



# Zohar

Selections translated and annotated by  
Moshe Miller

with cross-references and further explanation in footnotes – also the first time this has been done in English.

This volume covers stories which will probably be very familiar to the reader – the creation of the world, the creation of man, the story of Noah and the flood, and the life of Abraham, until the binding of Isaac. These verses also provide insight into some of the passages most representative of the *Zohar's* world-view and present us with a glimpse into the inner-dimensional realm of *Kabbalah*.

I have used the traditional names of the various Biblical books transliterated into English. Thus *Genesis* is rendered as *Bereishit*, *Exodus* as *Shemot*, *Leviticus* as *Vayikra*, *Numbers* as *Bamidbar*, *Deuteronomy* as *Devarim*, *Joshua* as *Yehoshua*, and so on, as listed in the Glossary. I have also transliterated the Hebrew names of the Prophets and Sages, rather than using the anglicized version. Modern Hebrew pronunciation has been used throughout.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family for their encouragement throughout this project, as well as all those who have provided the support that made this work possible, especially my good friends Golan Ben-Oni and Michael Livshin.

*Lag BaOmer*, the day of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's passing, 5760.

Moshe Miller.

## Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his circle

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was one of the great Tannaitic sages who lived during the era of Roman persecution (2<sup>nd</sup> century). He was one of the foremost students of Rabbi Akiva, who had said to him, "Let it be sufficient that I and your Creator know of your powers."<sup>29</sup> He was also one of the teachers of Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi,<sup>30</sup> as mentioned above.

Rabbi Shimon was well-versed in miracles, and was therefore sent by the leaders of the Jewish people to Rome to attempt have the ban on Jewish observance officially lifted by the emperor of the time (Antoninus Pius). The Talmud tells that the daughter of the emperor was possessed by a demon, which Rabbi Shimon exorcised. The ban was subsequently abrogated.<sup>31</sup> However, around the year 149 C. E. Rabbi Shimon himself was forced to flee from the Roman authorities. An acquaintance of his had privately praised the Romans for their efforts in initiating and organizing aspects of commercial and social life in Israel. Rabbi Shimon countered that they had done so merely out of self-interest. Word of this discussion reached the Roman authorities, who declared that Rabbi Shimon be put to death. He fled and hid in a cave for thirteen years together with his son Rabbi Elazar, where they studied Torah day and night. They were miraculously sustained by the fruit of a carob tree and water from a spring until the emperor died and the sentence upon them was annulled.<sup>32</sup>

During his stay in the cave, Rabbi Shimon apparently wrote the main body of the *Zohar*, which was described as "the First *Mishnah*."<sup>33</sup> The remainder of his teachings was passed on orally to his disciples and to their disciples, and they committed many of his teachings to writing, probably over a period of several generations.

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29. *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 6b.

30. *Rambam Intro*. Ibid.

31. *Me'ilah* 17a-b.

32. *Shabbat* 33b.

33. *Chabura Kadmaa* mentioned in *Zohar III*, p. 219a.

## Kabbalah

These secret mystical traditions came to be known as “Kabbalah,” from the Hebrew word *kabeil* – “receive,” signifying the transmission of the esoteric tradition which was received by the leaders of the generation from the leaders of the previous generation. This tradition was interpreted and expounded in both its theoretical and practical aspects.

We have spoken above of *Ma'aseh Bereishit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Another useful (albeit more modern) classification of Kabbalistic wisdom distinguishes between its theoretical and practical aspects, or *Kabbalah Iyunit* (“contemplative Kabbalah”) and *Kabbalah Ma'asit* (“practical Kabbalah”).<sup>34</sup>

### The Contemplative Tradition<sup>35</sup>

*Kabbalah Iyunit*, the category to which the majority of Kabbalistic texts in circulation today belong, sets out to explain the process whereby the created realm came into being as a finite, tangible existence through the will of the infinite Creator. *Kabbalah Iyunit* also analyzes the nature of the relationship between the creation as it proceeds toward the fulfillment of the purpose for which it was created, and the Divine source from which it emerges. On a deeper level, *Kabbalah Iyunit* explores the complex nature of Divine reality itself – in particular, the paradox of God’s simultaneous transcendence and the consequent inability of human thought to grasp Him at all, together with His immanence and active and reactive relationship with Creation and humanity.

An additional aspect of the contemplative tradition is the use of various meditative techniques to ponder the Divine, the manifestations of Divinity and the esoteric underpinnings of the material world. These include the contemplation of Divine Names,

34. See *Tiferet Yisrael's* commentary to the *mishnah* in *Chagiga* op. cit.

35. For a more detailed analysis of the following, see Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh’s teachings, published by *Gal Einai* – [www.inner.org](http://www.inner.org).

of Hebrew letter permutations and of the ways in which the *sefirot* (supernal Divine forces, see below) harmonize and interact. Some ancient forms of Kabbalistic meditation produced a visionary experience of the supernal “chambers” and the angelic beings who occupy them. This is known as the *Heichalot* tradition.

These techniques are also sometimes used as a means of rectifying imperfections in the soul, rather than producing spiritual knowledge or elevation.

### The Practical Tradition

The practical tradition of Kabbalah involves techniques aimed specifically at altering natural states or events – techniques such as the incantation of Divine names or the inscription of such names, or those of the angels, upon amulets. On occasion, these methods have been used to fashion a *golem* (humanoid) or some other creature.<sup>36</sup> However, *Kabbalah ma'asit* is meant to be employed by only the most saintly and responsible of individuals and for no other purpose than the benefit of man or implementation of God's plan in creation.

Even in the era of the great kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the holy Ari (mid 16th century), there are indications of these techniques being abused by unfit practitioners. The holy Ari himself admonished his disciples to avoid the practical arts of Kabbalah, as he deemed such practice unsafe so long as the state of ritual purity necessary for service in the Holy Temple remains unattainable.

In essence, however, there is no clear demarcation separating the contemplative elements of Kabbalah from those aimed at influencing or altering existence. Just as *Kabbalah Iyunit*, through its system of *kavanot* (guided meditations), can influence the configuration of Divine forces impinging upon our reality, so too is

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36. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 65b; R. Yaakov Emden's *Megilat Sefer*, p. 4 and *Mitpachat Sefarim*, p. 45a.

the efficacy of “practical Kabbalah” predicated upon the knowledge of Kabbalistic theory and doctrine.

### Kabbalah and the *Zohar*

*Kabbalah Iyunit* has thus been characterized as a descriptive “anatomy” of the Divine reality.<sup>37</sup> Kabbalah is concerned with the technical identities and “locations” of, and relationships between, the worlds (planes of reality), the *sefirot* (Divine emanations), and the order in which they evolve from one another and affect one another in the vast chain of being known in Kabbalah as the *seder hishtalshelut* – the process by which Divine energy (or “light,” in Kabbalistic terminology) devolves from higher spiritual planes to lower ones, eventually to become manifest in this physical plane of existence.

Of course, the ultimate intention of Kabbalah (including *Kabbalah Iyunit*) is practical – to reveal the Divinity manifested in the *sefirot* on each of the planes of reality, rather than merely describe the emanations themselves. The ultimate intention of kabbalah is to bring the individual, and then the entire world – all the planes of reality – into harmony with the Divine purpose for which they were initially created.

Within this scheme, the *Zohar* is regarded as the primary Kabbalistic text on which much if not most of later kabbalah is based.

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37. The following is a paraphrase and adaptation of translator’s footnote to *On the Essence of Chassidus*, Rabbi M. M. Schneerson, *Kehot*, 1986, transl. by R. H. Greenberg, p. 34.

## - II -

The Structure of the *Zohar*

Although the *Zohar* is generally referred to as a single multi-volume work, it comprises several books which may be further subdivided into approximately twenty main sections.<sup>38</sup> These are:

1) The main bulk of the *Zohar*, sometimes also called *Midrash HaZohar*, written as commentary on sections and passages of the Torah.

2) *Sifra d'Tzniuta*, or "Book of Concealed Matters." This is a commentary on *Bereishit* – the first section (*parsha*) of the Book of Bereishit (*Zohar II*, 176b-179a).

3) *Idra Rabba*, or Greater Assembly. In it Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai reveals the mysteries of the extremely recondite passages of the *Sifra d'Tzniuta* to his disciples (*Zohar III*, 127b-145a).

4) *Idra Zuta*, or Lesser Assembly. Here the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, and the teachings which he revealed just prior to his death, are described. The methodology of the *Zohar's* redaction is also described briefly (*Zohar III*, 287b-296b). We will discuss this point at length shortly.

5) *Idra de-bei Mishkana*, the Assembly in which the section of the Torah dealing with the Tabernacle is discussed (*Zohar II*, 127ab-146b).

6) *Razin d'Razin*, the "Secret of Secrets," or "Mystery of Mysteries" discusses *chochmat ha-partzuf* (the "wisdom of the countenance" – i.e., how to "read" a person's character etc. from his facial features) and *chochmat ha-yad* (palmistry) (*Zohar II*, 70a-78a; *Zohar Chadash* 35b-37c).

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38. This division is somewhat arbitrary; some of the sections may be subsumed under others, or may be further sub-divided. See e.g., Shalom, *Major Trends* p. 159 ff.

7) *Heichalot*, a description of the seven chambers of light perceived by the mystic during prayer, or by a righteous person as his soul passes away from this world and ascends on high (*Zohar I*, 38a-45b and *Zohar II*, 244b-268b).

8) *Matnitin* and *Tosefta*, are brief statement of Kabbalistic principles which are explained more fully in the sections which follow them. (These are spread throughout all three volumes of the *Zohar* and are also found in several places in the *Zohar Chadash*. See below).

9) *Raya Mehemna*, "the Faithful Shepherd," a Kabbalistic exposition of the commandments and prohibitions of the Torah (scattered throughout vols. 2 and 3. The bulk of the *Raya Mehemna* can be found in *Zohar II*, 114a-1121a, III 97-104, 108b-112a, 121b-126a, 215a-259b, 270b-283a).

10) *Sitrei Torah*, "Secrets of the Torah," a mystical interpretation of certain passages of the Torah (found in *Zohar I*, 74a-75b, 76b-80b, 88a-90a, 97a-102a, 108a-111a, 146b-149b<sup>39</sup>).

11) *Midrash HaNe'elam*, "Hidden Midrash," on various sections of the Torah (*Zohar Chadash* 2b-30b; *Zohar I* 97a-140a; *Zohar II*, 4a-5b, 14a-22a) and on *Shir HaShirim* (*Shir HaShirim*)

12) *Sava d'Mishpatim*, the wisdom of an old man who reveals the secrets of reincarnation and transmigration contained in the section of the Torah dealing with the laws governing the Hebrew slave (*Zohar II*, 94b-114a).

13) *Yenuka*, "The Child." The discourse of a young child who reveals mysteries of the Torah (*Zohar III*, 186a-192a).

14) *Rav Metivta*, a description of a journey through the Garden of Eden, and a discourse on the destiny of souls (*Zohar III*, 161b-174a).

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39 . According to some, the section of *Zohar I*, 15a-22b is the *Sitrei Torah* on *Bereishit*).

15) *Zohar* on *Shir HaShirim*, a Kabbalistic exposition of the *Shir HaShirim* (*Zohar Chadash* 61d-75a).

16) *Kav HaMiddah*, "The Measuring Rod." Mystical insights into the *Shema Yisrael* prayer (*Zohar Chadash* 56d-58d)

17) *Sitrei Otiot*, "Mysteries of the Letters." An exposition of the secrets of the Hebrew alphabet (*Zohar Chadash* 1-9).

18) *Tikkunei Zohar* and addenda. Discussing seventy permutations of the first word of the Torah – *Bereishit*, and commentaries on various other sections of Scripture.

19) *Zohar Chadash*, commentary on the Torah and on *Shir HaShirim*, *Ruth*, *Eichah* (Lamentations). The section on *Shir HaShirim* is actually part of the *Midrash HaNe'elam*.

## – III –

Mystical concepts in the *Zohar*

## The Oneness of God

There is One Infinite Creator, the Cause of causes and the Producer of effects. He is not one in a numerical sense – since He is not subject to change, definition or multiplicity – but rather in the following figurative sense: The number one signifies an independent unit and is the basis of all numbers, and in this sense contains all numbers in potential; it is also actually contained in all numbers. Similarly, the Creator is actually within everything, and everything is within Him, in a state of potential. And He is the Beginning and Cause of everything. We attribute these qualities to the Creator, since He does not change – one cannot add or subtract from Him.

Moreover, His existence is necessary existence (i.e. it is not contingent upon anything else), just like the number one is a necessary for the existence of any other (whole) number. If the number one would cease to be, every other number would also cease to exist. However, if other numbers disappeared, one would continue to exist. These are properties of the number one. Similar qualities apply to the Creator. He brings into being, creates everything, and sustains the existence of everything. Even if the act ceases to be, the One who acted remains. Since His existence is not contingent upon the existence of anything else; were they to cease existing, His existence would continue, for He is completely independent of anything else.<sup>40</sup>

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40. *Or Ne'erav*, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, part 6.

### The *Or Ein Sof*

Prior to creation, there was only the infinite revelation of God which filled all existence. This is called the *Or Ein Sof* – the Infinite Light – which is not God Himself, only His Infinite Revelation of Himself. Within this infinite revelation, limited beings could not possibly exist. Accordingly, there was a progressive lessening and constricting of the *Or Ein Sof*, making room for limited existence.

This progressive constriction, called *tzimtzum*,<sup>41</sup> brought about various planes of reality – called in Kabbalah the five worlds. Each “world” is a certain level of concealment of Godliness, of the *Or Ein Sof*. From highest to lowest (i.e. from greater to lesser revelation of the *Or Ein Sof*) they are: The world of *Adam Kadmon* which is the primordial world, or the first level of somewhat finite revelation; the world of *Atzilut*; the world of *Beriah*; the world of *Yetzirah*; and the world of *Asiyah*. The entire physical universe is the lowest aspect of the world of *Asiyah*. In each of the worlds there is an increasingly dim revelation of the Infinite light as it descends further and further and becomes more and more concealed. It is important to note that these worlds do not occupy different geographical places. They are not geographical at all, but descending planes of reality.

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41. The concept of *tzimtzum* is essentially Lurianic. However, it is based on an abstruse section of the *Zohar* (cf. *Zohar Chadash, Midrash Hene'elam, Bereishit*, מאמר יקו המים).

## The Planes of Reality – the Worlds

### *Adam Kadmon*

The highest of the five worlds is called *Adam Kadmon*. “*Adam*” means “in the likeness of,” or “in the image of,” from the word דומה (*domeh*) in Hebrew. And “*Kadmon*” means primordial, or primary. So, *Adam Kadmon* is the primordial world which is “in the likeness of” the Infinite Light which preceded it and which was concealed in the process of creation. This means that even though *Adam Kadmon* is a world, that is to say it comes into being through the concealment of the Infinite Light; nevertheless, it is such an elevated plane of reality that it is “in the likeness of” the Infinite Light, the *Or Ein Sof*, which precedes (*kadam*) the world of *Adam Kadmon*.

Thus, although the world of *Adam Kadmon* is a world, it is a level so sublime, pure, and transcendent that it is almost imperceptible. It cleaves to and mirrors the original *Or Ein Sof*.

In Kabbalah the world of *Adam Kadmon* represents the transcendent will of God. The desire that God has that there should be a creation, and what kind of creation it will be are planned out in one broad, all-encompassing overview, without separation into specific details. This is called the *machshava kedumah*, or “primordial thought” of *Adam Kadmon*. The primordial thought functions as the blueprint for all of creation.

In the world of *Adam Kadmon* everything is seen in one broad overview, but the exact details are not yet separated and ordered into the categories of reality. All the details of creation, from the beginning of space to the end of space, and from the beginning of time to the end of time – are all superimposed in this one thought, for in *Adam Kadmon* there is no concept of space and time whatsoever. There is as yet no inside and no outside, no up and no

down, no before and no after. There is only a potential for these limitations. Everything is undefined, unified, and simultaneous. Here lies the root and source of all the other planes of reality which descend from *Adam Kadmon*.

It is clear that the succeeding levels of creation, i.e. the series of worlds which descend from *Adam Kadmon*, particularly the lowest world, cannot possibly exist within the parameters of the existence of *Adam Kadmon*. Everything in *Adam Kadmon* is undefined, unified, and simultaneous, superimposed in a single primordial thought, which contradicts the very idea of worlds in the sense that we understand them, as limited being which presupposes separation and division. Subjectively, in terms of our awareness of God, the world of *Adam Kadmon* parallels the highest source of consciousness in man. It is the awareness of total unity with the Infinite Light.

The first step in bringing about the separation and division necessary for creating the lower worlds, is by "breaking" the unity of the light as it is in *Adam Kadmon*. As the light descends from *Adam Kadmon*, it breaks up into ten individual qualities or attributes (*sefirot*, *sefirah* in the singular), which act as separate independent points of light. Each of these points is an extremely powerful concentration of light as it descends from *Adam Kadmon*. These are called the *sefirot* of *Tohu*, which means chaos or disorder. The world of *Tohu* is not included in the scheme of the five worlds mentioned previously, by virtue of the fact that it shattered and does not exist as a stable plane of reality.

It will be explained later that *sefirot* generally constitute the inner structure of each of the worlds, somewhat like the bones give shape and form to the body. However, in *Tohu* this is precisely what is absent. The *sefirot* of *Tohu* are absolutely independent of each other, and form no inter-relationships with each other. Thus there is no order and no structure. Moreover, each *sefirah* in *Tohu* is the manifestation of one absolute and quintessential aspect of the light of *Adam Kadmon*, and therefore it does not interact with the

other *sefirot*, since they have nothing in common. A consequence of this lack of interaction is that none of the *sefirot* of *Tohu* are able to limit the activity and expansion of any of the other *sefirot* to a level in which all the *sefirot* can function together. Therefore none of the *sefirot* can endure the activity of any of the other *sefirot*. This results in the disintegration, or “shattering” of the *sefirot* of *Tohu*. Scripture hints at this process in describing the succeeding kings of Edom: “These are the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before any king ruled over the Israelites [representing the rectification of *Tohu* as will be explained shortly]. Bela son of Beor became king. . . . died and was succeeded as king by Yoav. . . . Yoav died, and he was succeeded as king by Chusham. . . . Chusham died, and he was succeeded. . . . etc.” (*Bereishit* 36:31-39). Rabbi Yitzchak Luria explains that this refers to the *sefirot* of *Tohu*, each of which rules exclusively, and then shatters and “dies”.

Nevertheless, the shattering of the *sefirot* of *Tohu* is no coincidence, nor does it signify a flaw in the creative process. On the contrary, it serves a very specific and important purpose, which is to bring about a state of separation or partition of the light into distinct qualities and attributes, and hence introduce diversity in creation. However, since the ultimate purpose of creation is not to remain in a state of separation and diversity, but to achieve unity and harmony, the separateness brought about by the shattering of *Tohu* is rectified in *Tikkun* (rectification, restitution, or reformation), which signifies the synthesis and re-unification of the diversity and fragmentation introduced by the shattering of the vessels of *Tohu*. The nature and specifics of the rectification that takes place in *Tikkun* will be discussed more fully below.

### *Atzilut*

The next plane of reality, the highest and most perfected level of *Tikkun*, is called the world of *Atzilut*, the world of emanation. The word "*Atzilut*" in Hebrew derives from the word אצל meaning "close to" or "near," for the world of *Atzilut* is also "close to" the Infinite Light, even though it is not united and identified with it to it to the same degree as the world of *Adam Kadmon*.

The word "*Atzilut*" also means "to set aside," or "take from" and to "draw down," for the light of the world of *Atzilut* is, so to speak, taken from and drawn down from the world above it, the world of *Adam Kadmon*. But is it already a step lower.

At every stage of devolution of the *Or Ein Sof* an additional factor of limitation is added. The dimension and limitation that is added in the world of *Atzilut* is the aspect of inner structure. Whereas everything in *Adam Kadmon* is unstructured and is so tightly bound together that it is impossible to distinguish top and bottom, inside and outside, beginning and end; in *Atzilut* the dimension of internal structure is added. In fact, the entire concept of internalization, of immanence – as opposed to transcendence – is first evident in the world of *Atzilut*.

*Atzilut* is thus the first plane or world of immanence, of structure. In the world of *Atzilut* there is a distinction between lights and vessels – called *orot* and *kelim*. This is not a **separation** between the lights and vessels, for the lights and vessels of *Atzilut* are integrally bound up with each other. But nevertheless there is a distinction between them. One aspect is recognizable as light and another is recognizable as the vessels which contain and limit the light.

A simple analogy could be used: in an initial flash of insight, the "eureka" of sudden inspiration, one has not yet had the time to analyze and interpret the original flash of insight, and sort it into

the appropriate categories of thought and understanding. The inspirational idea is felt, it is present, and the potential to analyze and interpret and understand the inspiration is in some way included in the inspiration, but it hasn't been conceptualized yet. In our analogy, the world of *Atzilut* corresponds to the structuring of the idea, and the process of understanding it, or, in more technical language, this is the forming of vessels to contain the original unformed light. Obviously, how much light is revealed depends on the capability of the vessels to receive it, just as the degree to which a person understands an idea is dependent on his intellectual capabilities. And so, the original idea (an analogy for the light), and the understanding of it (an analogy for the vessels), are integrally connected – for the idea is grasped only according to the level of understanding. The light fits the vessel perfectly. But they are, nevertheless, two distinct things. It could be that the person doesn't understand the idea. Accordingly, what he doesn't understand remains in a transcendent state, beyond his intellectual capabilities. The idea is grasped (i.e., internalized or made immanent) only according to the ability of the person to understand. The light is grasped (i.e., internalized or made immanent) only according to the ability of the vessels to receive it. In other words, the quality of light drawn down corresponds directly to, and is dependent on, the receptivity of the vessels. In the world of *Atzilut* the correlation between lights and vessels is about as perfect as it can be without the vessels actually disappearing, as they do in *Adam Kadmon*. The vessels in *Atzilut* exist – but they are nullified to the light.

This is how we would define the world of *Atzilut* – there is internal structure, and the light becomes immanent; i.e. the light drawn down from above becomes structured and ordered. In our analogy – the idea becomes understood perfectly.

This is why the world of *Atzilut* is called the world of *tikkun*, which means rectification and order. This is because the light becomes ordered and structured according to the capability of the vessels to receive it. The vessels of *Atzilut* are as capable of

receiving light as vessels can be before disappearing into oblivion. Thus it follows that structure in the world of *Atzilut* is neither a hindrance to, nor an obscuring of the light, as it is in the lower worlds. In this sense, the world of *Atzilut* is still a world of non-being, a world of thought, since the vessels are nullified to the light.

This concept of structure will be explained further when we discuss the *sefirot*, the emanated lights and vessels below. And we will explain later that actual existence comes about through the vessels, not through the lights.

### *Beriah*

The next plane of reality, the next level down, is called the world of *Beriah*, the world of creation. It is a tremendous step down from the world of *Atzilut*.

*Beriah*, or creation, implies limited reality, or bringing into being a limited existence. The dimension, the limitation, which is added by the descent of the light into the world of *Beriah* is the very concept of "being," as opposed to the "nothingness" of *Atzilut*. The world of *Atzilut* is a world of non-being, because the structuring of the light by the vessels is not a hindrance or an obscuring of the light, as it is in the world of *Beriah*. In the world of *Beriah*, however, the vessels begin to obscure the light and thereby create limited being. This can be understood by way of an analogy: if you were to go out on a very bright day – so bright that you would not be able to see anything if you kept your eyes wide open, so that in order to see you have to almost close your eyes. But you still can't see properly, even with your eyes half closed – you can only make out vague shapes. So you put on a pair of sunglasses. Now you can see better – you can see things clearly. This is like the world of *Beriah* – the clear form and existence of things only becomes apparent when the light is sufficiently dimmed and obscured. Of course the analogy is imperfect since the objects

which one sees with sunglasses were always separate, individual objects – which is not entirely true in the world of *Atzilut*.

The previous analogy we used, that of understanding a thought, can be used here, too. But here, in the world of *Beriah*, we move one step lower. Now we talk about explaining the thought to another person. And between the way you understand something and your ability to explain it to someone else, there is a tremendous gap. A story which is told about Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, better known as the Arizal,<sup>42</sup> one of the greatest kabbalistic masters who ever lived, will help us understand this. One day – a Sabbath afternoon – the Arizal fell asleep. One of his students, Rabbi Chaim Vital, saw that his master's lips were moving and when the master woke up he asked him, "what were you dreaming about?" The Arizal answered him, "I ascended to the supernal academy, and there I heard an explanation of the story of Balak and Bilaam. But what I saw in that moment would take me eighty years to explain.

Now, as yet, in the world of *Beriah*, we are not even talking about actually explaining an idea to another person. We are still talking about planning in one's mind **how** one would explain it to another person before actually doing so. In the world of *Atzilut*, the structuring of the original flash of inspiration, the original idea, was only in one's own understanding. And your grasp of the idea is proportionate to your own ability to comprehend. In the world of *Beriah*, there is an additional factor. The teacher who wants to explain an idea to his student now has to measure out the capability of his student to understand, and the teacher has to tone down and limit the idea accordingly. In fact, although for his own understanding it is not necessary for him to break the idea down into various simpler components, for the understanding of his student he must do so. For the student is, as yet, unable to grasp a vast complexity of ideas all at once. First he needs to understand all of its simpler components, one by one, until he is ready to piece

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42. An Acronym for *Adoneinu* (our Master) Rabbi Isaac, *zichrono livrachta* (may his memory be a blessing).

together the entire idea. So in order for the teacher to communicate his ideas to his students, he must break down and simplify the original idea, as it is in his understanding, so that it can be grasped by someone with lesser capabilities.

Another definition of the word *beriah* in Hebrew signifies "outside of." This implies a new level of separation – it is considered to be outside of the realm of the Infinite Light. That is to say that the Infinite Light, the *Or Ein Sof*, is concealed to such an extent that this plane of reality is considered as separated from the *Or Ein Sof*, even though, as we pointed out before, there is no place devoid of the *Or Ein Sof*. An analogy is used in Kabbalah to explain the relationship between *Beriah* and *Atzilut*. The light of *Atzilut* is like the light of a candle in a room. And the light of *Beriah* is like the light of the candle as it is seen on the other side of a curtain which closes off the room.

In a subjective sense, the awareness of separation implies that one is aware of one's existence as a separate (albeit dependent) entity.

### *Yetzirah*

The next plane of reality, the next world down, is called the world of *Yetzirah*, the world of formation. The limitation that is added by the descent into the world of *Yetzirah* is that of dimension itself. Formation is essentially a spatial concept, and Kabbalah also discusses the nature of space. It is important to know that the Kabbalah views time and space as created conditions, and not as intrinsic qualities, as will be discussed shortly. That is to say, until the descent of the light to the world of *Yetzirah*, the light is not limited by dimension. And even in the world of *Yetzirah* dimension is still spiritual and has not yet become the physical limitations of space.

Physical space has six dimensions which limit and define it. These are: above and below, right (south) and left (north), in front

(east) and behind (west). In Kabbalah each of the directions derives from a spiritual quality, one of the six dimensions of the world of *Yetzirah*, i.e. the spiritual dimension or quality of the world of *Yetzirah* devolves in the world of *Asiyah* into actual spatial dimension. These six dimensions as they are in the world of *Yetzirah* are called the six *middot*, or the six *sefirot* which are revealed primarily in that world. The word *middah* in Hebrew means dimension, limitation, measurement. This is the primary characteristic of the world of *Yetzirah*; that light which descends to that world is limited and measured.

One of the characteristics of dimension or measurement is that it requires at least two reference points – where something starts and where it ends. This is because the world of *Yetzirah* is the first plane of existence where polarity and duality (the opposite of unity and oneness) come into being. Thus, here is the beginning of relationship, i.e. where each thing is defined in reference to something else, rather than in terms of its own intrinsic qualities. However, this duality is still spiritual, and therefore the dimensions of the world of *Yetzirah* are beyond the limitations of **physical** space. When the surface reality of the world is stripped away, the inner dimension is seen.

Spatial dimension in the world of *Yetzirah* can be understood in the following way: “Above” is the active reaching out of light and life force (analogous to sunlight streaming down from above), which descend to the vessels which are waiting and ready to receive them (to continue the analogy – like plants or trees which absorb the sunlight). “Below” is the receiving by the vessels. The more light the vessels receive, the more they expand and grow (south, toward the path of the sun, toward the light), and consequently, the more elevated they become (advance toward the origin of the light). Conversely, if the vessels do not receive light from above, being too immature and constricted, or because something obstructs the light and prevents it from reaching the vessels, they contract. They do not grow, and they may even face

away from the sun and the source of light, and retreat, like a plant shriveling and dying in our analogy. This is the inner dimension of physical space. If we could watch this process we would not see merely the surface of things but their inner dynamic processes.

In the analogy we used earlier, if the original idea and its expansion in understanding represents the world of *Atzilut*, and thinking how to explain the idea to another person represents the world of *Beriah*; then the actual explanation of the idea to another person represents the world of *Yetzirah*. In explaining an idea to someone else, there is bound to be a limit as to how much of your understanding you can transmit in speech. Some have more success at this than others, but even the best teacher cannot communicate his own exact understanding to his student. The student has to work on this himself. Thus, speech is much more limited than thought. So too, the descent of the light into the world of *Yetzirah* defines and limits the light so that it can be absorbed by the lower level vessels of the world of *Asiyah*. In so doing the light becomes much more hidden and much more limited. In this way each vessel becomes separated from the other, because each receives the light and absorbs and expresses it in a different way. Thus there is division and diversity.

### ***Asiyah* and the Physical World**

The most limiting feature of all is the limitation of time. The limitation of time means that one object cannot be here and somewhere else simultaneously. Moreover, the concept of time is bound up with change. This means that when one thing ceases to be and another thing begins to be, a change has occurred. Change can only take place where the unity and infinity of God are hidden, where the continuity of being is not evident.

Time is created from the process of the extension and retraction of the light and life force as it reaches out to the vessels below and

returns to its original place. The “gap” between the reaching and returning of the light and life-force, as it pulsates continuously from above, creates time. From moment to moment the light and life force is extended downward, and then retracted, returning to its original place. That which it activated or vitalized “dies,” so to speak, as soon as the life force is withdrawn, and then when it reaches down once again, it creates a new being. This change is the origin of time, for time is a measure of change. This process is analogous to a motion picture. Light shining through the constantly changing frames of the strip of film appear to create a continuous scene. But in reality each frame in the strip of film is different from, and separated from the previous one – it is only because the movement of the frames through the projector is fast enough for the human eye to be unaware that these are separate frames. Thus the scene appears to the eye to be continuous. So too is it with the pulsating of the life-force into the physical world – the “gap” between one pulse and the next is so minute, that the scene appears to be continuous.

This reaching out and returning, or pulsating, of the life force from above is mirrored in the advance and retreat of the life-force below. The pulse which you can feel in your wrist and the heart-beat which you can hear is the result of this process. Each time you feel the thump of your pulse or your heart-beat, it indicates that a different “permutation” of the light and life-force is enlivening you, and therefore you change from moment to moment.

In Kabbalah, this continuous pulsation or fluctuation is manifested in the world of *Asiyah*, or the world of action. The essence of the world of *Asiyah* is action. The story of creation concludes with the words “that God made to do [or to rectify]”. The word *la’asot*, to do, is derived from the same word as *Asiyah* – action. This world is created for the sake of action, which means rectification. The just about perfect rectification of the world of *Atzilut* needs to be drawn down to this world too. This world is created “incomplete.” What it is “lacking” is the revelation of

Godliness that is found to greater or lesser extent in all the other worlds or planes of reality, and the rectification of this world is the revelation of Godliness in this world through the actions of man. The Jewish sages therefore recommend that every person say to himself "for me the world was created."<sup>43</sup> This does not mean one should regard oneself as the center of the universe and everything was created to serve one's ego. Quite the contrary. "For me the concealment of God was created," in order that I should reveal Godliness in this world and thereby rectify the world. This is the task God set us – to reveal the inner dimensions, the Godliness, of this world (and the other worlds). Thus, the world of *Asiyah*, the world of action, is really the ultimate purpose of creation. For here, more than anywhere else, Godliness is hidden. And God can be revealed here just as much as in the world of *Atzilut* and even more so, as will be explained later on.

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43. *Sanhedrin* 37a.

## The Structure of Reality – the *Sefirot*

In the previous section we discussed the various planes of reality which are called the five worlds. We explained that the higher the world or plane of reality, the greater the unity and infinity of God that is revealed or manifested there. Nevertheless, since all worlds are the result of a constriction and lessening of the Infinite Light (the *Or Ein Sof*), they are all, in one sense or another, limited and defined. That is to say, the revelation of God is less or more limited, depending on which world is referred to. Therefore the word for “world” in Hebrew, “*olam*,” is etymologically related to the word “*he’elem*,” meaning hiddenness, or concealment – referring to the concealment of God’s Infinite Light, so that in the higher worlds the Infinite Light is more revealed, and in the lower worlds the Infinite Light is less revealed.

The light is revealed in each world by what Kabbalah calls the *sefirot*. These are Divine emanations by which God reveals Himself to man, and by which He conducts the worlds, as the introduction to the *Zohar* states, “You are He who brings forth ten. . . . *sefirot*.”

The *sefirot* are not distinct entities, or intermediaries, which would imply duality or plurality in the Infinite Light or in God. Quite the contrary – they are nothing other than various phases and levels of God’s revealing Himself to man. Thus the *sefirot* are called *bli-mah*, without substance, in *Sefer Yetzirah*. The *sefirot* constitute the inner structure of each of the worlds, somewhat like the bones give shape and form to the human body. How, and to what degree, the *sefirot* reveal the Infinite Light in each world gives each particular world, each plane of reality, its individual character. Furthermore, the *sefirot* account for the dynamic interactions that take place in each of the worlds.

Now, even though the *sefirot* in all of the worlds bear the same names, it is nevertheless self-understood that the quality and power

delving deeper and deeper into the essence of these divine manifestations, one can come to some understanding of the inner structure of the increasingly elevated planes of reality, and to ever-increasing awareness of God's revelation of Himself to man through the attributes which He emanates.

The ten *sefirot* are called *keter*, *chochmah*, *binah*, *chesed*, *gevurah*, *tiferet*, *netzach*, *hod*, *yesod*, and *malchut*. In certain Kabbalistic texts an additional *sefirah* is mentioned. In reality, there are only ten *sefirot*, not eleven. However, sometimes *keter* is counted in the ten, and at other times *da'at* is counted instead of *keter*,<sup>45</sup> depending on whether we are looking at them from the point of view of the Creator, or from the point of view of the created. In the process of creation, in which the *sefirot* are emanated from above, i.e. from God to the physical world, *keter* is counted, and not *da'at*, since it is the first emanation, the manifestation of the Divine Will, whence all other emanations derive, as will be explained. But when the process is from below to above, man elevating himself from level to level in his desire to cleave to God, *da'at* is counted and not *keter*, since the latter is a level so sublime that it is in general beyond the scope of the average individual's ability to internalize or comprehend.<sup>46</sup> In the discussion of the *sefirot*, *keter* will be discussed, and in the discussion of the soul powers, *da'at* will be discussed.

### ***Keter***

The first and highest *sefirah* then is called *keter* or "crown," in which there are two main aspects – the inner aspect of *keter*, which is called *atik* or *atik yomin*, and the outer aspect, called *arich anpin*. Due to its loftiness *atik yomin* is sometimes referred to as *temira d'chol temirin* (the most concealed of all)<sup>47</sup> and as *ayin*

45. *Eit: Chaim* 25b.

46. See *Hadrat Melech* on *Patach Eliyahu* (Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar*).

47. *Zohar I*, 49a, 147a; *vol. II*, 234b.

(nothingness).<sup>48</sup> The infinite light of *Or Ein Sof* illuminates *atik* without any separation.<sup>49</sup> This aspect is the source of the Torah, which is referred to as "God's delight,"<sup>50</sup> and is revealed primarily in the esoteric teachings of the Torah, i.e. in kabbalah.<sup>51</sup>

*Arich Anpin* is essentially the expression of God's will. It is also the expression of God's purpose in emanating that plane of reality. In other words, the outer aspect of the *keter* of *Atzilut* is the expression of God's will and purpose in emanating *Atzilut*, and the outer aspect of the *keter* of *Beriah* is the expression of God's will and purpose in the creation of *Beriah*, and so on.

This can be understood better by comparing this *sefirah* to certain aspects of a human being.<sup>52</sup> The will of a human being is the most all-encompassing power of his soul, since it gives rise to and motivates all of the other powers of the soul. If a person has a will for something he begins to invent ways in which to achieve his will, his goal. Once he has discovered a theoretical method of achieving his goal he starts to plan out how to achieve this in reality, etc. From there he initiates the action. As long as he has not yet achieved his desire his will drives him onwards until he does so.

Similarly, *keter* contains within it the ultimate goal which it seeks to attain. The goal or the aim of every plane of reality is to reveal the *Or Ein Sof*, the Infinite Light appropriate to that plane of reality. Thus *keter* contains within itself the end-point which it desires to achieve. And when it has achieved that desired end-point, it ceases to drive further. This is the meaning of the statement of the Sages in *Sefer Yetzirah* (1:7), "the end is wedged in the beginning, and the beginning is wedged in the end." *Keter* is wedged in the lowest *sefirah*, *malchut* – for the purpose of the

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48. *Zohar III*, 256b.

49. See *Eitz Chaim, sha'ar 16*, chap. 1.

50. *Proverbs* 8:30; *Zohar I*, 5a, 47a; *vol. II*, 93b; *vol. III*, 35b, 67b.

51. *Zohar III*, 166b.

52. As will be explained below in the section titled "Powers of the Soul."

emanation of the *sefirot* which is expressed in *Keter* – is to unfold the level of Infinite Light appropriate for that plane of reality, all the way through the various stages of development (i.e. through the various *sefirot*) to the final revelation and manifestation of that light in the *sefirah* of *malchut*. The will of *keter* drives onward until it achieves its final aim. And *malchut* is wedged in the highest *sefirah*, *keter*, for it is the end-point which fulfills the purpose of the entire emanation.

Thus *keter* is the generator and activator of all the other *sefirot*. For in order to achieve the end-point – the fulfillment of the will of the Creator in bringing into being that plane of reality – the entire range of emanation from its highest point to its lowest is emanated and generated and unfolded from *keter* until the desired goal (the revelation of the Infinite Light) is achieved.

But, just as a person's will is transcendent, it envelops all of him, and there is no organ or limb which is the seat of the will. Rather his will envelops all of his organs and limbs and transcends them. So too, the will and purpose of the Creator in producing that plane of reality is transcendent and envelops the entire inner structure of that world. There is no level of revelation, and no level of manifestation which is outside of the Will of God as manifested in the *keter* of that world. Thus *keter* is the all-encompassing and transcendent *sefirah* of every world and is generally beyond human comprehension. The process of immanent, or in-dwelling, and comprehensible revelation of the Infinite Light appropriate for that plane of reality only begins with the next *sefirah*, the *sefirah* of *chochmah*.

### *Chochmah*

The *sefirah* of *chochmah* may be explained in several ways, because it has several aspects, each corresponding to a different relationship of the *sefirah* of *chochmah* to the other *sefirot*:

1) The *Zohar*<sup>53</sup> breaks up the word *chochmah* itself into two words: כּוּחַ (*koach*) and מַה (*mah*). *Koach* means “potential,” and “*mah*” means “what is.” Thus *chochmah* means “the potential of what is,” or, “the potential to be.” This aspect of *chochmah* describes the state of *chochmah* in relation to the *sefirah* of *keter*. As *chochmah* emanates from *keter*, the first dawning of the *Or Ein Sof*, it “appears” in an obscure and undefined state. It is only potential being. It is virtually non-being. Thus the verse states, “and *chochmah* emerges from nothingness” (*Job* 28:12).<sup>54</sup> In other words it is in a state of constant flux between being and non-being, between revelation, the first point of immanent being, and non-revelation as it returns to its state of potential and merges in its source in *keter*. *Chochmah* flashes in and out of existence. The light of *Ein Sof* thus becomes unified in the world of *Atzilut* through clothing itself first in the *sefirah* of *chochmah*.<sup>55</sup>

2) The second aspect of the *sefirah* of *chochmah* is that it is the first of the immanent or in-dwelling *sefirot*. This is why it is called the beginning. One of the verses in *Tehillim* (111:10) states ראשית חכמה, *reishit chochmah* – *chochmah* is the first, the head, that is to say the first of the immanent *sefirot*, the beginning and root of immanent being. Whereas *keter* is the all-encompassing *sefirah*, **from which** all other *sefirot* are generated, *chochmah* is the first *sefirah* to be generated.

3) The third aspect of *chochmah* is that it is called the life-force of all creation. The account of the creation at the beginning of the book of *Bereishit* (Genesis) begins with the word “*Bereishit*” – “in the beginning.” One of the Aramaic translations of the Torah, *Targum Yonatan* renders the word *Bereishit* as *b'chuchmata* – “with *chochmah*,” for this *sefirah* is also the instrument of creation.

53. Vol. III, 235b, in *Raya Mehemna; Tikkunei Zohar* p. 111a, 112b.

54. The literal reading of the text is: “From where shall wisdom be found?” However, this is the interpretation given in *kabbalah*. See *Zohar II*, 121a, *Zohar III*, 290a, commentaries

55. Note in *Tanya* chap. 35 (p. 44b) regarding a passage in *Eitz Chaim*.

That is to say, it permeates all of creation. This is the meaning of the verse כולם בכחמה עשית, "You made everything with *chochmah*" (*Tehillim* 104:24). In this sense Scripture refers to *chochmah* as the life-force of all creation (as opposed to *keter* which is the expression of purpose and motivation of all of creation), as in the verse: והחכמה תחיה בעליה, "and *chochmah* enlivens (or vitalizes) all that possess it" (*Kohelet* 7:12). Similarly, ימותו ולא בחכמה, "They will die but not with *chochmah*" (*Iyov* 4:21), that is to say, when they are without *chochmah*. This is the aspect of *chochmah* in its relation to all the other *sefirot*.

Thus, in brief, we could define *chochmah* as the germinal, highly condensed revelation of Godly Light on its highest level of immanence that is the life force of all of creation.

## *Binah*

The word *binah* is related to the word לבנות, (*livnot*) to build. For this is the essential quality of *binah*. The abstract, non-dimensional, incomprehensible point that represents *chochmah* is expanded and built into a three-dimensional structure, sometimes compared to the physical dimensions of length, breadth, and depth. In the context of *sefirot* they signify three aspects of *binah*, each aspect corresponding to a different relationship of the *sefirah* of *binah* to the other *sefirot*.

1) The "depth" of *binah* is that aspect of *binah* which expresses its relationship to its source in *chochmah*. The depth of *binah* derives from *chochmah*. And thus *chochmah* and *binah* together are called "the two beloved friends that never part," for where there is *chochmah*, *binah* invariably follows. The *Zohar*<sup>56</sup> therefore symbolizes *chochmah* and *binah* and their relationship as "the supernal point (*chochmah*) within its palace (*binah*)."

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56. *Zohar* I, 6a.

2) The “breadth” of *binah* signifies the aspect of expansion which is the definitive characteristic of *binah*. In this connection the sages of the Talmud (*Chagiga* 14a) describe *binah* as המבין דבר מתוך דבר (*hameivin davar mitoch davar*) – “understanding one thing from another.” In other words, what is contained within one concept (the word תוך in Hebrew means “within”), in *chochmah*, is expanded into an entire conceptual framework of inter-related ideas in *binah*.

3) The “length” of *binah* describes its relationship to the *sefirot* below it. The extent to which *binah* reaches down in affecting the other *sefirot* is called its “length.” Obviously, the further down *binah* has to reach in order to effect even the lowest *sefirah*, the more powerful it must be in its original state.

Thus, *binah* could be defined as the expansion of the initial point of *chochmah* into a full-blown and comprehensible revelation of the Divine Light.

An analogy is used in Kabbalah to describe the relationship of *keter*, *chochmah* and *binah*: From the great depth of waters – called in Hebrew the *tehom rabbah* – which reside under the earth (this signifies *keter*), a spring of water spurts out. The spring represents *chochmah*. It is connected by hidden channels to the great depth of waters, and the spring is their first revelation. The bubbling spring forms a trickle, and the trickle becomes a stream and the stream becomes a mighty river. The river represents *binah*. The source or depth of the river is the spring of *chochmah*, and corresponds to the power of the outflow from *chochmah*. The breadth of the river is the amount that the river expands over a wide area. The length of the river is the distance from its original source, via many levels and stages (signifying the other *sefirot*), until the river eventually flows into to the sea, which represents *malchut*, as will be explained.

There is another analogy used to explain the relationship of *chochmah* and *binah*. A drop of semen, which potentially contains

the life of hundreds, and even hundreds of thousands of people, is analogous to *chochmah*. And the womb which receives the drop of sperm is analogous to *binah*, which expands and develops and builds that single drop of potential life into a fully developed person with all the necessary limbs and faculties.

A further analogy: Imagine that you are walking in a unfamiliar place on a very dark night. Suddenly, a flash of lightning illuminates the whole area, and for an instant you can see everything with absolute clarity. But, a moment later, the night is just as dark. Now you have to reconstruct what you saw in that momentary flash of lightning, in order to find your way home. The lightning flash is akin to the activity of *chochmah*, which flashes in and out of existence. Reconstructing what it was that was revealed when the darkness was briefly illuminated is akin to the functioning of *binah*.

Again, *binah* is the expansion and extension of the initial point-like revelation of God into a comprehensive system.

The remaining seven *sefirot* are called the seven *middot* (singular: *middah*). The word "*middah*" in Hebrew means a measurement or an amount. This is precisely the function of these seven *sefirot* – to distribute the light and life force of a particular plane of reality, a particular world, according to its proper measure. They are also called in Kabbalah the seven days of Creation, for it is essentially through them that structure of each of the planes of reality is built. If *binah* is analogous to the builder, or to the process of building, as explained previously, then the seven *middot* are analogous to the edifice itself.

Each one of these seven *sefirot* also corresponds to one of the seven days of creation. The *sefirah* of *chesed* corresponds to the first day of creation, the *sefirah* of *gevurah* to the second day, and so on, until the seventh *sefirah*, *malchut*, which corresponds to the Sabbath. The nature of each of these *sefirot* can be understood by

examining the seven days of creation as a paradigm of the activity and interaction of these *sefirot*.

### *Chesed*

The word *chesed* means kindness or benevolence. It denotes the unbounded loving-kindness with which God created the worlds, and with which all of creation is permeated, as the verse explains: עולם חסד יבנה – “The world is built with *chesed*” (*Tehillim* 89:3). Kabbalah explains that kindness was in fact the reason for the creation. Since the “nature” of God, so to speak is absolute benevolence and loving-kindness, He created the worlds so that He would have on whom to bestow His kindness – “It is the nature of He who is good, to do good.”<sup>57</sup>

Light was created on the first day. Light is revelation, as explained previously. This light was infinite, as our Sages say, “The light that was created on the first day shone from one end of creation to the other.” Or, in the language of Kabbalah, “In the beginning, an infinite, uncompounded light filled all of creation.”<sup>58</sup> This is the light of *chesed* which permeates all of creation, and through which all of creation is built.

### *Gevurah*

However, since the *chesed* of God is infinite and unlimited, while the creatures on whom it is intended to be bestowed are finite and therefore unable to absorb infinite kindness and yet remain in physical existence, the attribute of *chesed* is controlled and restrained, or concealed and limited, by the aspect of *gevurah*. *Gevurah* means restrictive power, the power to limit and conceal

57. *Emek HaMelech, sha'ar Sha'ashuei HaMelech*, chap. 1.

58. *Eitz Chaim, Otrot Chaim*, beginning.

the Infinite Light so that each creature can receive according to its capacity. Thus, *gevurah* is also an aspect of God's kindness, for if the outpouring of infinite kindness were to remain unrestricted, finite creatures would become instantly nullified in the infinite revelation of Divine Love. Therefore the *sefirah* of *gevurah* is the manifestation of God's power to restrict and conceal the Light which He emanates, in order that His creatures will be able to receive His loving-kindness according to their capacity.

On the second day of creation, separation of the higher waters from the lower waters was introduced. This is called the firmament (*rakia*) in the Torah. In Kabbalah water signifies kindness, *chesed*. The separating of the waters means that the infinite *chesed* of God, referred to as the higher waters, is separated from the lower waters, signifying finite *chesed* which can permeate creation.

### *Tiferet*

*Tiferet* (from *pe'er* – beauty) represents the harmonious blending of varying colors and forms, producing a work of great beauty.<sup>59</sup> The harmonizing and blending of *chesed* and *gevurah*, so that a proper mixture of the two will result in a bearable revelation of *chesed* to finite created beings is brought about by the attribute of *tiferet*. In other words, *tiferet* is the attribute which blends the benevolent outflow of *chesed* and the restrictive severity of *gevurah* so that each creature will receive its proper measure of Divine Light and life-force. This is why *tiferet* is also called compassion or mercy, for it enables *chesed* and *gevurah* to balance each other so that God's benevolence can be absorbed by the limited world without its ceasing to exist.

On the third day of creation, water and land were separated, and the vegetable kingdom was created. The third day sets a balance between water and land, so that the vegetable kingdom (and thus the animal and human kingdoms also) can be sustained by both of

59. *Tikkunei Zohar*, *tikkun* 70, p. 133b; *Pardes, sha'ar* 8, chap. 17.

them, when there is a proper balance between them, each plant according to its needs.

### *Netzach and Hod*

Whereas *chesed* and *gevurah* signify unbounded loving-kindness, and the limitation and concealment thereof, respectively, so that finite creatures can receive according to their ability; *netzach* and *hod* are the two *sefirot* which define the ability of the **recipient** to receive. In addition they perform together as the "joint distribution committee," which decide how, and in what measure, each recipient will get its due.

Let us give an analogy. A professor wants to teach his student calculus, let us say. Of course, the professor wants to teach his students as much as possible in the shortest possible time, so that the students can go on to other subjects in math (this is the attribute of *chesed*, the desire to give more and more). But the professor is well aware that his students present level of understanding is insufficient to grasp the entire theory of calculus in a single lesson. So he divides up the subject into several lectures, explaining only one section of the theory at a time (this is the attribute of *gevurah*, limiting and dividing the outflow of benevolence). When the professor actually explains the subject, he takes into account the individual abilities and limitations of each of his students, and he explain the subject accordingly (this signifies the functioning of the attributes of *netzach* and *hod*).

On the fourth day of creation the sun and the moon and the stars were created. Even though light was created on the first day, this light was infinite and too sublime to be of use to the finite worlds. Thus on the fourth day, a finite, usable form of light was apportioned. On the fifth day birds and sea-creatures were created, the first recipients of God's benevolence and the first created beings able to fulfill the commandment *pru u'rvu*, be fruitful and multiply.

According to Kabbalah the powers of prophecy and Divine inspiration derive from the *sefirot* of *netzach* and *hod* – for they actually receive the efflux of Godly light.

### *Yesod*

Just as the *sefirah* of *tiferet* harmonizes and balances *chesed* and *gevurah*, so too, *yesod* harmonizes and balances *netzach* and *hod*. However, there is an additional unique aspect of *yesod* – it acts as the **channel** through which *malchut*, the recipient, receives its proper measure of light and life force. In the previous analogy: whereas *netzach* and *hod* distribute the Divine efflux and measure the amount the recipients will receive, and in what way, *yesod* is the actual distribution point. Thus *yesod* functions as the connector between all of the *sefirot* which precede it, and the recipient, *malchut*, below it.

In order for the distribution to reach its intended destination, there must be a proper channel of communication between the giver, *yesod*, and the receiver, *malchut*. To continue with the previous analogy: the distributor (*yesod*), must be able to identify the recipient (*malchut*) in order to match each portion with its intended recipient. This is why *yesod* is also called נחמ – (*emet*) “truth” in Kabbalah. *Yesod* makes sure that the light and life force reaches the proper destination.

But the “identification” process does not only mean that the recipient fulfills the necessary conditions that must be met in order for it to be able to receive. Much more than this, there must be an **internal bond** between *yesod* and *malchut*, between giver and receiver – a bond of love and understanding. *Yesod* arouses the desire to receive in *malchut*, and *malchut* in turn arouses in *yesod* the desire to give. In this way, *yesod* unites itself with *malchut* in complete empathy, so that the “giving” is direct, face to face, and not indirect, back to back, as it were.

Thus, *yesod* could be defined as the divine attribute which joins God to His creation in a bond of empathy and love. This is why the *sefirah* of *Yesod* is also called “*tzaddik*,” as in the verse צדיק יסוד עולם (*tzaddik yesod olam*) “a saint is the foundation of the world” (*Mishlei* 10:25). A *tzaddik*, or saint, arouses mankind to seek God. At the same time he draws down God’s compassion and goodness into the world. Thus he is the foundation of the world.

On the sixth day of creation the animal kingdom was created, and also the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, who were created in the Divine Image. Both animals and man are also told “be fruitful and multiply;” which also means to use God’s benevolent kindness to grow and expand in consciousness of Him. But an additional duty is given to man. Be fruitful and multiply, and rule over the animals and the birds and the fish. In other words, be **over** and above them, and not among them. Transcend your limited nature, transcend that part of yourself which is simply natural, like the animal world, and become the Divine Image in which you were created. The drive to do this is initiated by the power of *yesod*, the *tzaddik*.

### *Malchut*

The tenth and final *sefirah* is called *malchut*. *Malchut* contains two completely opposite qualities, called התנאשות (*hitnasut*) meaning “exaltedness,” and its opposite שפלות (*shiflut*) – “humility.” When we explained the *sefirah* of *keter*, it was pointed out that *keter*, the beginning, is wedged in *malchut* – the end. The reverse is also true – *malchut* is wedged in *keter*. We explained there that this means that the final product, *malchut*, is the original intention of the entire process of emanation. When *malchut* is still contained in the original intention (that is, in *keter*), it is in a state of exaltedness. And when it descends to its place as the last of the *sefirot*, it is in a state of humility. However, it is not the case that *malchut* is in one state or the other; it is in both states simultaneously.

On one hand, *malchut* receives all that it has from the other *sefirot*, and is described in Kabbalah as "having nothing of her own."<sup>60</sup> Thus the *Zohar* compares *malchut* to the moon which has no light of her own;<sup>61</sup> while on the other hand *malchut* is the final revelation of the Divine Light for which the entire process was begun. It was for the purpose of *malchut* that all the *sefirot* were emanated. Thus *malchut* is both the receiver and the consummation of giving.

In a previous analogy, we explained that *keter* was symbolized by the great depths of water hidden under the earth, the *tehom rabbah*. *Chochmah* was symbolized by the well-spring, from which flows a small quantity of pure water, and *binah* was symbolized by a broad and mighty river which begins from its source in the well-spring of *chochmah*. *Malchut* signifies the sea into which the river flows. It is the actualization of the entire revelation which began as a single tiny point of trickling water. Whereas *chochmah* is the potential to be, *malchut* is the actual being, the final manifestation, which was the original intention. It is for this reason that *malchut* is also called "*Shechinah*" – the Divine Indwelling Presence, the immanent revelation of God. And so the sea returns to the *tehom rabbah*, as the final revelation fulfills the original purpose.

The seventh day of creation, the Sabbath day, is therefore a cessation of work. The Sages say, "he who works prior to the Sabbath, will eat on the Sabbath." That is to say, all the six days of creation which precede the Sabbath must do their work if the culmination of creation is to be revealed on the Sabbath day. The *Zohar* (III, 92b) states, "Each day does its work." By fulfilling its function each day's purpose is consummated. Again the *Zohar*<sup>62</sup> expresses this perfectly – "from the Sabbath day all other days become blessed." This applies both retroactively and proactively. As the Torah states at the completion of creation: "And the work was complete. . . . and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified

60. See *Eitz Chaim, sha'ar* 6, ch. 5; *shaa'r* 8, ch. 5.

61. Vol. I, pp. 249b, 251b; vol. II, p. 245b.

62. Vol. III, 144b.

it." Thus the *Zohar* states: "the supernal crown [*keter elyon*] is the crown of kingdom (*keter malchut*)." The first, highest of the Divine emanations, *keter*, is thus linked to the last, *malchut*.

## The Arrangement and Interaction of the *Sefirot*

The *sefirot* represent the various stages of the creative process whereby God generated the progression of created realms which culminated in our finite physical universe. As a coexisting group, the *sefirot* constitute the interacting components of a single metaphysical structure whose imprint can be identified at all levels, and within all aspects, of Creation.

The *sefirot* exist not only as individual qualities, but also (and primarily) in configurations which are depicted in *Kabbalistic* texts as having the structure of the human body, which is called the *tzelem Elokim* (supernal "image of God"). Just like the body, the *sefirot* are arranged in vertical arrays along three parallel axes, each representing a mode of Divine influence within Creation. Hence each *sefirah* is associated with the particular limb or organ that corresponds to its position in the anatomical *sefirotic* structure. This configuration is also referred to in the literature as a *sulam* ("ladder"), or an *eitz* ("tree").

The interaction among the various *sefirot* takes place through a network of connecting *tzinorot* ("channels") which carry the flow of Divine energy throughout Creation. These connections suggest various sub-groupings of the *sefirot*, each reflecting a certain dynamic amongst the *sefirot* which they include. The loftiest triad of *sefirot* identifies comprises *keter*, *chochmah* and *binah* (or alternatively *chochmah*, and *binah* and *da'at*). This sub-grouping

defines a cognitive dynamic; the following triad comprises *chesed*, *gevurah*, and *tiferet* – these are the primary emotions; the final grouping comprises *netzach*, *hod* and *yesod* – the instinctual and pragmatic forces. *Malchut* may be viewed as either an appendage of this last sub-grouping, or as an independent entity receiving and manifesting those energies that precede it.

Another way of dividing the *sefirot* is into *partzufim* (“visages” or “profiles”). A *partzuf* is a metaphorical figure of human likeness, used to represent the expansion of a *sefirah* (or group of *sefirot*) into an independent configuration with ten *sefirot* of its own. According to Kabbalah, the *sefirot* of *keter*, *chochmah*, *binah* and *malchut* each possess two interrelated *partzufim*; whereas the six *sefirot* from *chesed* through *yesod* form their own common and independent pair of *partzufim*.

In the configuration of the *sefirot*, *keter* appears at the top of the middle axis, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the skull.

The *sefirah* of *keter* develops into two *partzufim*. Its outer *partzuf*, is referred to as *Arich Anpin*, and its inner *partzuf* is referred to as *Atik Yomin*.

*Chochmah* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* at the top of the right axis, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the right hemisphere of the brain. In its fully articulated form, *chochmah* possesses two *partzufim*: the higher of these is referred to as *Abba Ila'ah* (“the higher father”), whereas the lower is referred to as *Yisrael Sabba* (“Israel, the Elder”). These two *partzufim* are referred to jointly as *Abba* (“the father”).

*Binah* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* at the top of the left axis, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the left hemisphere of the brain.

In its fully expanded form, *binah* also possesses two *partzufim*: the higher of these is referred to as *Imma Ila'ah* (“the higher mother”), whereas the lower is referred to as *tevunah*

("comprehension"). These two *partzufim* are referred to jointly as *Imma* ("the mother").

The union of *chochmah* and *binah* ("the higher union," in Kabbalah), the "father" and the "mother" (the right and left hemispheres of the brain) is continual, and is referred to in the *Zohar* as "two companions that never separate." This union is necessary for the continual re-creation of the world (beginning with the birth of the seven attributes of the heart, corresponding to the seven days of Creation, from the womb of "mother," *binah*).

*Da'at* is the third and last conscious power of intellect in Creation. Generally, *da'at* is only enumerated among the *sefirot* when *keter* is not, as explained above. This is due to the fact that *da'at* represents the reflection of (the inner dimension of) *keter* itself within the realm of consciousness. Hence *da'at* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* along the middle axis, directly beneath *keter*; and, corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the cerebellum (posterior brain).

In the *Zohar*, *da'at* is referred to as "the key that includes six." The "key" of *da'at* opens all six attributes of the heart (the emotions) and fills them with life-force.

*Chesed* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* along the right axis, directly beneath *chochmah*, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the "right arm."

*Gevurah* is the fifth of the ten *sefirot*, and second of the emotive attributes in Creation. *Gevurah* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* along the left axis, directly beneath *binah*, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the "left arm."

*Tiferet* is the sixth of the ten *sefirot*, and the third of the emotive attributes within Creation. *Tiferet* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* along the middle axis, directly beneath *da'at* (or beneath *keter*, when *da'at* is excluded), and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the upper torso (in particular, the heart).

*Netzach* is the seventh of the ten *sefirot*, and the fourth of the emotive attributes within Creation. It appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* along the right axis, directly beneath *chesed*, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the right leg.

*Hod* is the eighth of the ten *sefirot*, and the fifth of the emotive attributes within Creation. It appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* along the left axis, directly beneath *gevurah*, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the left leg.

The two *sefirot* of *netzach* and *hod* are referred to as "two halves of a single body." This is so because more than with respect to *chesed* and *gevurah* (the right and left arms), *netzach* and *hod* (the right and left legs), can only perform their function in unison – walking together.

*Netzach* and *hod* are also referred to in the *Zohar* as "the scales of justice." *Netzach* merits while *hod* concedes ("acknowledges" or "confesses"). As the two hips of the body they are responsible for the general state of equilibrium of the body.

*Yesod* is the ninth of the ten *sefirot*, and the sixth of the emotive attributes within Creation. *Yesod* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* along the middle axis, directly beneath *tiferet*, and corresponds in the *tzelem Elokim* to the procreative organ (in the male; in the female, to the womb).

The six *sefirot* from *chesed* to *yesod* join and develop to form the *partzuf* of *Zeir Anpin*. *Zeir Anpin* (or *z"ra* in Kabbalistic shorthand) receives its "head" or "brain-power" (the three higher *sefirot* of *chochmah*, *binah* and *da'at*) from the higher *partzufim* of *Abba* and *Imma*.

*Malchut* is the last of the ten *sefirot*, and the final emotive attribute within Creation (or, more precisely, the manifestation of what is contained above it in a potential or latent state, as explained above). *Malchut* appears in the configuration of the *sefirot* at the bottom of the middle axis, directly beneath *yesod*, and corresponds

in the *tzelem Elokim* to the “crown” of the procreative organ (the corona in the male; the labia in the female). *Malchut* also corresponds to the mouth, and is often referred to as “the world of speech,” insofar as the spoken word represents the essential medium of self-expression, allowing one to not only reveal himself to outer reality but to guide and influence that reality as well. Hence, speech allows one to exercise authority and “kingship,” the literal meaning of *malchut*.

*Malchut* also serves as the means for establishing an identification with outer reality. Analogously, exercising kingship requires utmost sensitivity to the needs of the realm which one seeks to rule. Conversely, every individual creation must accept Divine authority, for only then can the ultimate good of the mundane realm be assured.

In its meditation of Divinity, the soul can only perceive and ascend to the higher *sefirot* through the “pane” and portal of *malchut*. “This is the gate to God, the righteous shall enter through it” (Psalms 118:20). In one’s devoted service to God this means receiving upon oneself, in total commitment, “the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.” When this is not done, the result is *galut haShechinah* – the exile of the Divine Presence.

## The Structure of Consciousness – the Soul –

The divine soul is an indivisible essence inseparably bound to God,<sup>63</sup> as the verse states, "For part of God is His People" (*Devarim* 32:9), and as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai states about himself: "My soul is one with Him, as one flame, cleaving to Him."<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, as it emanates from the *Ein Sof* – the Infinite One – eventually to be clothed in the physical body, the soul descends via the five worlds mentioned above, leaving a root in each of the worlds,<sup>65</sup> until it is clothed in a physical body. Thus there are five levels of soul, or levels of God-consciousness, corresponding to the various planes of reality, or levels of Divine revelation/concealment manifested in each of the worlds.<sup>66</sup>

The soul en clothed within the body is a reflection of the Divine Form, called the *tzelem*, or *tzelem Elokim*. This *tzelem Elokim* may be described as the human mold of man's physical form, linking his body and soul. This mold derives from the configuration of the *sefirot* which structure of the worlds through which the soul descends on its journey down into the body.

At the same time that the soul's outer dimension reflects the configuration of the *sefirot*, the inner dimension of the soul reflects the Infinite Light which illuminates the *sefirot*. This reflection is called the *demut Elokim* (the Image of God).<sup>67</sup> Thus man includes all of creation within him, from the loftiest spirituality to the most mundane physicality.<sup>68</sup>

63. See *Zohar II*, p. 5b, 96a, ; *Zohar III*, p. 94a; *Pardes, sha'ar* 4, chap. 7.

64. *Zohar III*, p. 292a.

65. See R. Chaim Vital's *Sha'arei Kedushah*, part 3, chap. 5; *ה יונתי בחגוי הסלע'ד* in *Likutei Torah, Shir Hashirim*, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi.

66. See *Tikkunei Zohar* p. 132b; *Pardes, sha'ar* 31, chap. 2.

67. See *Zohar I*, 37a, b; *Zohar II*, 70b; *Hashmatot* p. 265a; *Pardes, sha'ar* 31, chap. 4.

68. *Pardes, sha'ar* 4, chap. 10.

Viewed from the point of view of man's service of God, these levels of soul may be described as five ascending levels of awareness of, and communion with, God. They are called (in ascending order) *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *chayah* and *yechidah*.<sup>69</sup> Regarding these levels of soul, the *Zohar*<sup>70</sup> states that when a person is born, he is given a *nefesh* from the world of *Asiyah*, the lowest world, representing the greatest concealment of God. If, through his divine service and proper action, he makes himself worthy, he is then given *ruach* on the plane of *Yetzirah*. With greater effort, he can earn the revelation of *neshamah*, paralleling the world of *Beriah*. If he purifies himself greatly, he may be able to attain the level of *chaya* paralleling *Atzilut*, and even *yechidah* – the God-consciousness of the level of *Adam Kadmon* and beyond. ("Beyond," because the level of soul called *yechidah* in essence transcends all the worlds, since it is never separated from God. It is described as being "truly part of God above,"<sup>71</sup> and as "a spark of the Creator clothed within a spark of the created."<sup>72</sup>)

## *Nefesh*

*Nefesh*, the lowest level of consciousness, is awareness of the physical body and the physical world, the world of *Asiyah* – the world of action. However, this awareness of the physical body is not awareness in a passive sense; it is merely an observation of the facts. On the contrary, the *nefesh* is in fact the **life-force** of the body, and it is precisely because it is the life-force of the body that the *nefesh* has an awareness of the body. This physical awareness is a result of the enmeshing of the *nefesh* with the body. Now, although the *nefesh* is the life-force of the body, this does not mean that the *nefesh* creates the body. The body was and is created by God, just like everything else. After God created Adam's body

69. *Zohar II, Raya Mehemna*, p. 198b; *Hashmatot* p. 267a.

70. See vol. II, p. 94b; vol. III, p. 24b-25a, 70b; vol. I, p. 62a, commentaries; *Pardes, sha'ar* 31, chap. 3.

71. *Job* 31:2, *Tanya* chap. 2.

72. *Eitz Chaim sha'ar* 42, chap. 1.

“from the dust of the earth,” He blew into Adam the breath of life (see *Bereishit* 2:7). This is the *nefesh* – the life-force – that was blown into the body.

It is this part of the person which dies and goes to the grave with the body.<sup>73</sup> Just as in the world of *Asiyah malchut* is the dominant *sefirah*, so too in the *nefesh*, which corresponds to the world of *Asiyah*, the attribute of *malchut* – action – is the dominant characteristic of the soul.<sup>74</sup>

The divine service associated with the level of *nefesh* is acknowledgment of, and submission to, the supreme authority of God, particularly in reference to the fulfillment of the Commandments. It is therefore called “accepting the yoke of Heaven” – *kabbalat ol malchut shamayim*.<sup>75</sup>

### *Ruach*

*Ruach* is the next level of soul – a higher plane of consciousness than the rank of *nefesh*. The world (i.e., level of revelation of Godliness) corresponding to *ruach* is the world of *Yetzirah*.<sup>76</sup> The primary manifestation of *ruach* is in the emotions, just as the primary activity of the six *sefirot* of *Zeir Anpin* (from *chesed* to *yesod*) is in the world of *Yetzirah*. In terms of Divine service this entails arousing the emotions of love and awe of God.

Love and awe of God are aroused by contemplating the divine energy which forms and maintains the world of *Yetzirah*, and by observing the tremendous self-nullification of the angelic beings which inhabit it.<sup>77</sup> Although the intellect may be used extensively on this level of soul; nevertheless, the primary focus of the intellect here is contemplation in order to arouse the emotions. The

73. *Pardes, sha'ar* 31, chap. 2.

74. *Zohar I*, 81a, b; *Zohar III*, p. 46b.

75. See *Zohar III, Raya Mehemna*, p. 29a. See at length *Kuntreis HaAvodah*, by Rabbi Shalom DovBer Schneersohn, chap 1.

76. *Zohar II*, 94b.

77. *Zohar ibid.*

Talmudic sages therefore refer to it as “the toil of the heart,” through which one comes to love God with all one’s heart.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, this is a lower level of love, since it is generated by contemplating lower levels of God’s creative energy.

### *Neshamah*

The primary activity of *neshamah* is in the conceptual grasp of the intellect, as the verse states, “and the soul (*nishmat*) from the Almighty gives them understanding”<sup>79</sup> The level of *neshamah* contemplates the manifestation of Divine energy in the world of *Beriah*.<sup>80</sup> Just as in the world of *Beriah* the primary *sefirah* is *binah*, so too in the soul – the primary activity is understanding. Unlike the world of *Yetzirah*, the world of form and relationship, the world of *Beriah* is nascent divine energy. It is the notion of coming into being from nothingness, rather than structured, quantified existence. Thus one of the primary meditations of the *neshamah* is the concept of continuous creation (the coming-into-being) and sustenance of life and existence.

*Neshamah* analyzes underlying principles abstracted from the categories of thought imposed upon them by the human mind and human experience.<sup>81</sup> It seeks to pierce through to the essential rather than the ephemeral. One of the signs that a person is on this level of consciousness is that when the mind is clearly focused on an appropriate Divine concept, all of the senses become temporarily nullified. Subsequently, due to the abundance of spiritual light one experiences at this level, the emotions of love and awe are automatically aroused, and to a much greater extent than in the previous level, where effort was expended in arousing the emotions. This is referred to in Kabbalah as “the rapture of the

78. *Devarim* 6:5; *Zohar I*, 178b; vol. II 134a, 162b; *Ta’anit* 2a.

79. *Job* 32:8.

80. *Zohar II*, 94b.

81. *Kuntreis HaAvodah* chap. 1.

heart" (*re'uta d'libah*).<sup>82</sup> Here the heart truly desires Godliness, and love is revealed in its fullness in the heart. This is referred to in the verse as loving God "with all of your soul."<sup>83</sup> This may therefore be described as communion with God as the Creator of the worlds.

### *Chayah*

The aspect of the soul called *chayah* gazes upon the Divine energy of the world of *Atzilut*.<sup>84</sup> Whereas the primary activity of the level of *neshamah* is to use intellectual comprehension in order to come to communion with God as the Creator of the worlds, the level of *chayah* communes with God as He transcends the worlds. Here the soul's knowledge is not in the immanence of Divine attributes which identify the nature of the Divine energy manifested in creation, but rather with knowing what God is not – i.e. how He is not limited or defined by the finite universe. Thus the soul merges into a state of complete nullification of the ego. There is no self-seeking and no self-identity outside of God, and is called loving God "with all one's being."<sup>85</sup> This is knowledge of the absolute truth of things.

### *Yechidah*

Corresponding to *Adam Kadmon* is the level of soul called *yechidah*. Just as the sublime, pure and transcendent world of *Adam Kadmon*, cleaves to and reflects the original *Or Ein Sof*, so too the level of *yechidah*. This is the essence of the soul which is naturally and immutably bound to the Holy One. In the words of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai,<sup>86</sup> "Throughout the days of my connection to this world, I was bound to the Holy One blessed be

82. *Zohar II*, 93b, III 22b, in *Raya Mehemna*; *Tanya* chap. 39.

83. *Devarim* 6:5. *Zohar II*, 163a, 198b in *Raya Mehemna*.

84. *Zohar II*, 94b.

85. *Devarim* 6:5. *Zohar II*, 198b, in *Raya Mehemna*.

86. *Zohar III*, 288a in *Idra Zuta*.

He with a single knot. . . . at one with Him.” This is the level of soul revealed at the moment of self-sacrifice or martyrdom for the sake of God, His Torah, or His people.<sup>87</sup>

## Powers of the Soul

From the ten *sefirot*<sup>88</sup> described above the soul derives its corresponding ten soul-powers,<sup>89</sup> which have names identical to the *sefirot*. The soul is expressed and manifested through its powers, of which there are two general categories – the transcendent or encompassing powers, and the particular, or immanent powers (corresponding to the transcendent *keter*, and the remaining immanent *sefirot*). The transcendent or super-conscious powers of the soul are called delight (*oneg*) and will (*ratzon*), corresponding to the inner and outer dimensions of *keter* mentioned above.

The particular or immanent powers are further subdivided into intellect and emotions. The three intellectual powers are *chochmah*, wisdom or creative intellect; *binah*, understanding or developmental intellect; and *da'at*, which is knowledge or conclusive, synthesizing intellect.

### *Chochmah*

*Chochmah* is the creative and generally unpredictable power of the soul which is manifested in spontaneous insights or inspiration – an intuitive flash of intellectual illumination which has not yet been processed or developed by the understanding power of *binah*.

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87. *Kuntreis HaAvodah* p. 30.

88. *Tikkunei Zohar, Introduction – Patach Eliyahu*.

89. *Pardes, sha'ar* 31, chap. 1.

The creative power which illuminates *chochmah* derives from the concealed level of *keter* – “and *chochmah* emerges from nothingness” (*Job* 28:12), that is, from the hidden *keter*.<sup>90</sup> The reason that *chochmah* is able to act as a receptacle for the flash of Divine revelation is that in its inner essence is also “nothingness.” That is, the inner essence of *chochmah* is self-nullification (*bittul*). This is why the *Zohar* characterizes the nature of *chochmah* by one of the permutations of the word *chochmah* itself – *ko'ach mah* (כ"ח מ"ח = חכמה) – the potential to be “what,” i.e. undefined and therefore boundless.<sup>91</sup> In this state of *bittul*, a person will not experience his own being as an independent creation. Rather, his consciousness is focused on God’s omnipresence.

### *Binah*

*Binah*, usually translated as understanding, is the cognitive faculty that develops and articulates the seminal energy of *chochmah*, so that the latter becomes known, in a detailed conceptual way, through *binah*.<sup>92</sup> *Binah* is also the inductive and deductive faculty of “understanding (or deducing) one thing from another,”<sup>93</sup> thus expanding the point of *chochmah* into a multi-dimensional conceptual system. The *Zohar*<sup>94</sup> therefore symbolizes *chochmah* and *binah* and their relationship as “the supernal point (*chochmah*) within its palace (*binah*).” However, *binah* is not merely an adjunct to *chochmah*, it involves as well the ability to intuit a more inclusive reality that than encoded within *chochmah* itself.<sup>95</sup>

90. *Zohar II*, 121a, *Zohar III*, 290a, commentaries. A literal reading of the text is rendered as “From where shall wisdom be found?”

91. *Zohar III*, 235b, in *Raya Mehemna: Tikkunei Zohar* p. 111a, 112b.

92. *Tikkunei Zohar tikkun 22*, p. 63b.

93. *Chagiga* 14a; *Zohar Chadash* 4a.

94. *Zohar I*, 6a.

95. *Anatomy of the Soul*, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh (ed. Rabbi Yechezkel Anis), *Gal Einai Publications*, Jerusalem 1995, p. 53.

*Binah* is also the ability to explain the concept to another person, thus "reproducing" it. In this sense *binah* is referred to as "the mother of children" (*Psalms* 113:9).<sup>96</sup>

### *Da'at*

*Da'at* (knowledge) is the third faculty of the intellect. It is the ability to integrate and harmonize diametrically opposed views or states of being. As mentioned above, when *keter* is counted, *da'at* is not, and vice versa. In terms of the soul powers, *da'at* in fact plays a dual<sup>97</sup> role: On the one hand, *da'at* is the power which binds together the powers of *chochmah* and *binah*. In this capacity it is called *da'at elyon* (higher *da'at*), which generally remains in a state of concealment. As such it is identified with *keter*.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, *da'at* serves as the bridge between the opposing domains of the intellect and the emotional attributes of the soul. In this capacity it is called *da'at tachton* (lower *da'at*). *Da'at* is not merely another stage of intellect; it enables one to convert understanding into the vitality and inspiration of the emotions and actions. In this sense, the *Zohar*,<sup>99</sup> refers to *da'at* as "the key to the six [emotions]."

A person who possesses *da'at* will therefore exhibit rational, mature behavior, whereas one who lacks *da'at* is emotionally immature and will probably be plagued by inner emotional conflict.

### *Chesed*

*Chesed* (love, kindness) is the first emotional attribute of the soul. Its motivating force is love and benevolence. *Chesed* is also sometimes<sup>100</sup> called *gedulah* (largesse), for it nurtures the other

96. See *Zohar I*, p. 154; *vol II*, 84a..

97. See *Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh* chap. 15, end.

98. *Zohar III*, 291a in *Idra Zuta*.

99. *Zohar III*, 220b.

100. E.g. *Zohar II*, 59b; 132a, based on the verse in *I Chronicles* 29:11.

attributes of the soul into full development and maturity. The *Zohar*<sup>101</sup> therefore refers to it as "the first day [i.e., the first attribute] which accompanies all the other days [of creation]."<sup>102</sup>

Of the three Patriarchs, Avraham embodied the qualities of *chesed*, as the verse states, "Give. . . *chesed* to Avraham" (*Michah* 7:20). He is also referred to as "Avraham, My loving one" (*Yeshayahu* 41:8).

### *Gevurah*

*Gevurah* (fortitude, restrictive power), associated with the force of *din* (severe Divine judgment) restricts the benevolent expansiveness of *chesed*. As a soul-power it represents the emotional attribute of awe or fear.<sup>103</sup> Whereas *chesed* dictates that one give generously and unconditionally, without concern for the intended recipient's worthiness to receive, *gevurah* argues against doing so, for fear that the recipient is not worthy, or will misuse what he has been given. Accordingly, every opportunity to shower goodness upon someone is assessed in terms of the recipient's merit.

On the other hand, *gevurah* is just as influential in motivating one courageously to uphold another's rights to the rewards which are legitimately his, even in the face of stiff opposition. Should Divine justice dictate that someone be extended a particular benefit, the fear of Heaven impels one to do everything within one's power to facilitate it. Since *gevurah* is concerned with maintaining proper measure and proportion within Creation, it works to defend the boundaries of the law, be they to one's advantage or disadvantage, requiring courage or trepidation.<sup>104</sup>

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101. *Zohar I*, 46a.

102. The seven days of creation correspond to the seven lower *sefirot*.

103. *Tikkunei Zohar* p. 18a; *Zohar, Hashmatot*, p. 264a; *Zohar Tosafot* p. 302a.

104. *Anatomy of the Soul*, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, p. 61.

As complimentary forces, *chesed* and *gevurah* actually work together, establishing the rigorous standard of merit that endows subsequent overtures of *chesed* with genuine value and meaning for the recipient.<sup>105</sup>

*Gevurah* corresponds to the Patriarch Yitzchak,<sup>106</sup> as in the verse "The One whom Yitzchak fears. . . ." (*Bereishit* 31:42, 53).

### *Tiferet*

*Tiferet* (compassion) is the attribute of the soul which blends and harmonizes the two polar opposites of *chesed* and *gevurah*. *Tiferet* is also referred to as the attribute of truth, for it depends to some extent on the merit of the recipient<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, ideally, *tiferet* tends towards *chesed*,<sup>108</sup> and is therefore known as *rachamim* (compassion or mercy).<sup>109</sup>

*Tiferet* corresponds to the Patriarch Yaakov.<sup>110</sup>

### *Netzach*

*Netzach* has many meanings, referring to different aspects in the soul. It implies "victory" (*nitzachon*), "eternity" (*nitzchiyut*) and "orchestration" (*nitzuach*). Common to all these ideas is a sense of the initiative and persistence necessary in order to overcome the resistance to bringing thought and feeling into positive action. "Victory" assumes initiative; "eternity" implies persistence; and "orchestration" indicates a creative plan that deploys the other qualities in an intelligent way.<sup>111</sup>

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105. *Anatomy of the Soul*, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, p 61.

106. *Zohar I*, 90b; *Zohar, Tosafot* 276a, 302a.

107. *Zohar Chadash, Toldot*, p. 26c; *Yitro*, p. 31b.

108. *Pardes, shaa'r* 8, chap. 2; *sha'ar* 9, chap. 3.

109. *Zohar Chadash, Yitro*, p. 31b.

110. *Zohar, Tosafot*, 276a, 302a.

111. See *Anatomy of the Soul*, p. 63.

The quality of *netzach* in the soul is dependent upon the degree of confidence one has that he is doing what God wants of him.

### *Hod*

*Hod* (surrender, acknowledgment) is the complementary soul-power to *netzach*. Whereas *netzach* thrusts forward, overcoming the barriers between the outflow of benevolence (from *chesed*) and the intended recipient; *hod* (a quality derived from *gevurah*) ensures that the person's success is predicated on his acknowledging the Divine source of his power and might.<sup>112</sup> *Hod* therefore represents sincerity and innocence. The *Zohar* refers to this complementary relationship as "two halves of one body, like twins."<sup>113</sup>

### *Yesod*

*Yesod* is the quality which coalesces all the qualities which precede it into a single creative act binding the giver and the recipient into a single unit. In technical terms, *yesod* binds the higher *sefirot* to *malchut*, or heaven to earth.<sup>114</sup> In the soul this represents a person's ability to bind himself to God's will and thus bring about the implementation of God's plan for creation. *Yesod* also represents the *Tzadik* (saintly person), regarding whom it is said, "The *Tzadik* is the foundation (*yesod*) of the world" (*Mishlei* 10:25), for it is he who dedicates himself to fulfilling God's will and actualizing His plan for creation.<sup>115</sup>

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112. See *Devarim* 8:18.

113. *Zohar III*, 236a.

114. As in the verse (*I Chronicles* 29:7): To You, O God, is the *gedulah* and the *gevurah...for all* that is in the heavens and the earth is Yours." The words "for all" (*ki kol*) have the numerical value of *yesod* (80).

115. See *Zohar I*, 45b.

### *Malchut*

In terms of the powers of the soul, *malchut* represents receiving upon oneself the yoke of God's sovereignty, and acting in accordance with it, as a slave towards his master. *Malchut* thus experiences itself as a state of lowliness, for it possess nothing of its own – it is aware that it receives all of its qualities from the other powers of the soul. At the same time, *malchut* also represents royalty and sovereignty. Only when a king humbly takes upon himself the yoke of Heaven, is he able to find the strength and wisdom to rule properly.

When man does good, his soul disseminates God's abundant goodness and reveals His greatness. Through man's good deeds, certain *sefirot* prevail. For instance, if a person displays compassion towards others, he causes *tiferet* to prevail. Thus, for example, Abraham represents kindness and love, which derive from the *sefirah* of *chesed*, as explained above, for his deeds were concentrated in this direction.<sup>116</sup>

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116. See *Pardes, sha'ar* 31, chap. 1; *Eilimah Rabbati* pp. 1, 43.

## Angels

Maimonides<sup>117</sup> writes that everything which God created may be divided into three categories: Those things which are a composite of mutable substance and form; those of immutable substance and form; and those creatures which are form without substance. The latter are the angels. They are not bodies nor physical beings, but rather forms which are separated from one another by the principles which they represent. Thus “form” in this case does not mean dimensional structure, but rather a clearly defined spiritual principle, or permutation of Divine energy.

Angelic beings fall into two general categories – those which were created during the six days of creation<sup>118</sup> (referred to as the “ministering angels”) and those which are created on a day-to-day basis to fulfill various missions in this world.<sup>119</sup> The names of the angels change in accordance with their mission.<sup>120</sup>

When angels are sent down to this world as emissaries of the Holy One to carry out a specific mission,<sup>121</sup> they become clothed in a body<sup>122</sup> formed from the element of air<sup>123</sup> or of fire.<sup>124</sup> Angels may also appear in human form.<sup>125</sup> Once they have completed their worldly duties, they divest themselves of their bodies and return to their former spiritual state.

117. *Yad, Yesodei HaTorah*, 2:3.

118. *Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4. On which day of creation is the subject of a dispute among the sages: R' Yochanan says that they were created on the second day; R' Chanina – on the fifth.

119. *Zohar II*, 11a; *Eichah Rabbah*, 3:5.

120. *Tikkunei Zohar, tikkun 57*, p. 91b.

121. See *Zohar I*, 127a; vol. III, 68b.

122. *Zohar I*, 144a; vol. III, 152a.

123. *Zohar I*, 101a.

124. *Zohar I*, 40b; *Zohar Chadash, Ruth 99a*.

125. *Zohar I*, p. 81a.

There are angels which inhabit each of the four worlds: *Ofanim* in the world of *Asiyah*;<sup>126</sup> *chayot* in the world of *Yetzirah*;<sup>127</sup> *serafim* in the world of *Beriah*.<sup>128</sup> There are also angels in the world of *Atzilut*.<sup>129</sup>

The angels are further subdivided according to the *sefirah* from which they derive.<sup>130</sup> The angels are thus divided into "camps" according to the division of the *sefirot*. The angel Michael and his "camp," for example, derive from the *sefirah* of *chesed*,<sup>131</sup> and the angel Gabriel and his "camp" derive from the *sefirah* of *gevurah*,<sup>132</sup> and so on.

## Evil and Impurity

Evil and impurity are often referred to in the *Zohar*<sup>133</sup> as "the other side" (*sitra achra*), meaning the side distinct from, and opposed to holiness. Evil is also referred to as *kelipah*,<sup>134</sup> literally, shell or bark. The *kelipah* conceals within it a spark of holiness, which is the vital force by virtue of which the *kelipah* exists, analogous to a fruit surrounded by a shell or peel. In order to release the holy spark the encumbering shell must be removed.

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126. *Eit: Chaim, sha'ar* 40, chap. 15.

127. *Eit: Chaim, sha'ar* 40, chap. 13.

128. *Ibid.*

129. *Eit: Chaim, sha'ar* 28, chap. 1; *sha'ar* 40, chap. 13; *Sha'ar HaGilgulim* chap. 19.

130. *Eit: Chaim, sha'ar* 40, chap. 13.

131. *Zohar I*, 235a; *Tikkunei Zohar, Introduction* (p. 12a).

132. *Tikkunei Zohar, tikkun* 55 (p. 89a); *tikkun* 57 (p. 91b).

133. E.g., *vol. I*, 12a, 12b, 13a.

134. E.g., *vol. II*, 108b, 141a.

The *Zohar* distinguishes among four *kelipot*, three of which are entirely evil.<sup>135</sup> The fourth, *kelipat nogah*, is the shell which actually envelops the spark of holiness. It thus has direct contact with holiness and is not entirely evil. The other three *kelipot* surround *kelipat nogah* and are therefore further removed from holiness.

All matters pertaining to the prohibitions of the Torah (the forbidden objects, actions, utterances, thoughts, etc) derive from the *sitra achra*, from the three impure *kelipot*. Those matters which are permitted by the Torah (but do not pertain to the commandments of the Torah) derive from *kelipat nogah*.

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135. *Zohar II*, 131a, 203a-b.

# Bereishit

## In the Beginning

### 1:1 בראשית – In the Beginning

The Holy One blessed be He created the world and all created beings through the Torah. Regarding the Torah, the verse states, “God made me (the Torah) as the beginning (ראשית) of His way, the most primal of His works from the outset of time” (*Mishlei* 8:22). With this beginning, the Torah, He created the heavens and the earth, and He sustains them through Torah.

(*Zohar* 1, 24a)

Rabbi Chiyya taught: “Who can express the power of God, and acclaim all His praises?” (*Tehillim* 106). When God chose to create the world, He looked into the Torah and created the world with it. With every single act of creation God looked into the Torah again, and created that detail of creation, as the verse states, “I will be An instructor (אמן – *amun*) to Him, I will be His delight day by day!” Do not read אמן, an instructor, but אומן (*uman*), a workman. However, when He chose to create man, the Torah questioned if man should be created, for if he would sin, God would judge him, and the creation of man would be in vain, for none can withstand God’s retribution. God replied that He had already allocated repentance for this purpose, even before the world was created. Moreover, at the time of man’s creation, God declared that the world could only exist by virtue of the Torah, and for this reason He created man who could occupy himself with Torah. But if man would not do so, He would return the creation to a state of chaos. Hence, the world exists by virtue of man. This is the meaning of the verse, “I made the earth, and I created man upon it” (*Yeshayahu* 45:12) i.e., the creation of man upon earth is for the sake of its continued