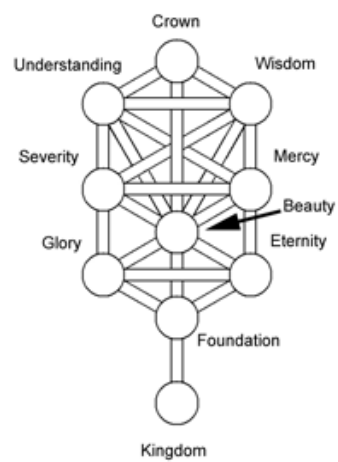
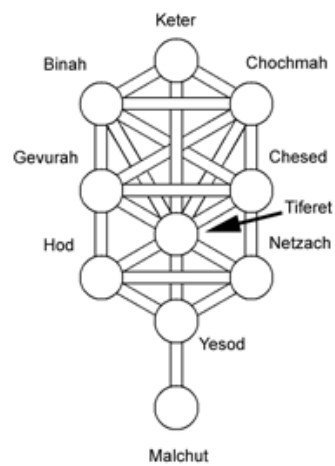
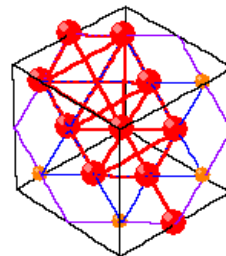
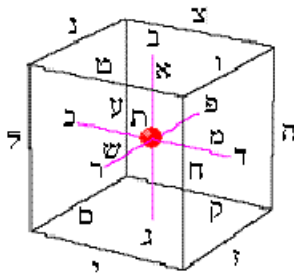


## NOTES ON THE ESSENCE OF JEWISH MYSTICISM

*by*



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## INTRODUCTION

Approximately 2,000 years ago the two main branches of Jewish mysticism were the *Way of Creation* and the *Way of the Chariot*. The first branch is about how to live a creative life, and it can be broken up into two parts – *something-from-nothing creation* and *something-from-something creation*. The *Way of the Chariot*, on the other hand, is about meditative and spiritual journeys that one might make. Both of these branches of early Jewish mysticism are covered in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Book of Creation*, which is the oldest extant book on Jewish mysticism. Also, though not referred to by these specific terms, the essence of these techniques is found in passages such as *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:8, 2:2, & 4:16., and they are discussed later on in this work.

The title of this short work is “Notes on the Essence of Jewish Mysticism,” and it attempts to provide some context for the development of mystical thought in Judaism as things moved from *Bible* to *Wisdom Literature* and then on to the great mystical traditions within Judaism. Much of this book focuses on the *Sefer Yetzirah* because it is the basis for much of later Jewish mysticism, and I sense that most people lack a proper foundation in this basis. Consequently, I devote less time to the *Zohar* even though it is a work that is much more comprehensive than the *Sefer Yetzirah*. Nevertheless, I do cover what I (and I believe the *Zohar*, too) consider to be its most important message, and again, it seems to me to be one that most people do not properly understand. Thus, I feel there is a need for me to express myself on these topics even though my own explanations may also be misunderstood! Still, that’s just the way things often work in this world. We often take a zig-zag path to knowledge, and while that may make the journey longer, humankind still inches its way forward, and I hope the information in this text also helps those who may be looking for what I have to say.

Regarding authorship, I have referred to myself simply by the “Hanged Man” tarot card, and this is because this card can represent a change in perspective. Thus, just as the inverted man sees the world differently, so has my perspective changed in recent years. For most of my life I was like many others. In other words, I acted as if the physical world had an absolute existence (even though I suspected it didn’t!), and my daily task was to maneuver around obstacles and to find objects that were beneficial. Likewise, my ego and personality were treated by me as if they, too, had an absolute existence. These days, however, my perspective is entirely different. I experience physical reality as a dream, albeit a very stable one. Likewise, I experience my personality as only a sometimes useful tool found within the dream. However, instead of seeing my personality as my real self, I experience the unknowable awareness, the unobservable observer, as my true identity, and rather than seeing the physical world as an obstacle, I awaken each day with the thought of, “What will I create today?” Thus, each day is filled with experiences of unity and creativity, and that’s how it should always be!

## FIRST WORDS

*“I bear witness and warn you concerning two things: That none of those who descend to the Merkabah (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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 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* (instruction), *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 your understanding of the above literature, the deeper will be your understanding of *Kabbalah*.

The majority of what is contained in this book is a translation and commentary on select verses from the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the ancient *Book of Creation/Formation* and the earliest extant work of Jewish mysticism. However, as with many ancient texts, the original manuscript of the *Sefer Yetzirah* is no longer in existence. Instead, we have a variety of variant texts to work from. The four main versions are: (1) the *Saadia version* by Saadia Gaon that was published in 931 CE, (2) the *long version* that was published in 946 CE by Rabbi Shabbetai Donnolo, (3) the *short version* published circa 956 CE by Donash ibn Tamim, and (4) the redacted text known as the *GRA version* produced by Rabbi Eliahu, the Gaon of Vilna, in the 1700s. These four versions all agree with one another on the main points, but variations start to enter in as one progresses to the finer details. In many respects, however, the *GRA* version is the best version to work with because it was produced after the *Zohar* and the creation of the *Tree of Life* diagram, and, consequently, it tends to harmonize itself with these later *Kabbalistic* developments more so than the other versions do. Thus, ninety-five percent of what is presented here is my own translation of the *GRA* version. As for the remaining five percent, that represents passages from the other versions that I thought better explained the model of reality that the *Sefer Yetzirah* intends to construct.

The *Sefer Yetzirah* is a short work that, based on the style of the Hebrew, was probably composed between 200 CE – 300 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 *Prizker edition* of the *Zohar* by scholar and translator Daniel C. Matt. There is no original manuscript of the *Zohar* that is still in existence as far as scholars of the *Zohar* know. Thus, for the translation by Daniel Matt, he and other scholars endeavored to, as best they could, reconstruct the original Aramaic text from those sources that are available, and the result is very well annotated work that is true to the Aramaic. 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. Nonetheless, it also has the potential to radically change one's understanding of the world. But only if one can avoid accepting fantasy for truth and instead see the truth behind the fantasy!

*"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*)

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

## THE ESSENCE OF JEWISH MYSTICISM

Jewish mysticism, whose later developments are known as *Kabbalah*, is a natural extension of various concepts found in the *Jewish Bible*. For example, the notion of a *God* that has no form and whose most sacred name is generally not pronounced leads quite naturally to the concept of an ineffable *Creator* that is intrinsically unknowable. Similarly, in *Proverbs* we are introduced to “*Wisdom*” that is specifically identified as female and that seems to be in existence prior to the creation of the universe and was even used as a tool to create the universe. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century mysticism of the *Zohar*, the feminine aspect of *God* comes into great prominence as the *Shechinah*. This term, *Shechinah*, doesn’t appear in the *Bible*; it was first introduced in early rabbinic literature. However, it wasn’t until the *Zohar* that the feminine aspects of *Shechinah* came into prominence through, first, acknowledgement of the fact that the word has a feminine ending and, second, by exploring all ramifications of that gender assignment. One of the more important *Biblical* preludes to mysticism, though, is found in the *Book of Ecclesiastes*:

*“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, to the end that man should find nothing after Him.”*  
(*Ecclesiastes* 7:14)

A more accurate rendering of the usual “*God* has made the one as well as the other” would be something like “This against this made the *Elohim*.” This implies that *God* created the world by separating things from one another and by establishing boundaries. For this reason, the *Zohar* refers to this world as the “*world of separation*.” The idea, however, that this world is the result of unity transforming into multiplicity is not something unique to Jewish mysticism. For example, in Taoism, the *Tao* is similarly split into the opposites of yin and yang, and then there is also a principle of interaction between the two that allows for change over time. This kind of interaction is also found in Jewish mysticism even though *Ecclesiastes* 7:14 makes no mention of it. Instead, to find *Biblical* evidence for the interaction, we have to go to the first chapter of *Genesis*:

*“And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.”*  
(*Genesis* 1:6)

In the *Zohar*, we find the firmament clearly described as a mechanism for interaction between the two opposites, the upper and lower waters. Also, because interactions always need to follow certain rules, the principle of interaction is often referred to in Jewish mysticism as a “*covenant*.”

*“AND GOD SAID, LET THERE BE A FIRMAMENT IN THE MIDST OF THE WATERS, AND LET IT DIVIDE WATERS FROM WATERS. R. Judah said: ‘There are seven firmaments above, all in the realm of supernal holiness, and the Holy Name is completed through them. The firmament mentioned here is in the midst of the waters; it rests upon other Hayyoth (living creatures), separating the upper from the lower waters. The lower*

*waters call to the upper and drink them in through the medium of this firmament, because all the upper waters are collected in it, and it then transmits them to these Hayyoth, and so they draw from there.”*

*(Zohar I:32b)*

And finally, note the last phrase of *Ecclesiastes* 7:14:

*“To the end that man should find nothing after Him.”*

*(Ecclesiastes 7:14)*

This phrase tells us that the whole purpose of all this multiplicity and separation of things is so that we can return once again to a state of unity with *God*. However, assuming that we were already in a state of oneness before the physical creation, it is natural to ask why we didn't just stay there? Why didn't we remain in *Oneness* instead of coming to Earth? The answer to that question is also given several times by the *Zohar*. Our reason for moving from a “world of *Oneness*” to a “world of *separation*” is that we did it solely for the sake of returning to *Oneness* with a greater understanding of what it is. For example, many of us begin this life as little babies that are surrounded by love and nurturing. However, over time that warm fuzzy environment disappears as we are soon faced with ever increasing challenges and situations that demand that we develop knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, as *Ecclesiastes* would say, all these things lead to weariness, and eventually some part of us longs for that early environment where love erased all fears and separation. Not everyone makes it back to that state, but those that do return with a greater understanding of both love and separation. That is the purpose of this creation.

*“Only through the disclosed can a man reach the undisclosed.”*

*(Zohar I:154a)*

*“Assuredly the man of discernment (naban) is of a higher degree than the wise man (hakham). Even a pupil who gives new ideas to his teacher is called “wise”. A wise man, then, it is true, knows for himself as much as is required, but the man of discernment apprehends the whole, knowing both his own point of view and that of others.”*

*(Zohar II:201a)*



## 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 the *Bible* and 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. Later, words that sounded alike were 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 Hebrew alphabet are also the ancient number system, and this gives every Hebrew word a numerical value. Thus, words with the same 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 brief introduction. 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. 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* (*Hebrew Bible*) can be examined quite easily for *Bible Codes*, and the results are sometimes extraordinary. We'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

Furthermore, over the centuries the letters of the Hebrew alphabet have been given various meanings and interpretations. Below is a table showing some of their various correspondences.

Letter	Number	Original	Sefer Yetzirah	Hebrew	Zohar	Modern
aleph	1	ox	air	א	unity	air, lungs, ruach (spirit/breath)
bet	2	house	wisdom	ב	blessings	blessing, house, 2 (duality)
gimmel	3	camel	wealth	ג	beneficence	camel, benefactor, giving to others
dalet	4	door	seed	ד	poverty	knowledge, door
hey	5	window	speech	ה	yaweh	hass (silence), effortless breath
vav	6	hook	thought	ו	yaweh	and, union
zayin	7	weapon	motion	ז	remember, sword	sword, 7th day (Sabbath)
chet	8	fence	sight	ח	sin	life, grace, mercy
tet	9	snake	hearing	ט	good, sunk, sin	good
yud	10	hand	action	י	Yaweh	y'chidah (unity), hand, yordei merkabah (descent into the chariot)
kaf	20	palm	life	כ	king, honor, extermination	kavanah (intention, devotion), cohein (priest)
lamed	30	ox goad	coition	ל	king	learning, left brain
mem	40	water	water	מ	king	water, abdomen, nefesh
nun	50	fish	smell	נ	awesome, comely, fallen	faithful, right brain
samech	60	support	sleep	ס	support	support, circle, cycles
ayin	70	eye	anger	ע	humility, iniquity	eye, fountain, 70 interpretations, multiplicity
peh	80	mouth	dominance	פ	redemption, deliverance, transgression, serpent	mouth, tongue, appetites
tzaddi	90	fish hook	taste	צ	righteousness	righteousness, charity
kuf	100	back of head	laughter	ק	falsehood, conspiracy	holiness, klippot (shells), kof (monkey)
resh	200	head	peace	ר	falsehood, conspiracy	compassion, womb
shin	300	tooth	fire	ש	almighty, falsehood	fire, brain, neshamah (higher soul)
tav	400	cross	grace	ת	truth, death	Torah, instruction

There is a tradition that the word *pardes*, which means “orchard” and is related to the English word “paradise,” is also an acronym for *peshat*, *remez*, *drash*, and *sod*. These are Hebrew words that represent 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 verses’ secret, *Kabbalistic* meaning. Of these four levels, *gematria* and wordplay are sometimes seen as hints for deeper meaning. We’ll now look at a few classic *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, יהוה<sup>1</sup>, (*yud-hey-*

<sup>1</sup> Unlike written English which is read from left to right, Hebrew letters and words are read right to left. This is likely because in the good ol’ days when the ruler’s words were carved in stone, it was easier for a right-handed person to engrave them from right to left.

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. Similarly, one could conclude from this that love = 13 = oneness, and this makes sense since whenever we experience one, we experience the other.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{God} &= \text{י} + \text{ה} + \text{ו} + \text{ה} = 10+5+6+5 = 26 \\ \text{Love} &= \text{א} + \text{ה} + \text{ב} + \text{ה} = 1+5+2+5 = 13 \\ \text{One} &= \text{א} + \text{ה} + \text{ד} = 1+5+4 = 10 \\ \text{Therefore, } \text{God} &= \text{Oneness} + \text{Love} \end{aligned}$$

This next wordplay involves letter shapes. The letter *aleph*, א, can be decomposed into two *yuds* and a *vav*, י י ו, 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 in *Ezekiel* 1:4 there is a word, *hashmal*, that is usually translated as “amber” or “electrum,” but according to the *Talmud*<sup>2</sup> it should really be translated as the “speaking silence.” And this along with *I Kings* 19:12 (“a still, small voice”) suggests how *God* may be found in silence.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{God} &= \text{י} + \text{ה} + \text{ו} + \text{ה} = 10+5+6+5 = 26 \\ \text{א} &= \text{י} + \text{י} + \text{ו} = 10+10+6 = 26 \\ \text{Therefore, the silent letter } \text{aleph} &\text{ is connected to the most sacred name for } \text{God}. \end{aligned}$$

Another name for *God* in Hebrew is *Elohim*, and in passages from the *Zohar*, *Elohim* generally represents a manifest image of *God* that is created by the unmanifest, unknowable *God* that is usually represented by *yud-hey-vav-hey*. This viewpoint is supported by a *gematria* that shows that the name *Elohim* has the same numerical value as *nature* or *the nature*, thus indentifying the name *Elohim* with the creation itself.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Elohim} &= \text{א} + \text{ל} + \text{ה} + \text{י} + \text{ם} = 1+30+5+10+40 = 86 \\ \text{nature} &= \text{ה} + \text{ט} + \text{ב} + \text{ע} = 5+9+2+70 = 86 \\ \text{Therefore, there is a connection between } \text{Elohim} &\text{ and nature.} \end{aligned}$$

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* (which is known as the written law).

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Mishnah} &= \text{משנה} \\ \text{Neshamah} &= \text{נשמה} \end{aligned}$$

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

<sup>2</sup> *B. Chagigah* 13b

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<sup>3</sup>.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Wine} &= \text{יין} = 50+10+10 = 70 \\ \text{Secret} &= \text{סוד} = 4+6+60 = 70\end{aligned}$$

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*.

$$\begin{aligned}\text{מ} &\leftrightarrow \text{י} \\ \text{צ} &\leftrightarrow \text{ה} \\ \text{מצוה} &\leftrightarrow \text{יהוה}\end{aligned}$$

The word *Kabbalah* comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to receive,” and, thus, many say that it is a tradition that has been handed down over the centuries from master to student. The term itself seems to have first appeared around the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Spain and Southern France, and many people use it to characterize Jewish mysticism from that point on. However, if we look at the *gematria* of *Kabbalah*, then we can find a deeper meaning within that word. In particular, consider the following from *Deuteronomy* 8:3,

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

In Hebrew, the single word *motzah* may be translated as “utterance that comes forth,” and the *gematria* or numerical value of this word is *mem+vav+tzaddi+aleph* = 40+6+90+1 = 137. Interestingly, this is also the *gematria* of *Kabbalah*, *kuf+bet+lamed+hey* = 100+2+30+5 = 137. Thus, we could say that the deeper meaning of the word *Kabbalah* is that it is an explanation of the ten utterances through which, according to tradition, *God* created the universe. These utterances appear in the first chapter of *Genesis*, and in Jewish mysticism they are later referred to as the *sefirot*. Since then, much has been written about the *sefirot* and their interpretation, but the point is that this is what *Kabbalah* is really about. It is our attempt to understand those utterances or declarations that brought about creation and to understand how we can be co-creators with *God*. And that’s it. That’s what it is all about. And hopefully this book will be an enjoyable explanation of it all!

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

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<sup>3</sup> *Numbers Rabbah* X:8

up to 36 and are often used to symbolize the thirty-six righteous souls for the sake of which *God*, according to rabbinic tradition, 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.

שלום = peace, wholeness  
 לו = 36

שם = 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*, mercy, kindness, love) has a *gematria* of 72 and *Gevurah* (*gimmel-bet-vav-resch-hey*, strength, severity, judgement) 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.

חסד = 72  
 גבורה = 216

Since the *Book of Ecclesiastes* deals with some of the harsher realities of life, it would be nice if there was an association between the number 216 and this text. Well, there is! 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.

Consider now 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*)

We can compare this verse to the following from *Deuteronomy*.

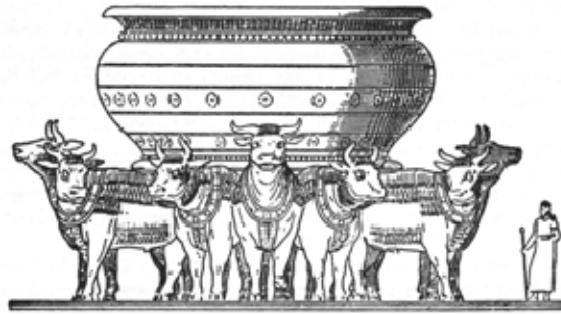
*You shall place My words upon your heart and upon your soul.*  
 (*Deuteronomy 11:18*)

Again, 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. Thus, the number 216 appears in *Ecclesiastes* in ways that defy what one would expect purely by chance.

Now for something a little different, let's look at the *Bible* with respect to the irrational number  $\pi$ . In the process of so doing, we will come across a very interesting *Bible Code*. Our journey begins with the following passage from *I Kings*.

*He made the sea of a casting ten cubits from one lip to the other lip, circular all around, five cubits its height, a measuring line thirty cubits could encircle it all around.*  
(*I Kings* 7:23, circa 550 BCE)



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  $\pi$  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 believed 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  $\pi$  that is accurate to four decimal places!

#### Measuring line thirty cubits

קוה שלשים באמה

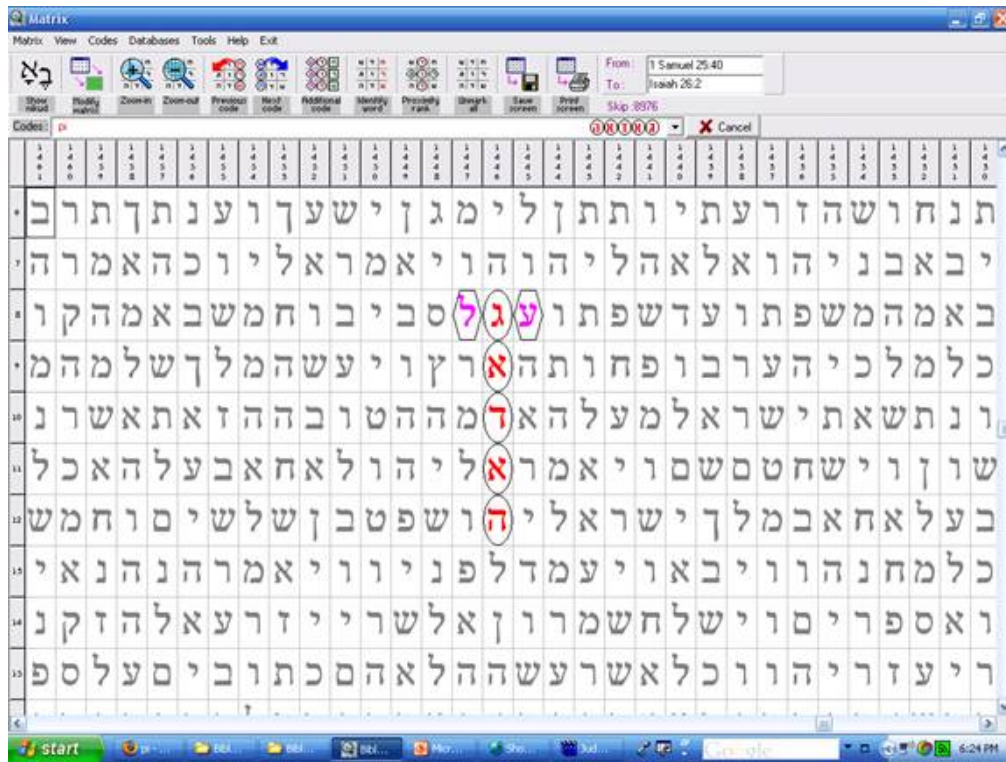
unusual spelling → קוה = 111

usual spelling → קו = 106

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

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, it is also the case that the beginning of our code starts in the very middle of the word *circular* (*agol*, אגול). The length of the skip sequence for this code is 8,976 letters. Now how cool is that!


$$1 \rightarrow 3$$
$$s \rightarrow 1$$
 $\tau \rightarrow 4$ 
$$s \rightarrow 1$$
 $\pi \rightarrow 5$ 

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? In some instances, the numerical patterns are most likely the result of human ingenuity. However, when it comes to *Bible Codes* that involve skips of thousands between the letters of the code, it is very unlikely that humans could have created such a thing. Consequently, we either have to assume the occurrence of an extraordinary coincidence or some other causal mechanism. 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 tastes. I believe that *God* exists, but is ultimately unknowable and generally works through physical laws so that his/her/its 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 *Hebrew Bible*. However, if a higher version of *quantum entanglement* is involved, then that also doesn't mean that every *Bible Code* found is true, only that enough people believed it to be true in such a way that it became entangled with this universal text. Additionally, 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 going, so let's just call this a religious belief of mine. It is my religious belief that everything throughout space-time is interconnected and that this results in information about the individual parts being encoded throughout the whole. And, of course, I may be completely wrong. After all, there's a first time for everything!

## THE INCREDIBLE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

The book of *Ecclesiastes*, in my humble opinion, is not only one of the most remarkable and most misunderstood books in the *Bible*, it is also the source of much that one finds in Jewish mysticism. 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 reality<sup>4</sup>. 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.”*  
(*Psalms 144:4*)

*“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 (Psalms 144:4).” Rav Huna said in the name of Rabbi Aha,*

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<sup>4</sup> One cannot help but notice a similarity here between what the rabbis are thinking and Plato’s allegory of the *Cave of Shadows*.

*“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, and this is the conclusion that the ancient rabbis come to in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* I:2. This makes sense because it is said that Solomon not only spoke with assemblies of people, he was also able to assemble the teachings of Torah in ways that made it easy for people to understand.

*“And more so because Kohelet was wise, he also taught the people knowledge; yea, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs (Ecclesiastes 9:12).” He pondered the words of the Torah and investigated the meaning of the words of the Torah. He made handles to the Torah, making it 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*<sup>5</sup>, 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. I like to call this hidden mechanism within the *Assembler*, and all of these ideas find greater elaboration in later *Kabbalah*.

The *Wisdom Literature* of the *Hebrew Bible* (*Ecclesiastes*, *Job*, *Song of Songs*, *Proverbs*, and various *Psalms*) often addresses the real problems and inequities of humankind. In many ways, the formula found in the *Torah* is rather simplistic. Do good and live, or do bad and die<sup>6</sup>. However, in real life we often see the good suffer while the evil prosper.

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<sup>5</sup> The word *gematria* comes from a Greek word for “measure,” and it has the same word origin as our more familiar term *geometry*.

<sup>6</sup> 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 live 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 you in this present moment, find satisfaction in your work, and joy with the spouse 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!

## NAMES OF GOD

In Hebrew there are many names for *God*, and some of this is the result of “*God names*” from adjacent cultures being appropriated by the surrounding Hebrew population. However, regardless of the source, each name is generally seen as revealing some aspect of the *Divine*. Below is a table showing some of my favorite names.

NAME	LETTERS	HEBREW	GEMATRIA	MEANING
Yah	yud-hey	יָהּ	10+5 = 15	Found occasionally in Exodus and Isaiah, and used quite often in Psalms.
Yahweh	yud-hey-vav-hey	יְהוָה	10+5+6+5 = 26	The most sacred name for God in Judaism, and it is generally not pronounced.
Elohim	aleph-lamed-hey-yud-mem	אֱלֹהִים	1+30+5+10+40 = 86	Names of God that begin with "El" are names from the Canaanite population that made their way into Hebrew.
Shechinah	shin-kaf-yud-nun-hey	שְׁכִינָה	300+20+10+50+5 = 385	God as an indwelling presence, the feminine aspect of God
Ehyeh	aleph-hey-yud-hey	אֶהְיֶה	1+5+10+5 = 21	I AM. The God name introduced in Exodus 3:14.
Mi	mem-yud	מִי	10+40 = 50	WHO? This name appears in the Zohar, and it reminds us that God is in many ways the eternal question that can never be completely answered.

The name “*Yah*” is often seen as an abbreviated form of *Yahweh*.

The name “*Yahweh*” is considered the most sacred name for *God* in Judaism, and since it is no longer pronounced, the original pronunciation is no longer known. However, many linguists see this name as a reflexive form of the verb “to be.” In other words, the one who causes creation or the *Creator*. Additionally, since *yud-hey-vav-hey* is no longer pronounced, it hints at the ineffableness of *God*.

The name “*Elohim*” often seems to appear in *Torah* just as frequently as “*Yahweh*” (*yud-hey-vav-hey*), and the ancient rabbis wrote that “*Yahweh*” represents *God’s* mercy while “*Elohim*” is used when *God* is executing judgement. In the *Zohar*, though, the contradistinction made is usually between an intrinsically unknowable *God* (*yud-hey-vav-hey*) and a less concealed, more revealed *God* (*Elohim*) that now possesses characteristics like long suffering, just, and merciful.

The name “*Shechinah*” never appears in the *Hebrew Bible*, but was introduced instead in early rabbinic literature as a name that indicates that feeling of nearness and presence of *God*. In the *Zohar*, though, this name has taken on added significance. Since in Hebrew this name has a feminine ending, the *Shechinah* has also come to represent the nurturing, feminine aspect of *God*. Additionally, it also represents the entire creation as *God in exile from God*, and both the *Shechinah* and the cosmos are also referred to as the “*Name*” since they are more revealed aspects that point us back to the true nature of *God* just as our names point to ourselves.

The name “*Ehyeh*” is from *Exodus* 3:14, and it translates as “*I AM*.” Note that when we use this construction in ordinary speech, the words “*I am*” are usually followed by some sort of descriptive noun such as when we say “*I am male*” or “*I am happy*.” However, when “*I AM*” appears without being followed by such a noun, then it can only refer to pure awareness, to the observer within that all our observations disappear into. It is this awareness that is the most mysterious and most divine part of being human, and the more we focus on it, the more we touch *Divinity*.

The name “*Mi*” means “*Who*,” and this name originates in the *Zohar*. In that text, the phrase “*Who has created these*” from *Isaiah* 40:26 is taken not as a question, but rather as a statement that a *God* designated as “*Who*” has created this world. The thing I absolutely love about this name is that it treats *God* as a question that can be asked, but never fully answered. Furthermore, the Hebrew letters for “*Who*” in *Isaiah* 40:26 combine with the Hebrew letters for “*these*” to form the *God* name “*Elohim*.”

## 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 it is the energy 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 in our teens 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 readily 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 (NISMATH) 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)

In the *Zohar* only the first three souls are discussed, the *nefesh*, the *ruach*, and the *neshamah*. Furthermore, it is useful to think of these souls as emergent properties. In other words, they represent levels of advancement and organization within our brains that occur once the conditions are right. Also, for the most part, everyone has a *nefesh*, and every adult has a *ruach* even though our moral soul is often lacking in various ways. However, not everyone develops a strong spiritual soul, a *neshamah*. Most people have at least a tiny *neshamah* if they have ever experienced things like love and oneness, but nonetheless, most of us can do better, and it is part of our purpose in life to keep growing, to continue to progress from *nefesh* to *ruach* to *neshamah* and to experience an ongoing connection with love and oneness. At the same time, though, the *Zohar* cautions that the ultimate goal is not to simply sit on a mountain top meditating once we've achieved that *Oneness* (*Zohar* II:176a). Instead, the goal is to take that revelation and see how many wondrous, creative things we can make from it!



## THE PARTICLE AND THE WAVE

In quantum physics, all matter has a dual nature as both a particle and a wave. As a wave, matter extends forever in all directions, blending and interacting with other waves, and it doesn't exist exclusively at just one location. However, as a particle, every piece of matter has boundaries that lead it to occupy a definite locale. Furthermore, in its particle mode, each piece of matter is separate from every other piece, and while these two modes of being for matter appear to contradict one another, that is, nonetheless, what quantum physics says, and quantum physics is the most successful theory that physics has ever produced.

Human beings, at least experientially, also have both a wave mode and a particle mode. In our wave mode we feel connected with other people. Our boundaries in that mode are less well defined, and it can be difficult to discern where we end and those that we are close to begin. In our wave mode we feel empathy, love, and oneness with the rest of creation. However, in our particle mode we often experience just the opposite. In our particle mode we feel keen separation between ourselves and others. As a particle, we are strongly aware of our boundaries and the differences between ourselves and "the other." In our particle mode, we understand why the *Zohar* refers to this world as the *world of separation*.

In the *Talmud* and other parts of rabbinic literature, the rabbis seem to recognize these two modes of being, and they go on to say that it is sin that contracts us and causes us to lose that sense of oneness with the rest of the cosmos.

*"Rab Judah said that Rav 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' (Deuteronomy 4:32); as soon as he sinned, the Holy One, blessed be He, placed His hand upon him and diminished him. (Psalm 139:5)"*  
(B. Chagigah 12a)

Whenever we are in our wave mode, we feel connected, but connected with what? The wrong way to live is to connect ourselves with our own desires entirely at the expense of the welfare of others because ultimately their pain will also become our pain. In contrast to this is to see and merge with the *Divinity* that is present in all things. In particular, one should strive to always sense that unifying *Presence* that connects all things even while observing diversity. The *Zohar* refers to this as perceiving unity above while recognizing diversity below, and this is the right way to go through life. Contrary to this is to unite yourself with something in the *world of separation* (united below), but to separate yourself from the underlying spiritual *Oneness* (divided above). As the *Zohar* expresses it:

*"Herein consisted the sin of the primeval serpent who united below but divided above, and so caused the mischief we still lament. The right way, on the contrary, is to recognize diversity below but unity above, so that the black light (the awareness that illumines but is not seen) becomes wholly merged above and afterwards unified in respect of its diverse elements, and so is kept away from the evil power."* (*Zohar* I:12b)

## THE MATHEMATICAL INEFFABLENESS OF GOD

By the time we finish *Genesis* and get into *Exodus*, it becomes increasingly clear that *God* is something that can be heard but not seen and that the name of *God* is something known to only a few. This may also be seen as the beginning of an image of *God* that is no image at all. This is the start of a doctrine that looks upon *God* as something intrinsically unknowable. Usually whenever there is something we don't know, such as is always case for those who work on the frontiers of science, there is generally a sense that our state of ignorance is a temporary condition. In other words, if we pursue the truth, then the truth will gradually reveal itself. Or so we like to believe. However, higher mathematics suggests that there are some things that can never be fully fathomed.

In the late 1800s, the field of set theory began to emerge within mathematics. Initially, a set was thought of as a synonym for the word "collection," and it was believed that any conceivable collection would therefore be a set. Also, one of the early developments of set theory was that the set of all subsets of some set will always be larger than the originally set. For example, if we start with a set of 2 objects such as  $\{a,b\}$ , then the set of all possible subsets consists of  $2^2 = 4$  objects. In particular,  $\{\{a\},\{b\},\{a,b\},\emptyset\}$  where  $\emptyset$  represents the null or empty set, the set that contains no objects. Furthermore, this result applies to infinite sets as well, and that means that in mathematics there exist infinities of different sizes! For example, if  $\mathbb{N} = \{1,2,3,\dots\}$  is the infinite set of counting numbers, then the set of all subsets of  $\mathbb{N}$  is an infinite set that is even larger than  $\mathbb{N}$ . In other words, an infinity larger than infinity!

At first everything progressed rapidly and remarkably well in this new field of mathematics, but suddenly problems began to emerge when infinite sets became too large. For example, we may naively assume that we can talk about the set of all sets which we might also describe as the totality of all things. However, when try to do so, paradoxes and contradictions start to emerge. For instance, given any set we can always construct a larger set by looking at the set of all subsets of our original set, but if we start with the set of everything, then how can we possibly make something bigger than everything? This, in a nutshell, is what we call Cantor's Paradox, and it shows us that the totality of all things is paradoxical. Furthermore, mathematicians dealt with this paradox by creating axioms for set theory that allow for the existence of infinite sets, but that don't permit the construction of the set of all sets. In other words, the totality of all things is different and contradictory and it is intrinsically unknowable and excluded from set theory.

The ancient sage Rav Huna intuitively understood this truth when he said, "*Whatever things you see are but parts of the ways of the Holy One. (Genesis Rabbah XII:1)*" We can only see the parts, but never completely see the whole. This is also suggested in the *Zohar* where *Who* is used to refer to the inherently unknowable *God*, but *What* is used to represent the world of things that can be known. The *Zohar* suggests that we may spend a lifetime trying to understand the ineffable *Who*, but in the end we only know a lot more about *What*. As for *Who*, the *Zohar* asserts that "Everything is as baffling as at the beginning. (*Zohar* I:1b)"

## HARD NONDUALISM VERSUS SOFT NONDUALISM

In the *Sefer Yetzirah* the fundamental elements of creation are seen as *air*, *water*, and *fire*, and these elements represent the presence of two opposites, water and fire, plus a third element, air or steam, that represents a dynamic interaction between the two poles. What is conspicuously left out of this element scheme, however, is *earth*, and this suggests that from the viewpoint of the *Sefer Yetzirah* that the physical world is derivative from these other elements. One might even liken this to a dream state where all the objects that are observed are simply different manifestations of consciousness. By the time of the *Zohar*, though, we begin to find very explicit statements regarding the oneness of all things, and, in particular, the *Zohar* espouses a philosophy of nondualism that ultimately sees separation as the illusion and oneness as the ultimate truth. Still, I like to make a distinction between what I call “hard nonduality” and “soft nonduality.”

By hard nonduality, I mean the belief that all that exists is consciousness and the various objective forms it may take on. In hard nonduality, rather than consciousness evolving from matter, it is the other way around. In other words, consciousness is primary, and matter is merely a particular expression of consciousness, and ultimately all is consciousness. One may readily accept that this is the truth of the dream state. In contrast to this, however, is what I call “soft nonduality” which begins by conceding that matter and duality are real and consciousness is an emergent property of matter. However, soft nonduality continues by asserting that even if duality is the real truth, our experience is, nonetheless, only of what presents itself during consciousness. In other words, even if matter and duality exist, it is still the case that everything we know takes place within our conscious awareness, and thus, from the perspective of the mind, all that exists is consciousness and nonduality! To put it another way, even if duality exists, our experience of it occurs only within consciousness, and in the realm of consciousness all things are only different manifestations of awareness, and so our experience of duality occurs in a way that is ultimately nondual. As a result, one may conclude that even if duality is true, one still has no choice but to live life as if it were nondual.

To live a nondual life, the first step is to start turning one’s focus back from the observed to the observer. If instead of focusing on what you are observing and getting either happy or sad from that perception, you should try focusing on the undifferentiated, unobservable awareness that underlies all perception. As you do this, you will begin to perceive more love and oneness. This is because the observer is not observable in the usual way, and as a result, we can never see it as having any parts (in spite of the fact that everything is a part of it!). Consequently, attempts to observe that which is indivisible only result in perceiving more unity within. And as one continues in this practice, one begins to experience everything more and more as just a manifestation of consciousness. This is expressed over and over again in the *Zohar* in ways such as the following:

*“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*)

## THE 2<sup>ND</sup> LAW OF THERMODYNAMICS

Everyone knows *Genesis* 1:2 where we read, “*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.*” The Hebrew words that are often translated as “without form” and “void” are *tohu* and *bohu*. The translation of these words is somewhat uncertain, and other renderings that one can find in rabbinic literature, for example, are “bewildered and astonished” and “chaos and confusion.” In the *Zohar*, we find *tohu* associated with the right side of the *Kabbalistic Tree of Life*, and, thus, it is associated with formlessness while *bohu*, on the other hand, is associated with the left side and it has form. If I use the English words “chaos” for *tohu* and “confusion” for *bohu*, then I would say that chaos is a state that we literally cannot make sense of with our left brains, and, consequently, we cannot fully describe what is occurring. In contrast, confusion or *bohu* is more akin to a messy room. We can perceive all the details, and the result is something that is just a mess.

*“Tohu is a place which has no color and no form, and the esoteric principle of “form” does not apply to it. It seems for a moment to have a form, but when looked at again it has no form. Everything has a “vestment” except this. Bohu, on the other hand, has shape and form.”*  
(*Zohar* I:16a)

In the *Midrash*, however, Rav Huna marvels at how our highly organized world rests upon a foundation that is equivalent to garbage.

*“In human practice, when an earthly monarch builds a palace on a site of sewers, dunghills, and garbage, if one says, ‘This palace is built on a site of sewers, dunghills, and garbage,’ does he not discredit it? Thus, whoever comes to say that this world was created out of tohu and bohu and darkness, does he not indeed impair [God's glory]? R. Huna said in Bar Kappara's name: If the matter were not written, it would be impossible to say it, viz., GOD CREATED HEAVEN AND EARTH; out of what? Out of NOW THE EARTH WAS TOHU AND BOHU (*Genesis* 1:2).”*  
(*Genesis Rabbah* I:5)

When looked at through the lens of modern science, I see something quite remarkable here. Namely, that the universe from its very beginning through the Big Bang has been characterized by random chaos. In physics this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics. This is the law that says that everything we do just adds to the overall randomness of the universe. In other words, even though the universe contains both hot places and cold places, everything is inexorably headed towards “lukewarm.” Salt and pepper will inevitably be randomly distributed. However, life, itself, is the very antithesis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics. Life represents structure and organization, not randomness, and while all our efforts at creating order still add to the overall universal disorder, we are, nonetheless, unable to help ourselves. We are biologically driven to create more organization and order and ever higher levels of complexity, and all our science and religion are examples of this. However, once again, the puzzle this poses is that all life

seems to exist in contradiction to this law. All living organisms are examples of complex structures that seem to defy disorder. However, if we look more closely at the process, we see that life is maintained by a constant flow of resources into the organism coupled with the ongoing expulsion of waste materials, and it is this very process that results in an overall increase in the disorganization of the universe while simultaneously letting the living achieve higher levels of organization. It is like a city which can only thrive as long as there is a constant flow of resources in and garbage out, and this is the insight that won Ilya Prigogine the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1977. The bottom line, though, is that while the universe as a whole is headed toward randomness, we are not. We are designed to seek things out and to understand them. We are driven toward greater complexity both in our physical structures and our mental structures. We are builders that defy chaos. We create cities and great centers of learning, and to some extent, we even create our understanding of *God*!

**משנה א': בשלשים ושתים נתיבות פליאות חכמה חקק יה  
יהוה צבאות אלהי ישראל אלהים חיים ומלך עולם אל שדי רחום  
וחנון רם ונשא שוכן עד וקדוש שמו מרום וקדוש הוא וברא את  
עולמו בשלשה ספרים בספר וספר וספור:**

1.1: With 32 mystical paths 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 (seferim), with text (sefer), with number (safar), and with communication (sippur).

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

1.1: With thirty-two wondrous paths (netivot) of ITS own wisdom, IT, Yah, the Creator of Multiplicity, created ITS universe with three books (seferim), with story (sefer), with number (safar), and with communication (sippur).

*(My translation)*

This opening statement contains so very much! First, the thirty-two paths of wisdom are likely a reconciliation of the doctrine that *God* created the universe with the twenty-two letters of the alphabet with the doctrine that *God* created the universe with ten utterances.

*“Rab Judah said in the name of Rav, ‘Bezalel knew how to combine the (22) letters (of the Hebrew alphabet) by which the heavens and earth were created.’”*

*(B. Berachot 55a)*

*“With ten utterances was the world created.”*

*(Pirkei Avot 5:1)*

With regard to the former, the letters of an alphabet are to words just like prime numbers are to the rest of the counting numbers. In other words, you can construct every single word from letters. Also, don't overlook the extent to which our world is dependent upon language. At the very least, the way in which we view the world is shaped by language and our verbal beliefs, and some might, indeed, take the position that we can only consciously perceive those things that we have created words for. This point of view can be seen in the very structure of the Hebrew language where the word *devar* means both “thing” and “word.” Words are things and things are words. We also see this doctrine appearing, too, in Christianity where at the beginning of the *Gospel of John* we read, “*In the beginning was the Word.*”

Additionally, recall that in the Hebrew alphabet every letter is also a number. Thus, you could extend this to mean that the universe is created by mathematics. Interestingly, there are some physicists who have already come to this conclusion via the recognition

that once physicists get beyond a certain point in their explorations, they no longer have any particles left to work with, only the math.

The ten utterances with which *God* created the world correspond to the number of times in *Genesis* that we read, “*And God said.*” However, at first there seems to be a problem because in the creation story we actually read the Hebrew for this phrase (v’yomer Elohim) only nine times. Nonetheless, the *Talmud* uses *Psalm 33:6* to explain that the opening words, “*In the beginning,*” are also a creative utterance, and this brings the total to ten, and since words are created from letters, you could also say that the statement that *God* created the world with ten utterances is just another way of looking at the doctrine that the world was created with the letters of the alphabet.

*“Rabbi 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 word *netivot* that is used for “*paths*” in the passage above also requires some explanation. This word refers primarily to narrow paths that would be traversed by a single person as opposed to a broader, public path. The latter in Hebrew would usually be referenced by the word *derech* (*Zohar II:215a*). Hence, there is a suggestion in this first passage that this work is not only about creation by *God*, but also creation by us on the individual level. Furthermore, *netivot* is the feminine version of the word for “*paths.*” This foreshadows that in this text we will find that in the created world that the feminine always comes before the masculine. Or as my Native American relatives say, “*Everything is born of Woman.*” And finally, *wisdom* is a reference to Biblical verses such as *Proverbs 24:3*, “*By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established.*”

Next in this passage is mention of *God* (*Yah*) as the *Creator of Multiplicity*. In several of the versions of *Sefer Yetzirah*, one finds at this point a list of various appellations for *God*. However, the appellations are not completely identical from one version to the next, and that suggests that they were added on later. Thus, I have decided to use a briefer description such as one finds in some of the variations of the short version of the *Sefer Yetzirah*. In that version we find *Yah*, the name for *God* that appears a few times in *Exodus* and *Isaiah* and several times in *Psalms*, as well as a phrase that is usually translated as *Lord of Hosts*. However, upon reflection one realizes that this translation is flawed. For instance, we say *Lord* (*Adonai*) simply in place of the most sacred name for *God* that is not pronounced and is written as *yud-hey-vav-hey*. A precise translation of *yud-hey-vav-hey* would be something like *the one who causes being*, or more simply, *the Creator*. Additionally, the word that is translated as *hosts* has the plain meaning of an *army* or a *host of soldiers*. However, the root meaning of the word *tzavah* is *a mass of things*. Thus, in the context of this mystical text, I believe the translation *Creator of Multiplicity* to be closer to the intent of the author. Furthermore, the name *Yah* (*yud-hey*)

can be seen as suggesting this interpretation. The letter *yud* stands for *y'chidah*, unity, and the letter *hey* is also, in Hebrew, the number five, thus, suggesting the expansion of unity into a five dimensional universe as will be described later on in this text. Below, for comparison, are the appellations that you find in the primary versions of the *Sefer Yetzirah* along with my choice.

APPELLATIONS 1:1				
Me	GRA	Short	Long	Saadia
Yah	Yah	Yah	Yah	Yah
Creator of Multiplicity	Lord of Hosts	Lord of Hosts	Yahweh Lord of Hosts	Yahweh Lord of Hosts
	God of Israel		God of Israel	God of Israel
	The Living God		The Living God	The Living God
	King of the Universe		God Almighty	God Almighty
	God Almighty		High and Exalted	High and Exalted
	Merciful and Gracious		Dwelling in Eternity on High	Dwelling in Eternity
	High and Exalted		His Name is Holy	His Name is Holy
	Dwelling in Eternity			
	Whose Name is Holy			
	Lofty and Holy			

For those versions of the *Sefer Yetzirah* that include several different appellations for *God*, it is a reminder that we can never see or know *God* in its entirety. We can only grasp particular, more limited aspects of *God* such as “*oneness*” or “*love*.”

*“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. (Job 26:14)'”*  
*(Genesis Rabbah XII:1)*

Additionally, in my translation, I often refer to *God* as *IT*. This is to highlight the ultimate ineffableness of *God*, and by doing this, I am also following a precedent found in the *Zohar* where, noticing that the very first verse of *Genesis* has a singular verb (*bara*) followed by a plural noun (*Elohim*), it retranslates this verse so that the plural *Elohim* becomes the direct object instead of the subject. Thus, the *Zohar* changes the phrase “*In the beginning, God created,*” to “*In the beginning, IT created God.*” And by doing this, it makes a distinction between the *God* we cannot know and the *God* that we describe with human attributes.

*“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 1:15a)



The last part of our passage says that *God* created the universe with three books (*seferim*) – story (*sefer*), number (*safar*), and communication (*sippur*). The most interesting thing about this is that all of these words have the same three letter Hebrew root, namely, *samach-peh-resh*. Consequently, this shows that while the basic pattern for creation is two opposing parts (story and number) with interaction between them, it is all still really just one undifferentiated unity. This is also suggested by the following verse from the *Zohar* that states that if it weren't for our minds making distinctions between things, we would still perceive the ever present *Oneness*.

*“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*)

Also in our passage, we may interpret the words “*story*” and “*number*” as referring to what we would understand today as the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Thus, we have the implication that it is consciousness that creates our world through manipulation of the brain.

Additionally, the *gematria* or numerical value of the Hebrew root for all three words (*story*, *number*, and *communication*) is *samach-peh-resh* = 340, the same as *shin-mem* which in Hebrew spells “*name*” and is often used as a synonym for *God*. Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that the creation is nothing but the *name of God*.

More specifically, it is the *God* name of *Elohim* that is most closely associated with the created universe. For example, the *gematria* of *Elohim* is 86 which is the same as that of *ha-tevah*, a word for “*nature*.” And the icing on the cake is the passage quoted previously from the *Zohar I:15a* that gives a very eloquent description of the creation of the universe that is in harmony with the Big Bang and that refers to the universe as a “*palace (that) is called Elohim*.” And then, of course, it closes with the words, “*By means of a beginning IT created Elohim*.”

The bottom line of this first passage is that in order to create a universe such as the one we know, unity has to be broken up into three component parts – one part opposite another, and a third part that provides for interaction between the two. And as the text will note later on, this mirrors a statement found in *Ecclesiastes 7:14* that *God* has made one thing opposite another. However, since the Hebrew root is the same for each of the component parts mentioned above, this shows the illusory nature of this division. It is like taking a glass of water and trying to separate it into the above water, the below water, and the in between water. In the end, it's all just water!

## משנה ב': עשר ספירות בלי מה ועשרים ושתים אותיות יסוד שלש מאות ושבע כפולות ושתים עשרה פשוטות:

1.2: Ten sefirot of nothingness and 22 foundation letters – three mothers, seven doubles, and twelve elementals.

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

1.2: Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint (belimah) and twenty-two letters of foundation, three mothers and seven doubles and twelve plain.

(My translation)

In this passage, we encounter for the first time a strange, new word, *sefirot*. Also, the fact that this is a manufactured word suggests that at times in reading this text, we should consider its words as coded and, thus, search for similar words with the same root in order to unlock the true connotation. In this case, the three letter Hebrew root of *sefirot* is *samach-peh-resh*, and several explanations have been given as to its meaning.

On the one hand, it seems to definitely be related to *safar*, the word for “number,” and this makes sense because the number of *sefirot* is ten and they are supposed to mirror or be the *ten creative utterances* of God. Similarly, the term *sefirot* could simultaneously be linked to the three Hebrew words for *story*, *number*, and *communication* that are given in the first passage of this text. In this way, *sefirot* could represent the essential creative process.

Others, however, also see a link between the word *sefirot* and the word *sapir* which means “sapphire,” specifically the sapphire of God’s throne in the vision of Ezekiel.

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

(Ezekiel 10:1)

However, I also think there is an important link between the words *sefirot* and *saprim* (*declare*). This makes good sense because the *ten creative utterances* by which God created the universe can also be thought of as *declarations*, and this is the point of view that is found in the *Bahir*.

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

(Bahir 125)

In summary, it is quite possible that since *sefirot* is a manufactured word that the author of the *Sefer Yetzirah* intended for it to embrace many interpretations. Also, the word

*sefirot* is a plural word with a feminine ending, and this may be a reflection of the author's position, as seen elsewhere in the text, that when trying to establish an order of events to the Creation, the feminine, in the context of a mother giving birth, comes before the masculine.

The word *belimah* that I have translated in this passage as “*constraint*” is frequently translated as *nothingness*, literally *beli-mah* (without what). Nonetheless, *belimah* appears to also be related to the verb *balam*, to *restrain*. In the *Bible*, this word appears only once in *Job* 26:7 where we usually read, in translation, that *God* “*hangs the earth upon nothing*.” However, this verse could also be translated as *God* “*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 is that in order for a finite world to exist, every component must be finite and constrained. This interpretation of *belimah* as meaning *restraint* is also suggested by the *Talmud*, and in context it is more than likely that the *sefirot* are meant to be restrictions upon the infinity of *God* so that a finite world can exist.

*“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)

And finally in this passage, we get a preview of how later on in the text the Hebrew alphabet, as an agent of creation, is going to be decomposed into *three primary mother letters*, *seven double letters*, and *twelve plain letters*. These themes are expanded upon in the passages to come.

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

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

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

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

*(My translation)*

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

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

*(B. Arachin 15b)*

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

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

*“Ben Zoma said, ‘Who is wise? He that learns from every man. ... Who is mighty? He who subdues his evil inclination. ... Who is rich? He that rejoices in his lot. ... Who is honored? He that honors every one of his fellows.’”*  
(Pirkei Avot 4:1)

**משנה ד': עשר ספירות בלימה עשר ולא תשע עשר ולא  
אחת עשרה הבן בחכמה וחכם בבניה בחון בהם וחקור מהם והעמד  
דבר על בוריו והשב יוצר על מכונן:**

1.4: Ten sefirot of nothingness. Ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand with wisdom, be wise with understanding. Examine with them, and probe from them. Make each thing stand on its essence, and make the Creator sit on His base.

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

1.4: Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand with wisdom, and be wise with understanding. Examine with them and explore with them, and stand each word and thing on its wellspring, and return the Assembler to its base.

(My translation)

A few things are going on in this passage. First, we are reminded that the number of *sefirot* is ten and not nine or eleven. Just ten, and that's important because if there are only ten *sefirot* or utterances, then that corresponds to ten commandments, ten generations from *Adam* to *Noah*, ten generations from *Noah* to *Abraham*, ten fingers, and various other things that come in "ten" that are meaningful to us. And remember that at the beginning of *Torah*, *God* creates the world with ten utterances and not nine. This is a reminder that there are really ten times that "And God said," is expressed in *Genesis* if we interpret the first verse as a creative utterance. Furthermore, if *God* made an additional eleventh utterance somewhere, then that would suggest that the *Torah* is incomplete, and that is a conclusion that is not considered acceptable.

Next, we read in the text that we need to understand with wisdom and be wise with understanding. As *Kabbalah* evolved, these words, *wisdom* and *understanding*, became synonymous, respectively, with the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and the result in *Kabbalah* of the coordination of these two brain functions is *knowledge*. Thus, use all the parts of your brain to explore and examine every facet of this reality.

In the *Bible*, we often encounter the image of *God* riding on a cloud or being carried by *cherubs*, but in many of these images it also becomes clear that *God* is not really moving. Instead, *He* is being carried around or is seated on a throne that is carried around. Consequently, *God* can in this way present an image of activity while at the same also conforming to the dictum found in *Malachi* 3:6 that *God* is always unchanging. In a similar manner, our consciousness appears to dart back and forth from one thing to another, but the text suggests that this movement of our consciousness is likewise illusory. Our awareness, instead of moving around, is always fixed and stationary, and in reality every perception points us back towards this silent observer. What this passage wants us to do is to become aware of that observer and make that the center of our universe. When

we learn how to let every perception lead us back to this center, then we will understand what is meant by the phrase “*stand each word and thing on its wellspring.*”

It is very important that as early as this fourth verse, the text essentially gives us a meditation technique. This suggests that this is a skill that must be mastered before any of the other techniques mentioned in this work can be successfully implemented. Further instructions on meditation are given in verse 1.8. Additionally, the word that I have rendered as *Assembler* is more commonly translated as *Creator*. However, the Hebrew word used in this context is based upon the verb *yatzar*, *to form*, and this refers generally to *something-from-something creation*. Consequently, I find it more accurate to refer to this as the *Assembler* within us that constructs the reality that we view. And when we establish this observer, this *Assembler*, in its proper place at the center of our awareness, then we will no longer be so caught up in the pursuit of things that lack real substance and we will have successfully returned *the Assembler to its base*.

**משנה ה': עשר ספירות בלימה מדתן עשר שאין להם סוף  
עומק ראשית ועומק אחרית עומק טוב ועומק רע עומק רום ועומק  
תחת עומק מזרח ועומק מערב עומק צפון ועומק דרום אדון יחיד  
אל מלך נאמן מושל בכולם ממעון קדשו עד עדי עד:**

1.5: Ten sefirot of nothingness. Their measure is ten which have no end. A depth of beginning, a depth of end, a depth of good, a depth of evil a depth of above, a depth of east, a depth of west, a depth of north, a depth of south. The singular Master, God faithful King, dominates over them all from His holy dwelling until eternity of eternities.  
(*Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation*)

1.5: Ten sefirot/declarations 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.  
(*My translation*)

The bulk of the passages in the first chapter of the *Sefer Yetzirah* begin with the phrase “ten *sefirot*/declarations of constraint,” and this suggests that each verse is intended to express some facet or view that is needed in order for us to understand what the *sefirot* really are. Also in this passage, we are presented with a vision of a 5-dimensional universe that incorporates three spatial dimensions, one temporal dimension, and one moral dimension. The number five is important in *Kabbalistic* theory in that we have five souls (or five levels to one soul), five worlds, and in this passage, five dimensions. Each dimension, in turn, is characterized by two polar opposites, thus resulting in ten principles, and there is no end to the depths that may be explored along each of the five axes. The unifying principle that holds the dimensions together is *God*, or if you prefer, our own awareness.

Furthermore, the poles of the five axes define thirty-two specific points of 5-dimensional space. Each point could be represented by five coordinates where for each coordinate position you have two choices, thus yielding  $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 32$  choices in all, the same as the number of paths mentioned at the beginning of this work. To give an example, one point could be designated by the coordinates (*beginning, good, height, east, north*) and a second point could have the coordinates (*end, good, height, east, north*).

And finally, notice, too, that the traditional closing for a blessing, *amen*, is in Hebrew an acronym for *Adonai melech neheman*, *God King of Faith*. In a similar manner, our consciousness, that part within us that is like *God*, is the King of the center that holds our universe of perception together.



**משנה ו': עשר ספירות בלי מה צפייתן כמראה הבזק  
ותכליתן אין להם קץ ודברו בהן ברצוא ושוב ולמאמרו כסופה  
ירדופו ולפני כסאו הם משתחווים:**

1.6: Ten sefirot of nothingness. Their vision is like the “appearance of lightning.” Their limit has no end, and His Word in them is “running and returning.” They rush to His saying like a whirlwind, and before His throne they prostrate themselves.

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

1.6: Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint. Observed like a flash in a mirror, their purpose has no end. And the words and things of IT are in them, running and returning, and to ITS utterances they rush like a whirlwind, and before ITS throne they bow. [And behold, “Whatever you see are but parts of the ways of the Holy One (Genesis Rabbah XII:1 & Job 26:14).” ]

*(My translation)*

Our world is in many respects a reflection of what arises in consciousness. If we are angry, we see anger in the world, and if we are happy, then we see happiness in the world. The world is a mirror for our thoughts and feelings. A few of us may be lucky enough to attain a high state of consciousness in which no thoughts at all are present and even the subject/object dichotomy has been transcended. This state of consciousness-without-an-object is absolute and cannot be transcended because there is nothing left to transcend.

However, when one returns from one’s meditation to more familiar states of consciousness, the first thing to reappear is the separation of oneness into an observer and an observed, and that ripples across one’s vision like a bolt of lightning. Then thoughts pick up, and we engage once again in that game of thought that leads us away from the center and then back to it again as our thoughts vanish once more into the observer.

Furthermore, whatever we turn our attention to, there our thoughts will run only to bow once again to the throne of awareness as they are observed. Over time one may even realize that there is no real “*running and returning*” since every observation is always inescapably bound with the observer. We may also realize that once we separate the universe into parts, we cannot perceive the whole, at least in the usual way of perception. As long as our minds insist upon separating the observed from the observer, there will always be something of the whole left out of each perception. Of course, the bottom line is that all of this separation is really just an illusion. We cannot really separate the observed from the observer. We only have the “thought” that they are separate.

Below is the verse from *Ezekiel* that is the inspiration for this particular passage.

*“And the living creatures ran and returned like the appearance of a flash of lightning.”*  
(Ezekiel 1:14)

Also, notice that at the very end I added a saying of Rav Huna from *Genesis Rabbah*. This line is not in the original text, but its meaning is in keeping with the message of the *Sefer Yetzirah*.

*“And behold, “Whatever you see are but parts of the ways of the Holy One.””*  
(*Genesis Rabbah XII:1 & Job 26:14*)

**משנה ז': עשר ספירות בלימה נעוץ סופן בתחלתן ותחלתן  
בסופן כשלהבת קשורה בגחלת שאדון יחיד ואין לו שני ולפני אחד  
מה אתה סופר:**

1.7: Ten sefirot of nothingness. Their end is embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end, like a flame in a burning coal. For the Master is singular, He has no second, and before One, what do you count?

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

1.7: Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint. Their end is contained in their beginning, and their beginning in their end. As a flame connected with a burning coal, the Master is unified, and there is not a second. And before the One, what is there to count?

*(My translation)*

The statement that the end is contained in the beginning and the beginning in the end says something about the simultaneity and, perhaps, the unreality of time. Not only do all things exist at once, but the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning. We just separate it out in our minds. An image is also given in this passage of a flame connected to a burning coal, and this is a very instructive image. The flame and the coal appear to be separate parts or components, but could the flame exist without the coal? And could the coal burn without fire? They appear as two, and yet like the Sun and its solar fire, they are inseparably one. You cannot have one without the other. Similarly, while we make a distinction between the observer and the observed, neither exists without the other.

Furthermore, the text goes on to inform us that there is really nothing but this One. There is nothing to count before this One, and there is nothing after the One. When you are in front of the One, there is neither you nor not you nor any other thing. All has merged into the One. However, the paradox of One is that it contains a lot more than just one!

**משנה ח': עשר ספירות בלימה בלום פין מלדבר ולבך  
מלהרהר ואם רץ פין לדבר ולבך להרהר שוב למקום שלךך נאמר  
(יחזקאל א') והחיות רצוא ושוב ועל דבר זה נכרת ברית:**

1.8: Ten sefirot of nothingness. Bridle your mouth from speaking and your heart from thinking. And if your heart runs, return to the place. It is therefore written, “The Chayot (living animals) running and returning. (Ezekiel 1:24)” Regarding this a covenant was made.

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

1.8: Ten sefirot/declarations 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.

*(My translation)*

This passage gives ancient instructions on meditation. Furthermore, it is interesting that the author begins his work with such a topic. The message appears to be that in order to exert some control over your life and the circumstances that surround you, you must first be able to control your mind. Controlling the self is a prerequisite for engaging in the *Work of the Chariot*. Thus, enter into silence, and restrain your mind from thinking. In *Biblical Hebrew*, by the way, the words for *mind* and *heart* are the same. Furthermore, as your thoughts begin to pick up and stray, simply return them to their place. That is, return to that silent place within you where all things are observed and understood.

Additionally, in *Ezekiel 1:27*, there is a marvelous verse containing the word *hashmal* that is usually translated as “amber.”

*“And I saw something like the color of amber, like the appearance of fire enclosed around it.”*

*(Ezekiel 1:27)”*

However, in the *Talmud*<sup>7</sup>, the word *hashmal* is seen as a contraction of two words, one meaning to speak and another meaning to be silent. Thus, some translate *hashmal* as the “*speaking silence*.” Hence, the first step in your meditative journey is to make your mind silent. This is reminiscent of *I Kings 19:12*.

*“And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”*

*(I Kings 19:12)*

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<sup>7</sup> *B. Chagigah 13b*

Also, the word *Chayot* (חיות) from *Ezekiel's* vision is very interesting. This word is generally translated as “living animals,” but if we spell it as *Chai Ot* (חי אֵוֶת), then it means “living signs” or “signs of life.” Furthermore, the word for “living” also means “running.” This is very telling, and it implies that the thoughts running to and fro in our brain are our signs of life. But to properly meditate, we have to slow down those thoughts and let them help return us back to the *Source of Life*.

In addition to this, note that a *covenant* is an agreement or contract between two parties, and in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the basic pattern of creation is always the presence of two opposites coupled with a mechanism for communication between them. This communication is the *covenant* between the two opposites, and the *covenant* is also a regulatory mechanism that binds each side to certain agreements.

Furthermore, in the passage above, the *covenant* is that which joins thoughts and perceptions, the perceived world, to consciousness, the unperceived world. Of course, the ultimate enlightenment is to understand that there is no difference between the two worlds. The seen world and the unseen world are never ever separated from one another. When you can experience this, then all will be joined in unity. Until then, however, this statement will remain a meaningless mystery.

Now let me relate some personal experiences that began for me over four decades ago. First, it has been said that the three most prominent exponents of nondualism in 20<sup>th</sup> century India were Ramana Maharshi, Sri Nasargadatta Maharaj, and Sri Atmananda Krishna Menon. I learned the basis of Sri Atmananda's philosophy and techniques back in the seventies in Austin, Texas, from his son who carried on his father's instruction upon Sri Atmananda's death. Also, unlike most pop gurus in the seventies, Sri Atmananda's son did not seek publicity, and admission to his talks was controlled in order to keep out people who were not serious or who were not felt to be ready. The nature of the talks is that they were question and answer sessions, and if there were no questions, then nothing was said. Consequently, one evening there was a lull between questions when nothing was said, and after a few minutes I became aware of a deep and profound stillness and silence. As a practitioner of yogic meditations for over a decade, I was familiar with very ecstatic states of consciousness that would sometimes even transcend the subject/object dichotomy, but this was something new and different. It was a stillness/silence that went so far beyond what is usually experienced that it seemed extremely holy. And as I examined what was happening, I realized that the source of this profound silence was Sri Atmananda's son. And that was when I realized that his way of perceiving reality was very, very different from my own.

Many of Sri Atmananda's teachings consisted of questions or instructions designed to make you focus on certain parts of perceptions in order to help you see the “glitch in the Matrix.” One of these instructions was to follow each perception back to that place where it is understood, back to the heart of awareness, and this is essentially the same technique described in the above verse from the *Sefer Yetzirah*. Consequently, I tend to refer to this technique as *running and returning*. Other instructions came in the form of questions such as, “At that place where objects are understood, are there any objects?” or “Where

are you between any two thoughts?” or even “Who is it that wants to know this?” All of these instructions and questions and self-examinations were designed help you realize both the true nature of who you really are and the true nature of reality. The techniques are simple, but in my case the fruit didn’t ripen for over forty years. I’m a slow learner.

Throughout much of my life work has been a distraction from the inner life, but once I retired, I began to practice *running and returning* once again. At first I would sit on the couch in a traditional meditation posture, then I would close my eyes, and then I would fall asleep. That’s something that’s very easy for an old man to do unless it is late at night when you’re supposed to be asleep. At that time, you might find yourself wide awake. Well, it didn’t seem like falling asleep was going to result in much enlightenment, and so I began to practice the technique with eyes wide open. And that’s when things began to pay off. I would begin this ancient meditation by just sitting in silence or even lying down. Posture didn’t matter, and so I didn’t need to sit in a traditional posture for meditation. Instead, just take whatever you are observing, and follow that observation to that point where it is simultaneously known and disappears into consciousness. Also, if you are still not sure how to do this, then don’t worry. What is most important is your intent. As long as your intent is to observe that which does the observing, your brain will find a way to honor that intent. Also, if there are loud noises or other distractions around you, then that doesn’t matter. As you mature in this technique, you will realize that perceptions that you might characterize as distractions can also be followed back to the source of awareness just as any other perception will also lead you there. Thus, nothing is a distraction in this technique, and there is nothing that won’t lead you back to pure consciousness if you allow it.

As I began to shift the focus of my attention away from the object perceived to the awareness that is doing the perceiving, several things began to happen. First, realize that your awareness is something strange and different. For instance, you know at your core that you are aware, but awareness is not perceived as an object the way a chair or a sound might. Consequently, to delve into awareness is to dive into something very deep and very different from the world of objects, and since there is no perception of parts in pure awareness, that means that as our attention is more fully turned towards it, the more we begin to experience unity within ourselves. Also, since love and unity are two sides of the same coin, as you draw towards the source of life and awareness within you, you naturally begin to experience both more love and more unity. And if you continue, there will be moments, either long or short, when you disappear completely into the *Oneness*.

For the first few years of my retirement I would perform this meditation, and in all circumstances I would frequently take whatever perception was before me and follow it back to the mysterious awareness where it is understood. Initially, though, I would sometimes feel an emptiness rather than love, unity, and fullness as I progressed, but I also quickly realized why this was happening. Since awareness is not directly perceived in the way that objects exterior to it are and since we perceive no component parts to awareness, it has a natural correspondence with our concepts of emptiness and void and, in fact, this is how Nirvana is frequently described within Buddhism. However, it is also true that we frequently associate emptiness with the notion that something is lacking.

Consequently, if you do this technique and you feel lack or emptiness inside as a result, then you have simply missed the mark. You have simply shifted your focus from one external object to another, to your concept of what emptiness should be. Nonetheless, the correction is simple. You just have to understand that the sensation of lacking something is only an association that you have paired with the concept of emptiness. Thus, once you realize that you don't have to choose that association, then you can double down on your intent to let each thought take you back to its very source and when that happens, then you will arrive not at an emptiness that represents lack, but rather at that true Void that contains everything!

In my experience there are stages that one goes through as this new perspective stabilizes, and I will delineate below what I can:

1. If you are trying to switch your focus from the observed to the observer, but only feel emptiness inside, then you have missed the mark. You are focusing instead only on your concept of emptiness as representing a lack of something. Thus, try again.
2. If you are on the right track, then as you shift your focus to that which is doing the looking, you will begin to disengage from your attachment to the objects in front of you and you will begin to experience more oneness and love as you draw nearer to pure awareness. However, while love and unity are symptoms of drawing nearer to your core self, they, too, are objects of perception that will disappear when your merger with awareness is complete.
3. If you still have trouble with this technique, then try simply focusing on feelings of love and oneness that you have felt before, and once you do that, then begin to uncouple that feeling of love from whatever object you were associating it with. Just experience the pure love, and that will take you close to pure consciousness.
4. It is just as important to practice the above technique with eyes open as it is with eyes closed. You should also practice it while standing up, lying down, sitting, being quiet, watching TV, talking with people, and even while surrounded by distracting noises. Likewise, it can be practiced whether drunk or sober, high or low. It can be practiced regardless of what state of consciousness one is in because in all those states the observer is present. In particular, if you suddenly find yourself feeling frightened or confused, then ask yourself who or what is it that experiences the fright, and that will take you to a different place.
5. At first one has the idea or experience of consciousness literally going out to objects and returning to awareness. However, as experience deepens one will probably realize that one never leaves awareness behind and that all the objects we perceive exist, for us, only within consciousness. Thus, at a deeper level one sees that there is no real going out into the world with consciousness, grabbing an object, and then taking it back to awareness. Instead, what we have separated into parts here actually happens simultaneously. In other words, as soon as an object is perceived, it is merged with awareness. Anything we see is already within awareness, and if we don't see it, then it's not part of our experience. Like the candle and the flame which only appear to be separate, independent parts, so do the observer and the observed seem to exist independently, but the truth is that you never have one without the other. By that do I also mean that there is no

awareness when there is nothing to be aware of? Not exactly. If this world of objects were to disappear, then awareness would still remain. However, what would be gone would be the concept of awareness, the concept of an observer that observes. That will go away, but the awareness itself still remains.

6. Once we become convinced that objects are only present when awareness is present, then we begin to see this world as only a type of dream because when we awake from a dream it is easy for us to accept that the objects we saw were created by consciousness. And that is the perspective that your mind will probably begin to adopt, too, for the world at large. The only difference, as I experience it, between this world and a dream is that we want this world to be more stable so that we can interact with it in a productive way, and consequently before we are born we have to sign what I call a “license agreement” to keep the world from changing too abruptly. I like to describe this license agreement as the laws of physics, and something as simple as Newton’s laws of motion can allow for change to occur, but only under specific circumstances such as “for every action there will be an equal and opposite reaction,” and those laws add a measure of stability to a changing environment.
7. As mathematics suggests, the totality of all things is unknowable as an object of perception since it is paradoxical and contradictory. All we can see are certain discernable parts within that whole. Once we realize this and that everything we see is composed of consciousness, then we begin to understand that consciousness is all that really exists, and, thus, it is actually impossible to not be one with it since that is all there really is. Consciousness or awareness is a whole that exceeds the sum of its parts, and while it can’t be directly perceived, it, nonetheless, contains everything. One way to see this is to imagine what the situation would be if, for example, the totality of all things lacked chocolate. If that were the case, then it could likely be described as that which contains everything except chocolate. In other words, it would not be quite so ineffable. Thus, to truly be beyond conception, this totality must simultaneously contain both everything and its opposite, and that is what makes it completely indefinable. And consequently, when we hear a sound or see an object or have a particular thought, we are just focusing our attention on one bit of knowledge that makes up the unperceivable whole. When we connect perceptions together in a particular sequence, we then create the impression of time, and when we assign the same time coordinate to different objects, we create space within our consciousness. However, everything is really present all at once, we are always connected to the whole, and it is only the thought that we are separate from the whole that creates a myriad of problems for us. Even if we are experiencing very difficult circumstances, a shift in focus from the object to the observer can start to change things, and the awareness that everything is consciousness will establish a different understanding of events that doesn’t involve denying or suppressing them.
8. When I was young, so-called enlightenment was seen as an illusive goal that would transform you into some sort of *God*, and that would likely result in you spending the rest of your life meditating upon some mountaintop. These days, however, I have a different understanding of the term. To me, enlightenment is just a corrected understanding of the nature of consciousness and reality.



- Enlightenment doesn't give you the power to fly, but it can open up your intellect to the possibility of humans flying, and that in turn initiates a creative process that will try to answer questions like, "How can a human fly?" And the end result is an airplane. Or anti-gravity, or something similar. Our intent to know something begins the process of knowing! Also, in Jewish mysticism, sitting on a mountaintop meditating is not necessarily the goal of enlightenment. Instead, it is noted that once Solomon attained Wisdom, he built the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, what really happens after this change in perspective is that you can more fully understand the creative process and how to live a creative life. As I often say, most of my daily life used to consist of trying to avoid obstacles while also finding allies to help me get to where I'm trying to go. Now, however, nothing is seen as an obstacle because every perception takes me back to its source, and, thus, I begin each day only with the thought, "What shall I create today?"
9. When your perspective on reality changes, several other things also occur. For example, a shift occurs in how you feel your energy distributed throughout your body. In particular, you feel more of your life force concentrated above the shoulders, and I like to call this configuration "*Athena's helmet*" after *Athena*, the *Goddess of Wisdom* who is often depicted with a helmet on top of her head like a hat. The eyes of the helmet can, thus, represent another pair of eyes to see with, and the helmet can symbolize another kind of brain to process reality with. Also, because this new perspective disengages you more from attachment to objects, it is much easier to choose your perceptions. If you are observing sadness, then you can realize that that is a choice, and you can choose a different perception instead. Likewise, you can either focus on your individual life and identity, what I call our particle mode, or you can shift your awareness to the experience of *Oneness* and connection with everything else, what I call our wave mode. Furthermore, you begin to see your own ego and sense of personal identity as just a useful tool that the brain developed for interacting with the world. After your perspective changes, the ego can still be used as a useful tool. You just don't see it as yourself in quite the same way that you did before. Thus, the focus now is on what can you create and what can you give to others instead of what can I get for myself. Additionally, a deeper, more vast version of yourself may begin to emerge as an intermediary between the ego and the unfathomable *Oneness*. If so, then that new center is one that always hears the deep sounds of silence and that desperately wants to create and to learn while sojourning in so-called physical reality. And that is the state that we should all be in.
  10. In Zohar I:31a we read, "R. Simeon explained the difference, and said: 'It is written, "Close by the border shall the rings be, for places for the staves (poles)" (Exodus 25:27). The "border" is a secret place accessible only by one narrow path known to a few.'" To me, this describes my daily experience. In other words, one does not spend all their time in undifferentiated *Oneness*, but when one isn't in that state, one can live close to that state. When I was much younger, psychologists used to say that the adult male thinks of sex perhaps about once every three seconds. In my case, though, I would say that I disappear into *Oneness* about once every three seconds, and then the rest of the time I try to stay close to the border. Additionally, when one goes to bed at night it is not

uncommon to regularly merge into *Oneness* through what we characterize as deep sleep. Within true deep sleep there is no perception of any external objects or concepts, and, thus, it is the same as absolute *Oneness*. However, our understanding of this *Oneness* gets colored by what we experience either right before or right after absolute merger. Many people try to fall asleep by forgetting or putting aside their thoughts about the day, and that can lead to a belief that deep sleep is just a state of ignorance. For me, however, as I lie down to sleep I begin shifting to my wave mode and to merge more and more into that *Oneness*, and thus, deep sleep for me is often experienced as absolute *Oneness* rather than absolute ignorance. Additionally, to clear up another point, when we are in the “world of separation,” we can have thoughts like “my awareness” and “my consciousness,” but when you are merged into absolute awareness, those thoughts disappear and there is no way to distinguish your awareness from that of anyone else. Thus, many with this perspective conclude that there is only one awareness, only one *Oneness*. The awareness in me is literally the same awareness in you, and there is no separation aside from thinking that makes it so. Also, one of the final revelations might be when one understands that since everything is part of the unknowable whole, *undifferentiated Oneness* is, likewise, only one part of this whole. The other part is what we might call *differentiated Oneness*. In other words, we can experience the ultimate not only as a state of *Oneness* with no distinctions, but also as the world of separation where everything appears distinct but is really always part of the *Oneness*. When you can see the *Oneness* even in diversity, then all obstacles to understanding will disappear and struggles will cease. From this point on there is only living to create!

As a final thought I wish to point out that though only a fraction of humanity may seem to attain the goal of this “running and returning” meditation, it is a technique that people in all cultures eventually seem to discover. For example, we seen so far how this technique has appeared both in ancient Judaism as well as in the nondualistic philosophies of sages in India. Similarly, it seems to have been known by Saint Francis of Assisi who said, “*What we are looking for is what is looking.*” Below are some additional examples of individuals that I believe have arrived at an understanding similar to that which the author of the *Sefer Yetzirah* wishes us to pursue.

*“I hear the train'd soprano (what work with hers is this?) The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies, It wrenches such ardors from me I did not know I possess'd them, It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they are lick'd by the indolent waves, I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose my breath, Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my windpipe throttled in fakes of death, At length let up again to feel the puzzle of puzzles, And that we call Being.”*

*(Song of Myself by Walt Whitman)*

*“... a kind of waking trance, I have frequently had, quite up from my boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself, silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away*

*into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life ... I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words?"*

*(from a letter of Tennyson to Mr. R. P. Blood)*

*"The Brahmins who do not know the truth vainly recite the Vedas. With earth and water and kusha-grass they make preparations, and seated at home they kindle fire, and from the senseless offerings that they make, they burn their eyes with the pungent smoke. In lordly garb with one staff or three, they think themselves wise with their brahminical lore. Vainly is the world enslaved by their vanity. They do not know that the dharma is the same as non-dharma."*

*(Saraha's Treasury of Songs)*

*"The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name. The unnamable is the eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things. Free from desire, you realize the mystery. Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations. Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source. This source is called darkness. Darkness within darkness. The gateway to all understanding."*

*(The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu)*

NOTE: This passage gives the *Sefer Yetzirah's* instructions for engaging in the *Work of the Chariot*, the branch of Jewish mysticism that 2000 years ago concerned itself with meditative techniques for traveling to different realms. Also, this is probably the most important passage in the *Sefer Yetzirah* since this one technique is all that is needed in order to eventually become a complete person.

**משנה ט': עשר ספירות בלימה אחת רוח אלהים חיים ברוך  
ומבורך שמו של חי העולמים קול ורוח ודבור והוא רוח הקודש:**

1.9: Ten sefirot of nothingness. One is the breath of the Living God, blessed and benedicted in the Name of the Life of the Worlds, the voice of breath and speech. And this is the Holy Breath.

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

1.9: Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint. One: Spirit/breath of the Living Elohim (God). Praised and blessed is ITS name, containing the Life of the Worlds, voice and breath and words, and the spirit of the holy.

*(My translation)*

In Hebrew, the word for *spirit* is the same as the word for *breath*, and in this passage we read that it all begins not with matter, but with spirit. Furthermore, this spirit is the life behind all that is created, and with voice and words the universe, the *Name of God (Elohim)*, is created. And additionally, this passage also begins an enumeration and identification of the ten *sefirot* that is ultimately quite different from what one finds in later *Kabbalah*. As we will see later on, the ten *sefirot* also correspond to the *three mother letters* plus the *seven double letters*, and they and the rest of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used to construct a model for physical reality known as the *Cube of Space*.

משנה י': שתיים רוח מרוח חקק וחצב בה עשרים ושתיים  
אותיות יסוד שלש אמות ושבע כפולות ושתיים עשרה פשוטות ורות  
אחת מהן:

1.10: Two: Breath from Breath. With it He engraved and carved 22 Foundation Letters  
Three Mothers Seven Doubles and Twelve Elementals And one Breath is from them.  
(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

1.10: Two: Spirit/breath from spirit/breath. With it, IT decreed and shaped twenty-two  
letters of foundation, three mothers, and seven doubles, and twelve plain, and one  
spirit/breath within them.  
(My translation)

When we read *breath from breath*, we are being told two things. First, we are seeing the first pair of opposites come into being, and second, the separation is entirely fictitious, a mental creation, if you will. It is like one of us looking at a glass of water and saying that we separate the upper water from the lower water. There is no separation in reality. Furthermore, because it says *breath from breath*, this lets us know that the observed world is no different from the observer. In our minds we try to make the distinction between physical and spiritual, but ultimately there is only spirit. Thus, the first *breath* is that which creates, and the second *breath* (which really is no different from the first) is the so-called physical world and individuality that are created.

The word *decree* refers to *something-from-nothing creation*. It is an act of will such as when we will ourselves to solve a problem or compose a song on a particular day. On the other hand, *shape* refers to *something-from-something creation*. *Shaping* involves taking something that is already there and working it over and over again until it feels just right. In particular, it is as if something within us intuits all possibilities at once and then selects the one that it deems is best. In other versions of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the Hebrew words that I've translated as *decreed* and *shaped* are frequently rendered instead as *engraved* and *carved*, but I feel that my translation more accurately captures the intent of the text. Furthermore, in ancient times the decree of the king was literally engraved in stone, so it is no surprise that a single Hebrew word can carry both meanings. However, even though I prefer the translation of *decreed* to *engraved*, this latter translation does find meaning in later *Kabbalah* in the concept of *tzimtzum*, the notion that *God* had to contract his essence in order to *shape* or *carve* a space in which the world could exist. In a similar way, in *engraving* it is the space that is created that defines the letter. And finally, in the passage above, *decreeing* and *shaping* result in the twenty-two letters of the alphabet from which all else will be created. However, within everything there is still only the original *spirit*. All our separation into multiplicity is only an illusion (in my opinion).

**משנה י"א: שלש מים מרוח חקק וחצב בהן כ"ב אותיות  
מתהו ובהו רפש וטיט חקקן כמין ערוגה חצבן כמין חומה סיבבם  
כמין מעזיבה ויצק עליהם שלג ונעשה עפר שנאמר כי לשלג יאמר  
הוא ארץ:**

1.11: Three: Water from Breath. With it He engraved and carved 22 letters from chaos and void mire and clay He engraved them like a sort of garden He carved them like a sort of wall He covered them like a sort of ceiling And He poured snow over them and it became dust as it is written "For to snow He said, 'Become earth'" (Job 37:6).  
(*Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation*)

1.11: Three: Water from spirit/breath. IT decreed and shaped with it twenty-two letters, from inconceivable chaos to conceivable disorder, formless mud and formed soil. Decreed and engraved as like a furrow, shaped as like a wall, covered as like a fortress. And snow is poured upon them and it becomes dust since it is said, "'To snow,' IT exclaims, 'Be earth (Job 37:6).'"  
(*My translation*)

As spirit begins to create, we first move from nothingness and no-perception to a state of perceived chaos which will in turn be superseded by more organized states of consciousness. Phrases such as *formless mud* refer to a disordered state without structure that is perceived first, while *formed soil* refers to the emergence of structure and order. Next, we see a brief outline of the steps involved in creation. It all begins with a *decree* which is equated to *engraving* and creating a space for something new.

Following this we have *shaping* where we mold and refine our creation. And lastly, *covering like a fortress* symbolizes the establishment of those boundaries that are necessary for solidifying the objects physical existence, and a covering also creates an inside and an outside with respect to the object.

And at the very end of this passage, we see *snow to earth* being used as a metaphor for this creation process. At the initial stage of creation our inspiration is like formless water. However, over time it acquires a more solid structure just as ice and snow can represent water that has been given form. And in the final stage we have an honest-to-goodness real world, physical object as symbolized by the words *dust* and *earth*.

An additional insight into this *snow to earth* transition comes from *Rav Huna* in *Genesis Rabbah*, the great rabbinical commentary on *Genesis*. *Rav Huna* makes the point that all creation originates on earth.

"*Rav Huna said in Rabbi Joseph's name, "Whatever is in heaven and on earth was created from the earth alone, as it is written, "For as the rain cometh down and the snow*

*from heaven (Isaiah 55:10).” Just as the rain's creation is from the earth, though it falls from heaven, so all that is in heaven and on earth was created from the earth alone.”*  
(Genesis Rabbah XII:11)

In *Genesis Rabbah*, Rabbi Judan goes on to say that the proof of this passage is found in *Ecclesiastes* 3:20, “All are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.” Furthermore, the message here seems to be that it is *intent*, namely our *intent* here on Earth, that is the real beginning of the creative process. This view is supported by the following passage from the *Zohar* that says that just as it is the mist that rises from the ground that turns into rain, so does it take our *intent* from below to get the ball rolling in the heavenly realms.

*“A MIST WENT UP FROM THE GROUND (Genesis 2:6), 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, it being necessary for the impulse from below to set in motion the power above.*  
(Zohar I:35a)

We can gain further insight into the connection between earth and creation by considering aspects of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*. The spheres on this tree are related to the letters of the most holy name of God, *yud-hey-vav-hey*. In particular, the letter *yud* corresponds to *Keter* (Crown) and *Chokmah* (Wisdom), the letter *vav* which has a numerical value of 6 corresponds to the six *sefirot* of *Chesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod* (Mecy, Severity, Beauty, Eternity, Glory, and Foundation), and the *sefirot* of *Binah* and *Malchut* are both represented by the letter *hey*. Thus, these two *sefirot* are seen as intimately connected. Additionally, *Binah* represents the highest level of the rational, left hemisphere of the brain where all the structure we impose upon our world is created while *Malchut* is identified with the earth, and in modern *Kabbalah* it is seen as entirely receptive. That is, it receives the influences of all the other *sefirot*.

Once we understand the equivalence between *Binah* and *Malchut*, we can begin to understand that what is really being described here is a cycle of alternation between both creation and reception. In other words, think of *Binah/Malchut* as representing the conscious mind. Our conscious mind both creates our structured world and perceives our structured world, and in that way it engages in a continuous cycle of *running and returning*. Thus, all creation comes from the earth (*Binah/Malchut*), and all creation returns to the earth (*Binah/Malchut*).

*“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)

*“All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; to the place from where the rivers come, there they return again.” (Ecclesiastes I:7)*



**משנה י"ב: ארבע אש ממים חקק וחצב בה כסא הכבוד  
שרפים ואופנים וחיות הקודש ומלאכי השרת ומשלשתן יסד מעונו  
שנאמר עושה מלאכיו רוחות משרתיו אש לזהט:**

1.12: Four: Fire from Water With it He engraved and carved the Throne of Glory Serafim, Ophanim, and holy Chayot and Ministering angels From these three He founded His dwelling as it is written: "He makes His angels of breaths, His ministers of flaming fire" (Psalms 104:4).

(*Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation*)

1.12: Four: Fire from water. IT decreed and shaped with it the Throne of Glory, Seraphim, Ophanim, and the holy living creatures (Chayot), and the messenger/angels that serve, and from these three (air, water, and fire), IT established a dwelling since it is said, "IT makes his messenger/angles of spirit/breath, his servants of flaming fire (Psalm 104:4)."

(*My translation*)

Before creation there is only that which is unknowable and inconceivable. This is the level that is referred to as *spirit*. At the next stage of creation, perception comes into existence, but what is perceived is unordered and chaotic. It lacks form and structure. This level is called *water*. But finally, we succeed in imposing order on the unordered and structure upon chaos, and we call this level *fire*. Just as disorder is transformed into order, so does *fire* transform the elements. And this is what we see going on in this passage.

Instead of disorder and *formless mud*, we see specific structures mentioned. In particular, the *Throne of Glory*, *Seraphim* (*fiery angels*), *Ophanim* (*wheel angels* that carry the *Throne of Glory*), and *Chayot* (the *holy living creatures* of *Ezekiel's* vision). We also have a reference from *Psalm 104:4* to *messenger angels* and *servant angels*, and this implies that a dwelling place for *God* has been created, a dwelling called the universe, and within the context of this dwelling we now have a *God* that has been objectified and that seems more conceivable. A world of finite objects has come into existence.

*Footnote 1:* The name *Elohim* refers to both the universe and to the *God* that has been objectified and given structure and attributes by our mind (see *Zohar 1:15a* in the commentary on *1:1*). It is identified with *Binah* on the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*, and it is the *God* that we see as separate from us and judging us. But beyond the objectified *God*, there are higher perceptions of *Divinity* that are found on those paths that lead us first to love and then to oneness.

*Footnote 2:* The word *Chayot* in Hebrew is spelled *chet-yud-vav-tav*. However, if we rewrite it as two words and spell it as *chet-yud / aleph-vav-tav*, then we can translate that as "life signs" or "signs of life." In *Ezekiel 1:4* we read, "And the living creatures

*(Chayot) ran and returned like the appearance of a flash of lightning.*” If, instead, we translate that as, “*And the signs of life ran and returned,*” then this is a reminder that living beings are characterized by a continual movement of matter and energy. Decades ago, Nobel Laureate *Iliya Prigogine* explained how such constant movement is necessary for the maintenance of all complex living structures. Once we stop moving, we die.

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

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

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

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

(My translation)

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

The most sacred name for *God* in Hebrew is spelled *yud-hey-vav-hey*, and the letters *yud*, *hey*, and *vav* are called father letters. We have *aleph* corresponding to *yud*, *mem* corresponds to *hey*, and *shin* corresponds to *vav*. Furthermore, with three letters, such as *yud*, *hey*, and *vav*, six different permutations are possible, and these are used to define

and seal the six directions. And by sealing we mean completing and establishing a boundary that will define 3-dimensional space.

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

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

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

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

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

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

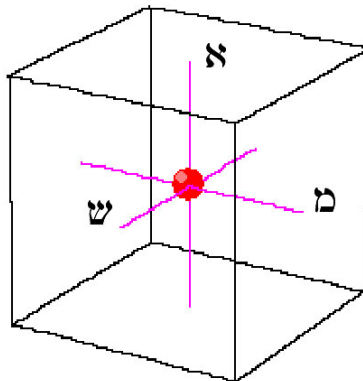
*Hey-vav-yud: Daughter and King.* The *vav* once again creates separation between the *Daughter* and the *King*, and the *King* appears last while the *Daughter* appears first. Holiness is even more concealed. Another decrease in holiness by one level. West.

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

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

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

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



משנה י"ד: אלו עשר ספירות בלימה (אחת) רוח אלהים חיים  
רוח מרוח מים מרוח אש ממים רום ותחת מזרח ומערב צפון  
ודרום:

1.14: These are the Ten Sefirot of Nothingness: The Breath of the Living God Breath from Breath Water from Breath Fire from Water Up down east west north south.  
(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

1.14: These are the ten sefirot/declarations of constraint. Spirit/breath of the Living Elohim (God), spirit/breath from spirit/breath, water from spirit/breath, fire from water, ascent and beneath, east and west, north and south.  
(My translation)

In this passage, we get a sense of the original meaning of the word *sefirot*. They are declarations that define our 3-dimensional universe. The letter *aleph* corresponds to *spirit/breath*, the letter *mem* to water, and the letter *shin* to fire. Soon we will also talk about the *seven double letters*, seven letters in Hebrew that can take on either a hard or a soft sound. These are the letters *bet*, *gimmel*, *dalet*, *kaf*, *peh*, *resh*, and *tav*, and a later passage will identify these letters as corresponding to *up*, *down*, *east*, *west*, *north*, *south*, and *center*. The letter *tav*, which is the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, corresponds to *center*, but in our passage above it also represents *breath from breath*.

Recall also the earlier passage that said that the *end is contained in the beginning and the beginning in the end*. Likewise, with the first letter of the alphabet, *aleph* (*breath*), and the last letter of the alphabet, *tav* (*breath from breath*). Ultimately, the beginning and the end are inseparable from one another and are one and the same. Again, it is only the mind that creates the false distinction between the two. And lastly, since the *sefirot* and the *three mother letters* plus the *seven double letters* both correspond to three spatial axes plus six directions and center, this suggests that the *ten sefirot* are none other than ten letters from the alphabet, the *three mother letters* plus the *seven doubles* that we'll discuss in more detail soon. Of course, in later *Kabbalah*, the *sefirot* were divorced from the letters and given entirely new meanings. Also, given the number of verses in this first chapter that begin with the phrase *ten sefirot/declarations of constraint*, one can assume that each verse in this chapter is attempting to describe some aspect of the *sefirot*. Thus, they are defined by directions, by letters, by numbers, by the process by which we go from *Oneness* to multiplicity, by the process by which we go back from multiplicity to *Oneness*, and likely a few additional meanings just waiting to be discovered.

## משנה ב': עשרים ושתיים אותיות יסוד חקקן חצבן צרפן שקלן והמירן וצר בהם את כל היצור ואת כל העתיד לצור:

2.2: Twenty-two Foundation Letters: He engraved them, He carved 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.

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

2:2 Twenty-two letters of foundation. IT decreed them, shaped them, combined them, weighed them, and exchanged them, and IT formed with them all that was formed and all the multiplications to be formed.

(My translation)

This passage is giving a succinct description of the process of creation from the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Remember that the first step is a *decree*, an act of will, and this represents *something-from-nothing creation*. The second step is *shaping*, refining our inspiration, and following this we *combine* letters (or thoughts!) in our mind for our third step, and remember, too, that letters form words and words create the structure of the reality we see. The fourth step is called *weighing*, and this refers to solidifying the characteristics of what we perceive. And the last step is *exchanging* or *transforming*, and this can be thought of as taking a successful pattern and using it as a template in another context. For example, if you identify yourself as a hard working individual, then this becomes a template or pattern that can be applied over and over to different situations in your life. However, while this pattern or template of working hard may appear as the same foreground in many different situations, it is the background that changes as one background pattern is *exchanged* or *transformed* into another, and if it weren't for this ability of ours to isolate a particular pattern from its surroundings, then we would never be able to recognize people we know once their surroundings or background change. Additionally, this interpretation is supported by later passages in the *Sefer Yetzirah* that give examples of how the same patterns of three, seven, and twelve letters appear in different contexts, and one particular instance of this *exchange of context* is found in how the *ten sefirot* correspond to ten letters of the alphabet (the *three mother letters* plus the *seven double letters*), thus showing also how creation via the twenty-two letters contains within it creation through the ten utterances.

NOTE: In addition to the *Work of the Chariot* which, 2000 years ago, referred to that branch of Jewish mysticism that involved meditative techniques in order to travel, there was another branch of Jewish mysticism called the *Work of Creation*. The *Sefer Yetzirah* breaks up the work of creation into two kinds, *something-from-nothing creation* and *something-from-something creation*. We say that this passage describes the process and steps of *something-from-nothing creation* since it begins with that *intent* or *decree* that pops into one's head out of nowhere!



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

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

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

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

(My translation)

From three objects you can make six permutations, and these permutations represent the six directions. These directions, in turn, define our 3-dimensional world, and the perception of this world covers and hides the true nature of reality. Note, too, that in previous times a ring was used to impress a wax seal upon a document. Thus, the rings mentioned in the passage above refer to the six seals defined by the six directions. Additionally, the three mother letters *aleph*, *mem*, and *shin* represent *air*, *fire*, and *water*, and from these come the three father letters of *yud*, *hey*, and *vav*, which are the letters of the most sacred name for *God*. Thus, that which is beyond perception creates a finite world through the pattern of three, through the process of two opposites and communication between them. And in this world we turn the inconceivable into the conceived concept of the *Father God* whose name is spelled out by using the *father letters*, and from this *God* image, we have consequences.

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

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



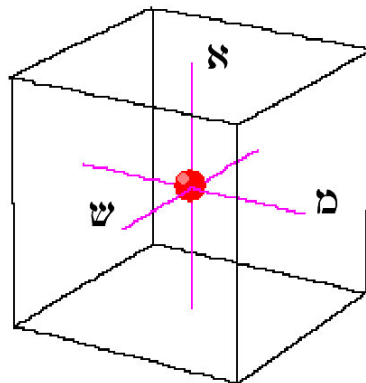
the male principle first, later *Kabbalah* seems to be following the pattern of *Genesis* where *Adam's* creation comes before *Eve's*.

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

In *Genesis Rabbah 1:15* there is an intriguing argument about which was created first, *heaven* or *earth*, and this argument can also be seen as symbolic of a discussion on whether the *masculine* preceded the *feminine* or vice-versa. The final conclusion is that both were created simultaneously, and this is true up to a point. In other words, opposites are always created in pairs without one coming before the other, and this is the case in both particle physics and in metaphysics. This is also yet another explanation of why the *Torah* begins with the letter *bet* which represents the number two. The created world appears with a minimum of two things, not one. Also, even if opposites are created simultaneously, interaction between opposites happens afterwards, and since the male sexual organ represents an interaction occurring between those opposites, the text wisely has the *feminine* coming before the interactive *masculine*, and in the *Zohar* it is the female that must arouse the male. In other words, female before interaction.

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

NOTE: This passage solidifies the correspondence between the letters *aleph*, *mem*, *shin* and the letters *yud*, *hey*, *vav*, and going back to *Sefer Yetzirah 1:13*, we can use this correspondence to further justify how the *three mother letters* correspond to the three spatial axes. Additionally, since three items can form six different permutations, the notion of the six directions of space is also implicit in this construction. And finally, note that we normally think of *yud-hey-vav-hey* as a masculine or *Father name* for *God*. If we do the coding that this passage suggests, in other words transform *yud* to *aleph*, *hey* to *mem*, and *vav* to *shin*, then we get *aleph-mem-shin-mem* and it would be very nice, indeed, if this spelled some sort of *Mother name* for *God*. Well, guess what? The letters *aleph-mem* spell “mother” in Biblical Hebrew, and the letters *shin-mem* spell “name” in Hebrew. Thus, *aleph-mem-shin-mem* literally says *Mother name*!



## משנה ד': שלש אמוש אמ"ש בעולם אויר מים אש שמים נבראו מאש וארץ נבראת ממים ואויר מרוח מכריע בינתים:

3.4: Three Mothers, AMSh, in the Universe are air, water, fire. Heaven was created from fire Earth was created from water And air from Breath decides between them.

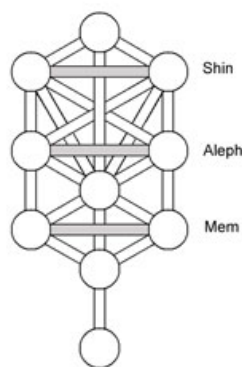
(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

3:4 Three mothers aleph-mem-shin in the world, air, water, fire. Heaven was created from fire, and earth was created from water, and air from spirit/breath decides between them.

(My translation)

The pattern of three is now extended to *heaven* and *earth* and the *air* in between. This arrangement appears again in *Sefer Yetzirah* 3:6 (not included here) where we will find the same pattern in human beings with *fire* above in the brain and *water* below in the belly and *air* in between in the lungs. We could also make sense of this pattern directly by noting that the majority of the earth is covered with *water*, above is the atmosphere or *air*, and the sun and the light of the stars in the heavens would have suggested *fire* even to the ancients. And this completes, in this passage, the decomposition of space via the pattern of three.

NOTE: In *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:13 we read that three of the ten *sefirot* correspond to *spirit/breath*, *water*, and *fire*, and it should be clear that since the *three mother letters* correspond to *air*, *water*, and *fire*, there is an association between these three *sefirot* and the *three mother letters*. Furthermore, in the later *Sefirotic Tree of Life*, these *three mother letters* and their elements correspond to the three horizontal paths on that tree.



**משנה א':** שבע כפולות בג"ד כפר"ת מתנהגות בשתי לשונות  
ב"ב, ג"ג, ד"ד, כ"כ, פ"פ, ר"ר, ת"ת. תבנית רך וקשה גבור וחלש:

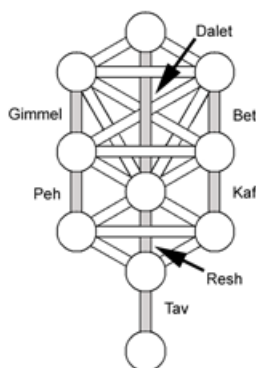
4.1: Seven Doubles: Bet, Gimel, Dalet, Kaf, Peh, Resh, Tav. They direct themselves with two tongues Bet-Bhet, Gimel-Ghimel, Dalet-Dhalet, Kaf-Khaf, Peh-Pheh, Resh-Rhesh, Tav-Thav, A structure of soft and hard, strong and weak.

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

4:1 Seven doubles bet-gimmel-dalet-kaf-peh-resh-tav. They conduct themselves with two tongues, bet-vet, gimmel-ghimmel, dalet-dhalet, kaf-khaf, peh-pheh, resh-rhesh, tav-thav. A paradigm of soft and hard, strong and weak.

*(My translation)*

On the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* there are seven vertical paths that correspond to the seven double letters. The placement of the letters in the order above on the *tree* below follows a pattern of *right-left-center-right-left-center-center*, and in this way it seems to reiterate the teaching that our finite world is brought into existence as a result of two opposites with a mediating principle in between. Also, because they are double letters, they represent qualities that can be expressed through either of two extremes such as wisdom and folly.

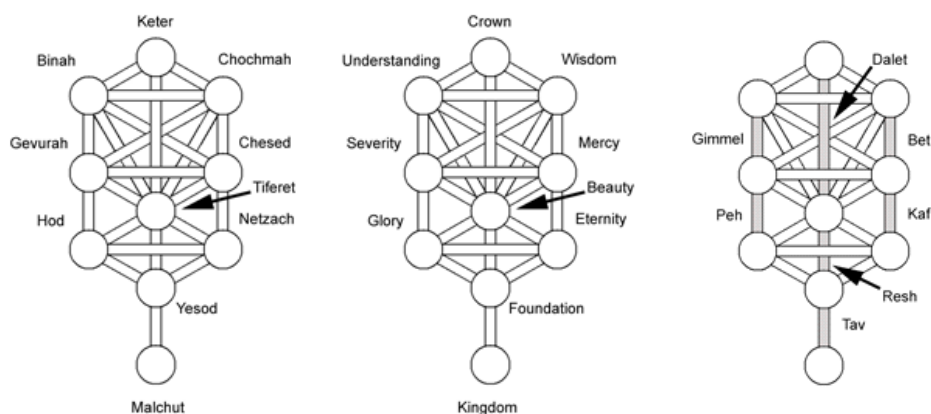


## משנה ב': שבע כפולות בג"ד כפר"ת יסודן חכמה עושר זרע חיים ממשלה שלום ורחן:

4.2: Seven Doubles: BGD KPRT Their foundation is Wisdom, Wealth, Seed, Life, Dominance, Peace and Grace.  
(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

4:2 Seven doubles bet-gimmel-dalet-kaf-peh-resh-tav. Their foundation is wisdom, wealth, seed, life, dominance, peace, and grace.  
(My translation)

This is one of those verses that appears in several variations in the different versions that exist of the original *Sefer Yetzirah*. However, the keyword assignments above fit in very well with the established *Sefirotic Tree of Life*.



For example, *bet* is the connecting path from *mercy* to *wisdom*, and furthermore, the letter *bet* stands for a *brachah*, a blessing. As we learn to be a blessing to others, we also open ourselves up to a higher *wisdom*.

The letter *gimmel* is the connecting path from *severity* to *understanding*, and *gimmel* stands for *gamal*, a camel. The camel is wealthy in that it can live off of its own stored resources. Likewise, when we learn how to be satisfied with our own fat and to drink water from our own well (*Proverbs 5:15*), then we, too, will be *wealthy*.

The letter *dalet* is the connecting path from *beauty* to *crown*, and it stands for *da'at*, knowledge. In *Kabbalah*, knowledge is the result of the combined functioning of *wisdom* and *understanding*, the result of the coordination of our right brain with our left brain, and knowledge is the *seed* whose sprouting can transport us to the enlightenment represented by the highest *sefirah*, *crown*.

The letter *kaf* is the connecting path from *eternity* to *mercy*. It represents *kavannah*, intention or devotion. This word is also used to represent those spontaneous prayers, praises, and supplications that arise from the very soul of our being, and by engaging in these kinds of *kavannahs*, we can elevate our right brains to a higher level of love and mercy. And in this manner, we also enhance *life*.

The letter *peh* is the connecting path from *glory* to *severity*. It is on the left side of the tree which rules form and structure and the left hemisphere of the brain. *Peh* is also the Hebrew word for *mouth*. Hence, if we learn to *dominate* our mouth and control our thoughts, then our strength of will and intellect will become formidable. Otherwise, the consequences can be *severe*.

The letter *resh* is the connecting path from *foundation* to *beauty*. It stands for *rachamim*, compassion. When we have a good *foundation* it is easy for compassion for others to develop, and this in turn gives us *peace*.

And finally, the letter *tav* is the connecting path from *kingdom* to *foundation*. The letter *tav* stands for *Torah*, and it is written in the *Talmud* that when we study the *Torah*, a thread of *grace* extends into our lives (*B. Avodah Zarah 3b*).

And now, below is a table showing how the characteristics of the seven doubles are portrayed in the other versions of the *Sefer Yetzirah*.

THE SEVEN DOUBLES					
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>GRA</i>	<i>Short</i>	<i>Long</i>	<i>Saadia</i>
Bet	wisdom	wisdom	life	wisdom	life
Gimmel	wealth	wealth	peace	wealth	peace
Dalet	seed	seed	wisdom	seed	wisdom
Kaf	life	life	wealth	life	wealth
Peh	dominance	dominance	grace	dominance	seed
Resh	peace	peace	seed	peace	grace
Tav	grace	grace	dominance	grace	dominance

**משנה ד': שבע כפולות בג"ד כפר"ת מעלה ומטה מזרח  
ומערב צפון ודרום והיכל הקודש מכוון באמצע והוא נושא את  
כולם:**

4.4: Seven Doubles: BGD KPRT Up and Down East and West North and South And the Holy Palace precisely in the center and it supports them all.

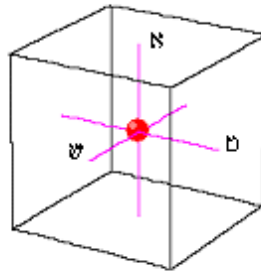
(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

4:4 Seven doubles bet-gimmel-dalet-kaf-peh-resch-tav. Ascent and beneath, east and west, north and south, and the Holy Temple dwelling in the middle, and it carries them all. (My translation)

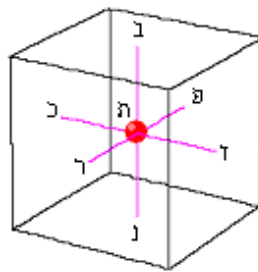
This passage completes the association of the ten *sefirot* with the three *mother letters* and the seven *double letters*. In previous passages we read that the ten *sefirot* are *breath*, *breath from breath*, *water*, *fire*, *up*, *down*, *east*, *west*, *north*, and *south*. The letters *aleph*, *mem*, and *shin* correspond to *breath*, *water*, and *fire*, and the seven double letters, *bet-gimmel-dalet-kaf-peh-resch-tav*, correspond to *up*, *down*, *east*, *west*, *north*, *south*, and the *Holy Temple*. Clearly, the *Holy Temple* represented by *tav* must also correspond to *breath from breath*.

Sefirot	Letters	Letter Associations
<i>Spirit/breath</i>	Aleph	<i>air</i>
<i>Water</i>	Mem	<i>water</i>
<i>Fire</i>	Shin	<i>fire</i>
<i>Ascent</i>	Bet	<i>ascent</i>
<i>Beneath</i>	Gimmel	<i>beneath</i>
<i>East</i>	Dalet	<i>east</i>
<i>West</i>	Kaf	<i>west</i>
<i>North</i>	Peh	<i>north</i>
<i>South</i>	Resh	<i>south</i>
<i>Spirit/breath from spirit breath</i>	Tav	<i>The Holy Temple</i>

In a previous passage we also saw that the three mother letters represent the up-down axis, the east-west axis, and the north-south axis, and with the directional associations of the seven *double letters*, we are well on our way to delineating the fundamental boundaries of a cube known as the *Cube of Space*. This is a precursor to the more recent *Sefirotic Tree of Life*, and like the *tree*, this is also a diagram that represents the created universe. Furthermore, the statement that the “Holy Temple carries them all” tells us that all is contained in the *center* in the same way that a cup contains the water that it carries.



**The three mother letters define axes for 3-dimensional space**



**The seven double letters define the six directions and the center**



**משנה ט"ז: שתי אבנים בונות שני בתים, שלש אבנים בונות  
ששה בתים, ארבע אבנים בונות ארבעה ועשרים בתים, חמש אבנים  
בונות מאה ועשרים בתים, שש אבנים בונות שבע מאות ועשרים  
בתים, שבע אבנים בונות חמשת אלפים וארבעים בתים, מכאן  
ואילך צא וחשוב מה שאין הפה יכול לדבר ואין האוזן יכולה  
לשמוע:**

4.16: Two stones build 2 houses Three stones build 6 houses Four stones build 24 houses  
Five stones build 120 houses Six stones build 620 houses Seven stones build 5040 houses  
From here on go out and calculate that which the mouth cannot speak and the ear cannot  
hear.

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

4:16 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.

*(My translation)*

Think of a “stone” in the above passage as a “letter,” and think of a “house” as a “word”  
that is built from letters. In this context, the passage correctly does the math in  
computing that 2 words can be constructed from 2 letters, 6 words may be constructed  
from 3 letters, and so on. In particular, our 7 double letters yield 5040 words or  
permutations, and through words we create the world that we can understand and think  
about. However, the very end of the passage tells us to also focus on that which can’t be  
put into words. Consider the observer, that which does the lookin’. It can’t be seen or  
heard, and yet it knows all that is to be objectively known. Don’t just focus on the  
outside world. Turn your focus inward, too, to the very core of your being.

# SEFER YETZIRAH 5:1

**משנה א': שתים עשרה פשוטות ה'ו'ז', ח', ט'י', ל'נ'ס',  
ע'צ'ק', יסודן שיחה הרהור הלך, ראייה שמיעה מעשה, תשמיש  
ריח שינה, רוגז לעיטה שחוק:**

5.1: Twelve Elementals: Heh, Vav, Zayin, Chet, Tet, Yud, Lamed, Nun, Samekh, Eyin, Tzadi, Kuf. Their foundation is speech, thought, motion, sight, hearing, action, coition, smell, sleep, anger, taste, laughter.

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

5:1 Twelve plain, hey-vav-zayin-chet-tet-yud-lamed-nun-samach-ayin-tzaddi-kuf. Their foundation is conversation, reflection, walking, seeing, hearing, action, procreation, smelling, sleeping, anger, swallowing, laughter.

*(My translation)*

The twelve plain letters are presented above in the order in which they occur in the Hebrew alphabet, and the attributes given to each letter seem to refer to actions or sensations that help define our experience of the world. In the passage that follows, we will see these letters interpreted even more literally as boundaries. Hence, our boundaries are defined by what we perceive. Which of the characteristics above that goes with which letter is another one of those things, however, that varies from one version of the text to another. Below is a table of the assignments found in the different primary texts. Also, in the *Saadia* version, these characteristics are treated as double characteristics similar to what we saw with the seven double letters. In other words, seeing is perceived as the opposite of being blind and the sleep of the night is seen as being in opposition to the sleep of the dead.

THE SENSATIONS					
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Me</i>	<i>GRA</i>	<i>Short</i>	<i>Long</i>	<i>Saadia</i>
Hey	conversation	conversation	seeing	seeing	seeing
Vav	reflection	reflection	hearing	hearing	hearing
Zayin	walking	walking	smelling	smelling	smelling
Chet	seeing	seeing	conversation	conversation	conversation
Tet	hearing	hearing	swallowing	swallowing	swallowing
Yud	action	action	procreation	procreation	procreation
Lamed	procreation	procreation	action	walking	action
Nun	smelling	smelling	walking	anger	walking
Samach	sleeping	sleeping	anger	laughter	anger
Ayin	anger	anger	laughter	reflection	laughter
Tzaddi	swallowing	swallowing	reflection	joy	reflection
Kuf	laughter	laughter	sleeping	sleeping	sleep

Ultimately one has to ask why do we have these particular sensations associated with these particular letters? My best guess is that it is because there are related Hebrew words that begin with these letters. Below is a list of the words and correspondences that I have been able to find.

Hebrew Letter	Glyph	Assignment in <i>Sefer Yetzirah</i>	Related Hebrew Word	Translation
hey	ה	speech/conversation	הבטחה	utterance
vav	ו	thought/reflection	וכוח	debate
zayin	ז	motion/walking	זבוח	flux, flow
			זוח	to move
			זיזוי	moveable
			זיעה	oscillation
chet	ח	sight/seeing	חזין	vision, prophecy
			חזיה	seeing
tet	ט	hearing	טרטור	noise
yud	י	action	ישמ	action
			יגיעה	exertion
lamed	ל	coition/procreation	לבן	semen
			לבב	to attract
nun	נ	smelling	נחיר	nostril
samech	ס	sleeping	סגום	thick blanket
			סהרורי	sleep walker
ayin	ע	anger	עברה	anger
			עשק	quarrel
tzaddi	צ	taste/swallowing	צרך	to consume
kuf	ק	laughter	קפריסי	humorous
			קוריוז	funny incident

**משנה ב':** שתים עשרה פשוטות ה' ו' ז', ח' ט' י', ל' נ'  
 ס', ע' צ' ק', יסודן שנים עשר גבולי אלכסון, גבול מזרחית רומית  
 גבול מזרחית צפונית גבול מזרחית תחתית, גבול דרומית רומית  
 גבול דרומית מזרחית גבול דרומית תחתית, גבול מערבית רומית  
 גבול מערבית דרומית גבול מערבית תחתית, גבול צפונית רומית  
 גבול צפונית מערבית גבול צפונית תחתית, ומתרחבין והולכין עד  
 עדי עד והן הן גבולות עולם:

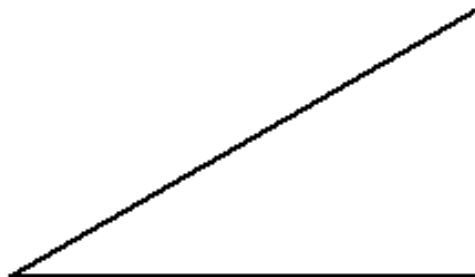
5.2: Twelve Elementals HVZ ChTY LWS OTzQ Their foundation is the twelve diagonal boundaries: The east upper boundary, The east northern boundary, The east lower boundary, The south upper boundary, The south eastern boundary, The south lower boundary, The west upper boundary, The west southern boundary, 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.

(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)

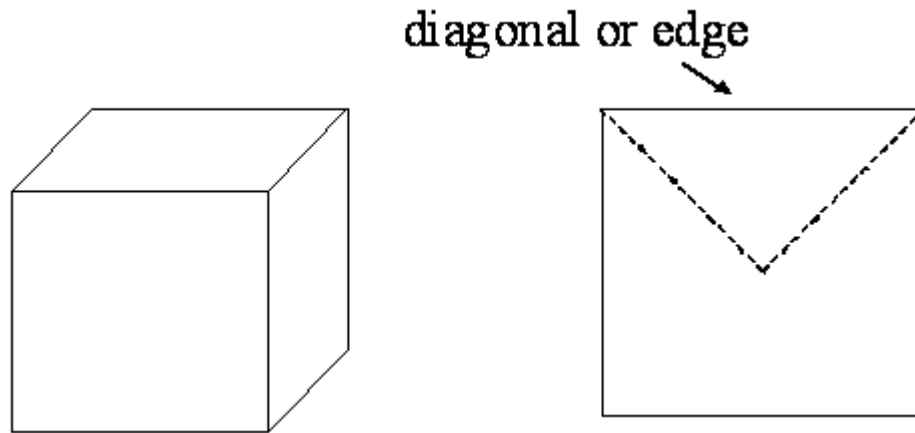
5:2 Twelve plain, hey-vav-zayin-chet-tet-yud-lamed-nun-samach-ayin-tzaddi-kuf. Their foundation is twelve diagonal boundaries. Boundary east north, boundary east ascent, boundary east below. Boundary south east, boundary south ascent, boundary south below. Boundary west south, boundary west ascent, boundary west below. Boundary north west, boundary north ascent, boundary north below. And they are permitted to go until forever, and behold, they are the boundaries of the world.

(My translation)

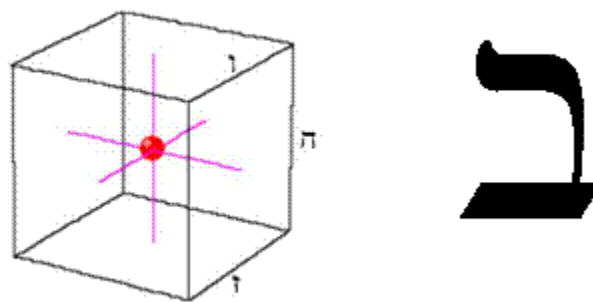
What is most important in this verse is the correspondence between the letters and the diagonal boundaries. However, what is meant by a “diagonal boundary” in this verse can easily be misunderstood. The Hebrew word that is employed is *alachson*, and this word actually means the longest side of a triangle. For example, in a right triangle this would be the hypotenuse which is usually oriented so that it looks like a diagonal line from the bottom to the top of the triangle.



If we now imagine creating triangles by drawing lines from the center of a cube to its various corner points, then the longest side of each triangle will be an edge of the cube. Thus, the twelve diagonal boundaries are nothing more than the twelve edges found on a typical cube.



In this particular passage, by the way, I am generally following the *Saadia* version rather than the *GRA* version even though I go around the cube in the clockwise direction like the *GRA* instead of the counterclockwise direction like the *Saadia* version. The letter assignments are made to the twelve edges in such a way that each set of three tends to describe the letter *bet* which is closed on three sides and open on one. The letter *bet* stands for a *bracha*, a blessing, and this conforms to the teaching in the *Zohar* that the world was created with the letter *bet* so that it would be a blessing. Furthermore, the letter *bet* consists of two opposite sides connected by a third, and this reiterates a basic teaching of the *Sefer Yetzirah* that creation depends upon one thing opposite another with a mediating principle in between.

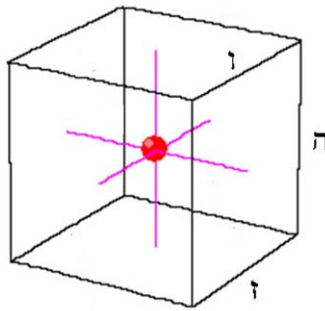


In the *Saadia* version, one finds a pattern of center, one side, and then the other side for the placement of the letters, and as the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* diagram shows, this same pattern of *center*-(*one side*)-(other side) occurs with respect to the placement of the plain letters on the diagonal branches of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*. Furthermore, the

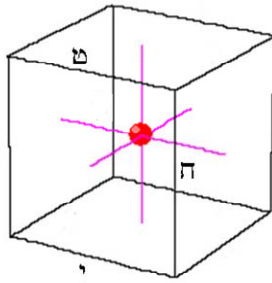
counterclockwise pattern found in the *Saadia* version seems to tell the story of humanity's fall from grace followed by eventual redemption.

In other words, we begin our story in *Eden* which is symbolized by the east, the direction of connection with the light. This is followed by a fall and harsh times as symbolized by the bitter cold of the north. As a result of the fall, we have to work hard to plow the earth and grow our own food, and the earth is symbolized by the west, the direction of the setting sun. Finally, however, there is the promise that we will be redeemed and that life will become easier and more joyous again, and this is symbolized by the direction of the warm south where life is not constantly surrounded by the bitterness of the north.

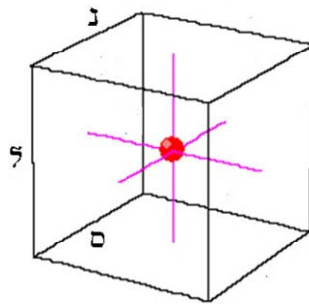
However, I have chosen the clockwise direction because that represents the way things should be. In other words, like the beginning of day, life begins in the east. Next, our childhood should be peaceful and nurturing, and these are attributes associated with the pleasant weather in the south. Following this, we should become responsible adults with our own lives which is represented by the west, the direction of the end of the day where we have experienced life and now have time to pause and reflect. And lastly, we reach the north direction when we become elders. At this point, life is more constrained for us just as life is harsher in the north, but we also have wisdom to share with the younger generations. Below now are the placements of the twelve letters along the edges of the *Cube of Space* where a pattern of *center-(top side)-(bottom side)* is followed in a clockwise direction around the cube.



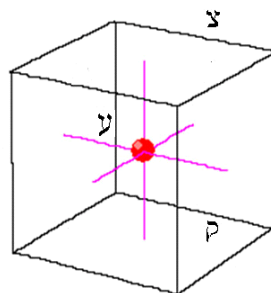
***hey-vav-zayin***



*chet-tet-yud*



*lamed-nun-samach*

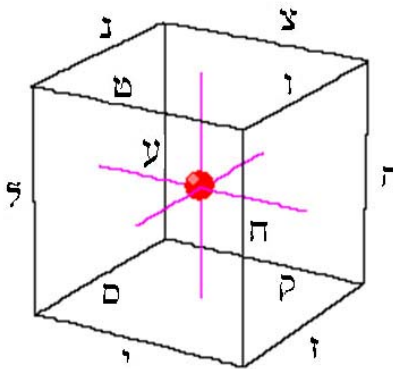


*ayin-tzaddi-kuf*

Below now is another table showing how this placement of the letters, which helps align the *Sefer Yetzirah* with later mystical Jewish literature, compares with what is found in the various other versions of the text.

Letters	THE EDGES OF THE CUBE				
	Me	GRA	Short	Long	Saadia
Hey	east north	east up	east north	east up	east north
Vav	east up	east north	south east	east north	east up
Zayin	east down	east down	east up	east down	east down
Chet	south east	south up	east down	south up	north west
Tet	south up	south east	north up	south east	north up
Yud	south down	south down	north down	south down	north down
Lamed	west south	west up	west south	west up	west south
Nun	west up	west south	north west	west south	west up
Samach	west down	west down	west up	west down	west down
Ayin	north west	north up	west down	north up	south east
Tzaddi	north up	north west	south up	north west	south up
Kuf	north down	north down	south down	north down	south down

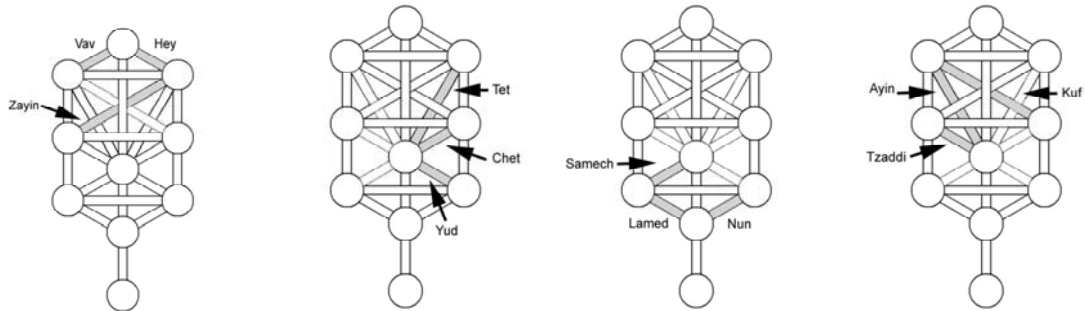
In spite of which edges one might assign the twelve plain letters to, the final result is that we now have the letters serving as a model for physical 3-dimensional space. In particular, we have defined that cube that is often referred to as the *Cube of Space*, and this completes the argument that the universe was created with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The *three mother letters* correspond to three spatial axes, the *seven double letters* correspond to the six directions plus center, and the *twelve plain letters* complete the cube by corresponding to the twelve defining edges. Below is a diagram showing the correspondences of all twelve plain letters at once..



*The twelve edge letters of the cube of space*



And now we show below the placements of the twelve letters along the diagonals of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*. Notice that a pattern of *center-(one side)-(other side)* is followed as we move clockwise around the *tree*.



And finally, on the next page is a table showing various correspondences that have been assigned to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet over the centuries and the sources for these associations.

Letters	Glyph	GRA	Short Version	Long Version	Saadia	Zohar	Other	Modern
aleph	א	air	air	air	air	unity	ox	air
mem	מ	water	water	water	water	king	water	water
shin	ש	fire	fire	fire	fire	Almighty, falsehood	tooth	fire
bet	ב	wisdom	life	wisdom	life	blessings	house	blessing
gimmel	ג	wealth	peace	wealth	peace	beneficence	camel	camel, benefactor
dalet	ד	seed	wisdom	seed	wisdom	poverty	door	knowledge, humility
kaf	כ	life	wealth	life	wealth	glory, extermination	palm of the hand	intent, devotions
peh	פ	dominance	grace	dominance	seed	redemption, deliverance, transgression, serpent	mouth	mouth
resh	ר	peace	seed	peace	grace	falsehood	head	compassion
tav	ת	grace	dominance	grace	dominance	truth, death	cross	Torah
hey	ה	speech	sight	speech	sight	Name of God	window	effortless creative utterance, <i>Shechinah</i> , five, 2 to the 5th power is 32
vav	ו	thought	hearing	thought	hearing	Name of God	hook	connection, union, six directions
zayin	ז	motion	smell	motion	smell	remember, sword	weapon	sword, seven, Sabbath
chet	ח	sight	speech	sight	speech	sin	fence	mercy, life
tet	ט	hearing	taste	hearing	taste	good, sunk, sin	snake	the creative womb, good
yud	י	action	coition	action	coition	God's will	hand	oneness, union, <i>yordeh merkavah</i> , descent into the subconscious followed by ascents to higher states
lamed	ל	coition	action	cotion	action	king	ox-goad	learning, <i>limmud</i>
nun	נ	smell	motion	smell	motion	awesome, comely, fallen	fish	faithful, <i>ne'ehmahn</i>
samech	ס	sleep	anger	sleep	anger	support	prop	support
ayin	ע	anger	laughter	anger	laughter	iniquity, humility	eye	eye, fountain, seventy, creation of multiplicity
tzaddi	צ	taste	thought	taste	thought	righteousness	fish-hook	righteousness
kuf	ק	laughter	sleep	laughter	sleep	falsehood	back of the head	holiness

One final question we can address at this point is if the *sefirot* correspond to the *three mother letters* and the *seven double letters*, then why are the *twelve plain letters* left out? Why aren't they characterized as *sefirot* also? That is a very good question, and I believe that it is because there is a tradition that people are supposed to participate with *God* in the creative process.

*"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 the mortals."*  
(*Genesis Rabbah III:9*)

*"A philosopher asked R. Hoshaya: 'If circumcision is so precious, why was it not given to Adam?' 'If so,' he replied, 'why do you shave the corners of your head and leave your beard?' 'Because it grew with me in folly,' was the answer. 'If so, you should blind your eye and cut off your hands!' 'To such an argument have we come!' observed he. 'I cannot send you away empty-handed,' said he; '[the real reason is this:] whatever was created in the first six days requires further preparation, e.g., mustard needs sweetening, vetches need sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and man too needs to be finished off.'"*  
(*Genesis Rabbah XI:6*)

Now, if we look again at the attributes of the *twelve plain letters* (conversation, reflection, walking, seeing, hearing, action, procreation, smelling, sleeping, anger, swallowing, and laughter), we see that they by and large represent personal experiences. Consequently, this suggests that *God* creates the ten *sefirot*, the ten utterances, as represented also by the *three mother letters* and the *seven double letters*, but that the rest of the creation is up to us. Another way to say this would be that we are pre-programmed to construct the usual perception of 3-dimensional reality, but beyond that we fill in the rest of creation through our own thoughts and actions. We are co-creators!

**משנה ז':** כשבא אברהם אבינו ע"ה הביט וראה והבין וחקר  
 וחצב וחצב ועלתה ידו הבריאה שנאמר ואת הנפש אשר עשו בחרן  
 מיד נגלה עליו אדון הכל יתברך שמו לעד והושיבו בחיקו ונשקו על  
 ראשו וקראו אברהם אוהבי וכתר ברית לו ולזרעו עד עולם נאמר  
 והאמין בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה. וכתר לו ברית בין עשר אצבעות ידיו  
 והוא ברית הלשון ובין עשר אצבעות רגליו והוא ברית המילה. וקשר  
 עשרים ושתים אותיות התורה בלשונו וגילה לו את סודו משכן במים  
 דלקן באש רעשן ברוח בערן בשבעה נהגן בשנים עשר מזלות:

6:7: And when Abraham our father, may he rest in peace, looked, saw, understood, probed, engraved and carved, He was successful in creation, as it is written, "And the souls that they made in Haran" (Genesis 12:5). Immediately there was revealed to him the Master of all, may His name be blessed forever, He placed him in His bosom, and kissed him on his head, and He called him, "Abraham my beloved" (Isaiah 41:8). He made a covenant with him and with his children after him forever, as it is written, "And he believed in God, and He considered it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). He made with him a covenant between the ten fingers of his hands - this is the covenant of the tongue, and between the ten toes of his feet - this is the covenant of circumcision. And He bound the 22 letters of the Torah to his tongue and He revealed to him His mystery He drew them in water, He flamed them with fire, He agitated them with Breath, He burned them with the seven planets He directed them with the twelve constellations.

*(Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation)*

6:7 As an elder, Abraham, our father, looked and saw and understood and explored and decreed and shaped, and manually caused creation since it is said, "And the person that was made in Haran (Genesis 12:5)." And at once, IT became apparent to him, the Lord of All, blessed is ITS Name forever. And IT set him in his bosom and kissed him on his head and called Abraham ITS beloved, and IT cut a covenant with him and with his seed until eternity since it is said he relied on God, and IT reckoned it to him as righteousness. And IT cut a covenant with him between the ten fingers of his hands and it is the covenant of the tongue, and between the ten fingers of his feet, and this is the covenant of the flesh. And IT connected the twenty-two letters of the Instruction to his tongue and revealed to him their secrets. He settled them in water, made them glow with fire, vibrated them with spirit/breath, ignited them with seven planets, and conducted them with twelve constellations.

*(My translation)*

Based upon the above passage, 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. Other people guess 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, between the years 200 CE and 300 CE. This was the time period during which the 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*<sup>8</sup>. Here is my argument. If we look in the *Talmud*, we see that the theory that the universe was created with twenty-two letters was 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*)

*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 ways; 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?’<sup>1</sup> 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 Creation* (*Sefer Yetzirah*) 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*,

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<sup>8</sup> To the best of my knowledge, no professional scholar has yet hypothesized that *Rav Huna* is the author.

and *Hanina* was *Oshaia*'s brother<sup>9</sup>. Thus, all the principal players are one way or another linked to *Rav Huna*.

*“Rabbah said: If the righteous desired it, they could be creators, for it is written, But your iniquities have distinguished between you and God. 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 Creation,’ by means of which they created a third-grown calf and ate it.”*  
(*B. Sanhedrin 65b*)

Furthermore, the expression *Life of the Worlds* as a name for *God* appears in the *Sefer Sefer Yetzirah*, and it also appears in *Genesis Rabbah* I:5 & LX:14 in close proximity to *Rav Huna*'s name.

So there you have the evidence:

1. 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*.
2. Quotations from the *Midrash Rabbah* collection show that *Rav Huna* had a deep mystical understanding of the universe.
3. 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*.

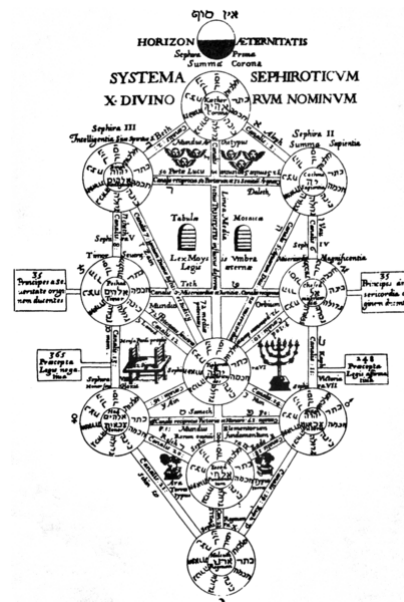
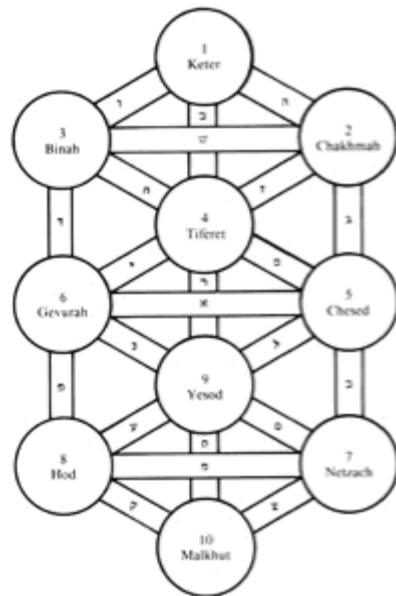
And one final note. When it says at the end of this passage that “*He settled them in water, made them glow with fire, vibrated them with spirit/breath, ignited them with seven planets, and conducted them with twelve constellations,*” this should be taken to mean that within our minds we have to combine our right brain tools with our left brain tools in order to effectively create, and it is our *intent*, our will, that ignites the fire.

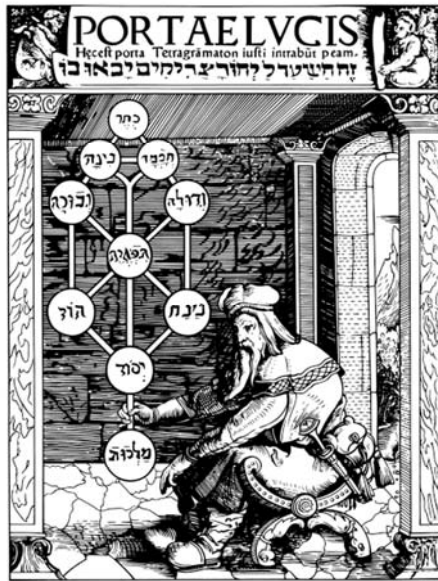
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<sup>9</sup> *Who's Who in the Talmud* by Shulamis Frieman

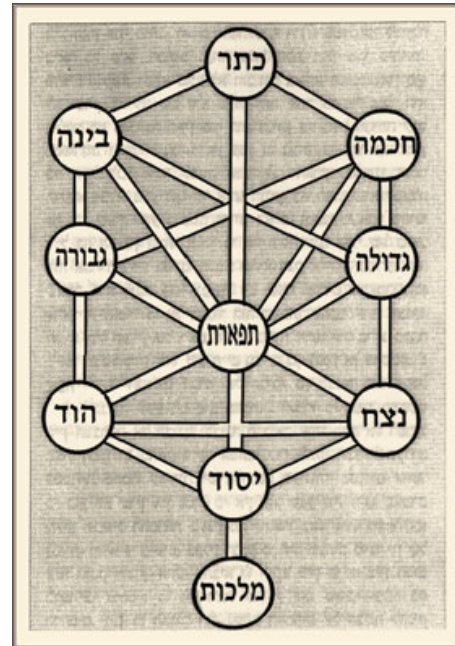
## TRANSITIONING FROM THE CUBE OF SPACE TO THE TREE OF LIFE

The *Cube of Space* is in many ways a wonderful model for the universe that incorporates many elements of early Jewish mysticism. Nonetheless, a cube is a 3-dimensional object, and it can be difficult to deal with a 3-dimensional cube and 22 letters when you have only a 2-dimensional piece of paper to work with. Thus, there was motivation to construct a simpler, 2-dimensional model that still incorporates the essential information of the cube. And that appears to be what happened! Also, through either conscious choice or through ignorance, one way or another, the *sefirot* were separated from the letters of the alphabet, and they were eventually given new meanings that also fit in with aspects of *God* found in the *Hebrew Bible* such as wisdom, power, and glory. It took awhile, however, for these changes to gel, and below are some of the different versions of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* that emerged.

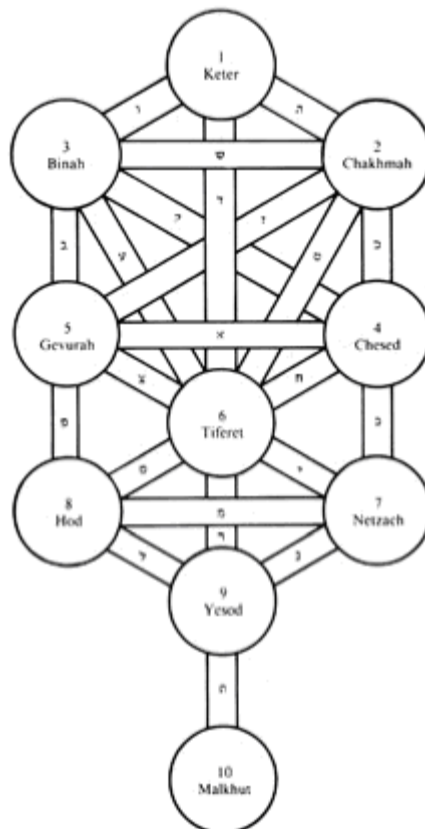




The Sefirotic Tree



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

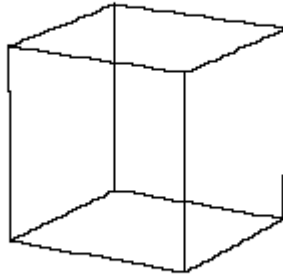


Interestingly, there is a passage in the *Bahir* that suggests that knowledge of this tree is contained within the cube.

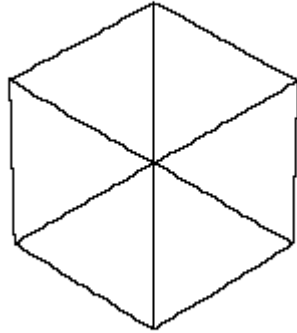
*“The Blessed Holy One has a single Tree, and it has twelve diagonal boundaries. The northeast boundary, the southeast boundary, the upper east boundary, the lower east boundary, the southwest boundary, the northwest boundary, the upper west boundary, the lower west boundary, the upper south boundary, the lower south boundary, the upper north boundary, the lower north boundary. On the inside of them is the tree.”*  
(*Bahir* 95)

Years ago this got me thinking, and I realized the following way to geometrically find the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* within the *Cube of Space*.

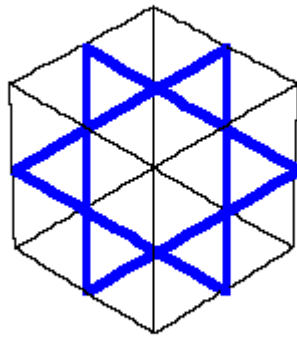
1. Draw a cube.



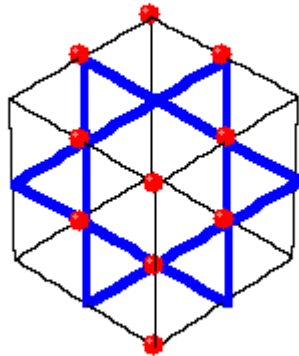
2. Rotate it until it looks like a hexagon.



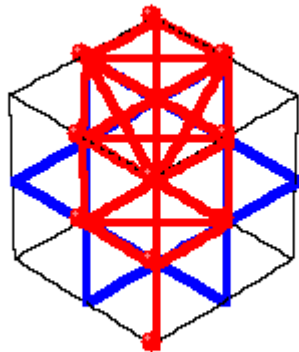
3. Draw a star.



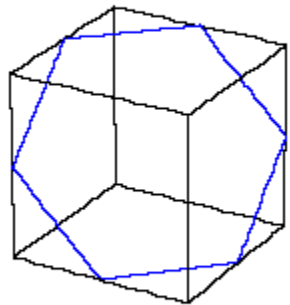
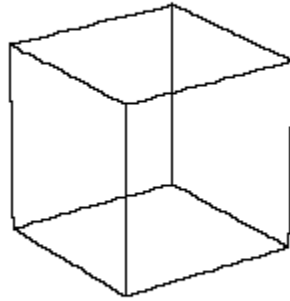
4. Add some dots.

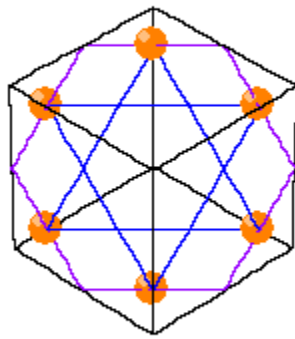
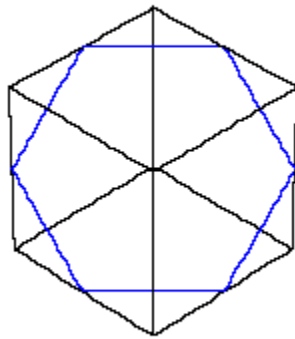


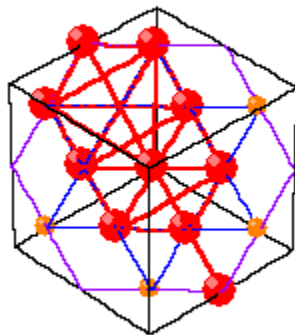
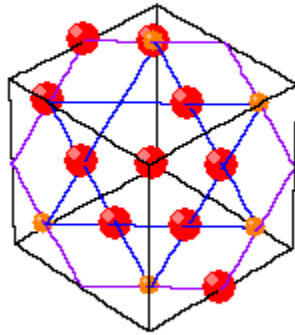
5. Make a tree!



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 hexagram.



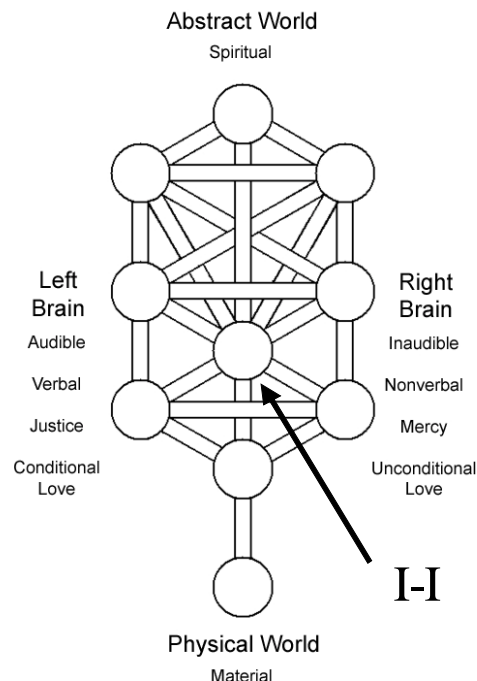




And that's how you make a tree!

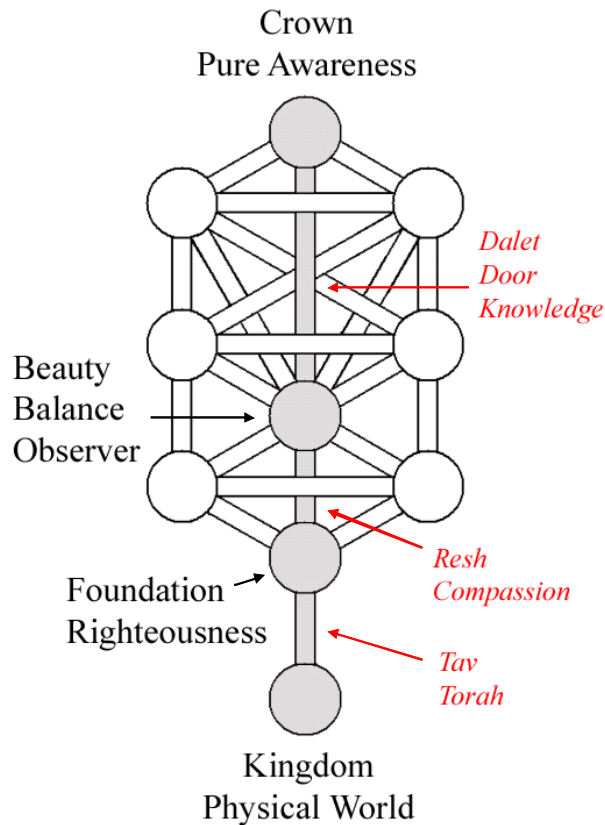
## INTERPRETING THE TREE OF LIFE

The *Cube of Space* model for creation that we discussed earlier shows how the letters of the Hebrew alphabet correspond to the spatial directions of the universe, and it also shows how the *three mother letters* and the *seven double letters* correspond to the ten *sefirot*, the ten declarations through which *God* created the universe. In comparison, the *Kabbalistic Tree of Life* is somewhat of a 2-dimensional unfolded cube that still contains within it all the basic features of the cube such as paths that correspond to the *three mother letters*, the *seven double letters*, the *twelve plain letters*, and the basic pattern of three (two opposites plus interaction between them). However, more so than the *Cube of Space*, the *Kabbalistic Tree of Life* is also a psychological map that highlights our position as creatures that are both verbal and nonverbal and both physical and nonphysical. At the center of the tree is what I have designated as the I-I because at this point two identities are represented. There is first the “I” that is defined by all those things we identify with such as “I am male” or “I am old” or “I like math.” The second “I” is the unobserved observer, the awareness that is our true self. Additionally, as we move down the tree, our focus is more on the things our ego identifies with, but as we ascend the tree, we merge more and more with that ineffable *Oneness*. This is even seen in Hebrew where the word for “I” is *ani* (*aleph-nun-yud*), and if we permute the letters of *ani*, then we change *ani* into *ayin* (*aleph-yud-nun*) which means “nothing.” A good exercise with the tree is to find one’s own place on it. For example, are you more left brained or right brained? Are you more spiritual or more material? The ideal is to find that point of balance at the “I-I.” However, collectively humanity throughout the world now seems to be far more left brained than right brained. We easily hear the audible voice of the TV, but few bother to listen anymore to the inaudible voice of the trees, the stones, and even the wordless thunder. Until we learn to use the other half of our brain, we will all be just a bunch of halfwits!



## The Middle Path

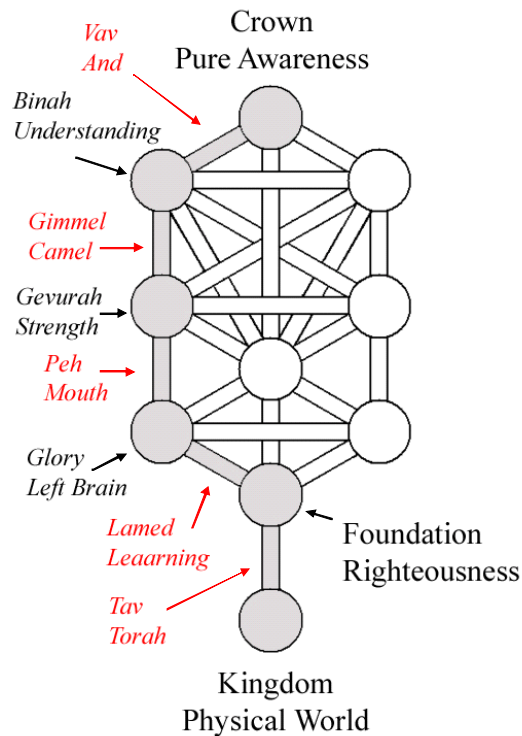
We can use the diagram for the *Kabbalistic Tree of Life* as a map for transitioning from one state of consciousness to another. Furthermore, recall that the right side of the tree represents mercy and the right hemisphere of the brain while the left side represents severity and the left hemisphere of the brain. The middle path represents the balance between the two, and in our diagram below we'll trace the path from physical reality to pure awareness. We begin our ascent with *Torah* which I'll interpret broadly here as any good code of ethical behavior that will help you establish a good foundation. Following the establishment of good habits, however, we next need to develop compassion (*rachamin*) and a deep empathy and awareness of others. This will help us to go beyond just an awareness of ourselves, and it will prepare us for a larger reality. Also, this development takes us to Beauty (*tiferet*) which is really the balance point for the whole tree. However, if we want to continue into pure awareness without any objects of perception, then we need to focus our attention not on objects, but on that which perceives the objects. If we go to that place where knowledge (*da'at*) is understood, then we will arrive at pure awareness. Furthermore, it matters not whether you remain, from the perspective of this world, in pure awareness for just an instant or for a lifetime. When you are in that place of "consciousness without an object," there is no time. Only from the side of multiplicity do time and other individual objects exist.





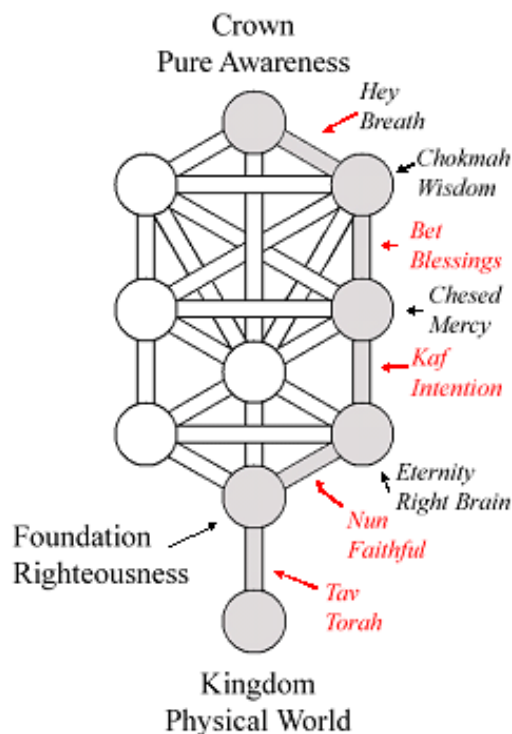
## The Left Path

The left side of the *Kabbalistic Tree of Life* represents the left brain, and so ascension upon the tree through the left side is the path of logic and reason. Once we have established a good foundation by following ethical behavior (*Torah*), then we take the path to the left that begins with the letter *lamed* which means “learning.” In other words, left hemisphere activity begins with the accumulation of facts and details, and the *sefirah* of Glory (*Hod*) represents the basic functioning of the left hemisphere of the brain. Following this, though, is the letter *peh* which means “mouth.” To reach the next level of development of Strength (*Gevurah*) we need to chew on what we’ve learned and digest it, and that makes our intellect strong and takes us to a point where we can judge for ourselves what is true and what is false. Continuing upward on our path, we next encounter the letter *gimmel* which stands for a “camel,” and just as a camel can live off of the fat and water stored within its body, so can we evolve to a point where we no longer need external teachers and guides. At this point, we are nurtured by our past development and we can create our own insights through the power of our own intellect. This then takes us to the next level of Understanding where we become creators of new insights into reality. And finally, the last step is represented by the letter *vav*. In Hebrew grammar, the letter *vav* represents the conjunction “and” which brings things into *union*. If, while in our state of high intellectual awareness, we realize that none of our thoughts can be separated from the awareness that perceives them, if we realize that the burning candle and flame are simply two sides of the same phenomenon, then this exterior world will vanish and we can merge with pure, undifferentiated awareness. Additionally, when we *combine* and *unite* our thoughts in order to create an insight or “aha!” moment, then at that moment of insight, we also disappear for a moment into pure awareness.



## The Right Path

The right path up the *Kabbalistic Tree of Life* is the wordless path of the right hemisphere of the brain. Again, once we have established a foundation of good behaviors, we then proceed to the right along the path labeled with the letter *nun*. This letter stands for *neheman*, faithful, and we enter into the right hemisphere by focusing on those things that we seem to know prior to our engagement with reality using words. In other words, those primary sensations whose reality we accept as a matter of faith - the sand and the sea, the rush of the waters, the crash of the heavens. These are the sorts of things we can experience without words and which help move us into the right hemisphere of the brain where everything exists at once and everything is eternal. From this vantage point, however, we continue upwards by focusing our mind on things such as love, goodness, and mercy. The letter *kaf* for this path stands for *kavannah* or “intention,” and that means we have to focus on our goal of love for others. Having reached this point, though, we can now become even more universal by extending our blessings to others both in thought and in deed. Mentally, think of people you know, quickly feel them surrounded by love and blessing, and then move on to others while having faith that the quantum interconnectedness of all things will deliver your blessing. And this will take us to *Chokmah*, the highest point of the right brain where we can access primordial Wisdom. At this point, we perceive higher truths even if we cannot verbalize them so well. The final step, however, is taken by focusing on the letter *hey* which is associated in *Genesis Rabbah* XII:10 with breath since the sound of *hey* is like the sound of an effortless exhalation. Thus, since breath is life, simply focus on the source of your living essence as you breathe, and this will take you into that essence of pure *Oneness*.



NOTE: On the front cover of this book there are pictures of the *Sefirotic Tree of Life* that include both the Hebrew names and the English names for the ten *sefirot*, and in this chapter we gave some additional details regarding the *sefirot* including general principles such as those on the left side corresponding to the left brain, those on the right side corresponding to the right brain, those above relating more to the nonphysical world, and those below relating more to the physical world. However, at the same time we have probably said far less about the *sefirot* than most books on *Kabbalah*, and there is a reason for that. Namely, in this short work we are endeavoring to cover the essentials of Jewish mysticism, and no more than what I've already said about the *sefirot* is essential, in my opinion. The truth is that, in spite of what some people may think, the *sefirot* are not the most important topic in the *Zohar*. Instead, as we'll see in the next section, the most important message of the *Zohar* is one about the unity and oneness of all things. And as I see it, people often switch their focus to the *sefirot*, instead, simply because they fail to grasp the *Zohar's* real message. In that respect, one might even think of discussions of the *sefirot* as a distraction from what is really important, and this may be why the *Zohar* never directly uses the term *sefirot* in its discussions. I suspect also that the *Zohar* doesn't want us to be too distracted by doctrines that may only delay the realization of *Oneness*. Consequently, focus on what is permanent and enduring, and not on what is temporary and only fleeting.

## ONENESS IN THE ZOHAR

A constant theme throughout the *Zohar* is that of the oneness of all things. Initially, the *Zohar* proposes that there exists both a disclosed world and an undisclosed world. For example, the unpronounced *God* name *yud-hey-vav-hey* often represents the hidden realm while *Elohim*, which often represents a revealed *God* of action and attributes, represents the known world. Ultimately, though, the *Zohar* stresses that TETRAGRAMMATON (*yud-hey-vav-hey*) and *Elohim* are one and the same, and the undisclosed and the disclosed realities are all the same. Also, when “I” is connected with the unobserved observer, then it, too, represents the unknowable, and the *Zohar* considers this realization to be the whole point of creation. And lastly, this is hinted at the beginning of *Torah* where the *Zohar* I:7b interprets *bereshit* (In the beginning) as being composed of the letter *bet* which has a numerical value of 2 and *reshit* which means *beginning*. Thus, the *Zohar* says that the single *beginning* following the duality of 2 (*bet*) suggests that what appears to be duality is really unity. When this is realized, the “other side” vanishes.

*“When it came to the lower creation, it gave a name to the creator, who was now discoverable, and said: “Elohim created the heavens and the earth.” Thus the first, which is the higher, remains shrouded in mystery, while the lower is disclosed, so that the work of the Holy One, blessed be He, should be ever both hidden and disclosed. Similarly, the holy name is also, in the esoteric doctrine, both hidden and disclosed.”*  
(*Zohar* I:39b)

*“That point is called Ani (I) (Leviticus 19:30), and upon it rests the unknown, the Most High, the unrevealed One which is TETRAGRAMMATON (yud-hey-vav-hey), both being one.”*  
(*Zohar* I:6a)

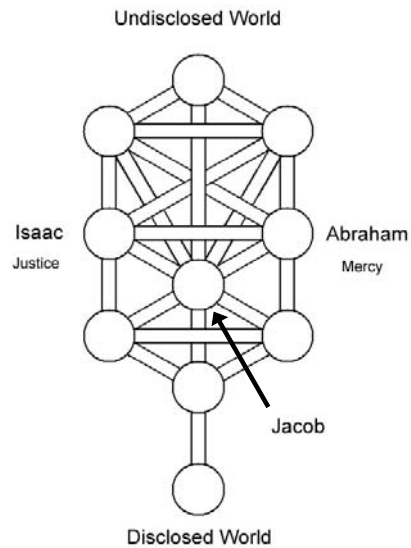
*“Ani (I) is sovereign over this world and of the world to come, all being dependent on it, whereas the other one (aher), the side of impurity, the other side, has rule only in this world and none at all in the other world; and hence, whoever cleaves to that Ani (I) has a portion in this world and in the world to come; but he who cleaves to that aher (the other one) perishes from this world and has no portion in the world to come.”*  
(*Zohar* I:204b)

*“When mankind will universally acknowledge this absolute unity (of Elohim and yud-hey-vav-hey), the evil power (sitra ahra, other side) itself will be removed from the world, and exercise no more influence on earth.”*  
(*Zohar* 12b)

*“The only aim and object of the Holy One in sending man into this world is that he may know and understand that TETRAGRAMMATON is Elohim. This is the sum of the whole mystery of the Faith, of the whole Torah, of all that is above and below, of the Written and Oral Torah, all together forming one unity. The essence of the mystery of Faith is to know that this is a complete Name.”*  
(*Zohar* II:161b-162a)

## THE COMPLETE MAN

In the *Zohar*, terms like *Who* and *Holy Ancient* refer to the unknowable, undisclosed realm while terms like *This*, *These*, *What*, and *Microprosopus* refer to the knowable, disclosed realm. Additionally in the *Zohar*, *Leah* refers to the undisclosed realm since she was buried out of sight at the *Cave of Machpelah* while *Rachel* represents the disclosed world since she was buried by an open road. Also, *Abraham* represents *Mercy* since he was known for his hospitality, and *Isaac* represents *Justice* since he was bound at *Moriah*. In contrast to all of these extremes, though, is *Jacob* who is considered *the complete man*, the one who is perfectly balanced between justice and mercy and between the disclosed and the undisclosed. The goal is not to sit isolated on a mountain top, but to be perfectly balanced at the center like *Jacob*.



*“R. Simeon discoursed on the text: “Who is this (zoth) that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as furnished with banners?” (Song of Songs 6:10). He said: ‘The words “Who” and “This” denote the two worlds: the “Who” symbolizing the most supernal sphere, the unknowable beginning of all things, and “This” a lower sphere, the so-called “lower world”; and these two are indissolubly linked together. ... “Jacob”, the “complete one”, who united the two worlds as one. He united them above, and he united them below ... For the whole longing and the most ardent desire of the lower world (symbolized by Rachel) is to be in all outer seeming like unto the upper world (symbolized by Leah). ... “Who” and “This” are termed “sisters.”’ (Zohar II:126b)*

*“Moreover, all that concerned Leah is kept under a veil, as she typified the upper world, which is veiled and undisclosed; and this is another reason why Leah's death is not divulged like that of Rachel. It is in accordance, too, with this difference between the upper and the lower worlds that Leah was buried away from sight in the cave of Machpelah; whereas Rachel was buried by the open road.” (Zohar I:158a)*

*“R. Simeon, we are told, explained thus the words, “And the middle bar in the midst of the boards shall pass from one end to the other.” ‘The middle bar’, he said, ‘signifies Jacob, the perfect saint, as we have pointed out on another occasion in connection with the characterization of Jacob as “a complete man, dwelling in tents” (Genesis 25:27). It does not say, ‘dwelling in a tent,’ but ‘dwelling in tents,’ which denotes that he unified the two ‘tents’ (of Severity and Mercy). The same implication may be found here: ‘The middle bar in the midst of the boards shall pass from one end to the other’, uniting them.*

*Jacob was perfect in regard to both sides, the Holy Ancient and the Microprosopus, and also to the supernal Grace and the supernal Power, harmonizing the two.’”  
(Zohar II:175b)*

## WHEN YOU BECOME ENLIGHTENED, BUILD!

In *Genesis* 26:22, Isaac names the last well he digs *Rehoboth* which means a “broad place.” This word appears not only in *Genesis* 26:22, but also in *Proverbs* 1:20.

*“Wisdom cries aloud in the street; she utters her voice in the broad places.”*  
(*Proverbs* 1:20)

Throughout *Proverbs*, wisdom refers to *Torah*, the feminine presence of *God* known as the *Shechinah*, and to an enlightenment or knowing that exists prior to creation. However, wisdom also refers to Solomon who was seen as the wisest person to have existed. In this regard, the *Zohar* tells us that after we have attained the level of wisdom or enlightenment equivalent to that of Solomon, we do not retreat to a mountain top to meditate for the rest of our lives. Instead, we build, we create.

*“When a man has penetrated into the mystery of Wisdom and perfected himself therein, then Solomon tells him to “build his house” (Proverbs 24:27), i.e. to cultivate his soul in his body, so as to attain perfection. Hence, when Isaac digged and prepared the well in peace, he called it Rehoboth (wide places), and all was done in the right manner. Happy are the righteous by whose works the Holy One sustains the world.”*  
(*Zohar* I:141b)

This message appears elsewhere in the *Zohar* in a story about a hermit who visits the townsfolk and discovers all sorts of tasty confections made from wheat. The hermit thinks that since he knows of raw wheat, he therefore knows the essence of everything and that that is enough. However, he fails to understand that as long as he resides in this world, he is meant to be active and to create. Thus, if he fails to use his wisdom to create and to build and to make the world a better place, then he has missed the mark.

*“Once there was a man who dwelt among the mountains and was a complete stranger to the ways of townsfolk. He sowed wheat, but knew no better than to consume it in its natural condition. One day he went down into a city, and there a loaf of good bread was placed before him. He asked what it was, and was informed that it was bread and was meant to eat. He ate it and liked it. “What is it made of?” he said. They told him “Wheat”. Later, he was given fine cake kneaded in oil. He tasted it, and again asked: “And this, of what is it made?” The same reply was made as before: “Of wheat”. Finally, he was treated to some royal confectionery, flavored with oil and honey. Once more he asked his question, and obtained the same reply. Then he said: “In sooth, I have all these at my command, because I eat the essential constituent of all, namely wheat.” Thus, through his untutored taste he remained a stranger to all these delicious flavors, and their enjoyment was lost to him. Even so it is with those who stop short at the general principles of knowledge because they are ignorant of the delights which may be derived from the further investigation and application of those principles.’”*  
(*Zohar* II:176a-176b)

Life means movement which means creating. As long as we live, we must co-create.



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