined” or “seek me and live.”

“David came and reduced them to eleven principles, as it is written, ‘A Psalm of David. Lord, who may sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell in your holy mountain? — [i] He that walks in innocence, and [ii] does what is right, and [iii] speaks truth in his heart, and [iv] has no slander on his tongue, [v] nor does evil to his fellow, [vi] nor discredits his neighbor, and [vii] in whose eyes a wicked person is repulsive, but [viii] who honors those that experience awe before God, [ix] a person that stands by his word at any cost, and, [x] who doesn’t lend his money to others at interest, [xi] nor takes a bribe to harm the innocent. He that does these things shall never be moved (Pslam 15).’ Isaiah came and reduced them to six principles, as it is written, ‘[i] He that walks righteously, and [ii]

speaks honestly, and [iii] despises gain through extortion, [iv] that refuses to hold a bribe in his hand, [v] that does not listen to plans of bloodshed, [vi] and shuts his eyes rather than allow them to gaze upon evil; he shall dwell on high (Isaiah 33:15).’ Michah came and reduced them to three principles, as it is written, ‘It has been told to you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord does require of you: [i] only to do justice, and [ii] to love mercy and [iii] to walk humbly with your God (Michah 6:8).’ Again came Isaiah and reduced them to two principles, as it is said, ‘Thus says the Lord, [i] Observe justice and [ii] do righteousness (Isaiah 56:1).’ Amos came and reduced them to one principle, as it is said, ‘For thus says the Lord unto the house of Israel, “Seek ye Me and live (Amos 5:4).”’ To this Rabbi Nahman ben Isaac demurred, saying, ‘Perhaps what is meant is, “Seek Me by observing the whole Torah and live.”’ But it is Habakuk who came and based them all on one principle, as it is said, ‘The righteous shall live by his faith (Habakuk 2:4).’”

(B. Makkoth 23b-24a)

In addition to reducing things to a few basics, the rabbis also argued that not only did they have the authority to decree their own injunctions, but those injunctions could be as important if not more important than the original commandments.

“Of the words of the Scribes it is written, ‘According to the law which they shall teach you (Deuteronomy 17:11).’ It does not say, ‘which the Torah shall teach you,’ but ‘which they shall teach you.’ Nor does it say ‘according to the judgment

which it shall tell you,’ but ‘which they shall tell you.’ You shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare to you to the right hand nor to the left. If they tell you that the right hand is right and the left hand left, listen to them, and even if they shall tell you that the right hand is left and the left hand right, listen to them.”

(Song of Songs Rabbah I:18)

“The injunctions of the Scribes are more beloved than those of the Torah, as it says, ‘For thy love (dodeka) is better than wine (Song of Songs 1:2).’ [‘Wine’ is a metaphor for the written Torah, and the Scribes are the lovers (dodim) of God.]”

If a man says: There is no command to put on phylacteries, thus transgressing a precept of the Torah, he is subject to no penalty. But if he says there are five compartments [in the phylacteries], thus transgressing the injunction of the Scribes, he is subject to a penalty.⁵

(Song of Songs Rabbah I:18)

Consequently, when it comes to observing the commandments, even without discarding any of the traditional precepts, one could still say that choices exist. For example, many of the traditional 613 commandments apply only to the ancient sacrificial service at the Temple, and likewise, many of the commandments regarding sexual behavior are not ones that I have a problem with. Thus, my choice is to put my initial focus elsewhere, and below, drawn from the extensive list of traditional commandments and rabbinic

injunctions, is my own list of 36 behaviors that I am currently working on in order to arrive at a greater mental and spiritual balance.

1. Treat other people the way you would like to be treated.

“On one occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, ‘Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.’ Thereupon, Shammai repulsed him with the builder's cubit. When he went before Hillel, Hillel said to him, ‘What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole of the Torah. The rest is just commentary. Now go and learn the commentary.’”

(B. Shabbath 31a)

Notice that *Hillel* reduces all of *Torah* to an ethical commandment: Treat other people the way you would like to be treated! Notice also that while he says that the rest of the *Torah* is just an elaboration on this principle, he also tells you to go and study the elaboration!

2. Give! Give! Give!

“Charity is equivalent to all the other religious precepts combined.”

(B. Baba Bartha 9a)

“Mar Zutra said, ‘Even a poor man who himself subsists on charity should give charity.’”

(B. Gittin 7b)

“Rabbi Eleazar said, ‘A man who gives charity in secret is greater than Moses.’”

(B. Babba Bathra 9b)

“Rabbi Eleazar further stated, ‘He who executes charity and justice is regarded as though he had filled all the world with kindness, for it is said, “He loves charity and justice, the earth is full of the loving kindness of the Lord (Psalm 33:5).”’”

(B. Sukkah 49b)

If blood and nutrients don't flow in your body, you die. If goods and services don't flow in the economic world, then the economy dies. Everything is maintained by the proper flow of energy, and in Judaism, charity is seen as a duty that must be performed even by the poorest among us. So, in all aspects of your life and in all ways, be a giving person.

3. Do random acts of kindness.

“Rabbi Eleazar stated, ‘Acts of loving kindness are even greater than charity, for it is said, “Sow to yourselves according to your charity, but reap according to your kindness (Hosea 10:12).”’”

(B. Sukkah 49b)

“The reward of charity depends entirely upon the extent of the kindness in it, for it is said, ‘Sow to yourselves according to charity, but reap according to the kindness.’ (Hosea 10:12).”

(B. Sukkah 49b)

“In three respects are acts of loving kindness superior to charity. Charity can be done only with one's money, but acts of loving kindness can be done with one's person and one's money. Charity can only be given to the poor, but acts of loving kindness can be done for both for the rich and the poor. Charity can be given to the living only, but acts of loving kindness can be done for both the living and the dead.”

(B. Sukkah 49b)

“Simeon the Righteous was one of the last men of the great assembly. He used to say, ‘Upon three things the world stands: Upon the Torah and upon service and upon acts of loving kindness.’”

(Pirkei Avot 1:2)

“By loving kindness and truth, iniquity is purged.”

(Proverbs 16:6)

A little kindness goes a long way!

4. **Greet people with a smile. Be a clown! Be a clown! Be a clown!**

“Greet all men with a pleasant countenance.”

(Pirkei Avot 1:15)

“While they were conversing, two men passed by and Elijah remarked, ‘These two have a share in the world to come.’ Rabbi Beroka then approached and asked them, ‘What is your occupation?’ They replied, ‘We are jesters, when we see men depressed we cheer them up. Furthermore, when we see two people quarrelling we strive hard to make peace between them.’”

(B. Taanith 22a)

At a place where I used to work, one secretary would greet everyone with a smile and look so happy to see you. The other secretary would give you that “Don’t you dare bother me” look. Guess which one made me feel better. Smiling and being courteous to people is so easy and it can make such a positive difference in the world.

5. Use your brain!

“Rabbi Eleazar also said, ‘Whenever there is knowledge in a man, it is as if the Sanctuary had been built in his days. For knowledge is set between two names of God, “For a God of knowledge is the Lord (I Samuel 2:3),” and the Sanctuary is set between two names of God, “Thou hast made, O Lord, the sanctuary, O Lord (Exodus 15:17).”’”

(B. Berachoth 33a)

“This, too, did Raba say, ‘Let one by all means learn, even though he is liable to forget, yea, even if he does not fully understand all the words which he studies, as it is said, “My soul breaks for the longing that it has for Your ordinances at all times.”’”

(B. Avodah Zarah 19a)

Our brains are what set us apart from the rest of the life forms on this planet. Don't let yours go to waste. You were given that brain for a purpose. Also, in *kabbalah*, the word “knowledge” has a very specific meaning. It doesn't mean just book knowledge or facts and figures. Instead, it is the synthesis of both left and right brain ways of comprehension. In other words, when we combine our rational analysis with the intuitive wisdom that lies within us, then we have true knowledge, and part of what we should be doing is seeking out this greater knowledge of what the universe is and who we are within it. Along these lines, the following passage seems most appropriate.

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter.”

(Proverbs 25:2)

6. Pray and give thanks for what you have.

“Rabbi Hanina ben Papa said, ‘To enjoy this world without a benediction is like robbing the Holy One.’”

(B. Berachoth 35b)

“Rabbi Eleazar also said, ‘Prayer is more efficacious than offerings, as it says, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me (Isaiah 1:11),” and this is followed by, “And when ye spread forth your hands (Isaiah 1:15).”’”

(B. Berachot 32b)

“Rabbi Eliezer says, “‘If a man makes his prayers a fixed task, it is not a genuine supplication.’”

(B. Berachoth 28b)

“It has been taught, ‘To love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart. (Deuteronomy 11:13)’ What is Service of Heart? You must say, ‘Prayer.’ And the verse following reads, ‘That I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former

rain and the latter rain. (Deuteronomy 11:14)’”

(B. Taanith 2a)

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”

(Proverbs 15:8)

“To You, silence is praise⁶.”

(Psalm 65:2)

There are so many wonderful things in my life right now that I give thanks for every day, and this is one form of prayer. Other prayers involve supplications for what we need, and others are just silent communion. In Judaism there are also formal prayers that are scripted the same for everyone. On the one hand, many of these prayers are so beautiful that they are like great symphonies. But on the other hand, as is noted in the *Talmud*, if one is not careful, then these scripted prayers can become lifeless and mechanical. The other type of prayer is that spontaneous prayer that arises from the heart, and the *Psalms* are a good model for such prayers that can cover virtually all situations.

7. Choose life.

“I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life that

⁶ See also *B. Eiruvim 19a* and *B. Megilah 18a*

both you and your seed may live.”

(Deuteronomy 30:19)

I apply this to myself in so many ways. Every day we are faced with choices. Some of those choices are destructive, and others are not. Always make the choice that leads to life. For me this means, among other things, eat a good diet, get exercise, don't fight with other people, and do those things that tend to strengthen the life force within. Choose life!

8. Be cheerful.

“A merry heart is good medicine.”

(Proverbs 17:22)

Maintaining a happy heart will not only make you feel better, it will also help heal those around you!

9. Don't be lazy!

“Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise. The ant, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides herself bread in the summer and gathers for herself food in the harvest.”

(Proverbs 6:6-8)

Life always oscillates between the poles of activity and inactivity. When you get up in the morning, you're supposed to be active. Do what you can to accomplish something with the time you are given. Later on comes the time to be inactive and rest.

10. Stay far away from a transgression.

“All the offerings that are to be eaten within one day may lawfully be consumed until the coming up of the dawn. Why then did the sages say, ‘Until midnight?’ In order to keep a man far from transgression.”

(B. Berachot 2a)

Don't even get close to doing the wrong thing. Stay as far away from it as possible. That way there will always be a little room for error without crossing that boundary.

11. Don't engage in risky behavior.

“Can one go on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?”

(Proverbs 6:28)

Whether we are talking about using your cell phone while you drive or just taking too many chances in other areas of our lives, the injunction is clear. Don't do it. Stay far

away from such behavior. If you play with fire, you can expect to get burned.

12. Make sure your heart is good.

“The Holy One, blessed be He, requires the heart, as it is written, ‘But the Lord looks on the heart.’”

(B. Sanhedrin 106b)

“It matters not whether a man offers much or little so long as his heart is directed to heaven.”

(B. Menachoth 110a)

“Righteousness, righteousness shall you pursue.”

(Deuteronomy 16:20)

It’s very important that your heart be in the right place. If it is, then everything else will follow.

13. Don’t gossip.

“The talk about third persons kills three persons - him who tells the slander, him who accepts it, and him about whom it is told.”

(B. Arachin 15b)

“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)

In Judaism, gossip is known as the evil tongue, and in the *Talmud* it is considered the equivalent of murder. Also, the evil tongue doesn’t mean simply telling lies about people. It also refers to saying things that are true that aren’t anyone else’s businesses. So watch your tongue!

14. Don’t always insist on your full rights.

“Three the Holy One, blessed be He, loves: he who does not display temper, he who does not become intoxicated, and he who does not insist on his full rights.”

(B. Pesachim 113b)

“Do not proceed hastily to litigation.”

(Proverbs 25:8)

Look, other people aren't perfect and neither are you. Sure, there are some things in life you must insist on, but don't expect to get a hundred percent of what is yours all the time. Sometimes you just have to compromise, give people a little slack, and then move on. Expect of other people that they try to do the right thing, but then be satisfied not with always getting what you want, but with getting what you need. You'll be a lot happier for it.

15. Listen to your spouse.

"If your wife is short, bend down and hear her whisper!"

(B. Baba Metzia 59a)

"In all that Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice."

(Genesis 21:12)

I am blessed with a wife that I love dearly. I don't want to miss a word that she has to say!

16. End the day on an inspirational note.

“Resh Lakish says, ‘To him who is engaged in the study of the Torah by night, the Holy One extends a thread of grace by day, as it is said, “By day the Lord will command his loving kindness, and in the night his song shall be with me. (Psalm 42:9)” For what reason will the Lord command his loving kindness by day? Because His song shall be with me in the night.’”

(B. Avodah Zarah 3b)

“Whenever the Torah is studied by night, a little thread of this hidden light steals down and plays upon them that are absorbed in their study, wherefore it is written, ‘The Lord commands His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song is with me (Psalms 42:9).’”

(Zohar Vol II:149)

A very good practice is to end your day with the study of some inspirational text.

Also, the very beginning of *Genesis* is related to these passages. According to *Genesis*, on the first day *God* says, “*Let there be light.*” However, there is a problem in the text because *God* doesn’t create the Sun and the Moon until the fourth day.

Consequently, where’s the light created on the first day? According to *Genesis Rabbah*, this light was a special light created for and hidden away for the righteous.

This conclusion is based on the following passage:

“Light is sown for the righteous.”

(Psalm 96:11)

As a result, the light that enters one due to divine study is part of this light set aside for the righteous. When I study *Torah, Talmud*, or related texts at night, I feel something at the crown of my head opening up, and I feel an invisible light of love and oneness entering me and filling my being. This is a particularly good way to end the day!

17. Don’t embarrass people.

“Rabbi Johanan said on the authority of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai, ‘Verbal wrong is more heinous than monetary wrong, because of the first it is written, “And thou shalt fear thy God,” but not of the second.’ Rabbi Eleazar said, ‘The one affects his person, the other only his money.’ Rabbi Samuel ben Nahmani said, ‘For monetary wrongs restoration is possible, but not for verbal wrongs.’ A tanna (a member of the early generation of rabbinic sages that spanned the period from approximately 70-200 CE) recited before Rabbi Nahman ben Isaac, ‘He who publicly shames his neighbor is as though he shed blood.’ Whereupon he remarked to him, ‘You say well, because I have seen such shaming, the ruddiness departing and paleness supervening.’

(B. Baba Metzia 58b)

Embarrassing someone publicly is very serious business. It is so serious that the

rabbis considered it equivalent to shedding blood. Consequently, I do what I can to avoid embarrassing people in public. You've got to leave people with their dignity.

18. Plan for the generations to come.

“One day Honi the Circle Drawer was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, ‘How long does it take for this tree to bear fruit?’ The man replied, ‘Seventy years.’ He then further asked him, ‘Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?’ The man replied, ‘I found ready grown carob trees in the world. As my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.’”

(B. Taanith 23a)

“When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him, ‘Behold My works, how beautiful and commendable they are! All that I have created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and destroy My universe for if you corrupt it, there is no one after you to repair it.’”

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:20)

Think not only about what kind of world you are creating for yourself, but also what kind of world you will leave behind.

19. Be honest.

“Raba said, ‘When man is led in for Judgment he is asked, “Did you deal faithfully with others (i.e. with integrity and honesty), did you fix times for learning, did you engage in procreation, did you hope for salvation, did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom, did you understand one thing from another?”’”

(B. Shabbat 31a)

As one rabbi I know likes to point out, when you die the very first question you’ll be asked is, “Were you honest in business?” This should show you the importance of having integrity in your dealings with others.

20. Think twice before rejoicing in the failure of those you don’t like.

“The ministering angels wanted to chant their hymns as the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea during the exodus, but the Holy One, blessed be He, said, ‘The work of my hands is being drowned in the sea, and shall you chant hymns?’”

(B. Megilah 10b)

“Rejoice not when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles.”

(Proverbs 24:17)

Always keep in my mind that the other person is a holy creation, too.

21. Don't be too quick to judge others.

“Judge not your fellow man until you have stood in his place.”

(Pirkei Avot 2:4)

We are often so judgmental, both of ourselves and others. See if you can go an entire day accepting everyone instead.

22. Respect your elders even when they've lost their abilities.

“The hoary head is a crown of glory. It is found in the way of righteousness.”

(Proverbs 16:31)

“You shall rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man.”

(Leviticus 19:32)

“Which you did break, and you shall put them in the ark (Deuteronomy 10:2).’

Rabbi Joseph taught ‘This teaches us that both the tablets and the fragments of the tablets were deposited in the ark. Hence we learn that a scholar who has forgotten his learning through no fault of his must not be treated with disrespect.’”

(B. Menachoth 99a)

As I get older, this respect for elders stuff becomes a whole lot more important to me!

When we are young, many elders help us along the way with their love and their wisdom. Eventually, they pass away from our lives, and then there comes a time when we realize that we are now the elders to guide the next generation.

23. Don't be filled with guile; be sincere in your dealings with others.

“Raba said, ‘Any scholar whose inside is not like his outside, is no scholar.’”

(B. Yoma 72b)

Always try and show your true face, both to yourself and to others.

24. Think about how your actions will affect others.

“It is said, ‘Shall one man sin, and you will be angry with the whole congregation? (Numbers 16:22).’ Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai taught, ‘This may be compared to the case of men on a ship, one of whom took a drill and began drilling a hole beneath his own room. His fellow travelers said to him, “What are you doing?” Said he to them, “What does that matter to you, am I not drilling in my own room?” Said they, “It matters because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all!” Even so did Job say, “And be it indeed that I have erred, my error remains with myself (Job 19:4),” and his friends said, “He adds transgression to his sin, and he extends it among us.” They said to him, “You extend your sins among us.”’”
(Leviticus Rabbah IV:6)

While we should be given maximum freedom to live our lives the way we want, we also need to be cognizant of how our choices affect others. I guess that’s why *God* created homeowners’ associations!

25. Live joyfully with your spouse.

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love.”
(Ecclesiastes 9:9)

“A man should always eat and drink less than his means allow, clothe himself in

accordance with his means, and honor his wife and children more than his means allow.”

(B. Chullin 84b)

Good relationships don't just happen. They require attention and loving care just like everything else. But the rewards are beyond measure.

26. Listen to your own heart.

“Rabbi. Jannai said, ‘If the patient says, I need food, while the physician says he does not need it, we listen to the patient. What is the reason? ‘The heart knows its own bitterness (Proverbs 14:10).’”

(B. Yoma 83a)

I am not an expert in everything, but every person will know their own being better than anyone else. Don't discount your intuition. Listen to it before making any final decision.

27. Be flexible.

“A person should always be as bending as a reed and not as rigid as the cedar.”

(B. Taanit 20a-b)

I consider myself persevering. Other people call that stubbornness. However, I always strive to be flexible and open to change. In fact, I work on physical flexibility as much as mental flexibility. I need to stretch my body as well as my brain.

28. Don't eat too much.

“More people die from overeating than from hunger.”

(B. Shabbat 33a)

This is probably the hardest injunction for me to fulfill. I still eat way too much. But I'm working on it!

29. Give people the benefit of the doubt.

“Judge all men in the scale of merit.”

(Pirkei Avot 1:6)

As a mathematics teacher, I am often in the role of judge and jury. Over the years, though, I've become convinced of the wisdom of giving people the benefit of the doubt. For example, if a student's grade is right on the border between an *A* and a *B*, I will assume they are an *A* student. And if they say they missed class due to a sudden emergency, I will believe them. There may be some who are engaging in chicanery, but I think the majority of people want to be honest, and so whenever I can,

in all situations, I assume the best of people.

30. Don't just study; do good deeds.

“Anyone whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom is enduring, but anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom is not enduring.”

(Pirkei Avot 3:9)

“Study is not the most important thing, but deed.”

(Pirkei Avot 1:17)

There are so many wonderful texts in Judaism with so much wisdom that it's easy to get lost in that scholarship. However, never forget that the most important thing is not what you read, but what you do. *Rabbi Akiba* believed that study was better, but only if it leads to practice.

31. Respect other people's property.

“Let the property of your fellow man be as precious to you as your own.”

(Pirkei Avot 2:12)

This is a big one for me because I see a lot of people who don't respect the property

of others.

32. Respect another person's honor.

“Let the honor of your friend be as precious to you as your own.”

(Pirkei Avot 2:10)

“Rabbi Nehunia ben haKaneh was asked by his disciples, ‘In virtue of what have you reached such a good old age?’ He replied, ‘Never in my life have I sought respect through the degradation of my fellow, nor has the curse of my fellow gone up with me upon my bed, and I have been generous with my money.’”

(B. Megillah 28a)

We don't raise ourselves up by putting other people down. We raise ourselves by raising others.

33. Take a walk after eating.

“If one eats without walking afterwards, his food rots and that is the beginning of a foul smell.”

(B. Shabbath 41a)

As I've said, in all things you've got to keep the energy flowing.

34. **Pursue peace.**

“Hillel used to say, ‘Be thou as the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace.’”

(Pirkei Avot 1:12)

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the word *shalom*, peace, is related to the word *shalem*, wholeness. Thus, peace isn't just an absence of conflict. It is a state of completeness and wholeness.

35. **Don't follow the multitude to do evil.**

“You shall not follow a multitude to do evil.”

(Exodus 23:2)

Frankly, these days it seems like all multitudes tend to do something wrong eventually. Hence, as I get older, I just become more independent. Also, my personal corollary to this passage is, *“Never let religion get in the way of doing what's right.”*

36. Control your outbursts.

“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)

“Commit your deeds to the Lord, and your thoughts shall be established.”

(Proverbs 16:3)

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.”

(Proverbs 15:1)

This, of course, is sometimes hard to do. I mean, have you seen how many idiots in my city are trying to drive while talking on their cell phones? Nonetheless, when you feel that flash of anger coming on, just take a nice deep breath and examine why you chose this particular emotion, and then your inner smile will return.

Conclusion

Some will, perhaps, regard the above list as a liberal deviation from tradition while others will find it enlightening. And still others will come from traditions that are outside of Judaism, and they will have their own guidelines for behavior to follow. That is okay. I am not here to argue with anyone. I am only here to share what I have learned, and what

I have learned teaches me the value of balance and level headedness before beginning any deep spiritual venture. Thus, before proceeding, do the following exercise, and realize that as with all the exercises in this book, it is both personally valuable and not at all difficult. The only difficulty is in making yourself actually exert the effort to get it done.

Exercise #3

Drawing upon your own learning and traditions, compile your own short list of commandments to focus on. Review it from time to time, and assess your progress towards becoming a better, more balanced individual. It's a very simple exercise, but if you don't do it, then you'll accomplish nothing. And if you successfully do it, you'll be glad you did!

CHAPTER 4

THE WORK OF THE CHARIOT

“The work of the chariot may not be discussed even in the presence of one unless he is a sage and already understands through his own knowledge.”

(B. Chagigah 11b)

Every tradition has its methods for going on spiritual journeys. In ancient Judaism, the method that was followed was known as the *work of the chariot*, and in this chapter we’ll describe what little is known of this method and the dangers that were involved. Furthermore, we’ll discuss modern, Jewish ways of going on spiritual journeys that avoid whatever dangers were inherent in more ancient methods of Jewish mysticism.

What is known in ancient Jewish mysticism as the *work of the chariot* stems from the phantasmagoric vision of Ezekiel in which he has a perception of *God* upon a throne.

*“And it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Kevar river, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. ... And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came from the north, a great cloud, and a fire flaring up, and a brightness was around it, out of its midst, as the color of **amber/electrum/brilliance**, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of its midst came the likeness of four living creatures. ... I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the*

*Almighty. ... And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like lapis lazuli; and **upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness like the appearance of a man upon it.***”

(Ezekiel 1:1-26)

This vision is often seen as a more elaborate version of one had earlier by the prophet Isaiah

*“In the year that king Uzziah died **I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly. And one cried to another, and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.’**”*

(Isaiah 6:1-3)

The throne above the four living creatures in the vision of Ezekiel is interpreted as “*God’s chariot*,” and hence the phrase *the work of the chariot*. In Hebrew, the word for chariot is *merkabah*, and this topic is often referred to as *merkabah mysticism*. Also, Ezekiel’s vision has come to be taken as a model for mystical attainment with the *work of the chariot* intended, to some degree, to replicate this experience. However, exactly what the methods and techniques were that were utilized in these ancient times, we cannot say with certainty. What remains in the literature is fragmentary.

What we do know of the ancient *work of the chariot* is confined, for the most part, to the *hekalot* literature. The word *hekalot* in Hebrew means *palaces*, and this is a reference to seven palaces in seven heavens that are traversed during this journey. Also, as is typical, the notion of seven heavens is derived from the variety of words found in the *Bible* that describe *God's* dwelling place.

“R. Judah said, ‘There are two firmaments, for it is said, “Behold, unto the Lord your God belongs heaven, and the heaven of heavens.”’ Resh Lakish said, ‘There are seven, namely, Wilon (curtain), Rakia (firmament), Shehakim (clouds), Zebul (lofty habitation), Ma'on (dwelling), Makon (fixed place), ‘Araboth (darkness).’”
(B. Chagigah 12b)

In ancient times, the *work of the chariot* was a quest fraught with both complexity and danger, not unlike the Arthurian legends of the quest for the Grail or other examples of the “hero’s journey.” Along the way, combinations of the correct passwords and seals were required to gain entrance to the next level, and if all was not right, then the results would be disastrous.

*“And whenever a man wished to descend to the Merkabha he would call to Surya the Prince of the Presence and conjure him one hundred and twelve times by Totrosi'ai the Lord who is called Totrosi'ai Zurtak Totrakhiel Tophgar 'Ashrawwili'ai Zebhodi el Zoharari el Tandi el, and Shekhadhozi'ai Dehibhiron, and 'Andiriron the Lord God of Israel. And **let him beware that he***

do not exceed a hundred and twelve times and do not diminish from them. And if he exceed or diminish his blood is upon his own head.”

(Hekalot Rabbatai, Chapter XIV)

*“Said Rabbi Ishmael: Rabban Simon ben Gamliel was angry with me. He said to me, “Almost had Zahaphtariai rebuked us and shucked us as husks of corn. Why didst thou, by criminal carelessness, sin against us? Dost thou, perhaps, think that Jonathan be Uzziel is a man of small account in Israel? **If he simply descended and came and stood at the entrance of the seventh palace without a seal, what would happen to him? He could not blink an eye before the door-keepers of the seventh palace had utterly exterminated him.** And yet you have said nothing about the necessary seals nor the names of the angels to whom they must be shown.”*

(Hekalot Rabbatai, Chapter XXI)

*“When thou comest and standest at the entrance of the sixth palace, display three seals of the door-keepers of the sixth palace. **Display two seals to Kazpiel the Prince, whose sword is drawn in his hand, and there issue forth from it lightnings, and he shaketh it against everyone who is not fit to behold the King and his throne, and there is no creature who may stay his hand. And his sword crieth and saith: ‘Pain!’**”*

(Hekalot Rabbatai, Chapter XVIII)

What qualifies one to pursue the *merkabah*? According to the *Hekalot Rabbatai* it is righteousness brought about by both practice and study of the *Torah* and other instructive writings.

“And Dumiel would say to him: ‘I bear witness and warn thee concerning two things: That none of those who descend to the Merkabha succeed to descend except only he who hath these two qualifications: He who hath read the Bible and studieth mishna, midrash, halakhoth and agadoth, and the explanation of halakhoth as to what is forbidden and permitted; and he who hath fulfilled all that which is written in the law and keepeth all warnings of statutes and of judgments and of laws which were declared to Moses on Sinai.’”

(Hekalot Rabbatai, Chapter XX)

In the previous chapter, we read the famous story of *pardes* in which four rabbis went on a mystical journey. Within that story we also found a warning from *Rabbi Akiba* to not mistake the marble stones for water.

“Rabbi Akiba said to them, ‘When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, do not say, water, water! For it is said, “He who speaks falsehood shall not be established before my eyes.””

(B. Chagigah 14b)

It is apparent from this passage that one of the great dangers of mystical journeys is the fantasy or delusion that one may fall prey to where the real reality (whatever that is) is mistaken for the more familiar water. Notice, too, that the image of water additionally appears in the vision of Ezekiel, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, where we read, “*I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty.*” Below, in *Hekalot Rabbatai*, we find another reference to water, and about this reference one must say some things. First, *Hekalot Rabbatai* is clearly referencing the *pardes* story found in the *Talmud*. However, that does not necessarily mean that the journey the rabbis went on in the *Talmudic* story is the same as the one outlined in *Hekalot Rabbatai*. As the scholar Joseph Dan⁷ points out, the journeys described in the *hekalot* literature may be later additions and layers added onto the *pardes* story, and it might, indeed, have little to do with the practices of our original four rabbis.

“And I beheld something like unto the appearance of lightning which was fixed and stationary and was divided, among those who descend to the Merkabha, between those who were fit to descend to the Merkabha and those who were not fit to descend to the Merkabha. If a man were fit to descend to the Merkabha, when they say to him “Enter” and he doth not enter, they repeat themselves and say to him “Enter,” and he at once entereth. They would then praise him, saying, “Surely this is on of those who descend to the Merkabha.” But if a man be not fit to descend to the Merkabha, when they say to him “Enter” and he entereth, they at once place upon him a thousand pieces of iron, because the door-keepers of the sixth palace place upon him a thousand thousands of waves of

⁷ *Jewish Mysticism, Volume* by Joseph Dan

water, and there is not in that place even a single drop. And if he said, “What is the nature of this water?” they at once run after him, stoning him, and saying to him, “Wretch, are thou not of the seed of them that kissed the golden calf, and art unfit to see the King and His throne in his beauty.” And if he be such, a voice goeth forth from the seventh heaven saying, “Well have ye said that he is from the seed of them that kissed the golden calf and is not fit to see the King and His throne.” He does not move from the spot before they place on him a Thousand thousands of pieces of iron.”

(Hekalot Rabbatai, Chapter XXV)

Today, we generally do not expect religious and mystical endeavors to be as fraught with peril as those we find in the *work of the chariot*. Instead, probably the most likely danger is that of self-delusion or “*following the multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2)*.” If problems are to occur today, they are more likely to result from being swept up in the mythology of a particular group or cult rather than from seals and secret passwords being required by menacing angels.

However, in the past, religious practices may have been more intense and, consequently, more likely to stir up deeper levels of the psyche. Certainly, the sacrificial cult of ancient Judaism must have dug more deeply into the consciousness of people because the passing of a life, albeit an animal one, was required. It was during such times, for example, that we read in *Leviticus 10:1-2* the story of the children of Aaron being struck down by *aish zerah*, alien fire, as a result of procedures not being followed to the letter. Such an

outcome is not necessarily a punishment meted out by a vengeful *parent-God*, but rather the natural consequence of violating laws of spiritual physics, literally playing with fire. Thus, the whole situation may not be unlike grasping a live electrical wire and having to pay the price for not following necessary rules of safety.

Whether at a church or a synagogue, most modern religious ceremonies are not as intense as the ancient ones, and thus, one is less likely to experience any sort of disastrous outcome. However, some more intense spiritual ceremonies do exist to this day, for example, among various Native American groups, that could result in harm if procedures are not followed. These would be ceremonies such as the *inipi* (the sweat lodge), *humblechya* (vision quest/crying for a vision), and the *sun dance*. In each of these ceremonies, there is the likelihood of experiencing *aish zerah* (alien fire) if they are not performed in a correct manner and without the proper amount of humility.

However, what we want to discuss here are ways of going on spiritual journeys that can be both rewarding and fairly safe for the typical person. Furthermore, all of these methods have their roots in traditional Judaism.

Dream a Little Dream of Me

There are several dreamers to be found in the stories of Judaism. One is *Jacob*, son of *Isaac*, who had his famous dream of a ladder extending to heaven as he was on his way to Haran.

“And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and remained there all night, because the sun was set, and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. ... And Jacob awoke from his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.”

(Genesis 28:10-16)

Jacob's son, *Joseph*, was likewise a great dreamer.

“And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brothers, and they hated him even more. And he said to them, ‘Hear, I beg you, this dream which I have dreamed. For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright. And, behold, your sheaves stood around, and made obeisance to my sheaf.’ And his brothers said to him, ‘Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?’ And they hated him even more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brothers, and said, ‘Behold, I have again dreamed a dream, and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.’ And he told it to his father, and to his brothers, and his father rebuked him, and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers, indeed, come to bow down ourselves to you to the earth?’”

(Genesis 37:5-10)

And yet another great dreamer was *Daniel*.

“In the first year of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay upon his bed. Then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matter. Daniel spoke and said, ‘I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, one different from the other. The first was like a lion, and had eagle’s

wings. I looked till its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand upon its feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, a second, like a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth, and it was told, "Arise, devour much flesh." After this I looked, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon its back four wings of a bird. The beast had also four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and exceedingly strong, and it had great iron teeth. It devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet, and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ... And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the most High, whose kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Here is the end of the matter.' As for me Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my color changed, but I kept the matter in my heart."

(Daniel 7:1-27)

Two things were understood by the ancient rabbis when it came to dreams. First, they were considered to be a form of prophecy. Along these same lines, some 13th century rabbis engaged in a practice known as "questions from heaven"⁸ wherein they would ask a question of *God* before going to sleep and then interpret the dream as the answer.

⁸ See *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction* by Joseph Dan

“Five things are a sixtieth part of something else: namely, fire, honey, Sabbath, sleep and a dream. Fire is one-sixtieth part of Gehinnom. Honey is one-sixtieth part of manna. Sabbath is one-sixtieth part of the world to come. Sleep is one-sixtieth part of death. A dream is one-sixtieth part of prophecy.”

(B. Berachot 57b)

“Rabbi Hanina b. Isaac said: There are three incomplete phenomena: the incomplete experience of death is sleep; an incomplete form of prophecy is the dream; the incomplete form of the next world is the Sabbath.”

(Genesis Rabbah XVII:5)

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.”

(Yoel 3:1)

And second, it was also understood that dreams were often a combination of valid information mixed with individual fantasy.

“Said R. Johanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai, that just as wheat cannot be without straw, so there cannot be a dream without some nonsense.”

(B. Berachot 55a)

Nonetheless, they were still both a simple and important source of otherworldly information.

“R. Hisda also said, ‘A dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read.’”

(B. Berachot 55a)

Consequently, dreams can be one of the safest and most rewarding ways of regularly going on a spiritual journey. When I was younger, I had a very active dream life filled with many recurring dreams. Unfortunately, as one gets older, sleep is often very light, and one’s capacity for vivid dreaming often diminishes. As we read in *Ecclesiastes*,

“(When one is old) one rises up at the voice of the bird.”

(Ecclesiastes 12:4)

Nonetheless, there are a variety of things one can do to promote dreams and dream recall. The most important thing one can do is to get a notepad and pencil, and begin to keep a dream diary. Our minds often follow our intent, and the mere intent to remember and record one’s dreams is often all it takes to bring about the desired result. The mere placement of a notebook and pencil by the bedside is generally enough to convince the mind of the seriousness of your intent. Also, another technique is to wake up briefly at 3 or 4am, and then go back to sleep. This usually results in deeper and more intense dreams for the remainder of the night.

When I was in my early twenties and in college, I used to have a recurring dream about being in a university bathroom with rows and rows of not so clean toilets. It took me a while to figure it out, but I eventually realized that the dream was trying to tell me that I'm full of you-know-what. Not surprising. Many people that age are full of it, or at least in my day they were. A more meaningful recurring dream I had for several years was one in which I would find a hole at the base of a tree, dive into it, and somehow fly through a tunnel to another location. It was always such a fun way to travel! The last time I had such a dream, I looked to the side to see what was actually occurring, and I saw that I was passing through an infinite number of layers of parallel realities until I found the one I was looking for. Dreams can tell us much about ourselves and provide a lot of interesting experiences.

A special type of dream that some excel in is called a *lucid dream*. These are dreams in which the dreamer focuses on waking up within the dream so that they can direct the action. I've only had a few lucid dreams within my lifetime, but it is an interesting experience to walk through walls. For more information on lucid dreams and techniques for achieving them, check out the work of Dr. Stephen LeBerge who has specialized in this topic.

A rarer type of dream that I have had more frequently has been labeled by psychologist Dr. Charles Tart as a *high dream*. These are dreams in which the dreamer enters an altered, more transcendent state of consciousness within the dream. In my last *high*

dream I was walking down a street in Israel, and all around me was a spiritual light that filled me with joy. Hence, in summary, dreams can provide an easy access to not only messages that your subconscious is trying to send to you, but also a variety of unique and rewarding experiences.

Meditation

The earliest known reference to meditation in Judaism might be *Genesis 24:63* where it says that *Isaac* went out into the field to meditate at evening time. While we can debate exactly what the word meditate means in this context, we can, nonetheless, conclude that the text suggests that meditation should be done (1) alone, (2) at the end of the day, and (3) in a natural environment free from distractions.

In modern day times, meditation can be an excellent way to reduce stress, tune in to other parts of your being, and experience higher states of consciousness. The most common type of meditation these days is mantra mediation where a word or a phrase is repeated as one's breath goes in and out. One of the more common mantras is *so-ham*. Some mentally recite “*so*” on the in-breath and “*hahm*” on the out-breath, while others recommend the reverse. That is, recite “*hahm*” on the in-breath and “*sah*” on the out breath. Still others prefer to recite “*om*” or longer phrases such as “*om namah shivaya*” as their mantra of choice. Additionally, you might try using some traditional Hebrew words such as “*amen*” (pronounced *aw-main*), “*shalom*” (peace), or “*ayin*” (nothingness) as your mantra. One can also meditate quite effectively on the images and meanings of

the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Take your pick to see what works best for you. Also, do your own research online on meditation techniques, or find yourself a competent teacher for meditation. When meditating, a cross-legged sitting position on a firm cushion on the floor and a straight spine are usually the best for letting the energy flow. Also, let the eyes gaze upward to direct the energy toward centers of higher consciousness. However, if this or any other position is too uncomfortable, then that will defeat the purpose.

“To you lift I up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens.”

(Psalm 123:1)

Research by the late Anna Wise⁹ has shown that meditation is a specific state of consciousness that is measureable in terms of brainwave signatures involving beta, alpha, theta, and delta waves. Brainwaves are measured in cycles per second called “Hertz,” and roughly speaking, the range of beta is 13 to 40 cycles per second, alpha is 8 to 13, theta is 4 to 8, and delta is 1/2 to 4 cycles per second. Some characterize a fast beta brainwave of 24 Hertz or higher as a gamma wave, and there is a hypothesis that it may be involved with forms of hyper-creativity. Lower beta waves, however, seem to correspond to a relaxed alertness and awareness of the present moment. It is said that cats can generate brainwaves at a frequency of 14 cycles per second at will. Not an insignificant skill for an animal that has to be vigilant as it stalks its prey! Another interesting fact is that most people immediately start generating alpha waves the moment they begin watching television. The overall significance of the various levels of

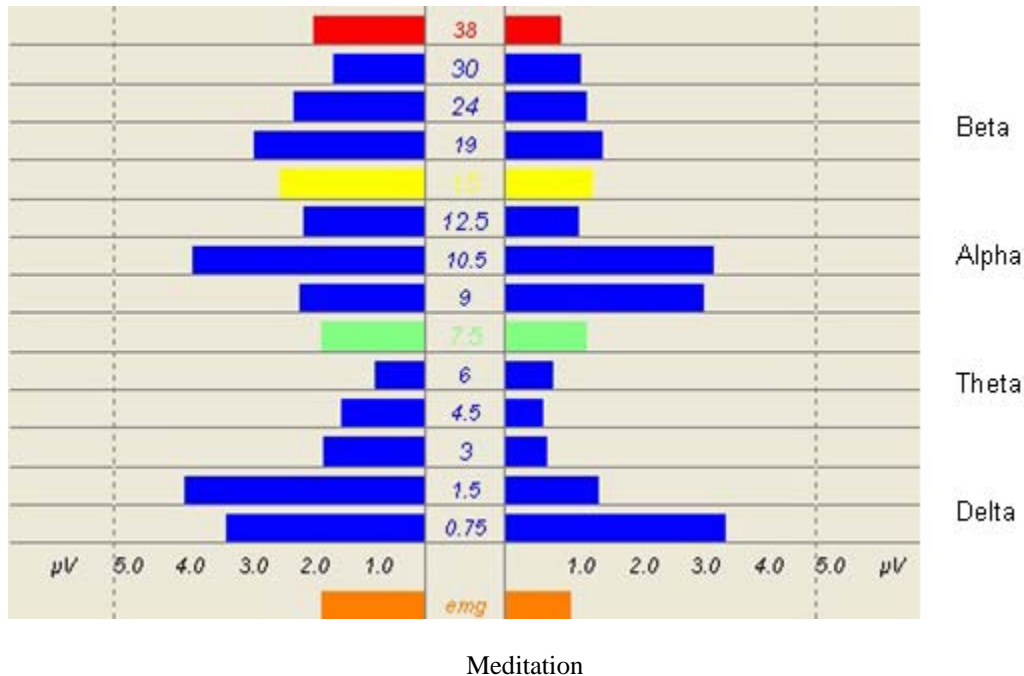
⁹ See *Awakening the Mind* and *The High-Performance Mind*

brainwaves is that beta waves are needed in order for us to be alert and pay attention, alpha waves permit relaxation, theta waves are involved with fantasy and imagery, and delta waves are required for deep sleep and relaxation. In our society, a problem many people have today is that the demands of the day leave them stuck in beta. This is what happens when you can't unwind and your mind is running the same thoughts and programs over and over again. As a result, many people turn to a variety of substances (alcohol, tobacco, tranquilizers, herbal preparations, etc) in the evening hours in an effort to change their state of consciousness. Personally, I use such legal mood changers only as a last resort. I prefer to use my own will and my own brain chemicals to change my state whenever possible because other substances can linger in your system far beyond the period that you desire. The alpha state is important because it serves as the bridge between beta and theta, and this is the state that needs to be reached before we can unwind. The theta state is where visions and fantasies occur, and this is the state that is the launching pad for a variety of journeys that you might take. If you have good control over your alpha, then you can move from beta to theta and back almost at will.

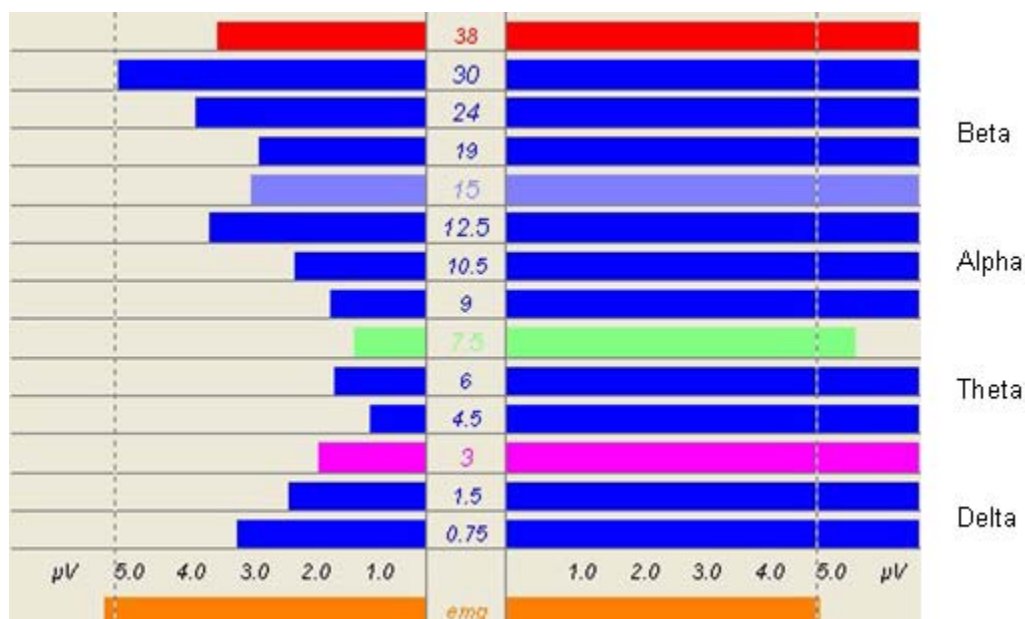
Brainwave	Range	State of Consciousness
beta	13 to 40 Hz	Alert, focused, active thinking
alpha	8 to 13 Hz	Relaxed state of mind
theta	4 to 8 Hz	Dreaming, reverie, visualization
delta	1/2 to 4 Hz	Deep sleep

When meditation truly begins, the amplitudes of the alpha waves in the brain increase, and we tend to get a display that is symmetrical between the left and right hemispheres and that simultaneously shows spikes for beta, alpha, theta, and delta waves. What follows now is a snapshot of my brain while meditating. The usually squiggly EEG lines

have been replaced by bar graphs showing the activity in the two brain hemispheres. Just remember that beta is at the top and delta is at the bottom, and you'll have no trouble interpreting the graph. Also, once that alpha kicks in, you're probably doing real meditation.

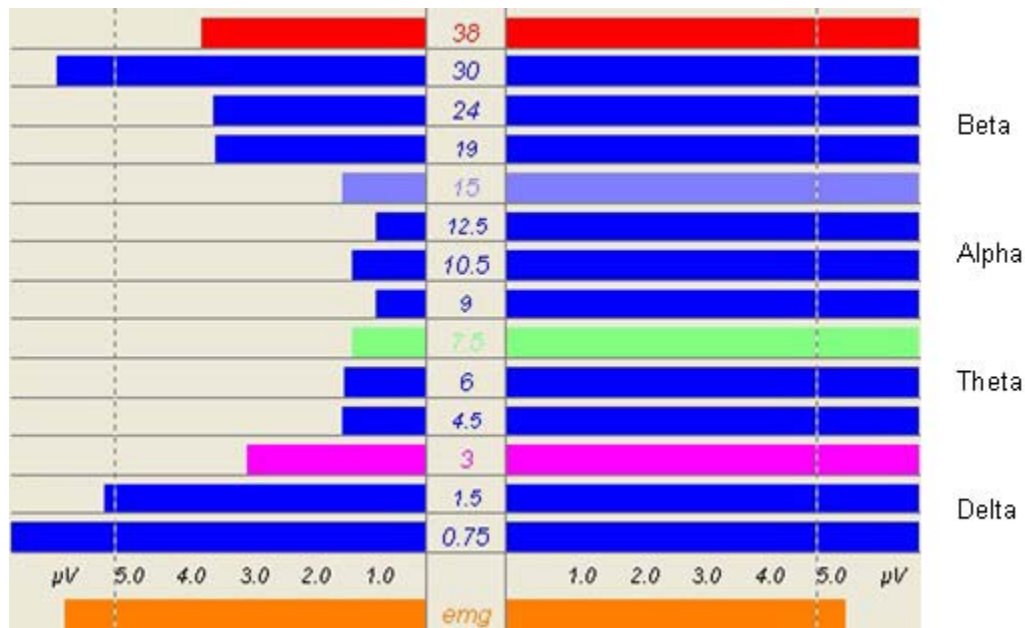


If you're fortunate, then every now and then during meditation, you will have an experience in which you dissolve into a state of complete oneness. What I'm talking about here is not merely feeling connected with everything, but actually going beyond the subject/object dichotomy, an ultimate state that can't be transcended because there is nothing left to transcend. When that happens to me while meditating, the amplitudes of all the frequencies in my right brain hemisphere just suddenly go off the chart. Sometimes the left hemisphere does the same. Here is a typical graph of what happens.



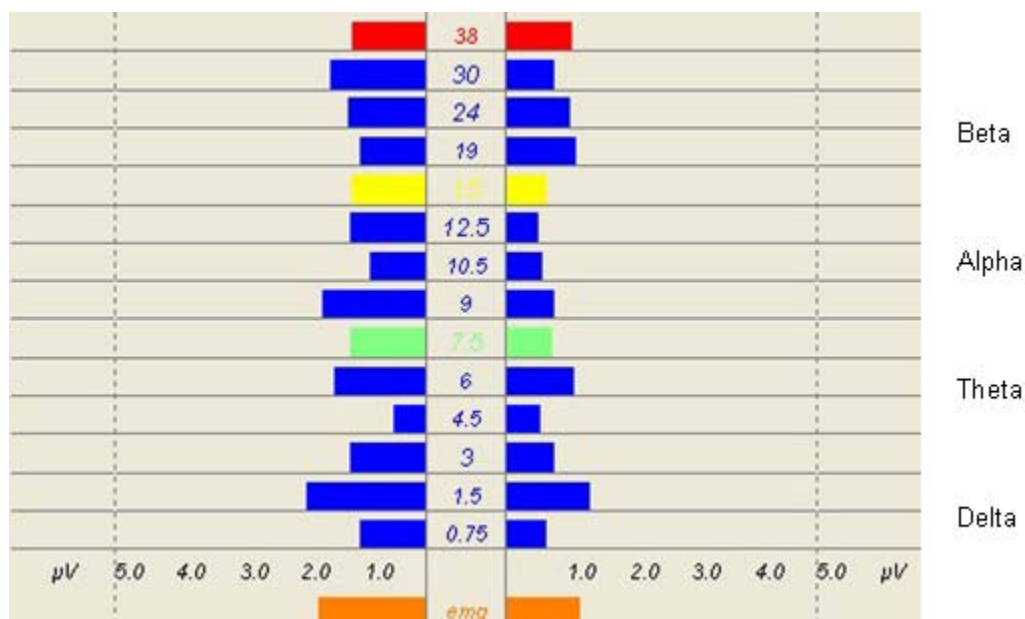
Achieving “oneness”

Interestingly, if I am studying rabbinic literature or some other wonderful subject such as mathematics, and if I have a sudden “aha” moment presaging the arrival of some deep insight, then the brainwave signature is exactly the same as that of the “oneness” attained during meditation. Once again, the amplitudes of the waves of the right hemisphere go off the chart, and this tells me that the two states are exactly the same. When I achieve oneness in meditation, it is no different from the “aha” moment where I similarly disappear momentarily into a oneness that is followed by a wave of organization around my new insight by the left hemisphere of the brain. Thus, *Torah* study can be another type of meditative journey.



The “aha” moment

And finally, there is another state I revel in from time to time that I sometimes call “neutral.” This is a state of minimal brain activity in which one is simply observing the world without judgment and without so much of the constant chatter going on in one’s head. One is simply being and enjoying the deliciousness of being. Here’s what the graph looks like.



Stopping the mind. Observing without judging.

In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Book of Formation*, there is an a very interesting reference to meditation where we are told essentially just to stop our thoughts, and if they run away, then simply let them return again to the seat of all thought.

“Ten sephirot of constraint. Restrain your mouth from speaking and your heart from thinking, and if your mouth runs to words or your heart to reflections, return them to their place. Thus, it is said, “And the living beings (chayot) ran and returned (Ezekiel 1:14),” and upon this word a covenant was cut.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 1.8)

In many ways, this resembles some Buddhist techniques of mindfulness. Rather than repeating a mantra, simply stop the world. Stop the chatter in your mind and sit in silence. Related to this technique is a discussion found in the *Talmud* on the difficulty of

translating a certain word, *hashmal*, found in *Ezekiel 1:4*. In the text passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, I have translated this word (in bold) in three different but common ways - as amber, electrum, or brilliance. The rabbis interpreted this word *hashmal*, however, as an abbreviation for *hashot m'malot* which means “the speaking silence.”

“It is taught that hashmal means at times they are silent and at times they speak.”

(B. Chagigah 13b)

Related to this are the following quotes from the *Bible*.

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

(Psalm 46:11)

“To thee, silence is praise¹⁰.”

(Psalm 65:2)

¹⁰ See also, *B. Eiruvim 19a* and *B. Megilah 18a*

“And he said, Go out, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

(I Kings 19:11-12)

Thus, the first step is just to be still. Stop everything. Stop the incessant chatter of your mind, stop all the things you are worrying about, stop your kvetching (complaining), and stop the passage of time and be only in the now. Then you will know.

Thinking is the Best Way to Travel

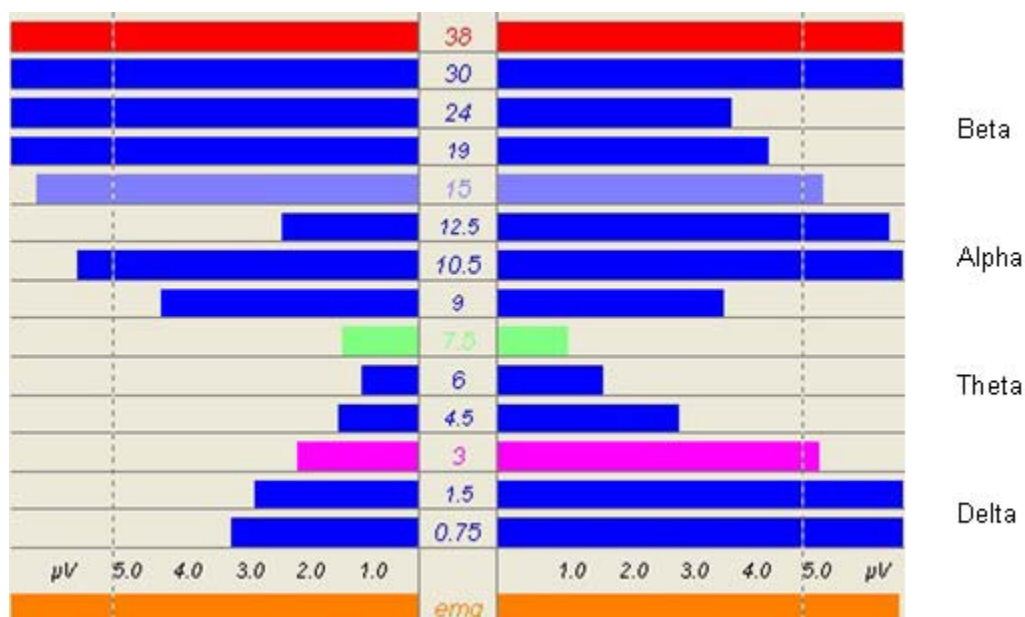
Recall that in *Ecclesiastes* it says that when you get old even the chirping of a bird is enough to wake you from your sleep.

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw near, when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them; Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain; In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look out of the windows are dimmed; And the doors are shut on the

streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low.”

(Ecclesiastes 12:1-4)

This is a reminder that as you age, you may not sleep as deeply as you did in your youth, and, hence, your ability to night dream may be diminished. However, you still have the ability to daydream! Even if we have difficulty in remembering the dreams of the night, there are still many fantastic voyages that may be taken while awake. On one level, these daydreams can simply be fantasies that take you any where you want. Just sit back in a comfortable recliner and enjoy. Or you may use daydreams for creative reveries where you solve problems or plan a beautiful future to come. However, if your doors of perception are open, then you may also easily access higher states of consciousness during your reverie. One of the keys to all of this, though, is being able to generate both alpha and theta waves in the brain. In a nutshell, when we are generating strong beta waves, then our mind is in the mode for pinpointed focus on some topic. Below is picture of my brainwaves when I’m studying rabbinic literature, but before I have the big “aha” moment. Look at the amplitudes of the beta waves in both the left and right hemispheres.



Studying

Unfortunately, many people today get so caught up in their work and lives that they get stuck in beta, and then they have a very difficult time relaxing. In order to relax, you have to be able to let go and generate alpha waves. Alpha forms the bridge between the focused, conscious mind and subconscious fantasies.

Interestingly, the literature of the *work of the chariot* makes frequent use of the phrase *yordei merkavah* (descent into the merkabah), and that is exactly what we are doing in terms of brainwaves. We are descending from a higher brainwave state to a lower one in order to access the subconscious mind and from there we can ascend to whatever heights we want.

If alpha is the bridge, then theta is where all the action is. When we are generating theta waves in our brain, then we can ride those waves to wherever our brains can take us.

Theta waves are associated with dreaming and fantasizing and a wide variety of visualizations. If we go any lower than theta, however, we will be in delta, and those are the brainwaves associated with deep, dreamless sleep. So, relax, make that alpha bridge from beta to below, and enjoy the ride!

What are some of the journeys that I take by this method of travel? Well, many of them are simply creative reveries. For example, in writing this book I'll often sit down and review what I want to write and say in any given chapter. A creative flow then begins to emerge, and before I know it, the book starts writing itself before my eyes. I just sit back and enjoy the process!

On other occasions, I use this method to get in touch with other parts of my being. Sometimes it is just merely getting in touch with my true, unbiased feelings about a subject, but frequently it is for listening to the voice of one of my higher souls. Remember that according to *Kabbalah* a person has five souls (or five levels to their being) – the *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *chayah*, and the *yechidah*. I will often relax to let myself tune into these higher parts of my being to see what messages they have for me and to get an inner confirmation that I'm on the right track.

Nature

The magnificent *Psalms 19* opens with a statement of how the heavens themselves declare the glory of *God*, but then in *verse 8* the topic switches to that of the perfection of *God's*

law. The juxtaposition of these two suggests an equivalence between nature and *Torah*. In fact, the *Talmud* even states that if we had not been given the *Torah*, then we could have learned all of its principles by observing the animals.

“R. Johanan observed, ‘If the Torah had not been given we could have learnt modesty from the cat, honesty from the ant, chastity from the dove, and good manners from the cock who first coaxes and then mates.’”
(Eiruvim 100b)

Thus, another way to journey and change our state of consciousness is by contact with nature. For some, it will just be the experience of being in nature that will be enough. Additionally, there are certain places on this planet where the energy is so overwhelming that it can be very difficult not to have a transcendent experience. One such place is the Kilauea volcano in Hawaii. It is not uncommon for visitors of all backgrounds to experience a deep religious awe at what nature does in this location. And others, like me, will also like to hug trees. Know, though, that when I talk about “hugging a tree,” I am not referring to some superficial experience. Instead, I am talking about opening yourself up to the energy of another life form. For instance, you want to be aware of how the tree feels. Is it a strong energy? A weak energy? Is it different in the morning than the afternoon? Plants go through cycles of activity and rest just like we do. Out in the deserts of Arizona, I often like to hug the saguaro cacti. And how do you hug a cactus? Very carefully! You can wrap your arms around a saguaro without actually making contact with its thorns and within seconds begin to sense its energy. In so doing, I’ve

realized that the cacti are more active at certain times and at rest at other times. Also, just like with people, the “youngsters” are more energetic than the older cacti.

Years ago, I knew an elderly Seneca Indian who would frequently walk up to the dragonflies on his property and pet them on their wings. Gradually, by osmosis, I also learned how to do this. Basically, you want to first lower your energy level so that you are not so threatening to the dragonfly. Just be still and let it fly around you. Next, open up your heart and radiate love toward the dragonfly. When it trusts you, it will suddenly drop its wings. Then, very slowly reach over to it and gently stroke its wings. It's wonderful feeling to be able to pet a dragonfly this way! There have been times back in Texas when I've stroked the wings of a dragonfly for over twenty minutes and then had it follow me around for another twenty. Even better, though, is to become so close to a dragonfly that you can suddenly see the world through its eyes and experience what it experiences. This is all part of what I call the *Torah* of nature. Also, one more thing. City dragonflies are more skittish than country dragonflies! They are just a little bit more wary of humans.

Exercise #4

Place a notebook by your bedside and begin keeping a dream journal. As you ponder your dreams during waking life, you will often begin to see patterns and have insights that were not available while you were in the dream state.

Exercise #5

Learn to meditate, and do some meditation regularly. The minimum benefit will be a healthy relaxation and elimination of stress. However, if you progress, then you will open the floodgates to a universe of higher, ecstatic states of consciousness and the knowledge that comes with those states. Also, when you meditate, I find that it is generally best to assume a comfortable, cross-legged position on a cushion on the floor and to close your eyelids but let your eyes gaze upward toward the top of your head. This helps to redirect the energy from lower centers to higher ones, and as the energy moves, so does your state of consciousness move into more sublime states.

Exercise #6

Engage in *Torah* study and the study of other texts of Judaism. This is an excellent way to go on a journey, and as we saw in the EEG diagrams, the brainwave signature of the “aha” moment during study is no different from the enlightenment moment during meditation.

Exercise #7

Engage in daydreaming. Even if you are the poorest of the poor, you can have a rich fantasy life, and properly directed daydreams can enhance your creativity and your insight into many facets of yourself. Creative daydreaming can also take you many other

places. Additionally, while this may seem the smallest of techniques, it is actually the most powerful because everything we do begins with intent. Once this technique is completely mastered, there are no limits to where you can send your mind and to what you can experience. But those are things I'll leave for you to discover on your own.

Exercise #8

Embrace nature and develop a relationship with the outdoors. In cities, we tend to put nature into little cages, into flower pots and front yards. However, everyone should experience nature as it exists without our excessive interference and learn to feel its unique energy.

Exercise #9

One of the most important journeys you can learn how to do is to go from a negative state to a positive one. Again, let your imagination be the key. If you feel overwhelmed by anger or despair, then let your mind focus on things that make you feel calm and happy. Like *Peter Pan*, find your happy thought and let it transport you to a better place. It is a simple thing, and yet, maybe the most important type of journey to know how to do on your own.

CHAPTER 5

THE WORK OF CREATION

“Every single person is obliged to say: The world was created for my sake.”

(B. Sanhedrin 38a)

Both the *work of the chariot* and the *work of creation* are mentioned in the *Talmud* as the two main forms of Jewish mysticism of that time. While the *work of the chariot* is based upon the vision of *Ezekiel*, the *work of creation* is based upon *Genesis*. Scant information is given about either discipline, however, in the *Talmud* itself.

When it comes to creation, there are two basic types identified within Judaism and elsewhere. The first type is called *yesh m’ayin*, something from nothing creation, and this is the type of creation the *God* engages in at the beginning of the *Bible* where the universe is brought into existence out of nothing. The other mode of creation is *yesh m’yesh*, something from something, and this is the type of creation we do whenever we turn a dirty room into a clean room by simply rearranging the objects.

The oldest extant text on *Kabbalah*, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, deals with these topics of *something from nothing creation* and *something from something creation* as well as additional areas of inquiry. The title, *Sefer Yetzirah*, is often translated as *Book of Creation*, but a more apropos translation might be *Book of Formation*. This is because the verb *yatzar*, to form, is generally connected with *something from something creation*

while it is the verb *bara*, to create, that is paired with *something from nothing creation*. Thus, we'll refer to this tome in English as the *Book of Formation*. Also, one of the best English translations and commentaries I can recommend is *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation* by Aryeh Kaplan. Also good, but more difficult to find these days is *The Fundamentals of Jewish Mysticism: The Book Of Creation and Its Commentaries* by Leonard Glotzer.

Tradition has it that the book was originally authored by *Abraham*. However, that is hardly possible. The Hebrew alphabet, which is referred to so often, was not even in existence at that time. Others believe that it was the famous *Talmudic* rabbi, *Rabbi Akiba*, who authored the work. Possible, but I have another theory as to its authorship. Based upon the grammatical style of the book, it was probably written, more or less, around the year 200 CE. This was about the time that a great *Talmudic* scholar, *Rav Huna*, was born. This is a name that is probably unfamiliar to most of you, but he is, nonetheless, my best guess as to the true author of the *Sefer Yetzirah*¹¹. Here is my argument. If we look in the *Talmud*, we see that the theory that the universe was created with twenty-two letters is cited in the name of *Rav*. This in itself suggests that *Rav* was knowledgeable of mystical traditions.

“Rab Judah said in the name of Rav: Bezalel knew how to combine the letters by which the heavens and earth were created.”

(B. Berachot 55a)

¹¹ To the best of my knowledge, no professional historian has yet hypothesized that Rav Huna is the author.

Rav was born in the year 175 CE and lived in Babylonia where he started an academy at Sura, and this is the academy where the *Babylonian Talmud* was ultimately constructed. Also, *Rav*'s student and successor at the academy was *Rav Huna*, and teachings recorded in rabbinic literature indicate that *Rav Huna* also had a deep, mystical understanding of the universe. For example, the first quotation below shows that he understood that everything we see is a part of *God*, but we can never see the totality of *God*, and the second quotation indicates that he understood that much of what we see is utterly lacking in substance. Deep, indeed!

“Lo, these are but parts of His ways, and what blemish of aught is heard of Him! But the thunder of His mighty deeds who can understand (Job 26:14)? Rav Huna said, ‘Whatever things you see are but parts of the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says, “Lo, these are but parts of His way,; and what blemish of aught is heard of Him? What defect is heard of Him? But the thunder of His mighty deeds who can understand?”’ Rav Huna said, ‘When thunder goes forth in its full force, no creature can understand it. It is not written, none understands, but “who can understand?” The intelligent know His hints and His thoughts.’ Said Rav Huna, ‘If you cannot comprehend the essential nature of thunder, can you comprehend the essence of the world?’”

(Genesis Rabbah XII:1)

“Solomon said, “For who knows what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life which he spends as a shadow (Ecclesiastes 6:12)?” As a shadow of

what? If life is like the shadow cast by a wall, there is substance in it. If like the shadow cast by a date-palm, there is substance in it!’ David came and explained, ‘His days are as a shadow that passes away (Psalm 144:4).’ Rav Huna said in the name of R. Aha, ‘Life is like a bird which flies past and its shadow passes with it.’”

(Ecclesiastes Rabbah I:3)

There is but a single mention in the *Talmud* of the *Book of Formation* and its use for magical creation. The particular people involved are *Hanina*, *Oshaia*, *Rabbah*, and *Zera*, and all of these are people that were involved one way or another with *Rav Huna*. *Oshaia*, *Zera*, and *Rabbah* (*Rabbah bar Nachmani*) were students of *Rav Huna*, and *Hanina* was *Oshaia*’s brother¹². Thus, all the principal players are one way or another linked to *Rav Huna*.

“Rabbah said: If the righteous desired it, they could [by living a life of absolute purity] be creators, for it is written, But your iniquities have distinguished between etc. Rabbah created a man, and sent him to R. Zera. R. Zera spoke to him, but received no answer. Thereupon he said unto him, ‘Thou art a creature of the magicians. Return to thy dust.’ R. Hanina and R. Oshaia spent every Sabbath eve in studying the ‘Book of Formation, by means of which they created a third-grown calf and ate it.”

(B. Sanhedrin 65b)

¹² *Who’s Who in the Talmud* by Shulamis Frieman

So there you have the evidence:

- The *Book of Formation* describes at length how the universe was created from the letters of the alphabet, and *Rav Huna's* teacher, *Rav*, was a teacher of this doctrine according to the *Talmud*.
- Quotations from the *Midrash Rabbah* collection show that *Rav Huna* had a deep mystical understanding of the universe.
- The people mentioned in the *Talmud* as actually having used the *Book of Formation* for purposes of creation were all connected to *Rav Huna*.

Is this conclusive proof? No! Nonetheless, I would not at all be surprised if *Rav Huna* was the true author of the *Sefer Yetzirah*.

Now let's turn to the actual text of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Book of Formation*. The very first verse says that *God* created his universe "with 32 mystical paths." The fact that thirty-two is the sum of twenty-two and ten suggests that the text wants to reconcile the theory that the universe was created with twenty-two letters with the other rabbinic doctrine that the universe was created with ten utterances.

“With 32 mystical paths (netivot peliyot) of wisdom engraved Yah, the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, the Living God, King of the universe, El Shaddai, merciful and gracious, high and exalted, dwelling in eternity, whose name is holy. He is lofty and holy, and He created His universe with three books, with text (sefer), with number (safar), and with communication (sippur).”

(Sefer Yetzirah 1:1)

A remark should be made here about the “mystical paths.” The word used for “paths” is *netivot* which usually denotes a narrow path for a single person. If we were talking about a wider more public road, then the appropriate Hebrew word would be *derech*. Thus, the *Sefer Yetzirah* seems to be informing us that it is going to be talking about personal, individual creation as well as universal creation.

At the end of this passage, we read that *God* created the universe with three books, “*with story (sefer), with number (safar), and with communication (sippur)*.” These books also may be associated, according to modern psychology, with the functions of the right hemisphere of the brain (story), the left hemisphere (number), and communication between the two. The interesting thing here, however, is that the Hebrew words for these activities all have the same three letter root, *samach-peh-resh*, and this suggests that the three activities are in reality the same. This suggests, too, that it is our brain that creates reality for us, and in the *Zohar* we find a statement that if it wasn’t for all the differentiation that the brain does, then we would see everything as absolutely one.

“We have been taught that all this differentiation of the Divine Personality is from our side and relative to our knowledge, and that, above, all is one, all is set in one balance, unvarying and eternal, as it is written: “I the Lord change not” (Malachi 3:6).’”

(Zohar II 176a)

There is a reason why we have three functions defined above, and that is because the basis for creation in the *Sefer Yetzirah* is seen as having one thing opposite another with a third principle providing communication between the two. This pattern of three is continued throughout the text, and one should not be surprised that this is based on a verse from *Ecclesiastes* that is quoted in the *Sefer Yetzirah*.

“Also God made one opposite the other’ (Ecclesiastes 7:14). Good opposite evil, Evil opposite good. Good from good, Evil from evil. Good defines evil And evil defines good. Good is kept for the good ones And evil is kept for the evil ones.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 6:4)

In the second verse of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, we read that the Hebrew alphabet is comprised of three mother letters, seven double letters, and twelve plain letters, and we are introduced to a new word, *sefirot*. The three mother letters correspond to the principle of three highlighted above that forms the basis for creation. Additionally, in the Hebrew alphabet there are some letters that can be pronounced with either a hard sound or a soft sound, and these are the seven double letters that are mentioned. They correspond to

characteristics that possess polar opposites such as *wisdom* versus *folly*. And finally, we are left with twelve plain letters to complete the count of twenty-two letters in total that are found in the Hebrew alphabet. Also, to reiterate from a previous chapter, it is not surprising that one would see the world as having been created with letters since letters create words, and words create our view of the world. In fact, the Hebrew word for “word,” *devar*, also means “thing.” Hence, words are things and things are words.

“Ten sefirot of constraint (belimah) and twenty-two letters of foundation, three mothers and seven doubles and twelve plain.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 1:2)

The introduction of the word *sefirot* in the above passage is extremely interesting. It has the same three letter root (*samach-peh-resh*) as our key words in the first passage (*sefer*, *safar*, and *sippur*), and it could refer to story, number, or communication, or a combination of all three. On the one hand, I think it definitely has a connotation of number since it is the number of creative utterances that the author is trying to reconcile with the theory that the universe was created with twenty-two letters, but on the other hand, I suspect that the term also encompasses other meanings, in particular *declare* (*me-SaPrim*)¹³. Furthermore, many translators render the Hebrew word *belimah* as *nothingness*, thus beginning the above passage with the phrase *ten sefirot of nothingness*. But because it appears related to the verb *balam*, to restrain, for this and other reasons I

¹³ “Why are they called Sefirot? Because it is written (Psalm 19:2), ‘The heavens declare (me-SaPrim) the glory of God.’” (Bahir 125)

feel a translation of *constraint*¹⁴ is more appropriate. Thus, the ten utterances are creative words that create reality by placing constraints on various aspects of it.

The three mother letters are *aleph*, *mem*, and *shin*, and they correspond to the elements of *air*, *water*, and *fire*. They also correspond to the human body where we have fire in the brain, water in the belly, and air in the lungs as the mediator between the two. What is very interesting, though, is that we do not have a letter corresponding to the element *earth* like we do in Greek philosophy where the world is created from *fire*, *water*, *air*, and *earth*. This is because in the *Sefer Yetzirah* the world is seen as derivative from the activities of air, water, and fire. In other words, according to the *Sefer Yetzirah*, we create our world! Our world doesn't create us. Consciousness is seen as the primary substance of the universe, and the differentiation of it into two opposites with communication between them is what constructs our physical reality!

“Three mothers: Aleph-Mem-Shin, in the universe are air, water, fire. Heaven was created from fire, earth was created from water, and air from breath decides between them.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 3:4)

“Three mothers: Aleph-Mem-Shin, in the soul (person), male and female, are the head, belly, and chest. The head is created from fire, the belly is created from water, and the chest, from breath, decides between them.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 3:6)

¹⁴ B. Chullin 89a

The seven double letters of the alphabet (*bet-gimmel-dalet-kaf-peh-resh-tav*) are associated, among other things, in the the *Sefer Yetzirah* with the six directions plus the very center.

“Seven doubles: Bet, Gimmel, Dalet, Kaf, Peh, Resh, Tav. Up and down, east and west, north and south, and the Holy Palace precisely in the center and it supports them all.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 4:4)

We can now see how the *Sefer Yetzirah* reconciles the creation of the world through ten utterances and the creation of the world from the twenty-two letters. We have seen that the three mother letters correspond to air, water and fire, and the seven double letters correspond to up, down, east, west, north, south, and center. This gives us ten letters, and these ten letters are, in my opinion, the original ten sefirot! In other words, each letter does double duty as both a letter and a creative utterance. The following verse supports this linkage.

“These are the ten sefirot of constraint: the breath of the Living God, breath from breath, water from breath, fire from water, up, down, east, west, north, south.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 1:14)

The *breath of the Living God* is represented by the letter *aleph*. Similarly, water, fire, up, down, east, west, north, and south correspond to the letters *mem, shin, bet, gimmel, dalet,*

kaf, *peh*, and *resh*. This leaves only the letter *tav* to be accounted for, and so it must correspond to *breath from breath*. This makes sense because *aleph* is the first letter of the alphabet and *tav* is the last, and it says in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, essentially, that the end is the beginning and the beginning is the end.

“Their end is imbedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 1:7)

In particular, *tav* stands for *Torah*, and this has additional meaning for us since in the *midrashic* tradition we encountered earlier, *Torah* is the blueprint for the universe. Thus, as with any blueprint, the end is contained in the beginning and vice-versa, and this implies that the end is the beginning. Hence, *breath from breath*.

So we now see that the original ten *sefirot* were also ten letters of the alphabet. In the centuries that followed, however, the *sefirot* were separated from the alphabet and given new meanings.

We now need to address a new topic. Namely, just how do we use the *Sefer Yetzirah* today to help us lead creative lives? Well, remember that we said there are two types of creation, *something from something* and *something from nothing*. We'll first discuss *something from something* creation.

The key to *something from something* creation is permutations. In other words, you can create a new reality from an old reality just by rearranging the old one. As I like to say, the only difference between a clean room and a messy room is how things are arranged. It's also what I like to call Jewish *Feng Shui*. This sounds maybe too simple, but this is exactly what takes place in a lot of creation in the real world. Every bit of organizing or rearranging you do is *something from something* creation. Likewise with pulling the weeds or mowing the lawn or even when the farmer plants his crops for the spring. It's all just a rearrangement of what's already there in order to make something new. The process of permutation is mentioned several times in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, but one of the more explicit verses may be the one below.

“Twenty-two letters of foundation. Establish them in a circle like a type of wall with 231 gates, and the cycle repeats front and back, and a sign for this thing is that there isn't in good anything more elevated than joy (oneg), and there isn't in evil anything beneath affliction (negah).”

(Sefer Yetzirah 2:4)

All right, this verse may still be a little cryptic, but let's see if we can decipher it. First, we are talking about a coding procedure where we exchange one letter of the alphabet for another. Mathematically, the number of exchanges that can be made is 231¹⁵. Additionally, we are also talking about creating permutations of the existing letters in

¹⁵ Mathematically, in this verse we are talking about the number of combinations we can make from 22

$${}_{22}C_2 = \frac{22!}{(22-2)! 2!} = 231$$

letters if we choose 2. In symbols,

order to create something new. This is indicated by the fact that when you rearrange the Hebrew letters of the word for joy (*oneg*), those letters can also spell affliction (*negah*). As I said, a permutation is all the difference there is between a clean room and a messy room. By rearranging what is already in front of you, you can clean up your universe.

This next verse below also talks about permutations. It talks about the number of houses you can build from a given number of stones. For instance, it says that you can build two houses from 2 stones, six houses from 3 stones, and so on. First, replace the word “stone” by “letter” and the word “house” by “word.” Then the verse is telling us that by creating different arrangements or permutations, we can construct two words from 2 letters, six words from 3 letters, etc., and this is all mathematically correct. They got the math right!

“Two stones build 2 houses, three stones build 6 houses, four stones build 24 houses, five stones build 120 houses, six stones build 720 houses, seven stones build 5040 houses. From here, henceforth, go and consider what the mouth is not able to speak and the ear is not able to hear.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 4:15)

Now, what about *something from nothing* creation? Is that only something *God* can do, or can we do it, too? Of course we can! Have you ever had an “aha” moment, an inspiration that popped into your head out of nowhere? That is how we experience *something from nothing* creation. In the *Sefer Yetzirah* this process is seen as consisting

of five steps that are sometimes called *engraving*, *carving*, *permuting*, *weighing*, and *transforming*. However, the Hebrew word for *engraving* (*chet-kuf-kuf*) can also be translated as *decreeing*, and this makes sense since in ancient times the decree of the king was literally engraved in stone. Furthermore, a decree is associated with an act of will, and we see this association made in rabbinic literature where the word for the earth is almost a permutation of the Hebrew word for will, thus showing that the creation began with an act of will.

“AND GOD CALLED THE DRY LAND ERETZ-EARTH (Genesis 1:10). Why ERETZ? Because she conformed (razethah) to His will (razon).”
(Genesis Rabbah V:8)

Continuing on now, the next Hebrew word for *carving* (*bet-kuf-vav-lamed*) also means *shaping*. We may now think of an act of will, such as the desire to understand something or to solve a problem, as bringing forth *something from nothing*. We then take that inspiration and begin to mold it and shape it. That is *something from something* creation. Next we *permute* or *rearrange* the elements to make it better, and this is followed by the fourth step called *weighing*. This refers to establishing the final boundaries and characteristics of our creation. And then the final step, *transforming*, can be thought of as taking the pattern we’ve created and using it in another setting. For example, I go through a process like this whenever I create a syllabus for a math course I am going to teach. First, there is *decreeing*, an act of will. I want to create a syllabus. What will I put in it? Next there is *shaping*. I know what I want to say, but what’s the best way to

say it? How shall I phrase it? Third, a bit of *permuting* or *rearranging* may occur. I know what I want to say and how to say it, but now what order do I want to put things in? And fourth is *weighing*, finalizing the characteristics of the syllabus. In other words, I know what I want to say and how to say it and what order to do it in, but now I need to make decisions about fonts, font size, indentations, and all the other formatting characteristics of the paper. And finally, once I've created my syllabus, I've also created a template, a pattern, that may be used for another class. Thus, the template remains the same, but the setting is *transformed* from one math class to another. This is not unlike in creation where *God* creates a nice spiral shape for a galaxy and then decides to *transform* the setting for that shape from the grandeur of outer space to the much smaller world of a seashell. And this is how you create a world!

“Twenty-two Foundation letters: He decreed them, He shaped them, He permuted them, He weighed them, He transformed them, and with them, He depicted all that was formed and all that would be formed.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 2:2)

To me this world is like a dream we've created. However, if our world is in essence no different from a dream, then there are lots of questions to ask. In particular, why can't I fly or dream that a million dollars suddenly appears in my hand or instantly go from one place to another? These are all good questions, so let's begin to answer. First, imagine that you are getting ready to incarnate on planet earth, and there are lots of things you'd like to do in this earthly dream that you are planning. However, because you really want

to do these things, you want the dream to be much more stable than an ordinary sleeping dream. Thus, you build certain constraints into the dream to ensure stability, and these constraints appear in our world as what we might call the laws of physics, things such as “energy is conserved” and “to every action there is an opposite and equal reaction.” These laws allow things to change in only certain ways, and they result in creating more stability than is found in a typical sleeping dream. It’s almost like before coming into physical form we have to sign a “license agreement” agreeing not have extraordinary superpowers or defy the law of gravity. Above all, we want some stability in this dream, and we want to make it last and achieve its purpose.

Assuming that our reality is a dream, then there’s something else that often prevents things from working out exactly the way we want. Namely, it’s not just our individual dream; it’s a shared dream! Recall how in quantum physics every bit of matter simultaneously exists as both a wave and a particle. When we measure its location, it looks pretty much like a particle existing pretty much where we measure it to be, but when we’re not looking at it, it acts like a wave extending to infinity and interacting with other waves. Recall also the ancient story in rabbinic literature of how *Adam* extended from one end of the universe to another and was then later diminished in size to a specific location. In my personal experience, we also have our wave mode and our particle mode. A part of us extends forever and connects with everything else while at the same time we appear to exist in a specific location. Also, just as in quantum physics, we’re never entirely in one mode or another. An electron can be pretty much in a specific locale, but we can never know its location with 100% exactness and so a part of it is still a wave.

Likewise, with us. We can never entirely sever our connection with other people and the rest of the world. Consequently, our reality dream is never entirely just about us. It is always a shared dream, and thus, our personal dreams will from time to time run up against the dreams of other people. And so it goes.

Even though our reality may be a shared dream, nonetheless, there are some things we can do, from both the standpoint of rabbinic literature and the standpoint of modern science, to help us have some control over our fate. From the standpoint of rabbinic literature, it's righteousness that makes all the difference. For example, there is a story in the *Talmud* about a rabbi named *Rabbi Nahum of Gamzu*. The word *gamzu* simply means *also this*, and *Rabbi Nahum* was the original optimist. Whatever happened he would say, "This, too, is for the best." The story in the *Talmud* goes on to relate a series of seemingly ups and downs that occur to *Rabbi Nahum*, but in the end everything does turn out for the best for him as well as for the worst for those that wished him harm. And what makes the difference? Righteousness! If we lead a righteous life, then have faith that things will always turn out better than they would have if we had lacked that righteousness.

Other stories in rabbinic literature relate that *Joshua* was able to make the sun stop because of his righteousness. As the rabbis said, the righteous have power over what was created. They also said that a righteous person has the power to create a world. In other words, righteousness gives us power and control over our lives. And how do we attain righteousness? By making good choices at every step along the way. In *Deuteronomy*

30:19 we read what I call *God's* multiple choice test. *God* essentially gives us two options, life/blessing and death/cursing, and then actually tells us what the right answer is. How can it possibly get any better than that? Nevertheless, I'm sure we all know people who have made one bad choice after another in life. It could have to do with drugs or alcohol or personal conduct, but in each case you reach a point where the person is so ensnared by the negative consequences of their actions that they no longer have any control over their lives. Don't let that happen to you. Make the right choices.

"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life that both you and your seed may live."

(Deuteronomy 30:19)

"Raba said: If the righteous desired it, they could be creators."

(B. Sanhedrin 65b)

"Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob said, 'He who performs one precept acquires for himself one advocate, and he who commits one transgression acquires for himself one accuser. Repentance and good deeds are as a shield against calamity.'"

(Pirkei Avot 4:13)

“Rabban Gamiel used to say, ‘Do His will as if it were your own will, so that He may do your will as if it were His will. Set aside your will before His will, so that He may set aside the will of others before your will.’”

(Pirkei Avot 2:2)

“Then what is taught by AND TO RULE OVER THE DAY AND THE NIGHT? It refers to the righteous, who have power over what was created to give light by day and what was created to give light by night, as it is written, ‘And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed... (Joshua 10:13).’”

(Genesis Rabbah VI:9)

“Rabbi Judah expounded, ‘In the time to come the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring the Evil Inclination and slay it in the presence of the righteous and the wicked. To the righteous it will have the appearance of a towering hill, and to the wicked it will have the appearance of a hair thread. Both the former and the latter will weep. The righteous will weep saying, ‘How were we able to overcome such a towering hill!’ The wicked also will weep saying, ‘How is it that we were unable to conquer this hair thread!’”

(B. Sukkah 52a)

“Why was he called Nahum of Gamzu (also this)? — Because whatever befell him he would declare, This also is for the best. Once the Jews desired to send to the Emperor a gift and after discussing who should go they decided that Nahum of

Gamzu should go because he had experienced many miracles. They sent with him a bag full of precious stones and pearls. He went and spent the night in a certain inn and during the night the people in the inn arose and emptied the bag and filled it up with earth. When he discovered this next morning he exclaimed, "This also is for the best." When he arrived at his destination and they undid his bag, they found that it was full of earth. The king thereupon desired to put them all to death saying, "The Jews are mocking me." Nahum then exclaimed, "This also is for the best." Whereupon Elijah the Prophet appeared in the guise of one of them and remarked, "Perhaps this is some of the earth of their father Abraham, for when he threw earth against the enemy, it turned into swords and when he threw stubble, it changed into arrows, for it is written, 'His sword makes them as dust, his bow as the driven stubble.'" Now there was one province which the emperor had not been able to conquer, but when they tried some of this earth against it, they were able to conquer it. Then they took Rabbi Nahum to the royal treasury and filled his bag with precious stones and pearls and sent him back with great honor. When on his return journey he again spent the night in the same inn he was asked, "What did you take to the king that they showed you such great honor?" He replied, "I brought there the bag that I had taken from here." The innkeepers thereupon razed the inn to the ground and took of the earth to the king and they said to him, "The earth that was brought to you belonged to us." They tested it and it was not found to be effective, and the innkeepers were put to death."

(B. Taanith 21a)

So, we gain a degree of control over our reality and our lives by being righteous, but then again, some things are easier to control than others. For example, I can easily control my own movements throughout the house, but I'm having a heck of a time controlling the mountain that's behind my house, and that brings up another important facet of our reality. Parts of it, like the mountain, are very stable and difficult to change while other parts are less fixed and more amenable to change. It's those parts that are most easily changed that we can have the greatest impact on, and those are also the parts that we think of as related to choice. Thus, if you are having difficulties in life, then focus on those areas of your life that you can make changes in, and then make good choices. That will be the start of taking control of your own life once more. On the other hand, each bad choice you make tends to ensnare you and take away more control and freedom from your life. This is illustrated by the following story from *Genesis Rabbah*.

"At first sin is weak, like a woman, but then it grows strong, like a man. R. Akiba said: At first it is like a spider's web, but eventually it becomes like a ship's rope, as it is written, Woe to them that draw iniquity with trifling cords, and sin as it were with a cart rope (Isaiah 5:18)."

(Genesis Rabbah XXII:6)

Another piece of the puzzle that we need to be aware of is what mathematicians call "sensitivity to initial conditions." This essentially refers to situations where a small change can result in a big difference down the road. These are the moments when we are faced with pivotal decisions. For example, the decision to go to college can result in an

increased income down that road, while a crime committed in a moment of anger could result in years of incarceration. Throughout our lives there are moments when the decisions we make will be crucial and affect our lives for years to come. We certainly can't avoid every pain that life has to offer, but if we follow a path of righteousness and get in the habit of making good decisions, then we are much more likely to experience our fair share of happiness and prosperity.

What are the limits to what we can create in this dream reality? That is something we can't say. Certainly, there are constraints we have to work under in this world, but as to the limits, that is something that each person will have to determine for themselves. And then once a limit is determined, that just might be something that in the future they will learn how to transcend and go beyond.

Here are a few more thoughts regarding real world creation. First, the physical laws of conservation that govern the physics of the universe may also be interpreted as meaning that everything comes with a price. In other words, there is no free lunch in this universe. If you want to accomplish something, then you're going to have to put forth the effort. For example, one of the greatest creative accomplishments of my life has been the attainment of a PhD in mathematics. It all began with me waking up one morning, after not having done any math for seven years, and suddenly saying, "It's time to go to graduate school in mathematics." Next, I had to make plans and follow through, and when I arrived at graduate school, nothing was handed to me on a silver platter. I wound up doing quite well, but I had to work hard for everything I attained. And that's the way

it is with most things we create in this universe. You've got to put in the time if you want to make the dime.

Another interesting thing to consider is what in mathematics we call *attractors* and *repellers*. An *attractor* is something we are going to move toward regardless of what path we start on, and a *repellor* is something we will move away from, again regardless of where our path begins. For example, if you start a marble rolling at the top of a bowl, then the bottom will be an *attractor* and the top of the bowl will be a *repellor*. Regardless of the path the marble takes, it will move away from the top and toward the bottom. Another example would be to pick any fraction strictly between zero and one, for instance, one-half. If you now start squaring one-half over and over again, the result gets closer to zero and further away from one. And the same goes for any other fraction between zero and one. Thus, in this situation, zero is the *attractor* and one is the *repellor*. The concept of *attractors* and *repellers* gives us a way of understanding the destiny of our lives. For example, in my life I was always good at math, and mathematics became an *attractor* for me and something that I would always return to. By the same token, the greatest *repellor* in my life may be *brussel sprouts*. In any event, if we can understand what the *attractors* and *repellers* are in our lives, then we will understand something of our destiny and what paths will be fully open to us for creative exploration.

The greatest act of creation from my life involves me and my wife, Susan. I first met Susan in the spring of 1973 when we had both taken jobs as nurses aids in the psychiatric ward of a hospital in Austin, Texas. We soon discovered that we lived just around the

corner from one another in Austin, and that in itself was a sign that we were always meant to be close to one another. We fell in love immediately, but if youth is characterized by eternal optimism, then it can also be characterized by endless folly. It was Austin in the early part of the seventies, and at that time in that city the hippie culture of sex, drugs, and rock and roll was in full bloom. On top of those distractions, I was young and immature, and before I knew what happened, Susan had married someone else. At one point, I had the opportunity to ask her why, and she said that she had loved me so much it had frightened her. Given my immaturity and total lack of preparation for a relationship at that point in time, I wouldn't have been surprised if other things had frightened her, too, but, nonetheless, I still had faith in my visions that we were to be married some day. I knew that was the *attactor* in my life, my destiny. Five years later, I was older, more mature, and in graduate school in mathematics, and still in love with Susan. I didn't know where she was, and so I wrote a letter to her mother in Phoenix hoping that she would forward it to her. Fortunately, her mother did and I received a call from Susan. She was divorced and living in Galveston, Texas, at the time, and she wasn't that far away from the University of Houston where I was attending graduate school. Also, during the interim years following her divorce, she had moved to Alvin, Texas, a small town southeast of Houston, and obtained an associates degree in nursing from Alvin Community College. We got together for awhile, but as she was still feeling the effects of a bad marriage, she really needed to be alone at that time to develop and establish her own sense of identity. Thus, I reluctantly stayed away and focused on my graduate studies. A couple of years later, though, after I had finished my master's degree, I was sitting around one day wondering how Susan was doing. I immediately felt that

she had been very ill and near death, and so I gave her a call and asked her how she was. She answered at first that she was fine but then added, “Not really.” It turned out that she was recovering from a severe case of viral encephalitis and, indeed, had almost died. I went to visit her and I told her of my visions that we were supposed to be together, but at that point she wasn’t able to be in a relationship. After having her nervous system and brain scrambled by encephalitis, she was too busy struggling just to make it one day at a time. Nonetheless, being an eternal optimist I asked when she would be ready. “Twenty years,” she said off the top of her head, not knowing why. I then said, “Give me something I can use to help me find you again.” Immediately, again off the top of her head without knowing why, she said, “My mother’s maiden name is McIndoo.” I left her that day feeling elated because I knew that someday I would see her again and we would be together.

Not long after that I got a full-time job teaching mathematics at Alvin Community College where Susan had gotten her nursing degree, and I worked there for over twenty years both as a teacher and as an administrator. Again, my life and Susan’s life seemed to be playing tag. First, we were just around the corner from each other in Austin, and later we both found ourselves in Alvin, though at different times. Nonetheless, this led to us having a lot of mutual friends in that city. Even my landlord in Alvin had once (unsuccessfully) asked her out on a date. Susan, meanwhile, decided to change careers and went to law school, in part to prove to herself that her brain had fully recovered from the trauma of the severe illness she had experienced. Unbeknownst to me, after finishing law school she moved into an apartment in Houston that was next to the condominium

complex my parents lived in. She had no idea she was so close to my parents, but this is again just one of the many ways in which we seem to have been following each other all these many years. The *attractor* wants us to be together.

During the nineties there were many times when I missed her very deeply, and I would often lie awake at night imagining myself lying next to her and wrapping my arms and my heart around her. I just wanted her to feel the depth of the love in my heart that I had for her, and, as you'll soon see, I found out a decade later that she did indeed feel the call of my soul. And so life went on with me wanting to be with her, but for many years I sensed that she was not quite ready to be found.

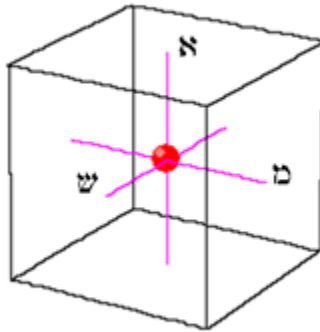
Things began to change, however, in the fall of 2003. I was thinking about her one day, when I suddenly felt a push back. I sensed that she wanted to see me again and that she missed me, but by then I had no idea where she was and I no longer had a current address for her parents. Nonetheless, in the early part of 2004, I was meditating one day when in my inner eye I saw a light that I recognized as Susan's soul. I grabbed onto that light with my mind and said to myself, "I don't want to live in a world without Susan." A creative utterance. A few months later, twenty years after I had last seen Susan, I was surfing the Internet when I came across a reference to someone with one of the surnames in my family line that had married a McIndoo, the maiden name of Susan's mother. From there a link took me to the online McIndoo family tree, and with a few clicks of the mouse I had found Susan again. I was elated. I wrote Susan, hoping that she was in fact the girl I had fallen in love with so many years before, and as soon as she saw the letter

from Alvin, Texas, she knew it was from me and that we would soon be married. And we were. It was finally the right time. It's funny how things work out eventually if you just hang in there long enough. Also, even though I never told Susan about how I would miss her and blend with her on a spirit level back in the nineties, in one of her early emails she wrote the following, "By the way, during the nineties I would often be lying in bed at night when I would suddenly feel this male presence beside me with its arms wrapped around me, and it really scared the heck out of me. But then I would feel surrounded by the purest love imaginable, and I knew there was someone out there who really loved me. I think it was you and I hope it was because if it wasn't, then there's someone else out there who knows how to be in two places at once!" As I said, funny how things work out. Susan was very ill throughout much of the nineties, and it was only after much suffering that doctors realized she had Celiac's disease, an inherited condition that makes wheat and all wheat byproducts poisonous to the body. However, we are now happily married and living in the Valley of the Sun, a place that I also knew I would someday live in as a result of my visions from decades ago.

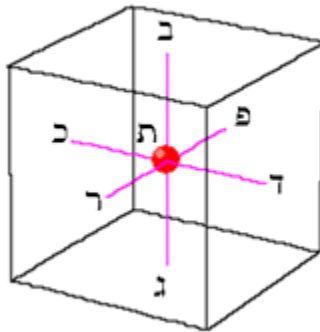
The Cube of Space

We won't go into detail here¹⁶, but there are passages in the *Sefer Yetzirah* that indicate a connection between the three mother letters (*aleph-mem-shin*) and the axes that are generally used to define three dimensional space. In particular, the up-down axis corresponds to *aleph* (air), the east-west axis corresponds to *mem* (water), and the north-south axis corresponds to *shin* (fire).

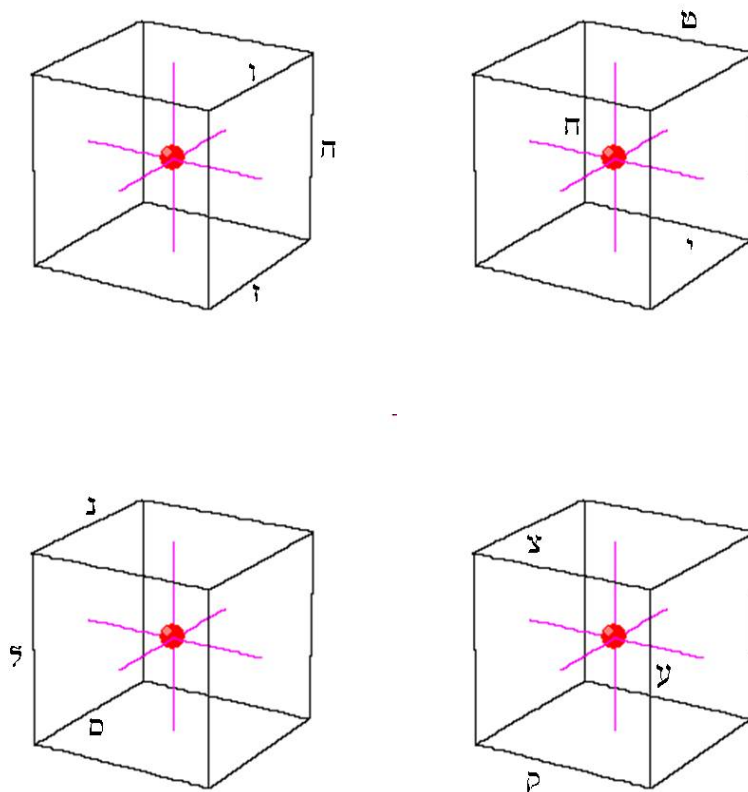
¹⁶ For complete details, however, see <http://magom.com/journal/paper33.pdf>.



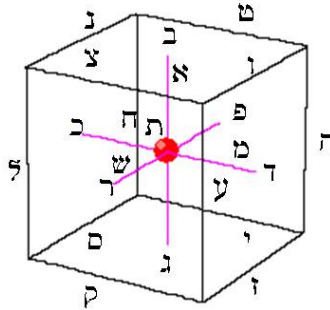
The seven double letters (*bet-gimmel-dalet-kaf-peh-resh-tav*) now correspond to the six endpoints of these axes plus the center point.



And finally, the twelve plain letters of the Hebrew alphabet correspond to the twelve edges of the cube. The diagrams that follow are based upon the *Saadia* version of the text.



The end result is a diagram associated with the twenty-two letters of the alphabet (ten of which are also *sefirot*) that some like to call the *cube of space*.



This winds up being a marvelous geometric model for the universe that is comprised of both the twenty-two letters and the ten *sefirot*. It is the version from Jewish mysticism of what other cultures may call the *cosmic egg* in which the whole universe is contained. Later, however, this model will be superseded by the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*, and we will trace that progression in the chapters that follow. For now, however, we want to close with some stories and legends that may not be historically factual, but which are, nonetheless, intriguing tales.

Another version of the *cube of space* that can be found in the mythology and folklore of Judaism is the *even shetiyah*, the *stone of foundation*. The original reference to this *stone* appears to occur in *Isaiah 28:16*.

“Therefore thus said the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation.” (Isaiah 28:16)

References to the *stone of foundation* are also found in the *Midrash Rabbah* collection.

“The building of the world commenced from the spot on which the Temple was to stand. R. Jose b. Ilalafta said, ‘Why was it called Foundation Stone? Because thereon began the foundation of the world. Hence it is written,’ Out of Zion the perfection of beauty, God hath shines forth (Psalm 50:2).””

(Numbers Rabbah XII:4)

It is in the *Zohar*, though, that the *stone of foundation* finds its full mythic voice.

“This foundation stone¹⁷ was created before the world, to be the point from which the world evolved.”

(Zohar I:72a)

¹⁷ Daniel Matt, in the Pritzker edition of the *Zohar*, also refers to this *stone* as the *Rock of Weaving* that weaves the world into existence.

“When the Holy One, blessed be He, was about to create the world, He detached one precious stone from underneath His Throne of Glory and plunged it into the Abyss, one end of it remaining fastened therein whilst the other end stood out above; and this other and superior head constituted the nucleus of the world, the point out of which the world started, spreading itself to right and left and into all directions, and by which it is sustained. That nucleus, that stone, is called sh'thyiah (foundation), as it was the starting-point of the world. The name sh'thyiah, furthermore, is a compound of shath (founded) and Yah (God), signifying that the Holy One, blessed be He, made it the foundation and starting-point of the world and all that is therein.”

(Zohar II:222a)

In this next passage from the *Zohar*, we not only find the elements of air, water, and fire, (the elements of the three mother letters) associated with the *stone of foundation*, we also find a more mundane association with *Jacob's pillow*¹⁸.

“R. Jose discoursed on the verse: Whereupon were the foundations thereof fastened? (Job 38:6). He said: ‘When God created the world, He established it on seven pillars, but upon what those pillars rest no one may know, since it is a recondite and inscrutable mystery. The world did not come into being until God took a certain stone, which is called the “foundation stone”, and cast it into the abyss so that it held fast there, and from it the world was planted. This is the central point of the universe, and on this point stands the holy of holies. This is

¹⁸ See also *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* by Howard Schwartz

the stone referred to in the verses, “Who laid the corner-stone thereof” (Job 38:6), “the stone of testing, the precious corner-stone” (Isaiah 28:16), and “the stone that the builders despise became the head of the corner” (Psalm 128:22). This stone is compounded of fire, water, and air, and rests on the abyss. Sometimes water flows from it and fills the deep. This stone is set as a sign in the centre of the world. It is referred to in the words, “And Jacob took a stone and set it as a pillar” (Genesis 31:45). Not that he took this stone, which was created from the beginning, but he established it above and below, by making there a “house of God”. This stone has on it seven eyes, as it is written, “On one stone seven eyes” (Zecharia 3:9), and it is called “foundation stone”, for one thing because the world was planted from it, and for another because God set it as a source of blessing to the world.”

(Zohar I:231a)

A further development is a European legend that when *King Nebuchadnezzar* conquered Israel and destroyed Jerusalem, the prophet *Jeremiah* fled with his scribe, *Baruch*, and *Tamar*, the daughter of *King Josiah* of Israel, and eventually arrived in Ireland where *Tamar* became known as *Tamar Tephi* and married the *King of Ireland*. Also rescued from the destruction of the Temple, according to the legend, was the *harp of David* and *Jacob’s pillow*, the *mundane stone of foundation*. It is now said that the *stone of foundation* became known in Ireland as the *Lia Fáil*, the *stone of destiny*, and this became the coronation stone for all the Irish *kings of Tara* (which sounds an awful lot like *Torah!*).



The current *Lia Fáil* at Tara

This stone remained in Ireland for several years, but was eventually transported to Scone Palace in Scotland for the coronation of Scottish kings, and there it became known as the *Stone of Scone*. During the reign of *Edward I, King of England*, the *Stone of Scone* was forcibly taken from Scone Palace to Westminster Abbey where it became the coronation stone for the kings of England. The stone was made a part of the royal throne in Westminster Abbey, but in 1996 the stone was returned to Edinburgh Castle in Scotland.



It is certainly difficult to know how much of this legend is historical fact and how much is mere fancy, but even so it illustrates how a powerful myth can touch the soul and jump from one culture to another!

Exercise #10

Consciously engage in an act of *something from something creation*. This can be something as simple as mowing the lawn or cleaning up a room. The point, though, is to realize how you can change your reality simply by creating a different arrangement of what's already there.

Exercise #11

Consciously engage in an act of *something from nothing creation*. This can be a little more difficult than the previous exercise, but remember that every “aha” moment you have is an example of *something from nothing creation*. Examples could be writing a song or poem, creating a work of art, solving a difficult problem, or even getting insights while doing *Torah* study. In particular, feel the difference between *something from something* and *something from nothing creation*.

Exercise #12

As you go through a day, let yourself be consciously aware of the choices you are making. As you do, also ask yourself whether this is a good choice or a bad choice, a righteous choice or an unrighteous choice, a choice that will lead to freedom or one that will create more difficulties.

Exercise #13

Additionally, as you go through a day, try to be aware of the likely impact of each of your choices. In particular, you want to be able to distinguish a critical, life changing choice from those that are more innocuous.

CHAPTER 6

THE *BAHIR* AND THE *ZOHAR*

“There is no single right way to read and proceed through the Zohar.” Daniel C. Matt

The *Sefer Yetziah*, examined in the previous chapter, is a short work that was probably composed around 200 CE. The whole thing can be printed out on six pages of notebook paper even though you can spend a lifetime trying to understand it. Much later were the *Bahir* and the *Zohar*. The *Bahir* is also known as the *Book of Illumination*, and it was published in the twelfth century. When, where, how, and by whom it was written, however, is still a matter of debate by scholars. It often reads like a one volume set of *CliffsNotes* for a variety of teachings from *Talmud*, *Midrash Rabbah*, and early Jewish mysticism. It is longer than the *Sefer Yetzirah*, but can be read in a single day. Furthermore, the material in the *Bahir* is often modified somewhat from the original sources – sometimes for the better and other times, perhaps not. It’s like a student was taking notes in a class in an earlier generation and then passed them on to someone in a later generation. The notes don’t always say exactly what the professor said, sometimes they say it better, and sometimes they may make a few errors. The best English translation with extensive commentary that I know of is *The Bahir* by Aryeh Kaplan. On the other hand, the best English translations and books about the *Zohar* for personal study are, in my opinion, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* by Isaiah Tishby, the Soncino edition of the *Zohar*, and the excellent *Pritzker edition* of the *Zohar* that is still a work in progress by scholar and translator Daniel C. Matt. The translation by Daniel Matt is true to the

original Aramaic text, and it is very well annotated. Also, the work cited above by *Isaiah Tishby* is a valuable addition to anyone's library because it presents excerpts organized around the fundamental topics of the text, and in this way it more clearly reveals the focus of the book.

The *Zohar* was published in the thirteenth century, and it is comprised of several volumes and is much more elaborate than the *Bahir*. It is similar to the *Midrash Rabbah* collection in that it is organized around the weekly *Torah* portions, but that is where the similarity ends. In *Midrash Rabbah*, even though political agendas are often involved, the material revolves around the same kind of astute logic and intellectual discourse that is found in the *Talmud*. By comparison, the *Zohar* is often a phantasmagoria of fantastic elements and stream of consciousness imagery. It is more like a dream that can contain both true elements and fantasy elements.

“The truth, said R. Johanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai, is that just as wheat cannot be without straw, so there cannot be a dream without some nonsense.”

(B. Berachot 55a)

The first thing we want to do in this chapter is, thus, to examine a few passages from both of these works so that we can see how Jewish mysticism evolved since the time of the *Sefer Yetzirah*.

This first passage below is something new that we find in the *Bahir*. It is an acknowledgement that when we begin on the mystical path, it is inevitable that we are going to make mistakes. And I thought it was just me!

“What is the meaning of the verse (Proverbs 6:23), “And the way of life is the rebuke of admonition?” This teaches us that when a person accustoms himself to study the Mystery of Creation and the Mystery of the Chariot, it is impossible that he not stumble. It is therefore written (Isaiah 3:6), “Let this stumbling be under your hand.” This refers to things that a person cannot understand unless they cause him to stumble.”

(Bahir 150)

This next passage paraphrases an earlier teaching from the *Midrash* that the light created on the first day is saved for the righteous. Also, remember what we said earlier about how none of this mystical stuff sprang up overnight. What you will see in this chapter will be lots of examples of later mystical teachings that are derived directly from earlier ones.

“We learned that before the world was created, it arose in thought to create an intense light to illuminate it. He created an intense light over which no created thing could have authority. The Blessed Holy One saw, however, that the world could not endure it. He therefore took a seventh of it and left it in its place for them. The rest He put away for the righteous in the Ultimate Future.”

(Bahir 160)

Earlier we discussed one very enigmatic passage from *Ecclesiastes* and how *God* is unknowable and concealed. Below, we find essentially this same discussion in the *Bahir*.

“What is the meaning of the verse (Proverbs 8:23), ‘I was set up from eternity (Me-Olam), from a head, before the earth?’ What is the meaning of ‘from eternity (Me-Olam)?’ This means that it must be concealed (He-elam) from the world. It is thus written (Ecclesiastes 3:11), ‘He has also placed the world (Ha-Olam) in their hearts that they should not find out the work that God has done from the beginning to the end.’”

(Bahir 10)

As a follow up to both the above verse from *Ecclesiastes* and the teaching of the *Sefer Yetzirah* that *God* created his world with thirty-two wondrous paths, we find in the *Bahir* a linkage between the paths and the heart. What makes this work is the fact that the Hebrew word for heart, *lev*, has a numerical value of thirty-two (*lamed* + *bet* = 30 + 2 =

32). Furthermore, the first and last letters of the *Torah* are *bet* and *lamed*, respectively, and this suggests the whole *Torah* is contained within our hearts.

“The heart (Lev) in numerical value is 32. These are concealed, and with them the world was created. What are these 32? He said: These are the 32 paths.”
(*Bahir* 63)

“O my God; your Torah is in my heart.”
(*Psalm* 40:9)

Next we see a restatement of a story we first saw in the *Talmud* where *Rabbah* and *Zeira* create an artificial man. However, in the *Bahir* we see the story evolve a bit and some new details involving sin are added.

“Rabbah said, ‘If the righteous wanted, they could create a world. What interferes? Your sins, as it is written (Isaiah 59:2), “Only your sins separate between you and your God.”’ ... We thus see that Rabbah created a man and sent it to Rav Zeira. He spoke to it, but it would not reply. But if not for your sins, it would also have been able to reply.”
(*Bahir* 196)

As we said in our previous chapter, in the *Sefer Yetzirah* the ten *sefirot* are very likely just ten letters doing double duty as both letters of the alphabet and representations for the ten

utterances. However, by the time we get to the *Bahir*, we see the *sefirot* beginning to take on new meanings that are independent of the alphabet. Of the meanings given in the passage below, *Crown*, *Wisdom*, *Kindness*, and *Foundation* are still in use in modern times.

“What are the Ten Sayings? The first is the Highest Crown. ... The second one is Wisdom. ... The third one is the quarry of the Torah, the treasury of Wisdom, the quarry of the “spirit of God. ... The fourth is (Deuteronomy 33:21), “the charity of God,” His merit and his Kindness (Chesed) to all the world. ... The fifth is the great fire of the Blessed Holy One. ... The sixth one is the Throne of Glory. ... What is the seventh? It is the heaven called Aravot. ... What is the eighth one? The Blessed Holy One has a single Righteous One (Tzaddik) in His world, and it is dear to Him because it supports all the world. It is the Foundation (Yesod). ... What is the ninth? He said to them: the ninth and tenth are together, one opposite the other.”

(Bahir 141-169)

We also find in the *Bahir* yet another explanation for the term *sefirot*, that it is related to a word meaning *declare* which in Hebrew has the same three letter root as *sefirot*. Additionally, one could also relate the word *sefirot* to the word for *sapphire* that appears in the vision of *Ezekiel*. By so doing, this also makes a connection between the *work of creation* and the *work of the chariot* in that *sefirot* refers to the former and *Ezekiel* refers to the latter. Furthermore, it is not surprising that we should be able to find ways to

connect the *work of creation* with the *work of the chariot* because from a more abstract view, they are exactly the same! In other words, every time we create something, we are in a new world and we have journeyed from one reality to another, and every time we journey, the old world is left behind and we, in essence, create a new world. Thus, there is no creation without journeying and there is no journey without creating.

“Why are they called Sefirot? Because it is written (Psalm 19:2), ‘The heavens declare (me-SaPrim) the glory of God.’”

(Bahir 125)

“Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the kerubim appeared over them something like a sapphire stone, in appearance like the shape of a throne.”

(Ezekiel 10:1)

One of the new teachings that appears in the *Bahir* is the doctrine of reincarnation as a way of explaining divine justice.

“Why is there a righteous person who has good and another righteous person who has evil? This is because the second righteous person was wicked previously, and is now being punished. Is one then punished for his childhood deeds? Did not Rabbi Simon say that in the Tribunal on high, no punishment is meted out

until one is twenty years or older? He said, 'I am not speaking of his present lifetime. I am speaking about what he has already been, previously.'"

(Bahir 195)

The passage from the *Bahir* that is most important to me, though, is the one I've saved for last. There are several passages in the *Bahir* that make reference to the *Tree of Life*, but in this one passage we have the *tree* connected with the *cube of space* that was described in the *Sefer Yetzirah*. The twelve diagonal boundaries mentioned below are the twelve edges of the *cube of space*, and the passage below contains an important statement that the *Tree of Life* is contained inside the *cube of space*.

"The Blessed Holy One has a single Tree, and it has twelve diagonal boundaries. The northeast boundary, the southeast boundary, the upper east boundary, the lower east boundary, the southwest boundary, the northwest boundary, the upper west boundary, the lower west boundary, the upper south boundary, the lower south boundary, the upper north boundary, the lower north boundary. On the inside of them is the tree."

(Bahir 95)

The *Zohar* is much longer than the *Bahir*, and it is written as a narrative discussion between companions on the road. As such it is often cryptic and it takes time to understand it. This is indicated by the passage below. Nonetheless, it is also a treasure trove of wisdom and great ideas, if one can find them. Additionally, as with the *Bahir*,

much of what you see in the *Zohar* is just an evolvement and continuation of a discussion that was started centuries earlier by the rabbis of the *Talmud*.

“Woe to the sinners who consider the Torah as mere worldly tales, who only see its outer garment. Happy are the righteous who fix their gaze on the Torah proper. As wine cannot be kept save in a jar, so the Torah needs an outer garment. These are the stories and narratives, but it behooves us to penetrate beneath them.”

(Zohar III:152a)

One of my very favorite passages from the *Zohar* is the one below. It presents a story of creation that sounds remarkably like the Big Bang theory of cosmologists. The universe begins at a single point and expands outward. Additionally, this passage addresses a grammatical problem found at the beginning of *Genesis*. Namely, that the word used for *God (Elohim)* is plural while the verb “create” (*bara*) is singular. The *Zohar* resolves this issue by making a distinction between the *God* that is unknowable and can’t be seen with the images of *God* that we can conceive of. In so doing, it retranslates the phrase “*God created*” as “*It created God*.”

“It is written, ‘And the intelligent shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever (Daniel 12:3).’ There was indeed a ‘brightness’ (Zohar). The Most Mysterious struck its void, and caused this point to shine. This ‘beginning’ then extended, and made for

itself a palace for its honor and glory. There it sowed a sacred seed which was to generate for the benefit of the universe, and to which may be applied the Scriptural words 'the holy seed is the stock thereof' (Isaiah 6:13). Again there was Zohar, in that it sowed a seed for its glory, just as the silkworm encloses itself, as it were, in a palace of its own production which is both useful and beautiful. Thus by means of this 'beginning' the Mysterious Unknown made this palace. This palace is called Elohim, and this doctrine is contained in the words, 'By means of a beginning IT created Elohim.'”

(Zohar I:15a)

There are also many beautiful poetic images in the *Zohar*. One of my favorite is that of the *Torah* as a beautiful princess who only shows her face to one who truly desires her.

“How many human beings live in confusion of mind, beholding not the way of truth whose dwelling is in the Torah, the Torah which calls them day by day to herself in love, but alas, they do not even turn their heads! It is indeed as I have said, that the Torah lets out a word, and emerges for a little from her sheath, and then hides herself again. But she does this only for those who understand and obey her. She is like unto a beautiful and stately damsel, who is hidden in a secluded chamber of a palace and who has a lover of whom no one knows but she. Out of his love for her he constantly passes by her gate, turning his eyes towards all sides to find her. She, knowing that he is always haunting the palace, what does she do? She opens a little door in her hidden palace, discloses for a moment

her face to her lover, then swiftly hides it again. None but he notices it. But his heart and soul, and all that is in him are drawn to her, knowing as he does that she has revealed herself to him for a moment because she loves him. It is the same with the Torah, which reveals her hidden secrets only to those who love her.”

(Zohar II:99a)

This next short passage is interesting because it takes a teaching from the *Talmud* and alters just one word from *grace* to *light*. This allows us to now also relate the message of this passage to the light created on the first day of creation that is stored away for the righteous.

“Resh Lakish says, ‘To him who is engaged in the study of the Torah by night, the Holy One extends a thread of grace by day, as it is said, “By day the Lord will command his loving kindness, and in the night his song shall be with me (Psalm 42:9).”’”

(B. Avodah Zarah 3b)

“Whenever the Torah is studied by night, a little thread of this hidden light steals down and plays upon them that are absorbed in their study, wherefore it is written, ‘The Lord commands His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song is with me (Psalms 42:9).’”

(Zohar II:149a)

This next passage from the *Zohar* shows how the doctrine of the creation of the universe from the twenty-two letters of the alphabet can also be found within the opening words of *Genesis*. The crux of the argument rests upon the fact that in Hebrew grammar a direct object is always introduced by the marker *aleph-tav*. However, since these are the first and last letters of the alphabet, respectively, the *Zohar* interprets this as meaning that *God* created the universe using all the letters of the alphabet, or as we might say, using everything from *a* to *z*.

“In the beginning God created the (et) heaven and the (et) earth’ (Genesis 1:1), where the particle et (consisting of Aleph and Tav) is a summary of the twenty-two letters by which the earth is nourished. Now, the same letters were the instruments used in the building of the Tabernacle. This work was carried out by Bezalel for the reason that, as his very name (Bezel-EI = in the shadow of God) implies, he had a knowledge of the various permutations of the letters, by the power of which heaven and earth were created. Without such knowledge Bezalel could not have accomplished the work of the Tabernacle; for, inasmuch as the celestial Tabernacle was made in all its parts by the mystical power of those letters, the lower Tabernacle could only be prepared by the power of the same letters.”

(Zohar II:234b)

In the previous chapter we made mention of how creation, whether creation by us or creation by *God*, begins with an act of will. We have to resolve that we are going to

accomplish a certain thing. In the *Zohar* we find a very beautiful discussion regarding how in every creative endeavor everything has to start with our own impulse to create, and it is that impulse that gets the universal ball rolling!

“A MIST WENT UP FROM THE GROUND, to repair the deficiency below, by 'watering the whole face of the ground'. The rising of the mist signifies the yearning of the female for the male. According to another explanation, we supply the word 'not' from the previous clause after 'mist', the meaning being that God did not send rain because a mist had not gone up, etc., it being necessary for the impulse from below to set in motion the power above. So vapor first ascends from the earth to form the cloud. Similarly, the smoke of the sacrifice rises and creates harmony above, so that all unite, and in this way there is completion in the supernal realm. The impulse commences from below, and from this all is perfected. If the Community of Israel did not give the first impulse, the One above would not move to meet her, for by the yearning from below completion is effected above.”

(Zohar I:35a)

This next passage is one I find both extremely beautiful and extremely interesting. It basically states that every new insight we have results in the creation of a new world. As I said, every creation is a journey, and every journey is a creation.

“How greatly is it incumbent on a man to study the Torah day and night! For the Holy One, blessed be He, is attentive to the voice of those who occupy themselves with the Torah, and through each fresh discovery made by them in the Torah a new heaven is created. Our teachers have told us that at the moment when a man expounds something new in the Torah, his utterance ascends before the Holy One, blessed be He, and He takes it up and kisses it and crowns it with seventy crowns of graven and inscribed letters. When a new idea is formulated in the field of the esoteric wisdom, it ascends and rests on the head of the 'Zaddik, the life of the universe', and then it flies off and traverses seventy thousand worlds until it ascends to the 'Ancient of Days'. And inasmuch as all the words of the 'Ancient of Days' are words of wisdom comprising sublime and hidden mysteries, that hidden word of wisdom that was discovered here when it ascends is joined to the words of the 'Ancient of Days', and becomes an integral part of them, and enters into the eighteen mystical worlds, concerning which we read 'No eye hath seen beside thee, O God' (Isaiah 64:3). From thence they issue and fly to and fro, until finally arriving, perfected and completed, before the 'Ancient of Days'. At that moment the 'Ancient of Days' savors that word of wisdom, and finds satisfaction therein above all else. He takes that word and crowns it with three hundred and seventy thousand crowns, and it flies up and down until it is made into a sky. And so each word of wisdom is made into a sky which presents itself fully formed before the 'Ancient of Days', who calls them 'new heavens', that is, heavens created out of the mystic ideas of the sublime wisdom. As for the other new expositions of the Torah, they present themselves before the Holy One, blessed be He, and ascend

and become 'earths of the living', then they descend and become absorbed into one earth, whereby a new earth emerges through that new discovery in the Torah. This is implied in the verse, 'For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I am making, rise up before me, etc.' (Isaiah 66:22). It is not written 'I have made', but 'I am making', signifying continual creation out of the new ideas discovered in the Torah."

(ZoharI:4b-5a)

One of the teachings that becomes more prominent in the *Zohar* is that of the completely unknowable nature of *God*. In the short passage below, we have a reminder that it is our mind that creates distinctions and differentiations in this world, and if it weren't for that then we would always be immersed in oneness. This passage should also remind us of two things. Namely, the teaching found in *Genesis Rabbah* that "*It is good*" was not uttered on the second day because that was the day divisions were made and the teaching found in the *Sefer Yetzirah* that our minds create our world. The passage immediately following the one below highlights the paradoxical and contradictory nature of *God* as embracing both existence and non-existence. This is something the *Zohar* does both frequently and quite well.

“We have been taught that all this differentiation of the Divine Personality is from our side and relative to our knowledge, and that, above, all is one, all is set in one balance, unvarying and eternal, as it is written: “I the Lord do not change.” (Malachi 3:6).”

(Zohar II:176a)

“When Concealed of all Concealed verged on being revealed, it produced at first a single point, which ascended to become thought. Within, it drew all drawings, graved all engravings, carving within the concealed holy lamp a graving of one hidden design, holy of holies, a deep structure emerging from thought, called Who, origin of structure. Existent and non-existent, deep and hidden called by no name but Who.

(Zohar I:2a)

Here is another interesting passage from the *Zohar*. To me this one seems to be describing what today we would call a near death experience. All the classic elements are there. The tunnel appears as a cave, and the being of light is identified as *Adam*, the first man.

“God also decreed that he should die. Taking pity on him, however, God allowed him when he died to be buried near the Garden of Eden. For Adam had made a cave near the Garden, and had hidden himself there with his wife. He knew it was near the Garden, because he saw a faint ray of light enter it from there, and

therefore he desired to be buried in it; and there he was buried, close to the gate of the Garden of Eden. So it is that when a man is about to depart from life, Adam, the first man, appears to him and asks him why and in what state he leaves the world. He says: "Woe to thee that through thee I have to die." To which Adam replies: "My son, I transgressed one commandment and was punished for so doing. See how many commandments of your Master, negative and positive, you have transgressed".'

(Zohar I:57b)

This next passage is something few people will pick up on. It describes using a knife as a reflector to create a flickering light for healing purposes. What I find fascinating about this is that modern technology has created similar devices for the purpose of inducing particular brainwave states, and healing can, thus, be brought about through the release of stress. These machines are usually referred to as brain machines or light-sound machines, and they use flashing lights and pulsing sound to induce brainwave patterns at the corresponding frequency. Many people, including myself, have successfully used them for years as a drug-free way of eliminating stress.

"Certain illnesses of men, as jaundice, can be cured through the patient's gazing upon shining steel, which is held before his eyes and rapidly moved from side to side, so that, like a comet's tail, it sends flashes of light into the face, thus healing the disease."

(Zohar II:171b)

And finally, we arrive at our ultimate goal in this chapter which is to continue to show how the meanings of the *sefirot* evolved since their first mention in the *Sefer Yetzirah* and how the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* may have evolved from the *cube of space*. In this passage, in particular, we'll see how many of the modern meanings of the *sefirot* are taken from a single passage in *Chronicles*. An interesting footnote, however, is that even though we find the modern names for the *sefirot* in the *Zohar*, we don't really find the term "*sefirot*" used in that work.

"R. Jose propounded the question, 'What are the "six days of Bereshith" of which the Rabbis speak so often?' R. Simeon answered, 'These are, in truth, "the cedars of Lebanon which he has planted". As the cedars spring from Lebanon, so these six days spring from Bereshith. These are the six supernal days which are specified in the verse: "Thine, O Lord, are the Greatness (Gedulah), the Might (Gevurah), the Beauty (Tifereth), the Victory (Netzach), and the Majesty (Hod)" (I Chronicles 29:11). The words "For all" refer to the Zaddik (righteous one), who is Yesod (foundation of the world). The word Bereshith we interpret to mean "the second, i.e. Chokmah (Wisdom) is the starting-point", because the supernal Keter (Crown), which is really first, is too recondite and therefore is not counted; hence the second is the starting-point."

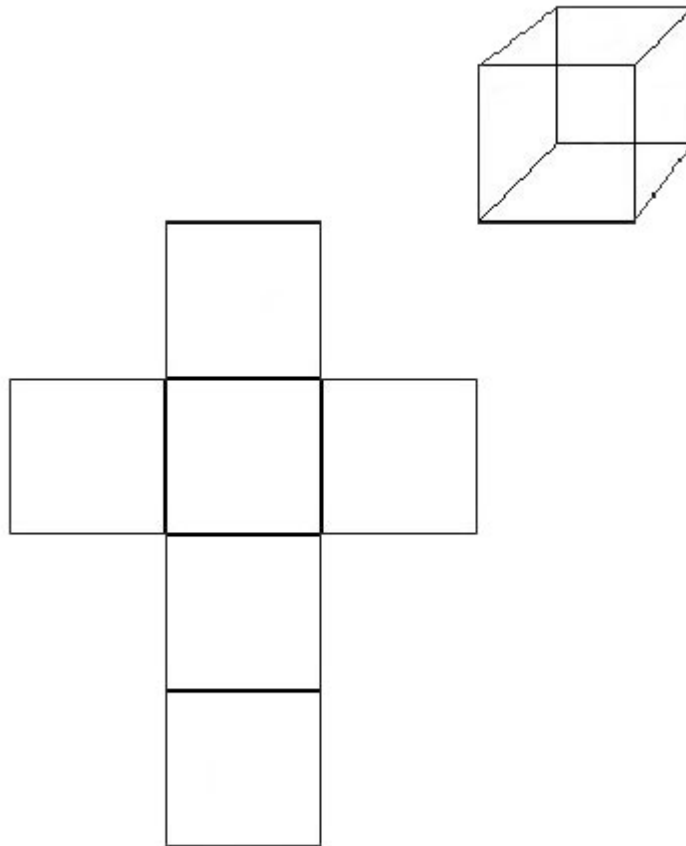
(Zohar I:31a-31b)

“When Thought illumines, though from what source is not known, it is clothed and enveloped in Binah (understanding), and then further lights appear and one is embraced with the other until all are intertwined.”

(Zohar I:65a)

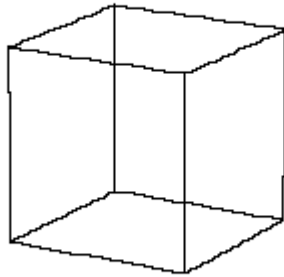
And now we want to begin to look more closely at how the symbol of the *tree* emerges from the *cube*. On the one hand, there is more than enough reason to switch to the *tree* motif. While the *cube of space* is, in itself, a very wonderful diagram, it is also somewhat difficult to work with in just two dimensions. Furthermore, the concept of the *world tree* is one that is fairly universal and appears in most cultures, and within Judaism it can certainly be related to the *Tree of Life* that is mentioned in *Genesis*. The key to our transformation, though, is the passage we saw earlier in the *Bahir* that states that the *tree* is contained within the *cube*.

One way to create a *2-dimensional tree* out of a *3-dimensional cube* is to just unfold the *cube* to create a diagram composed of its six faces.

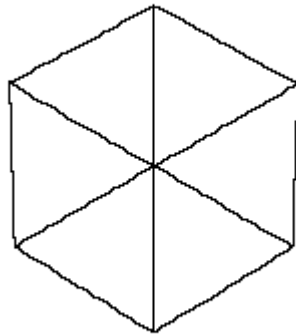


Well, this is getting us on the right track in spite of the fact that our *2-dimensional “tree”* looks somewhat like a *Christian cross*. Nevertheless, the unfolded cube also looks a little more like a *tree*. However, let me show you a better way in which we can find the *Tree of Life* diagram as we know it today within the *cube*.

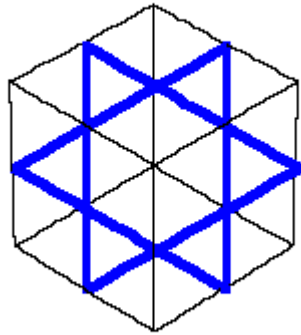
1. Draw a *cube*.



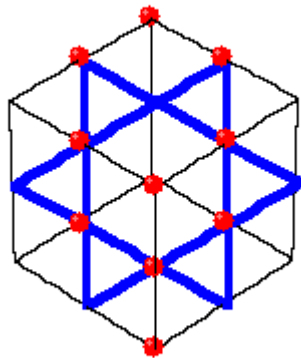
2. Rotate it until it looks like a *hexagon*.



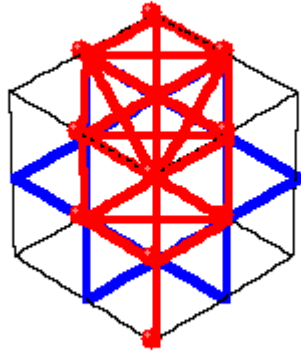
3. Draw a *star*.



4. Add some dots.

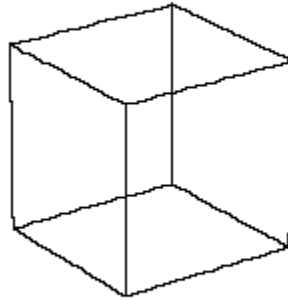


5. Make a *tree*!

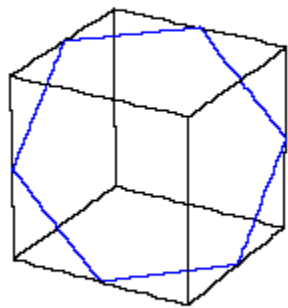


Now is this the way in which the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* was originally derived? We don't know for sure, but the geometry of it certainly suggests that its derivation is connected to the six-pointed *Star of David*. Also, below is a similar way to embed the *Tree of Life* within the *cube of space*. We begin by dividing the *cube* in half in such a way that the cross-section is a *hexagon*.

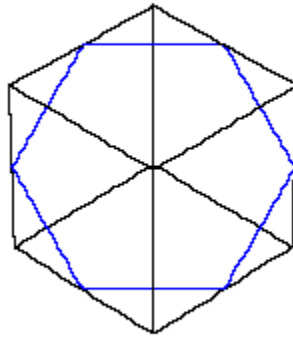
1. Start with a cube.



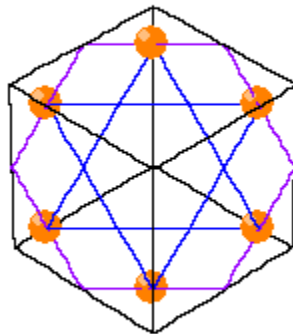
2. Connect the midpoints of six edges to make a *hexagon*.



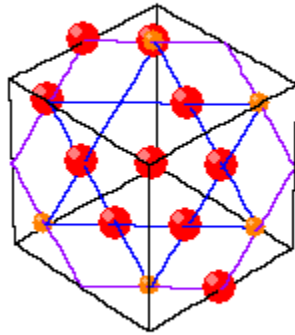
3. Rotate to more clearly see the *hexagon*.



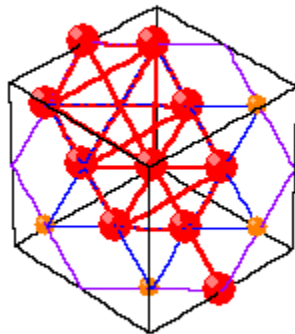
4. Inscribe a *Star of David* inside the *hexagon*.



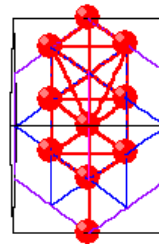
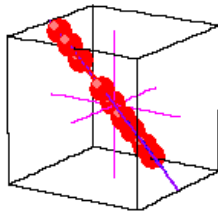
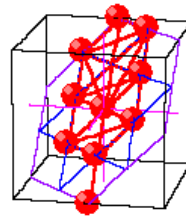
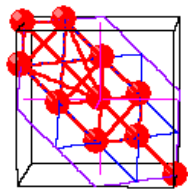
5. Mark the points on the star and the *hexagon* that define the *Tree of Life*.



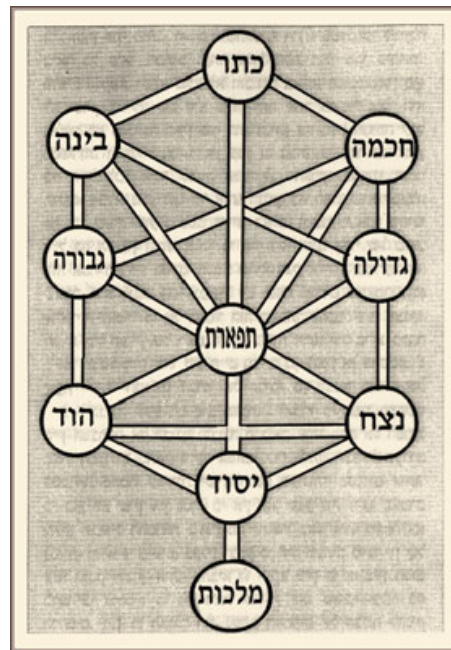
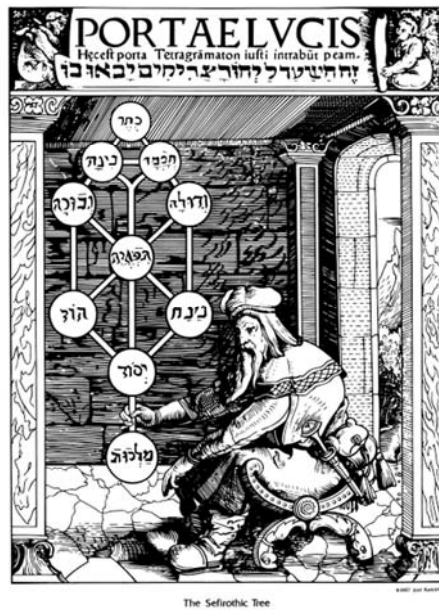
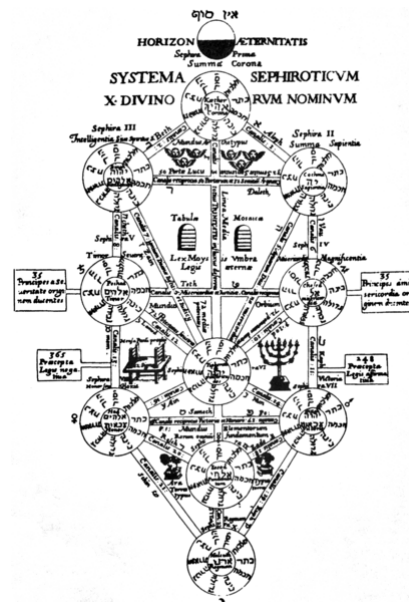
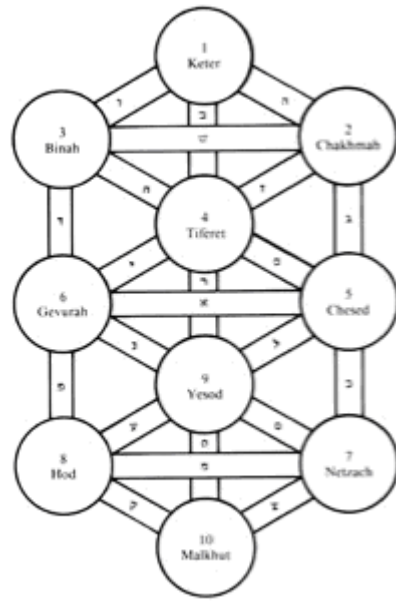
6. Connect the dots!



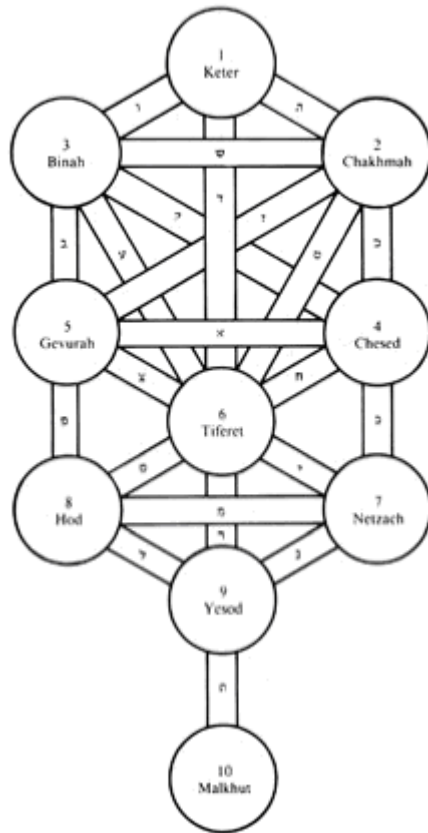
And finally, here are a few images from different perspectives of the embedded *tree*.



The *tree* that you see embedded in the *cube* above is the final version of the *tree* that was used by the great *Kabbalist Isaac Luria* in the sixteenth century. However, between the initial publication of the *Zohar* and the final development of the above diagram, there were a lot of years and a lot of other diagrams people experimented with. Below are a few of the other *tree* diagrams that people have explored.



And now we have the modern *Sefirotic Tree of Life* with the *sefirot* separated from the letters and the twenty-two letters of the alphabet corresponding to the twenty-two paths.



The Modern Tree of Life

Exercise #14

Study the excerpts from the *Bahir* and the *Zohar* that are given in this chapter. Turn them over and over again in your mind and see if there are other insights you can get from these passages. Remember that text study is another way to achieve spiritual enlightenment!

CHAPTER 7

THE TREE OF LIFE

“Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold on her; and happy is every one who holds her fast.”
(Proverbs 3:13,18)

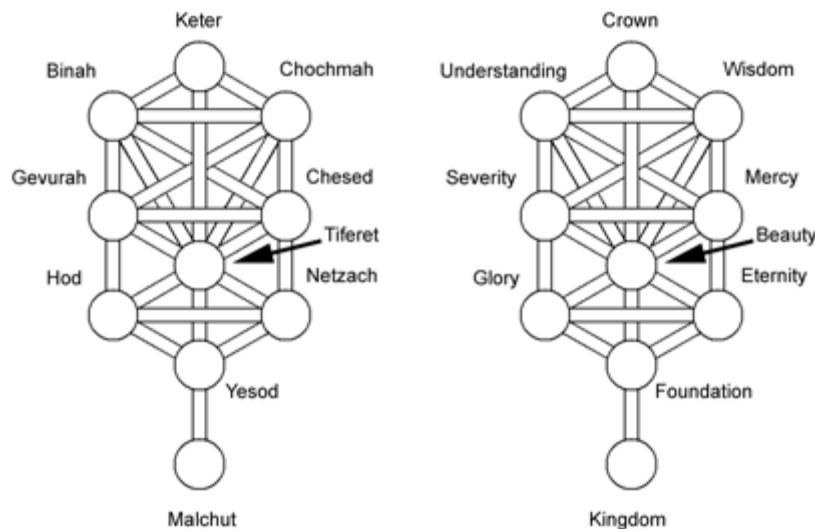
In 1492, the king and queen of Spain expelled the Jews from their country. Bad move. Spain at that time was a center of intellectual activity, and when the Jewish population left, Spain lost many of its scholars. However, this led many of the *Kabbalists* of that day to find refuge in the town of *Safed* in *Israel*, and the result was a flowering of *Kabbalistic* discourse and activity. One of the *Kabbalists* even wrote the song *L’Cha Dodi* that is sung in many synagogues every Friday evening in order to welcome the *Sabbath*. Also of great import was that *Rabbi Isaac Luria* finalized the best version of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* while residing in *Safed*.

In trigonometry we work with a diagram called the “unit circle” (a circle of radius one with center at the origin), and everything you ever wanted to know about trigonometry can be derived by studying that unit circle. In *Kabbalah* the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* performs a similar function. It does a remarkable job of synthesizing various trends of *Kabbalah* from the *Midrash* and *Sefer Yetzirah* all the way to present times. In this chapter we will go over the basics of this diagram. Also, as we know by now, the impetus for this schema comes from that second verse of the *Sefer Yetzirah*.

“Ten sefirot of constraint and 22 foundation letters. Three mothers, seven doubles, and twelve elementals.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 1:2)

The *sefirot* are represented by 10 spheres in the diagram, and the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are assigned to paths that connect those spheres. The diagram with the names of the 10 *sefirot* in both Hebrew transliteration and English is as follows:



Part of the basic structure of this *tree* is the presence of two sets of polar opposites or dichotomies. We can think of the very bottom of the *tree* as pertaining to the physical world and the top of the *tree* pertains to the spiritual world. Thus, as we move up the *tree* we are moving from the physical to the non-physical. The right side of the *tree* represents formlessness, and the left side of the *tree* is structure. The right side of the *tree* also corresponds to the right hemisphere of the brain where perception is more holistic, and the left side corresponds to the left hemisphere where structure is created.

We could also say, using the metaphors from quantum mechanics that we've introduced previously, that the right side is the wave nature of reality and the left side is the particle. Along these same lines of physics, we might say that the bottom is matter and the top is energy. Now let's start moving on the *tree*.

We'll start at the bottom with *Malchut*, the Kingdom. This is just the material world, hard core physical reality. Directly above *Malchut* is *Yesod*, Foundation. Think of this in terms of your physical body, your persona, and your habits or basic reactions to things. In other words, *Yesod* is your interface with the physical world. It is also the foundation on which the rest of your being rests. Thus, you want to have a healthy physical body and to have good habits and a personality without guile. If your foundation is good, then it's easy to build on and move up to the next level.

To the right of *Yesod* is *Netzach*, Eternity. *Netzach* is our basic right brain mode of functioning. In the right hemisphere of the brain, things are apprehended in a more holistic manner without detailed analysis, and, consequently, there is no time. The memory of the good time we had one day when we were a child sits right alongside the great dinner we had today. They both make their psychological impact on us without reference to time. Because in the right brain perceptions are distinguished only by intensity and not by time, we refer to this realm as Eternity.

To the immediate left of *Yesod* is *Hod*, Glory. This *sefirah* refers to the analytical functions of the left hemisphere of our brain. Typically, we think of all these left brain

functions as what distinguishes us from the other mammals on the planet. We can reason and solve problems and reach great intellectual heights, and as human beings that is our glory. As it says in the *Psalms*,

“You have made him a little lower than the angels, and have crowned him with glory and honor.”

(Psalm 8:6)

Directly above *Yesod*, is *Tiferet*, Beauty and Harmony. This *sefirah* corresponds to our ego, our sense of self, and our moral compass. It is the “I” within, the inner identity by which we describe ourselves. When we are little, our actions are more instinctive, and we have comparatively little or imperfect control over ourselves. Our consciousness at this point is centered at *Yesod*, and we are, in some respects, only slightly more evolved than the animals we might keep as pets. When we reach our teenage years, though, we begin to develop more of a sense of self and individuality as well as awareness of others, and we begin to pull away from our parents. If we have established good habits, then we will blossom into a moral individual at this point and be able to take greater control and responsibility of our life. On the other hand, if we have not developed good habits, then we will still seek greater freedom, but we will be more controlled by our desires and impulses. Notice that on the *Tree of Life* that *Tiferet* is essentially in the middle and directly connected to all the other parts of the tree with the exception of *Malchut*. This is because *Tiferet* represents the balance point within our being. After we have experienced all the other parts of the *tree*, all the other parts of our being, this is where we should sit

in order to keep everything else in balance and harmony. When our development is complete, we will be good, moral individuals with the ability to make choices without being a slave to either others or our own desires, and we will be able to focus our attention in any direction we wish. *Tiferet* is the point of harmony within our universe.

To the right of *Tiferet* and slightly above is *Chesed*, Mercy, Kindness, and Love. Think of *Chesed* as a higher function of the right hemisphere of the brain. Also, since love and mercy are not things with sharp boundaries, they belong on the formless side of the *tree*. But again, if we develop in a proper fashion, then we not only develop a healthy ego and good control over ourselves (*Tiferet*), we also become more giving individuals and develop a greater capacity for love and kindness (*Chesed*).

To the left and above *Tiferet* we find *Gevurah*, Strength and Severity. This *sefirah* is on the left side of the *tree*, so we naturally expect it to be connected with form and with left brain functions. In its proper development, it represents moving from just having a brain (*Hod*) to being able to use that brain (*Gevurah*). As such, *Gevurah* represents a higher stage in our intellectual development. If we mature properly, then in our teen years we find ourselves also with greater intellectual capacity. We begin to appreciate our ability to do math and to read and comprehend great literature. Our minds become strong. On the other hand, if we don't have a proper development, then we only increase our capacity to plot and scheme and to be judgmental. We create severity both for ourselves and for others. Another term applied to *Gevurah* is *Din*, Judgement. We also sometimes

think of *Gevurah* as tough love, that love that comes with caveats and restrictions as opposed to the unconditional love of *Chesed*.

Back on the right side of the *tree* and directly above *Chesed* is *Chochmah*, Wisdom. This *sefirah* represents the highest level of functioning of the right hemisphere of the brain, and it corresponds to what I call the “aha” moment. Whenever we are trying to solve some puzzle or problem, there is that moment where we say “aha,” and we know we’ve got the answer. At that point, the answer is still formless. It hasn’t been put into words, but we know we have it. We feel a tremendous rush of excitement and joy, and the bigger the problem, the bigger that “aha” moment is. That “aha” is our encounter with Wisdom.

Once we have our inspiration in *Chochmah*, the left side of the brain immediately begins to interpret it and give it structure. This is the function of *Binah*, Understanding. This *sefirah* lies to the left of *Tiferet* and directly above *Gevurah*. This is the highest level of functioning of the left hemisphere of our brain. We can liken it to when we have completely mastered a subject and we take joy in seeing and understanding all the interconnections between the various parts of that topic. That is when our brain is like a Beethoven symphony reveling in the comprehension of a theme and its many variations. It is a very high level of intellectual functioning.

Directly above *Tiferet* at the top of the *tree* is *Keter*, the Crown. Just as *Yesod* is our interface with the physical world, *Keter* is our point of contact with whatever it is that lies

beyond our being on non-physical planes. It corresponds to the crown of our head where we feel that light hidden away for the righteous enter our body when we are in an exalted state. The *sefirah* of *Keter* is also the source for that inspiration we receive in *Chochmah*. Thus, *Keter* is our muse, our genius. This *sefirah* is additionally associated with will and intent. Intent is often where many of our actions begin. We will ourselves to get out of bed in the morning, and we have the intent to accomplish things throughout the day. But where does this intent come from? Who knows? That's as far back as we can trace it. Our journey from the top can only start with *Keter*. Beyond that, there is no me or you to talk about.

There are many patterns in the *Tree of Life* to discern and appreciate. One of the more obvious ones is that of the three vertical pillars that the tree defines. On the right we have the *pillar of mercy*, on the left the *pillar of justice*, and the third pillar is the *middle path* that balances the other two. We also associate the right pillar with expansion and giving and the left pillar with constriction, receiving, and the creation of form. And as we've mentioned before, the presence of two opposites and a mediator in between is a central theme of *The Book of Formation*.

*“Three: Each one stands alone. One acts as advocate. One acts as accuser.
And one decides between them.”*

(Sefer Yetzirah 6:5)

Another pattern of three we see is formed by the *sefirot Keter, Chochmah, and Binah*. We can think of this as the spiritual triad. If we are functioning at this level, then our intent or will reigns supreme and we can delight in the emergence of our inspirations and our understandings and then the dissolution of both back into oneness.

Below this we have the moral triad of *Tiferet, Chesed, and Gevurah*. At this level of functioning, if our development has been good, we are a moral being capable of making good choices and being responsible for them. We can direct our lives and use both sides of our brain, and we can find that proper balance between mercy and justice.

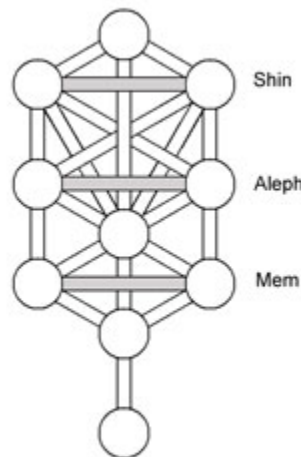
The lowest triad is the instinctual triad of *Yesod, Netzach, and Hod*. This is the level at which children function. They operate mostly out of instinct, and they need the guidance and control of a mature adult. From *Yesod* we learn that children need to develop good habits so that they will have a good foundation for when they are older. From *Hod* we learn that children need to begin developing their brains and learning the basic skills that will carry them successfully through the rest of life. And from *Netzach* we learn that children also need time to play and to dream. After all, it's the fantasies we have as children that create the reality we experience later on. It's that dream we have as a child of being a dancer or an astronaut or a mathematician that begins that process of creation for what is to come. These days with all the emphasis on early development, I'm not sure that kids are given enough time just to be kids.

Well, that takes us through the basic structure of the ten *sefirot*. Let's start looking now at the paths that connect them!

The Three Mother Letters

“Three Mothers: Aleph, Mem, Shin. Air, water, and fire. Fire is above, water is below, and air of breath is the rule that decided between them.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 6:2)



On the *Tree of Life* there are just three paths that connect the left and right sides of the *tree*, and these paths correspond to the three mother letters: *Aleph*, *Mem*, and *Shin*. The top connecting path is *Shin*, the middle path is *Aleph*, and the bottom connecting path is *Mem*. Elementally, these are fire, air, and water. Notice that this also corresponds to our physical anatomy. We have electrical fire in the brain, air in the lungs, and water and other fluids in the organs of the belly. Also, as connecting paths, these letters represent

ways in which we can balance the two sides of our being. For example, think of how you might use fire to balance yourself, or air, or water. There are a variety of ways in which this can be done, and yet another good exercise is to find ways pertaining to fire, air, and water that you enjoy using in order to bring about health and balance within you. For fire, one can meditate to balance the fire of the mind, or one can enjoy a sauna or soak in a hot tub or take a sun bath if the sun is not too severe. Let your imagination soar in order to come up with your own ways to balance yourself through heat.

For air, I usually do breathing exercises to calm my being. More than one culture has noticed the relationship between breathing and mental states. For instance, when one is afraid or anxious, one's breathing tends to become rapid and shallow. However, when one is calm, the breathing is also slower and more regular. By controlling our breathing we can better regulate our state of consciousness. One of the better breathing exercises I've found for calming the mind is to breathe in for a count of seven and then breathe out for the same count. Others prefer to breathe in for a fixed count, hold the breath for that count, and then breathe out for the same duration. Another way to balance through air is to do aerobic exercise. Treadmill here I come!

For water there are also a variety of ways that this element can be utilized for health and balance. First, of course, make sure you drink a sufficient amount of clean water each day. Also, you can balance your system by swimming or other water play. For myself, I like to sit in a whirlpool tub a couple of times a week and let the hot water massage all

my aches and pains away. Furthermore, since the letter *Mem* corresponds to the belly, this also suggests using food and herbs to balance your system.

Another way to use water is by studying *Torah*. This conclusion, that we've mentioned previously, is due to passages in rabbinic literature and the *Bible* that establish a connection between *Torah* and water.

“Water means nothing but Torah, as it is written (Isaiah 55:1), ‘Ho, everyone that is thirsty, come you for water.’”

(B. Baba Kama 82a)

“My doctrine shall drop as the rain.”

(Deuteronomy 32:2)

Additionally, in *Song of Songs Rabbah* we find a very lengthy list of correspondences between *Torah* and water. We gave this information in an earlier chapter, but we'll repeat it here in a bullet format.

- *Just as rain **water** comes down in drops and forms rivers, so with the **Torah**. A man learns two halachahs (laws) today and two tomorrow, until he becomes like a flowing stream.*

- *Just as **water** has no taste unless one is thirsty, so the **Torah** has no taste unless one labors at it*
- *Just as **water** leaves a high place and flows to a low one, so the **Torah** leaves one whose spirit is proud and cleaves to one whose spirit is lowly.*
- *Just as **water** does not keep well in a vessel of silver or gold but in the commonest of vessels, so the **Torah** resides only in one who makes himself like a vessel of earthenware.*
- *Just as with **water** a great man is not ashamed to say to a lowly man, “Give me a drink of **water**,” so with the words of the **Torah**. A great scholar must not be ashamed to say to a lesser one, “Teach me one chapter, or one statement, or one verse, or even one letter.”*
- *Just as **water** makes plants grow, so the words of the **Torah** nurture everyone who labors over them as they require.*
- *Just as **water** is a source of life for the world, as it says, “A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters (Song of Songs 4:15),” so the **Torah** is a source of life for the world, as it says, “For they are life unto those that find them and health to all their flesh (Proverbs 4:22).”*

- *Just as **water** restores the soul, as it says, “But God cleaved the hollow place which was in Lehi and there came water out of it. And when he had drunk... he revived (Judges 15:19),” so does the **Torah**, as it says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul (Psalms 19:8).”*
- *Just as **water** purifies man from ritual uncleanness, as it says, “And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean (Ezekiel 36:25),” so the **Torah** cleanses an unclean man of his uncleanness, as it says, “The words of the Lord are pure words (Psalms 12:7).”*
- *Just as **water** cleanses the body, as it says, “He shall bathe himself in **water** (Leviticus 17:15),” so the **Torah** cleanses the body, as it says, “Thy word is purifying to the uttermost (Psalms 119:140).”*

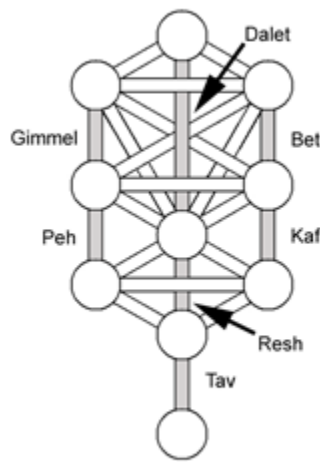
(Song of Songs Rabbah 1:19)

The bottom line is that study of a sacred text, when done with joy and creativity, can also be very healing and balancing to one's being.

Above we've listed just a few ways in which fire, air, and water can be used to balance and to heal. Let your imagination go to work and help you find your own ways to keep your being in balance. It's an exercise you won't regret!

The Seven Doubles

“Seven doubles: Bet, Gimmel, Dalet, Kaf, Peh, Resh, Tav. They direct themselves with two tongues: Bet-Bhet, Gimmel-Ghimmel, Dalet-Dhalet, Kaf-Khaf, Peh-Pheh, Resh-Rhesh, Tav-Thav. A structure of soft and hard, strong and weak.”
(Sefer Yetzirah 4:1)



There are seven letters in the Hebrew alphabet that can be pronounced with either a hard sound or a soft sound. It's these letters that are represented by the seven vertical paths that we find on the *Tree of Life*. As such, they represent activities that can elevate us from one level of the tree to another. Let's begin with the paths that travel up the central column of the tree.

The letter *Tav* connects *Malchut* and *Yesod*, and it stands for *Torah*. Recall, too, that the word "*Torah*" means "instruction." Thus, what elevates us above the level of the beasts and instills good habits within is following our original instructions. For me that means I

will try to base my behavior on the commandments. This, in turn, puts me on a path that leads to that good foundation.

The letter *Resh* connects *Yesod* with *Tiferet*, and it stands for *rachamin*, compassion. The word *rachamin* is also related to the word *rechem*, womb. Thus, the love of a mother for her child in the womb is seen as the model for compassion. Through the development of such compassion, we become aware of others and their suffering, and we begin to see that there is a world beyond that of just me, me, me! At this point, we become moral individuals capable of making these good, responsible choices.

The letter *Dalet* connects *Tiferet* to *Keter*, and it stands for *da'at*, knowledge. *Dalet* also represents the Hebrew word for “door.” In *Kabbalah*, knowledge has a specific meaning just as do wisdom and understanding. In fact, knowledge is seen as the synthesis of these two. In other words, if our higher wisdom and understanding are functioning properly, then the result will be a depth of knowledge that will open the door to a higher realm of being. This makes us reflect upon the following *Talmudic* passage.

“Rabbi Eleazar also said, ‘Whenever there is knowledge in a man it is as if the Sanctuary had been built in his days, for knowledge is set between two names of God, ‘For a God of knowledge is the Lord (I Samuel 2:3),’ and the Sanctuary is set between two names of God, ‘Thou hast made, O Lord, the sanctuary, O Lord’ (Exodus 15:17).’”

(B. Berachoth 33a)

Recall, too, that *Tiferet* is both the center of the *Tree of Life* and the center of our being. In every day life, we experience our center as our ego, our sense of “I.” The Hebrew word for “I” is *ani*. However, if we rearrange the letters, then this spells *ain* or *ai-een* which means “negation” or “nothingness.” Thus, when we become aware of the unseen observer that stands behind our sense of “I,” then we can ascend from ego consciousness to more cosmic consciousness. When we become firmly established in the true observer, then we ascend to *Keter*, but we can, nonetheless, also still be at the center of our *Tree of Life* because this unseen awareness has been described as having center everywhere and circumference nowhere.

On the left side of the tree, we have *Peh* on the path from *Hod* to *Gevurah* and *Gimmel* on the path connecting *Gevurah* to *Binah*. *Peh* is also the Hebrew word for mouth, and this suggests that the way to progress from ordinary left brain activities to the higher level of intellectual functioning of *Gevurah* is to control your mouth. In other words, learn to control both your tongue and your appetites! In the *Talmud*, *leshon hara*, gossip or the evil tongue, is considered equivalent to murder. Don’t do it! Additionally, we have to chew on and digest the things we learn. As it says in *Pirkei Avot*,

“*Ben Bag Bag said, ‘Turn it over and over again.’*”

(*Pirkei Avot* 5:22)

The letter *Gimmel*, from *Gevurah* to *Binah*, stands for *gamal*, a camel. As a camel crosses the desert, it has to live off of its own fat and water. Likewise, in our intellectual

development, there comes a time when we have to live and work with what is inside of us in order to get to the next level. As it says in *Proverbs*,

“Drink the water from your own storage well, and fresh water from your own spring.”

(Proverbs 5:15)

When we make the necessary sacrifices of time and effort to reach this higher level of mental development, then we will have crossed that desert to reach an oasis of understanding. This is all very reminiscent of the following *Talmudic* passage.

“When Rabbi Shesheth kept a fast, on concluding his prayer he added the following, ‘Sovereign of the Universe, You know full well that in the time when the Temple was standing, if a man sinned he used to bring a sacrifice, and though all that was offered of it was its fat and blood, atonement was made for him therewith. Now I have kept a fast and my fat and blood have diminished. May it be Your will to account my fat and blood which have been diminished as if I had offered them before You on the altar, and do You favor me.’”

(B. Berachoth 17a)

Furthermore, *Gimmel* also stands for *gomeil*, benefactor, i.e. giving to others. When we give an explanation to others of what we have learned, then, as all teachers know, our own understanding ascends to a higher level. Thus, we read in the *Talmud*,

“Rabbi Hanina said, ‘I have learned much from my teachers, and more from my colleagues, but from my students I have learned the most of all.’”

(B. Taanith 7a)

On the right side of the tree, the letter *Kaf* connects *Netzach* to *Chesed*, and *Bet* connects *Chesed* to *Chochmah*. *Kaf* stands for *kavannah*, intention or devotion. This word is often used to represent those spontaneous prayers, praises, and supplications that arise from the very soul of our being. By engaging in these *kavannahs*, we can elevate our right brains to a higher level of love and mercy. The letter *Kaf* also stands for *cohein*, a priest. Additionally, in the *Talmud* we read that a non-Jewish person who studies the *Torah* is equivalent in stature to the High Priest.

“Rabbi Meir used to say, ‘From where can we learn that even if a gentile occupies himself with the study of the Torah he is equal in status to the High Priest? We find it stated, ‘You shall keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them. (Leviticus 18:5)’ It does not say "priests, Levites and Israelites", but "a man", which shows that even if a gentile occupies himself with the study of the Torah he is as the High Priest.’”

(B. Baba Kama 38a)

Thus, the study of *Torah* (and the rest of the *Bible*) is elevating for everyone. However, since the letter *Kaf* represents a pathway on the right side of the *Tree of Life*, this is a reminder that scriptures have an emotional/feeling component as well as a

thinking/intellectual component. Detailed analysis of scripture in order to arrive at deeper spiritual truths belongs to the left, analytical side of the *Tree of Life*. For study related to the right side, pick a pleasing *Psalm* or other scripture whose very beauty and eloquence reveals to you a higher truth. This is one way to do devotional study on the right side of the *Tree of Life*.

The letter *Bet*, among other things, stands for blessings. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for “blessing” can also be translated as “praising.” Once we have reached the level of love and mercy and kindness on our right side, we can travel still higher by giving blessings to things and also by giving praise. Recall from previous chapters how in our wave form we are always connected with everything else. Consequently, a good exercise is to hold someone in thought and just give them a blessing. See them enveloped in love and light and peace and healing. That’s all you need to do. You can also take a space such as a room and see that room filled with blessings. This creates a conditioned space, a space filled with your intent to bless all who enter it. Finally, with every person you see, let a blessing go forth from your eyes to that person. Let your eyes look upon them with love and joy. This sort of exercise will take you up to the next level of divine wisdom.

The letter *Bet* also stands for *bayit*, a house. In particular, when we exhibit kindness and mercy as represented by *Chesed*, then we create a house within us for higher wisdom. As it says in the *Tanach*,

“And let them make a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.”

(Exodus 25:8)

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

(Isaiah 56:7)

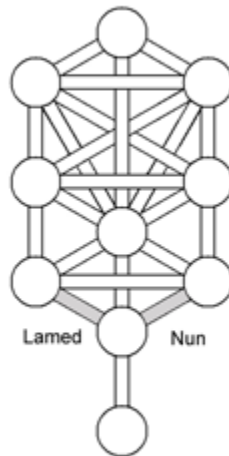
As you might see at this point, our methodology has been to associate each letter with something that corresponds to its position on the tree. For the most part, these associations have been traditional ones, but even so the main thing is that it fits. If you know some Hebrew, then you can look for your own associations in order to better understand what activities can take you from one level to the next.

The Twelve Elementals

“Twelve elementals: Hey, Vav, Zayin, Chet, Tet, Yud, Lamed, Nun, Samech, Ayin, Tzaddi, Kuf. Their foundation is the twelve diagonal boundaries: the east upper boundary, the east northern boundary, the east lower boundary, the south upper boundary, the south eastern boundary, the south lower boundary, the west upper boundary, the west southern boundary, the west lower boundary, the north upper boundary, the north western boundary, the north lower boundary. They extend continually until eternity of eternities, and it is they that are the boundaries of the universe.”

(Sefer Yetzirah 5:2)

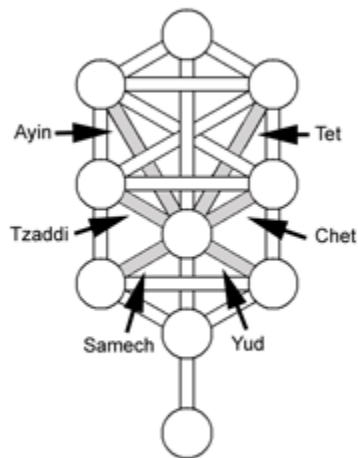
The remaining twelve letters of the Hebrew alphabet are assigned to the diagonal paths that go from one column to another. We think of these paths as not only moving us vertically, but also horizontally on the *Tree of Life*.



The first letter we'll look at is *Lamed* which connects *Yesod* to *Hod*. *Lamed* stands for *lamad* which means to learn. Through learning we stimulate the left side of our brain and begin our intellectual development.

Next we have *Nun* which connects *Yesod* to *Netzach*. *Nun* stands for *neheman*, faithful. When we listen to that still voice within and learn to accept on faith what we know to be true, then we begin to stimulate the more intuitive right side of the brain. Also, when we spell *Nun* as a word in Hebrew it appears as *nun-vav-nun*. Like the word *neheman*, it begins and ends in the letter *Nun*. If we now drop the first and final letters *Nun* from *neheman* and if we insert the middle letter *Vav* from *Nun* into the middle of what's left, then it spells *aleph-vav-mem* or OM. This is a nice reminder that meditation on the sound

of a mantra such as OM is another way to enter into the right brain functioning of *Netzach*.



The next six letters we will look at all connect to *Tiferet* which represents the core of our self. Consequently, each path leading to *Tiferet* is a pathway to the essence of our being. We'll start with *Samech*. The letter *Samech* connects *Hod* to *Tiferet*, and one of the meanings of *Samech* is *samoch*, support. When we turn our attention from the mental activity we are engaged in to the consciousness that is supporting that activity, we move from *Hod* to *Tiferet*. The shape of the letter *Samech* is a circle, and this is a reminder of the cyclic nature of our thoughts. We often go round and round again with the issues that concern us. Additionally, our whole existence seems to be wrapped up in cycles. There is the cycle of day and night, the cycle of the seasons, and so on and so on. When we move in the direction from *Tiferet* back to *Hod*, we move from that which supports our existence back into the world of cycles.

The letter *Yud* connects *Netzach* to *Tiferet*. We are now starting in the right brain and moving toward the center. In this case, think of *Yud* as standing for *y'chidah*, unity. It is in the conscious awareness of *Tiferet* that all objects of perception are united. The letter *Yud* also stands for *yad*, hand. With our hands we grasp things, and with our awareness, we also grasp. In *Netzach* we have a holistic, right brain perception of things, and when we turn our attention to the awareness that is grasping that apprehension, then we move from *Netzach* to *Tiferet*. The letter *Yud* also stands for the expression *yordei merkabah*, descent into the *merkabah*, the phrase that the practitioners of the *work of the chariot* used to describe the initial phase of their mystical journey which was then followed by an ascent into the various heavens. With regard to the *Tree of Life*, this means a descent from the balance point of *Tiferet* into the right brain mind represented by *Netzach* followed by an ascent up the right side of the *tree*.

The letter *Tzaddi* connects *Gevurah* to *Tiferet*. In Hebrew, a *tzaddik* is a righteous person. Thus, through the practice of righteousness we are able to perceive our true essence more clearly and to become more centered. There is also the tradition that this world continues to exist because of the presence of righteous people.

“As the stormy wind which passes, so is the wicked no more, but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.”

(Proverbs 10:25)

“Abaye said, ‘The world must contain not less than thirty-six righteous men in each generation who are granted the sight of the Shechinah (God’s presence), for it is written, “Blessed are all they that wait lo (for him, Isaiah 30:18), the numerical value of lo (Lamed + Vav) is thirty-six.””

(B. Sandhedrin 97b)

“Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba said in the name of Rabbi Johanan, ‘Even for the sake of a single righteous man does the world endure, as it is said, “But the righteous is the foundation of the world. (Proverbs 10:25)””

(B. Yoma 38b)

Consequently, every act of righteousness you perform helps to sustain the world.

The letter *Chet* is the link from *Chesed* to *Tiferet*. *Chet* stands for *chai*, live, and *chaim*, life. When we are in the loving state of *Chesed*, if we focus on the source of our life, then that will help center us in *Tiferet*. The letter *Chet* also represents *chein*, grace/favor, and *chesed*, mercy/kindness. This informs us that when we extend grace and mercy and kindness to people, we also enhance life.

Connecting *Tiferet* and *Binah* is the letter *Ayin*. This letter has a numerical value of 70, and we’ve seen that there is a rabbinic tradition that every verse of the *Torah* has seventy interpretations. In my own experience I have found that whenever you are able to understand anything in several different ways, you automatically move up to a higher

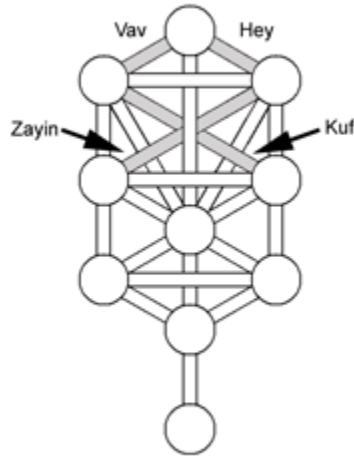
level of understanding. Understanding multiple points of view is always elevating. In Hebrew the word *ayin* means “eye.” Thus, when we turn our focus away from the lofty understandings we are having back to the essence of consciousness that sees those understandings, then we make that move back from *Binah* to *Tiferet*.

Connecting *Tiferet* to *Chochmah* is the letter *Tet*. This letter stands for *to*v, good. When we put our focus on doing good, we move from *Tiferet* to *Chochmah*, the place of higher wisdom. Additionally, in the *Talmud* it says that every man was formed with two inclinations, one good and one evil or self-serving.


“Rabbi Nahman ben Rabbi Hisda expounded, ‘What is meant by the text, ‘Then the Lord God formed (vayitser) man? (Genesis 2:7)’ The word vayitser is written with two yuds to show that God created two inclinations, one good and the other evil.’”

(B. Berachot 61a)

Just as righteous acts help us connect with our center, so does choosing to do good help us more clearly see the center of our being that is represented by *Tiferet*.



We now look at the final four elemental letters beginning with *Kuf* which connects *Chesed* to *Binah*. The letter *Kuf* stands for *kadosh*, holy. To make the transition from *Chesed* on the right side of the tree to *Binah* on the left side, focus on those feelings of holiness within, and let that transport you to a higher state. The letter *Kuf* also stands for *klippot*, shells. In *Kabbalah*, the *klippot* are the shells that hide the holiness that resides at the center of all things. Consequently, as we move from a higher part of the *Tree of Life* to a lower part, the light of this holiness becomes more obscured. The letter *Kuf* also stands for *kof*, monkey, and this is a reminder that human beings are a combination of both spirit and physical form, and that we can choose to go in either direction. We can either accentuate our spiritual side or we can descend to the level of beasts.

The letter *Zayin* connects *Gevurah* to *Chochmah*. This letter represents a sword, and the glyph for *Zayin*, , even looks like a sword. Remember that *Gevurah* is on the left side of the tree which deals with form and discrimination. In one sense, we create our reality

by cutting the totality of all things into pieces and saying, “This goes here,” and “That goes there.” If we reverse the process, if we stop our hair splitting and quit creating separations and distinctions between things, then we can travel from *Gevurah* back to *Chochmah*. The numerical value of the letter *Zayin* is seven, and this also reminds us of the *Sabbath*, the seventh day of the week. This is the one day of the week when we want to rest. The one day when we want to stop our slicing and dicing method of creation and return to the higher wisdom of *Chochmah*. Furthermore, since *Chochmah* represents the “aha” moment, this is the type of thought we want to engage in on the *Sabbath*. The kind of mentation that is used to generate reports and other mundane learning and writing activities is tedious by comparison. Of this type of activity, *Ecclesiastes* says,

“He that increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

(Ecclesiastes 1:18)

On the other hand, the “aha” moment of *Chochmah*, Wisdom, renews and refreshes. Regarding this type of inspiration, *Ecclesiastes* states,

“Wisdom gives life to those who have it.”

(Ecclesiastes 7:12)

Just two letters left! And these are the two connecting *Binah* and *Chochmah* back to the crown, *Keter*. This means that if we are traveling these paths, then we are already at a very high level. The letter *Vav* connects *Binah* to *Keter*, and *Vav* represents the

connective “and.” You can also think of *Vav* as representing “union.” However, this is a different type of union from what we experience in mathematics. In mathematics when we talk about the union of two sets, *A* and *B*, we are talking about two collections merely being combined to give us a larger collection. The union signified by *Vav*, though, is different. The *Vav* union is of the type where “the two become one.” In other words, instead of the union of two collections *A* and *B* simply resulting in a larger collection, we have *A* and *B* merging in such a way that they become indistinguishable from one another. This is the type of union that is indicated, for example, in the following verse from *Genesis*.

“Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh.”

(Genesis 2:24)

When we are in *Binah* consciousness, if we can remove all distinctions between the objects of our perception and unite both the observer and the observed into a single whole, then we will attain *Keter* consciousness. When we are in *Binah* consciousness, all we have to do is simply ask ourselves where does understanding occur? At the moment when we know an object, where does that object go? If we can shift from the looking to that which does the looking, then we can unite our understanding with the very source of awareness because it is into this awareness that all objects merge and disappear leaving only a wordless, objectless understanding.

The final path is the letter *Hey* which connects *Chochmah* to *Keter*. When moving in this direction, think of *Hey* as standing for the Hebrew word *hass*, silence. As we move from *Chochmah* to *Keter*, we enter the Great Silence into which all perceptions disappear. This state is suggested by the following verse from *Ecclesiastes*,

“All the rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. That place from where the rivers come, there they return again.”

(Ecclesiastes 1:7)

Think of the sea as representing our basic awareness or consciousness. All objects arise in consciousness and disappear into conscious awareness, and yet that awareness is never full. Similarly, all being extends from *Keter* and then returns again into that state of nothingness or *Ayin*, another name for *Keter*. When *Hey* is spelled as a word, *hey-aleph*, it has a numerical value of six, the same as *Vav*. Thus, the function of *Hey* is similar to that of *Vav*, and both paths represent the union of things back into awareness. When traveling the path from *Keter* to *Chochmah*, think of *Hey* as standing for *hayah*, the verb to be. Recall, too, how we read previously in *Genesis Rabbah* that the world was created with the letter *hey* to show that the creation was as effortless for *God* as expelling a breath of air is for us. The letter *hey* connecting *Chokmah* and *Keter* is, also, another reminder that one direction brings being effortlessly into existence, and the other takes us back to that silent void that contains all things.

This concludes our brief introduction to the letters that form the connecting paths on the *Tree of Life*, and hopefully it has been very helpful. Before we leave this chapter, though, there are just a couple of other patterns we would like to point out. First, remember always that the *Tree of Life* is a diagram that represents the structure of our being. What is beyond this structure is outside of what humans can know or put into words. Also, the most sacred name of *God* in Hebrew is spelled *Yud-Hey-Vav-Hey*, יהוה, and we find this name is reflected in the *Tree of Life*. The very tip of the letter *Yud* represents *Keter*, and the rest of it corresponds to *Chochmah*. The first letter *Hey* represents *Binah* and the second letter *Hey* represents *Malchuth*. Since both of these *sefirot* are represented by *Hey*, this is another way in which we see that the physical world is a mental creation. This also says that to change things in this world, we have to go to a high level, i.e. to the level where the basic programming is done. For example, if you feel that you are a worthless person and have nothing but bad luck and rejection as a result, you have to go up to the level where that thought “I am a worthless person” is programmed in, and you have to change the program there before you will see a change in your life. The remaining six *sefirot* in the *Tree of Life* correspond to *Vav*, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the glyph for the number 6. And finally, if we arrange the Hebrew letters of the most holy name for *God* vertically, then the image of a man emerges. In this way the *Tree of Life* teaches us that even though we are limited and finite, we are still made in *God's* image and can understand *God* through that link and connection.



Exercise #15

Use the meanings of the *Tree of Life* to determine where you tend to reside most of the time. Are you left brained? Right brained? Do you focus more on the abstract? The material? A first step is to understand your predilection and where it places you on this *tree*.

Exercise #16

Now that you understand what part of the *tree* represents your focus in this lifetime, engage in activities that will move your focus to another part of the *tree*. For example, if you are an intellectual person residing primarily on the left side of the *tree*, then try and

balance that by engaging in more right brain activities such as art or music that correspond to the right side of the *tree*. In this way, you will gain greater balance and flexibility, and you will understand other ways of approaching life.

CHAPTER 8

GEMATRIA

“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”

(Proverbs 25:2)

Wordplay is ubiquitous throughout rabbinic literature. It likely began in the early days of the *Bible* where, before it was a written text, names were probably given to characters that would help the storyteller remember what was going on. For example, *Adam* received that name because his body was made from *adamah*, the ground. Words that sounded alike were often seen as having a connection that was used to expand the meaning of the text, and when the alphabet was introduced, the possibilities for wordplay became even greater. For example, the letters of the ancient alphabet are also the ancient number system, and this gives every Hebrew word a numerical value. Thus, words with the same numerical value could now be seen as connected. This form of ancient Jewish numerology is called *gematria*, and that is what we primarily want to explore in this chapter. First, though, let me explain how I utilize *gematria*. I basically use this procedure to help me make meaningful connections that I wouldn't make otherwise. In other words, just because two words have the same numerical value, that doesn't automatically mean to me that they are connected. That would be like saying *God* is *dog* because the two words contain the same letters. (Okay, my dog thinks she's *God*, but I don't go that far.) Instead, the connection has to be relevant and meaningful to me. Also,

the second rule I follow is based on the admonition found in *Exodus* not to follow the multitude to do evil.

You shall not follow a multitude to do evil. Nor shall you speak in a cause to incline a multitude to pervert justice.

(Exodus 23:2)

My corollary to this is, “*Never let religion get in the way of doing what’s right.*” Thus, only have faith in a *gematria* if it rings true to you, and if you have developed a habit of *righteousness*, then you will be able to discern more clearly between what’s right and what’s wrong, what is true and what is false.

In addition to the wordplay of *gematria*, you will find other forms of wordplay based on things such as letter shapes and, more recently, *Bible Codes*. An alleged *Bible Code* is a word or message found by skipping a fixed number of letters from some starting point. With modern computer programs, the *Torah* and *Tanach* can be examined quite easily for *Bible Codes*, and the results are sometimes extraordinary. I’ll give an example later on in this chapter. But first, below is a table showing the name and numerical value of each Hebrew letter.

NAME	LETTER	VALUE
<i>aleph</i>	א	1
<i>bet</i>	ב	2
<i>gimmel</i>	ג	3
<i>dalet</i>	ד	4
<i>hey</i>	ה	5
<i>vav</i>	ו	6
<i>zayin</i>	ז	7
<i>chet</i>	ח	8
<i>tet</i>	ט	9
<i>yud</i>	י	10
<i>kaf</i>	כ	20
<i>lamed</i>	ל	30
<i>mem</i>	מ	40
<i>nun</i>	נ	50
<i>samech</i>	ס	60
<i>ayin</i>	ע	70
<i>peh</i>	פ	80
<i>tzaddi</i>	צ	90
<i>kuf</i>	ק	100
<i>resh</i>	ר	200
<i>shin</i>	ש	300
<i>tav</i>	ת	400

Recall now the story we told some time ago of *pardes*, the story of the four rabbis who went on a mystical journey and entered the garden (*pardes*). There is a tradition that the word *pardes* is also an acronym for *peshat*, *remez*, *drash*, and *sod*. These are Hebrew words that represent the different levels of interpretation of the *Torah*. Namely, the plain meaning of the verse, hints contained within the verse for deeper meanings, the allegorical or symbolic meaning of the verse, and the verse's secret, *Kabbalistic* meaning. Of these four levels, *gematria* and wordplay are sometimes seen as *remez*, hints for deeper meaning.

We'll now look at a few classical *gematriot*, and then we'll explore some interesting patterns I've found on my own as a further example of how *gematria* can help expand the meaning of a piece of text.



A very nice and very well known example of *gematria* is its use to show that *God* is a combination of love and oneness. In Hebrew, there are several different names used for *God*, but the one that is considered most sacred is the four-letter name, *yud-hey-vav-hey*. This name has a *gematria* of 26. By the way, it is interesting that if you number the letters in the English alphabet 1 through 26, then the numerical value of *God* is again 26. However, to continue, the numerical value of *oneness* in Hebrew is 13, and the numerical value of *love* in Hebrew is also 13. Thus, $13 + 13 = 26$ is our proof by *gematria* that *God* is *oneness* plus *love*.

$$God = yud + hey + vav + hey = 10 + 5 + 6 + 5 = 26$$

$$Love = aleph + hey + bet + hey = 1 + 5 + 2 + 5 = 13$$

$$One = aleph + chet + dalet = 1 + 8 + 4 = 13$$

$$\text{Therefore, } God = Oneness + Love$$

This next wordplay also involves letter shapes. The letter *aleph*, , can be decomposed into two *yuds* and a *vav*, , and the numerical value of *yud+yud+vav* is again 26.

Thus, the letter *aleph* also represents the most sacred name for *God* in Hebrew.

Additionally, *aleph* is a silent letter, and recall our discussion several chapters ago about *hashmal*, the speaking silence, and how *God* may be found in silence.

$$God = yud + hey + vav + hey = 10 + 5 + 6 + 5 = 26$$

$$aleph = yud + you + vav = 10 + 10 + 6 = 26$$

Therefore, the letter *aleph* is connected to the most sacred name for *God*.

Another name for *God* in Hebrew is *Elohim*, and in our discussions on passages from the *Zohar* we saw how *Elohim* can represent a manifest image of *God* that is created by the unmanifest, unknowable *God* (i.e. with a beginning, *IT* created *Elohim*). This viewpoint is supported by a *gematria* that shows that the name *Elohim* has the same numerical value as *nature*, thus indentifying the name *Elohim* with the creation itself.

$$Elohim = aleph + lamed + hey + yud + mem = 1 + 30 + 5 + 10 + 40 = 86$$

$$nature = hey + tet + bet + ayin = 5 + 9 + 2 + 70 = 86$$

Therefore, there is a connection between *Elohim* and *nature*.

Sometimes to find a connection, all we have to do is create a permutation of the letters. Thus, for example, the letters that spell *Mishnah*, the oral law, can be rearranged to spell *neshamah*, the soul. Consequently, people will sometimes say that the oral law is the soul of the *Torah*, the written law.

$$Mishnah = mem - shin - nun - hey$$

$$Neshamah = nun - shin - mem - hey$$

We all know that when one has been drinking, one is liable to say anything and “loose lips, sink ships.” In the *Talmud* (*B. Sanhedrin 38a*) the rabbis give a *gematria* proof of this by showing that the words for *wine* and *secret* have the same numerical value. Furthermore, in the *Midrash Rabbah* collection, they give an even deeper meaning to this correspondence. They conclude that when we drink alcohol, our ability to understand the deeper secrets of the universe is severely impaired (*Numbers Rabbah* X:8).

$$\text{Wine} = \text{yud-yud-nun} = 10+10+50 = 70$$

$$\text{Secret} = \text{samech-vav-dalet} = 60+6+4 = 70$$

Another type of wordplay is what is known as an *atbash* transformation. An *atbash* transformation is when we replace letters at the beginning of the alphabet with letters at the end. For example, *aleph* with *tav*, *bet* with *shin*, and so on. Under an *atbash* transformation, if we replace the first two letters of *mitzvah*, commandment, with *yud* and *hey*, then we get the most sacred name for *God*. Thus, the commandments connect us to *God*.

$$\text{mem} = \text{yud}$$

$$\text{tzaddi} = \text{hey}$$

$$\text{mem-tzaddi-vav-hey} = \text{yud-hey-vav-hey}$$

To give another example of the benefits of wordplay, I was once sitting in the synagogue looking at my *siddur* (prayerbook) when I realized that the two middle letters of the word *shalom* are *lamed* and *vav*. These two letters add up to 36 and are often used to symbolize

the thirty-six righteous souls for the sake of which *God* refrains from destroying the world, the *lamed-vav tzaddikim*, the hidden 36 righteous ones. Furthermore, the outer two letters of the word spell *Shem*, which means “name,” a reference to *God*. Thus, I concluded that without righteousness at its core, there can be no peace. And when there is a peace based on righteousness, then the name of *God* surrounds it.

shin-vav-lamed-mem = peace

vav+lamed = 36

shin-mem = name

In rabbinic and *Kabbalistic* traditions, there exist a 72 letter name of *God* and a 216 letter name of *God*. On the *Tree of Life*, *Chesed* (*chet-samech-dalet*) has a *gematria* of 72 and *Gevurah* (*gimmel-bet-vav-resh-hey*) has a *gematria* of 216. This suggests that the number 72 is associated with *God*’s mercy and the number 216 with *God*’s severity or justice.

chet+samech+dalet = 72

gimmel+bet+vav+resh+hey = 216

We’ve seen before that *Ecclesiastes* deals with some of the harsher realities of life, and it would be nice if there was an association between the number 216 and this text. The text of *Ecclesiastes* begins with the phrase “*Words of Kohelet*.” The very first word *Divrei* (words of) has a *gematria* of 216. Also, the *gematria* of the key theme of *Ecclesiastes*, “*Futility of futilities, all is futile*,” is 216.

We've also talked previously about the following verse from *Ecclesiastes*.

He has also put a world/eternity/enigma into their heart so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end.

(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Compare this verse to the following from *Deuteronomy*.

You shall place My words upon your heart and upon your soul.

(Deuteronomy 11:18)

The *gematria* of *My words* (*divarai*) is 216.

Finally, many scholars believe that the last four verses of *Ecclesiastes* were a later addition to the text for the sake of political correctness. If we remove these four verses, then *Ecclesiastes* has a total of 216 verses. And *Ecclesiastes* then ends with *Kohelet* once again uttering the words, "*Futility of futilities, all is futile,*" the *gematria* of which is 216.

We'll now look at some numerical patterns in the Priestly Blessing (*Numbers 6:24-26*).

The Lord bless you, and keep you,

The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you,

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Y'varekh'kha Adonai v'yishm'rekha;

Ya'ar Adonai Panav ay'lekha viy'hunekha;

Yisa Adonai Panav ay'lekha, v'yasaym l'kha shalom.

By placing the letters of the *Priestly Blessing* in a grid, like the one below, it will be easier to find meaningful patterns. First, notice that the *Priestly Blessing* is a supplication of blessings for another, not for oneself. In this way, it is an act of giving, of charity.

						ך	מ	ש	ו	י	ה	ו	ה	י	ך	ב	ר	י							
			ך	נ	י	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו		י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	א		
ם	ו	ל	ש	ך	ל	ך	ו	י	ש	ם	י	ך	א	ל	ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י

If we look at the middle word in each line, then those words basically say *Adonai panav ay'lekha*, “God’s face to you.”

						ך	מ	ש	ו	י	ה	ו	ה	י	ך	ב	ר	י						
			ך	נ	י	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו		י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	א	
ם	ו	ל	ש	ך	ל	ך	ו	י	ש	ם	י	ך	א	ל	ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו

If we look at the middle letters, *lamed* and *vav*, their numerical value is 36, the number associated with righteousness and charity.

As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness.

(Psalm 17:15)

						ו	י	ש	מ	ר	ך	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	כ	ר	ב	ך						
			ך	נ	י	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו		ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	א	ר		
ו	ם	ש	ל	ו	ם	ל	ך	ו	י	ש	ם	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י

Additionally, if we look at the corner letters of the square defined by the three middle words, these letters also add up to 36.

						ו	י	ש	מ	ר	ך	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	כ	ר	ב	ך					
			ך	נ	י	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו		ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	א	ר	
ו	ם	ש	ל	ו	ם	ל	ך	ו	י	ש	ם	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו

If we look at the middle word, *panav*, in the second verse, this word has a *gematria* of 146 which is the same as *olam*, world or eternity.

						ו	י	ש	מ	ר	ך	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	כ	ר	ב	ך					
			ך	נ	י	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו		ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו	י	א	ר	
ו	ם	ש	ל	ו	ם	ל	ך	ו	י	ש	ם	ו	י	ך	א	ל	ו	י	פ	נ	י	ו	ה	י	ה	ו

If we now read this as two words with the *vav* representing the number 6, then we get *pani vav*, *my face – six*. This is reminiscent of a passage in the *Sefer Yetzirah* where the six directions are sealed with the letters from *God's* name.

(Sefer Yetzira 1:13)

[illegible]

He has also put a world/eternity/enigma into their heart so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end.

(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

following passage from the *Talmud* lends even more credence to our association of *samech* with the support of the righteous.

“R. Eleazar b. Shammua’ says: The world rests on one pillar, and its name is ‘Righteous’, for it is said: But ‘Righteous’ is the foundation of the world.”
(B. Chagigah 12b)

Furthermore, the area highlighted below geometrically forms the shape of a pillar.

[illegible]

If we now count the white fire (the spaces) along with the black fire, then we arrive at a count of 72, the number representing *God's* mercy.

[illegible]

We now note that there are 3 words in the first verse, 5 words in the second verse, and 7 words in the third verse. This creates the sequence 3, 5, 7 where the difference between each successive term is 2. Also, there are 15 letters in the first verse, 20 letters in the second verse, and 25 letters in the third verse. This creates the sequence 15, 20, 25 where

the difference between each successive term is 5. If we include the spaces, the white fire, in each verse, then the sequence of black and white letters in each verse is 17, 24, 31. In this sequence (17, 24, 31) the difference between each successive term is 7. If we combine these numbers 2, 5, and 7 by thinking of them as 2 hundreds, 5 tens, and 7 ones, then we get 257 which is the *gematria* of both *liv'rachah* (for a blessing) and *brachah*, "a blessing." Additionally, 257 is also the *gematria* of *l'zachor*, "to remember."

[illegible]

And finally, if we add up the values of all the letters of the three middle words, we get 233 which is the *gematria* of *zachor, remember*.

“A light burns above the head of a baby in the womb, and it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other. As it is said, ‘Then his lamp shined above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness.’ . . . It is also taught all the Torah from beginning to end, for it is said, ‘And he taught me, and said unto me: Let your heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments and live (Proverbs 4:4).’ . . . As soon as it sees the light an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth and causes it to forget all the Torah completely.”

(B. Nidah 30b)

The problem with this passage is that it states that the circumference of our circular object is exactly three times the diameter, and as every child should know, the real ratio of circumference to diameter is the irrational number π whose decimal expansion goes on forever without repeating. The fact that the ratio is stated in the *Bible* as being exactly three caused consternation for all those who believe in *Bible* inerrancy.

$$\pi = 3.141592654\dots$$

However, Jewish scholars noted that the word *kav* for *measuring line* was spelled oddly, and that if we divide the numerical value of the unusual spelling by the numerical value of the usual spelling, and if we multiply this result by the ratio of 30 cubits to 10 cubits that is given in the text, then we get a value for π that is accurate to four decimal places!

Measuring line thirty cubits

קוה שלשים באמה

unusual spelling → קוה = 111

usual spelling → קו = 106

$$\pi = \frac{30}{10} \cdot \frac{111}{106} = 3.141509434\dots$$

What would be very cool now would be if we could find the digits 3, 1, 4, 1, and 5 appearing as a *Bible Code* that starts somewhere in this passage from *I Kings*. Well, it turns out that reality is even cooler than I imagined. Not only do we have these numbers

appearing as a *Bible Code* that begins in this verse, the beginning of our code starts in the very middle of the word *circular*. The length of the skip sequence for this code is 8,976 letters. Now how cool is that!

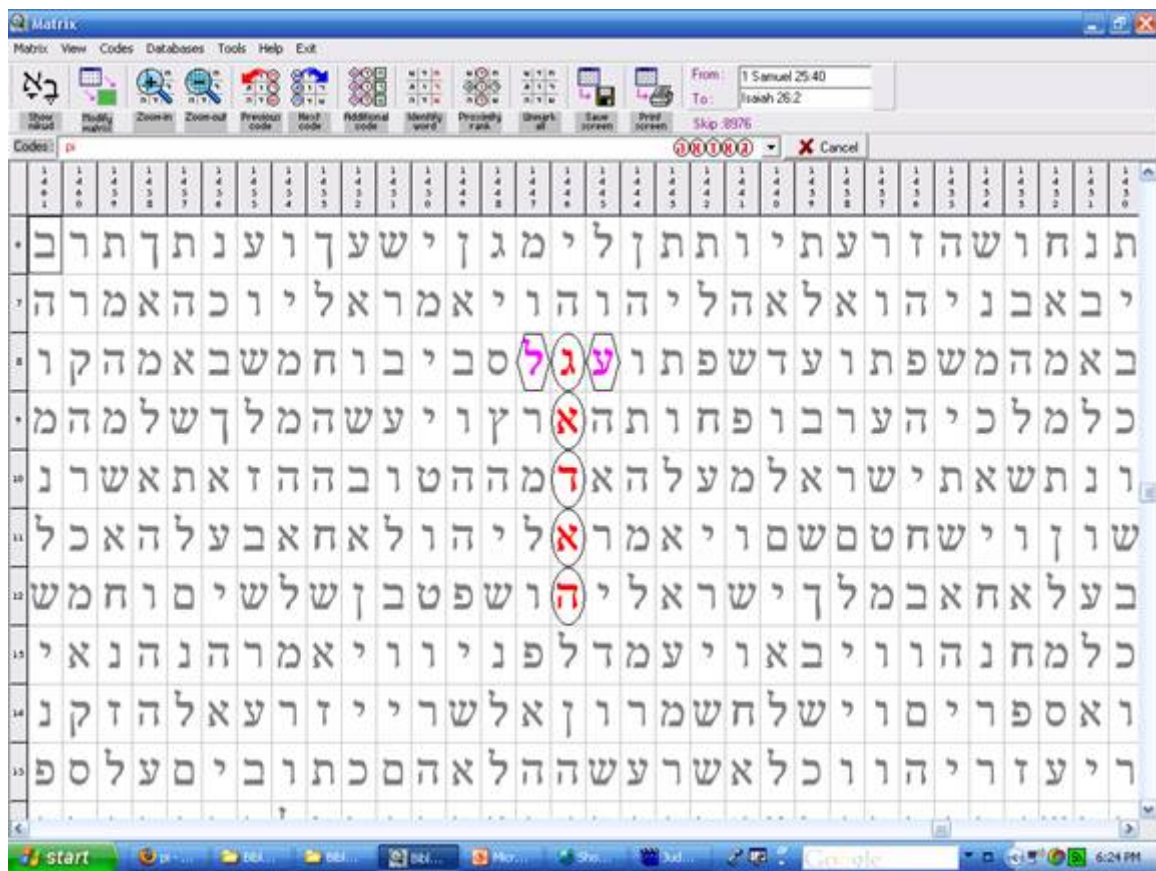
ג → 3

א → 1

ד → 4

א → 1

ה → 5



From the above examples we can see how much richer the text becomes when *gematria* and wordplay are brought into the picture. Also, assuming these incidences are not

entirely due to coincidence, we have to ask ourselves what makes this happen? To some the answer may be that of an ancient, bearded man sitting on a throne, but that image of *God* is far too anthropomorphic for my taste. I believe that *God* exists, but is ultimately unknowable and generally works through physical laws so that his/her presence remains concealed. Thus, in this case, I believe the physical law at work is *quantum entanglement*. In a nutshell, *quantum entanglement* means that once two particles have interacted, they become part of a single system and will contain shared information regardless of the magnitude of the separation by space or time. And, of course, countless numbers of people have intellectually and emotionally interacted with the *Bible* throughout much of recorded history. Thus, I suspect that a principle of *quantum entanglement* has resulted in information about us and many other things being encoded into the very structure of the text. In so stating this, I should also mention that I am taking the concept of *quantum entanglement* to a point far beyond where most conventional physicists would feel comfortable doing, so let's just call this a religious belief of mine. It is my religious belief that everything throughout spacetime is interconnected, and that this results in information about the individual parts of spacetime being encoded throughout the whole. And, of course, I may be completely wrong. After all, there's a first time for everything!

Exercise #17

Using the Internet or other tools, start collecting examples of *gematria* and other forms of *Biblical* wordplay. Keep a file of what you find. As your file grows, you will begin to

see more and more ways of applying what you have found to passages that you are studying, and in so doing, the meaning of the text will be greatly expanded for you.

CHAPTER 9

LURIANIC KABBALAH

“Let your house be a house of meeting for the sages and suffer thyself to be covered by the dust of their feet, and drink in their words with thirst.” (Pirkei Avot 1:4)

Isaac Luria (1534 CE – 1572 CE) was born in Jerusalem and raised in Egypt, and after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, he became the most prominent leader of an extraordinary circle of *Kabbalists* that gathered in the town of *Safed* in northern Israel in the sixteenth century. In fact, most of the *Kabbalah* referred to today is *Lurianic Kabbalah*, based upon the insights and teachings of this great scholar. In this last chapter we just want to tie up a few loose ends by going over some concepts of *Lurianic Kabbalah* that we may not have mentioned previously. Enjoy!

Reincarnation

We saw previously that the concept of reincarnation was introduced in the *Bahir* as an explanation for why the good suffer and the wicked prosper during this lifetime. Additionally, reincarnation seems to be related to the cyclic view of time that is found in *Ecclesiastes* where we read “*There is nothing new under the sun*” (*Ecclesiastes 1:9*). What is now has already been before. *Rabbi Isaac Luria*, however, took this doctrine to new heights. He believed, in addition, that the souls or parts of the souls of great individuals could attach themselves to the body of a living person in order to help that

person complete their task. This is similar to the “new age” belief of “walk-ins”¹⁹ that was popular in the nineteen eighties. Nonetheless, notice how this and all the other ideas in this section on *Lurianic Kabbalah* are logical extensions of ideas that appeared during earlier rabbinic periods if not sooner. None of this stuff appeared without prior preparation. There is nothing new under the sun.

Ain Sof

Ain, which means negation or “there is not,” is one of the more esoteric names for *God* in *Kabbalah*. It is essentially a reminder that whatever we can perceive is not the totality that we refer to as *God*. This, also, is not a new idea. The notion that *God* cannot be perceived by man goes back to the beginning of Judaism. Nevertheless, the concept of *Ain* is made more prominent in the *Zohar* and continued in the philosophy of *Isaac Luria*. *Ain Sof* literally means “there is no end,” and it is often translated as “infinity” or “infinite space.” Beyond the finite structure imposed by the *Tree of Life* are *Ain* and *Ain Sof*. Beyond what we can conceive lies that which is referred to by the word *God*.

“If that which is within the Thought cannot be comprehended, how much less the Thought itself! What is within the Thought no one can conceive, much less can one know the Ain Sof, of which no trace can be found and to which thought cannot reach by any means.”

(Zohar I:21a)

¹⁹ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walk-in>

Tzimtzum

Tzimtzum means contraction or constriction. In the *Kabbalistic* theory of creation, *God* had to "contract" some of his infinite essence in order to make a space for a finite world to exist. This contraction is known as the "*tzimtzum*," and it is easy to see how this doctrine could be an outgrowth of the teachings that no one can see *God* as well as the verses we've seen earlier that speak of the concealment of *God*. It is also understood today that this concept of *tzimtzum* contains a built-in contradiction. On the one hand, if the *Infinite* did not restrict itself, then everything would be overwhelmed by *God's* totality, but on the other hand we are told that *God's* glory fills the world²⁰. Hence, we can have a simultaneous perception of the world being imperfect and *God's* presence being everywhere. As a result, many contemporary *Kabbalists* see the *tzimtzum* as a cosmic illusion. As it says in the *Zohar*, if our mind did not make the divisions and differentiations between things that it does, then we would immediately be united once again with the *divine unity*.

"And he said, You can not see my face; for no man shall see me and live."

(Exodus 33:20)

"Rav Huna said: Whatever things you see are but parts of the ways of the Holy One, blessed be He."

(Genesis Rabbah XII:1)

²⁰ *Numbers 14:21, Isaiah 6:3, and Psalm 72:19*

“He has also put a world/eternity/enigma into their heart so that man cannot comprehend what God has done from beginning to end.

(Ecclesiastes 3:11)

“We have been taught that all this differentiation of the Divine Personality is from our side and relative to our knowledge, and that, above, all is one, all is set in one balance, unvarying and eternal, as it is written: “I the Lord do not change.” (Malachi 3:6).”

(Zohar III: 176a)

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

(Isaiah 6:3)

Shevirat HaKelim

Shevirat HaKelim means the “shattering of the vessels,” and this teaching is a continuation of the doctrine found in *Genesis Rabbah* that *God* created and destroyed other worlds before creating this one. In the *Zohar*, these previous worlds are referred to as the *Kings of Edom*. According to current *Kabbalistic* theory, *God* is the totality of all things, and it is the nature of abundance to want to give. The desire to give immediately created a vessel to receive. However, this vessel initially could ONLY receive, and in an instant it was filled to capacity and shattered. The universe was then reconstituted into vessels that could both give and receive. As a consequence, our present universe now

contains areas of abundance as well as lack, and only through giving can the original balance be restored. This is why charity, giving, and acts of loving kindness are so important. In fact, if it weren't for the *shattering of the vessels*, we would not be able to experience the joy that comes from giving to others. We might say that this same *shattering of the vessels* also occurs on a personal level. For the first few years of our lives, we take in many perceptions, but the connections between things are few. It takes time to construct a proper perceptual map. However, after perhaps two or three years, a dramatic shift suddenly occurs, and our whole universe becomes reoriented around the development of a personal sense of "I". At the moment that this "I" emerges, the previous, egoless universe is shattered and a new universe emerges in which thoughts and experiences can now be connected with one another.

“R. Tanhuma began: He has made every thing beautiful in its time (Ecclesiastes 3:11). R. Tanhuma continued: The world was created when it was due, and the world was not fit to be created earlier. R. Abbahu said: Hence we learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them until He created these, heaven and earth, and then He said: ‘These please Me and those did not please Me.; R. Phinehas said: ‘The proof of R. Abbahu's statement is: AND GOD SAW EVERY THING WHICH HE HAD MADE AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD.’”

(Genesis Rabbah IX:3)

“And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the people of Israel.”

(Genesis 36:31)

“He constructed kings, inscribed kings, and conjectured kings, but they could not survive, so that after a time He concealed them. This is the meaning of the verse, ‘And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom.’ (Genesis 36:31)”

(Zohar III:135a)

Partzufim

After the *shattering of the vessels*, the universe was reconstituted into five gestalts known as *partzufim*. This reconstruction into *partzufim* is like the description of our world found in *Genesis Rabbah* (after the destruction of the previous worlds) where the balance between mercy and justice, giving and receiving, is just right. The first *partzuf* is comprised of *Keter* and is known as *Arikh Anpin*, Long Face. The second *partzuf* is comprised of *Chokmah* and is known as *Abba*, Father. The third *partzuf* is derived from *Binah* and is known as *Ima*, Mother. The next *partzuf* is an amalgam of the next six *sefirot* - *Chesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod* - and is known as *Zer Anpin*, Small Face. Finally, *Malchut* forms the last *partzuf* and is also known as *Nukva*, derived from the Hebrew *Nekevah* for "feminine". The *partzufim* represent a restructured universe which is now both dynamic and holographic. This new universe is highlighted by connectedness. Every piece is now a part of every other piece. As a result,

communication and flow of energy can now occur safely and smoothly. Furthermore, such a flow of energy is absolutely necessary for the health of the universe. At all levels, as soon as the giving stops, deterioration begins. This is just the *second law of thermodynamics*. We can only preserve the balance if we take what we have been given in life and learn how to give it away to others.

Klippot and Tikkun Olam

The *klippot* are coverings that hide the divinity or "holy sparks" that reside within everything that exists. Again, this is reminiscent of passages we saw earlier that spoke of the concealment of *God*. Some see the *klippot* as dregs left over from the *shattering of the vessels*, and others see the *klippot* as an evil that hides goodness. Maybe so, but as with everything in *Torah*, the *klippot* have seventy facets from which they may be viewed. One viewpoint is that within each of us is a deep desire to merge back into the infinite oneness of the *Ain Sof*, and that if there were no sort of barrier placed between us and that immensity, we would cease to exist in an instant. Ultimately, I see these coverings not as an evil but as a gift to help us safely develop as individuals. Nevertheless, all growth eventually involves dropping masks and barriers when the time is right and letting our true self shine through. The true self within something is referred to in *Kabbalah* as a *holy spark*, and the *Zohar*²¹ tells us that nothing can exist without having a spark of holiness at its core. The process of removing barriers to release these sparks is known as *tikkun*, correction or repairing. To repair the world at large through good works is *tikkun olam*, and to repair one's individual soul is *tikkun nefesh*. In our lives we sometimes

²¹ *Zohar I:156a*

encounter people whose divinity is not so deeply hidden and we may also encounter places where the *holy sparks* are covered by a thinner veil. This helps us better understand the concept of holiness of people (a righteous person) and the concept of holiness of place. As a final note, we should mention that the concept of *tikkun olam* also appears in the *Talmud*²². However, in earlier times it essentially meant a course correction “for the public interest.” Nonetheless, that was enough to give a basis for the later mystical understanding of the term that eventually evolved.

The Line

In *Lurianic* thought, *God* must be concealed in order to not overwhelm the created universe. Nonetheless, we do not live by bread alone, and thus, a thin ray or line of divine light penetrates all the layers of creation in order to provide it sustenance. This seems to also reflect earlier doctrines of the hidden light from the first day of creation, and the thread of grace and light that is bestowed upon those who study *Torah*.

“Man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord does man live.”

(Deuteronomy 8:3)

²² See *B. Pesachim* 88b

“Resh Lakish says, ‘To him who is engaged in the study of the Torah by night, the Holy One extends a thread of grace by day, as it is said, “By day the Lord will command his loving kindness, and in the night his song shall be with me.”’”

(B. Avodah Zarah 3b)

“When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He engraved in the midst of the mysterious, ineffable and most glorious lights, the letters Yod, He, Vau, He, which are in themselves the synthesis of all worlds both above and below. The upper was brought to completion by the influence symbolized by the letter Yod, representing the primordial supernal point which issued from the absolutely hidden and unknowable, the mysterious Limitless (Ain Sof). Out of this unknowable issued a slender thread of light which was itself concealed and invisible, but which yet contained all other lights, and which received vibrations from That which does not vibrate and reflected light from That which diffused it not. This slender light in turn gave birth to another light wherein to disport and to conceal itself; and in this light were woven and fashioned six impressions which are not known save to that slender light when it goes in to hide itself and shine through the other light.”

(Zohar II:126b)

“It is written, ‘And God said, Let there be light, and there was light’ (Genesis 1: 3). Said R. Jose, ‘That light was hidden and kept in store for the righteous in the world to come, as already stated, for it is written, “A light is sown for the

righteous” (Psalm 97:11). Thus that light functioned in the world only on the first day of Creation. After that it was hidden away and no longer seen.’ Said R. Judah, ‘Had it been hidden away altogether, the world would not have been able to exist for one moment. But it was only hidden like a seed which generates others, seeds and fruits, and the world is sustained by it. There is not a day that something does not emanate from that light to sustain all things, for it is with this that the Holy One nourishes the world. Moreover, whenever the Torah is studied by night, a little thread of this hidden light steals down and plays upon them that are absorbed in their study, wherefore it is written, “The Lord commands His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song is with me” (Psalm 42:9)’”
(Zohar 149a)

The Five Worlds

Many *Kabbalists* speak of four worlds while some speak of five. I prefer the latter view because it fits in more easily with the five dimensions talked about in the *Sefer Yetzirah*²³ and also the doctrine of the five souls that we first encountered in *Midrash Rabbah*.

“R. Simon said, ‘The soul is called by the following five names: ruah, nefesh, neshamah, hayyah, yehidah.’”
(Deuteronomy Rabbah II:37)

²³ *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:5

Thus, think of our reality as being subdivided into five worlds. As we move from undivided wholeness into the world of distinctions, we begin to divide the wholeness into a series of parts. In particular, we may distinguish five levels or worlds that descend from the spiritual to the material. These worlds are succinctly described below.

Adam Kadmon Primordial Man "*The first man extended from one end of the world to the other*" (*B. Chagigah 12a*). The level of *Adam Kadmon* is beyond what can be known. It is, nevertheless, associated with will since will and intent seem to originate from a level that is beyond thought. It is associated with the *sefirah* of *Keter*.

Atzilut World of Emanation *Atzilut* is derived from a word meaning "nearness". This world is the level of the "aha!" It is the level at which we know things that we have yet to put into words. It is associated with the *sefirah* of *Chokmah*.

Beriyah World of Creation *Beriyah* is the level at which all creativity is given a "name." It is here that we take the "aha" of the previous level and clothe it in speech and thought. Anytime we are engaged in adding flesh to true creativity, whether it be writing a book or composing a symphony, we are at the level of *Beriyah*. Through the initial part of the creative process, the "aha" moment, we experience "*yesh m'ayin*," something form nothing. In *Beriyah*, we add a name and structure to that creation. It is associated with the *sefirah* of *Binah*.

Yetzirah World of Formation I like to call *Yetzirah* the world of recycled thoughts and emotions. It is the level at which we further distill and perfect the inspirations born of *Atzilut* and *Beriyah*, but if we are cut off from our creativity, then *Yetzirah* becomes a level at which we just repeat the same old thoughts and emotions. This level is described as "*yesh m'yesh*," the something from something creation through which we refine our initial insight. It is associated with the next six *sefirot* from *Chesed* to *Yesod*.

Asiyah World of Doing *Asiyah* is the world of physical doing. At this level we manifest that which was created in *Atzilut* and *Beriyah* and refined in *Yetzirah*. While our bodies belong to the world of *Asiyah*, the trick is to live creatively and always be connected to the higher worlds. *Asiyah* is associated with the last *sefirah* of *Malchut*.

"Ten sefirot of constraint. Their measure is ten, and to them there is no end. A profound depth of beginning and a profound depth of end. A profound depth of good and a profound depth of evil. A profound depth of height and a profound depth of below. A profound depth of east and a profound depth of west. A profound depth of north and a profound depth of south. And a unifying Master, God King of Faith, ruler of them all, from a holy dwelling, until forever of forever."

(Sefer Yetzirah 1:5)

As a final note, while these different worlds of *Adam Kadmon*, *Atzilut*, *Beriyah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah* are said to correspond to the *sefirot*, respectively, of *Keter*, *Chokmah*, *Binah*,

Chesed to *Yesod*, and *Malchut*, I see one problem with this arrangement. Namely, this scheme pairs the *World of Creation*, *Beriyah*, with *Binah* which is really where formation and structure begin to take place, not where *something from nothing* creation begins. Thus, I propose the following modification to tradition. For me, *Primordial Man* is really what is experienced at the interface or interaction between *Keter* and *God*. The *World of Emanation* is what is experienced at the point where *Chokmah* interacts with *Keter*. The *World of Creation*, similarly, is the interaction of *Chokmah* with *Binah*. The *World of Formation* is the interaction of *Binah* with the lower six *sefirot* (*Chesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*), and lastly, the *World of Doing* is the consequence or result of the interaction of the lower six *sefirot* with *Malchut*.

Exercise #18

Take stock of yourself to determine what world you spend most of your time in. If you are a person of action, then you probably spend most of your time in *Asiyah*, the world of doing. On the other hand, if you are a great thinker, then your life may dwell primarily in the worlds of *Beriyah* and *Yetzirah*, the worlds of creation and formation.

CHAPTER 10

ENDINGS

“The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings, which are given by one shepherd. And furthermore, by these, my son, be admonished; of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter is this. Be in awe of that which created all things, and keep the commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.”

(Ecclesiastes 12:11-13)

I began this work with an explanation that the whole of *Kabbalah* is an attempt to understand and explain what is meant by the dictum that “*man does not live by bread alone but by every utterance that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*” I hope I have succeeded in this explanation in at least some small way, and I hope you have found at least some of the richness of *Kabbalah* to be remarkable. That is only fitting because my own life has been punctuated by contacts with a variety of remarkable people and ideas. For instance, rabbis who are remarkable scholars and rabbis who are remarkable shepherds. Full-blood Native American medicine people that I came to be personally close to and who taught me their own art of how to be a blessing to others. Little known gurus who attained remarkable levels of enlightenment solely by learning to view reality in the proper way. And ordinary people who lived with extraordinary physical ailments and hardships, and yet contained more happiness than anyone else I’ve met.

While my matrilineal ancestry is Jewish, my background and ideas are eclectic, and that is fitting because my full ancestry is similarly eclectic and contains several other branches – English, Scottish, Irish, German, Swiss, French, Scandanavian, Choctaw, and a good sprinkling of royalty and commoners, scoundrels and saints. There is a saying in the *Talmud* that once you reach a certain point, you should learn from many teachers, and so I have.

As a final parting comment, all I can say is this. Remember that many of your current views of reality are probably incorrect, and that the truth is grander and more vast than either of us can imagine. There is no end to the learning that is available to you if you only make the effort to seize the opportunities, and if in this cyclic universe you ever do reach the end of anything, then you can know the joy of beginning it all over again!

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After many adventures and misadventures, he finally became an adult and obtained a master of science degree and a doctor of philosophy degree in mathematics from the University of Houston. He currently lives in Arizona in The Valley of the Sun with his beloved wife, Susan, and their dog, Dr. Chloe Continuum, Do.G. (doctor of growlology). Chloe's favorite pastimes are eating tasty dog food and curling up every evening with a good calculus book to read.

