

# The Essential Kabbalah

## The Heart of Jewish Mysticism

Daniel C. Matt

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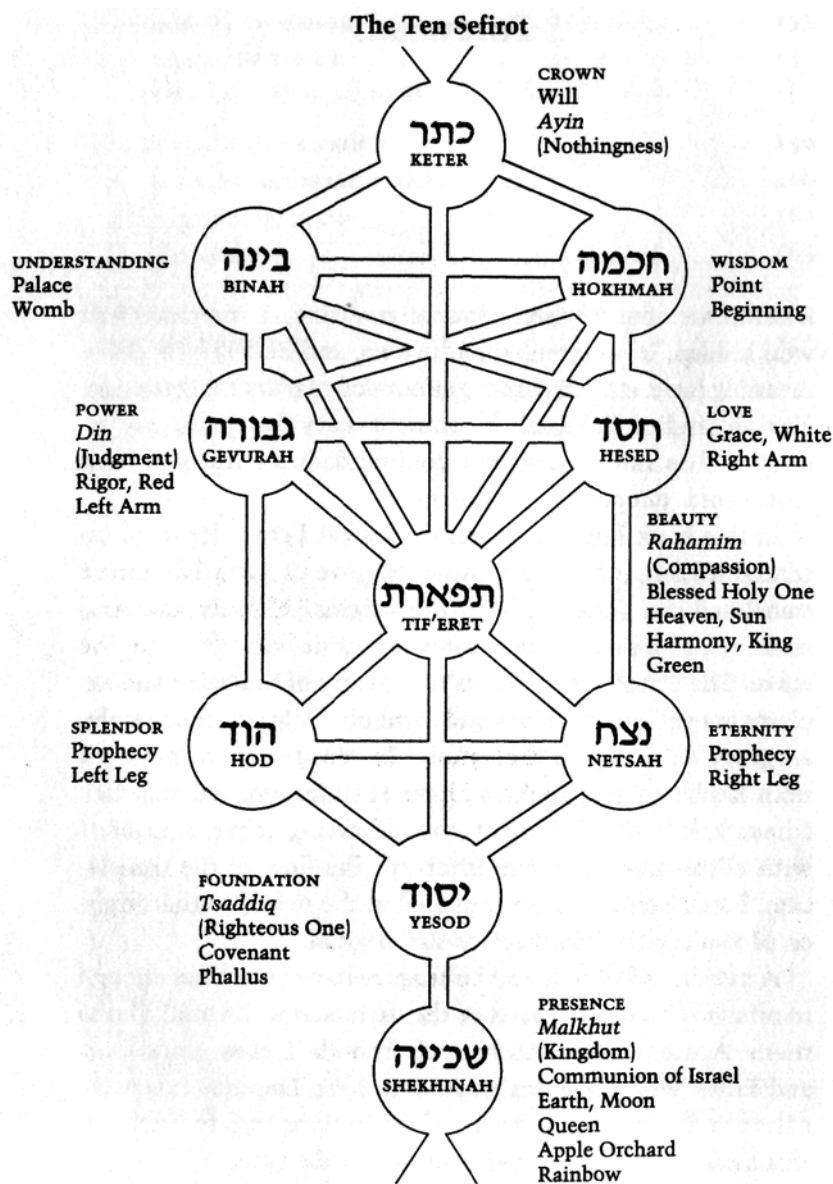
## Foreword

KABBALAH, the Jewish mystical tradition, is precious and well hidden. Its symbolism, allusions, and multiple layers of meaning have attracted and confounded readers for centuries. Having studied Kabbalah for some twenty-five years, my attraction has not abated; my confoundedness has not been eliminated, but seasoned by wonder.

In this book I offer a selection of what I consider to be essential teachings from the immense trove of Kabbalah. I have translated the passages from the original Hebrew and Aramaic texts, and supplied notes to guide you through the maze. The introduction traces the history of Kabbalah and explains its salient concepts and symbols. A brief bibliography suggests titles for further study. In rendering the passages from Kabbalah into English, I have at times omitted material. I have taken the liberty of not indicating these omissions with ellipses, so as not to interrupt the flow of the translation. Precise citations are provided in the notes, so that interested readers can refer back to the original.

A number of friends and colleagues have been kind enough to offer advice or read parts of the manuscript. I would like to thank Arnold Eisen, Moshe Idel, Yehuda Liebes, Ehud Luz, and Elliot Wolfson. I am grateful to John Loudon, executive editor at Harper San Francisco, for inviting me to compose this book and for encouraging me along the way.

# The Ten Sefirot



## Introduction: A Glimpse of the Orchard

THE HEBREW word *kabbalah* means "receiving" or "that which has been received." On the one hand, Kabbalah refers to tradition, ancient wisdom received and treasured from the past. On the other hand, if one is truly receptive, wisdom appears spontaneously, unprecedented, taking you by surprise.

The Jewish mystical tradition combines both of these elements. Its vocabulary teems with what the *Zohar*—the canonical text of the Kabbalah—calls "new-ancient

words." Many of its formulations derive from traditional sources—the Bible and rabbinic literature—but with a twist. For example, "the world that is coming," a traditional phrase often understood as referring to a far-off messianic era, turns into "the world that is constantly coming," constantly flowing, a timeless dimension of reality available right here and now, if one is receptive.

The rabbinic concept of *Shekhinah*, divine immanence, blossoms into the feminine half of God, balancing the patriarchal conception that dominates the Bible and the Talmud. Kabbalah retains the traditional discipline of Torah and *mitsvot* (commandments), but now the mitsvot have cosmic impact: "The secret of fulfilling the mitsvot is the mending of all the worlds and drawing forth the emanation from above."<sup>1</sup> According to Kabbalah, every human action here on earth affects the divine realm, either promoting or hindering the union of Shekhinah and her partner—the Holy One, blessed be he. God is not static being, but dynamic becoming. Without human participation, God remains incomplete, unrealized. It is up to us to actualize the divine potential in the world. God needs us.

Kabbalah owes its success to this piquant blend of tradition and creativity, loyalty to the past and bold innovation. The kabbalists grew adept at walking the tightrope between blind fundamentalism and mystical anarchy, though a number of them lost their balance and fell into one extreme or the other. Remarkably, despite their startling ideas and sometimes shocking imagery, the kabbalists aroused relatively little opposition, compared to some of the famous Islamic Sufis and Catholic mystics such as Hallaj and Meister Eckhart. No doubt this was due in part to the esoteric method of transmitting Kabbalah. At first, the secret teachings were conveyed orally from master to disciple and restricted to small circles. Even when written down, the message was often cryptic, sometimes concluding: "This is sufficient for one who is enlightened," or "The enlightened one will understand," or "I cannot expand on this, for thus have I been commanded."

From the beginning of the movement in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Kabbalah was promoted by renowned, learned rabbis such as Rabad of Posquieres and Nahmanides. Strongly committed to traditional observance, the kabbalists could not easily be attacked as radicals. But they were profoundly radical, and they touched something deep in the human soul.

The kabbalists made the fantastic claim that their mystical teachings derived from the Garden of Eden. This suggests that Kabbalah conveys our original nature: the unbounded awareness of Adam and Eve. We have lost this nature, the most ancient tradition, as the inevitable consequence of tasting the fruit of knowledge, the price of maturity and culture. The kabbalist yearns to recover that primordial tradition, to regain cosmic consciousness, without renouncing the world.

### ***Visions of God***

Kabbalah emerges as a distinct movement within Judaism in medieval Europe, but the experience of direct contact with the divine is already evident in the earliest Jewish book—the Bible. When Moses encounters God at the burning bush, he is overwhelmed: "afraid to look at God," he hides his face. Soon God reveals the divine name, "*I am that I am*," intimating what eventually becomes a mystical refrain: God cannot be defined (Exodus 3:6, 14). Later, at Mt. Sinai, Moses asks to see the divine presence, but God tells

him, "No human can see me and live." Yet the Torah concludes by saying that God knew Moses "face to face" (Exodus 33:20; Deuteronomy 34:10). The prophet Isaiah sees God enthroned in the Temple in Jerusalem, accompanied by fiery angels who call out to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his presence" (Isaiah 6:3). The most graphic account of a vision of God is undoubtedly the opening chapter of the book of Ezekiel. Standing by a river in Babylon, the prophet sees a throne whirling through heaven, accompanied by four winged creatures darting to and fro. On the throne is "a figure with the appearance of a human being," surrounded by radiance like a rainbow.

Ezekiel experienced this vision near the beginning of the sixth century B.C.E. Even before his book was canonized as part of the Bible, his vision had become the archetype of Jewish mystical ascent. Until the emergence of Kabbalah, Jewish mystics used Ezekiel's account as their model. *Ma'aseh merkavah*, the account of the chariot—as it came to be called—was expounded in some circles, imitated in others. An entire literature developed recounting the visionary exploits of those who followed in Ezekiel's footsteps, among them some of the leading figures of rabbinic Judaism. The journey was arduous and dangerous, requiring intense, ascetic preparation and precise knowledge of secret passwords in order to be admitted to the various heavenly palaces guarded by menacing angels. The final goal was to attain a vision of the divine figure on the throne.

The danger of the mystical search is conveyed by a famous report in the Talmud of four rabbis who ventured into *pardes*, the divine orchard, or paradise:

Four entered pardes: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher, and Rabbi Akiva. Ben Azzai glimpsed and died. Ben Zoma glimpsed and went mad. Aher cut the plants. Rabbi Akiva emerged in peace.<sup>2</sup>

Aher, "the other one," is the nickname of Elisha ben Avuyah, the most famous heretic in rabbinic literature. The exact nature of his heresy is unclear; the metaphor of "cutting the plants" may refer to his conversion to Gnostic dualism. In any case, only Rabbi Akiva, we are told, emerged unscathed.

Certain Jewish mystics went so far as to formulate detailed descriptions of the body of God. These texts became known as *Shi'ur Qomah*, "the measurement of the [divine] stature." Such extreme anthropomorphism generated criticism, such as that of Moses Maimonides, but it also influenced the bold mythical language of the Kabbalah.

### ***Secrets of Creation***

The account of Ezekiel's chariot formed one major branch of early Jewish mysticism. The other branch was *ma'aseh beieshit*, the account of creation, or cosmology. The most important text concerning these secrets was *Sefer Yetsirah*, *The Book of Creation*, composed apparently in Palestine sometime between the third and sixth centuries. Here we are told how God created the world by means of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the ten *sefirot*—a term that appears for the first time in Hebrew literature. Genesis and Psalms had already indicated that divine speech was the tool of creation. "God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'" "By the word of God the heavens were made; by the breath of his mouth, all their hosts" (Genesis 1:1; Psalms 33:6). What is new in *Sefer Yetsirah* is the detailed speculation on how God combined the individual letters, as well

as the idea of the sefirot, which in this text are numerical entities, living beings embodying the numbers one through ten, ciphers, metaphysical potencies through which creation unfolds. The notion that numbers are essential to the structure of the cosmos derives from Pythagorean mysticism. Gradually, however, the sefirot evolved into something more, becoming the central symbol system of Kabbalah.

### ***The Zohar***

Based on these earlier traditions, Kabbalah emerged in its own right in the fertile region of Provence toward the end of the twelfth century. Here a variegated Jewish community flourished, a center of learning that encompassed rabbinic law, philosophy, and mysticism. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, usually considered the first kabbalistic text, was edited here. Ironically, although *bahir* means "bright" or "clear," this small book is unimaginably obscure: an often impenetrable collection of esoteric fragments. In it, the sefirot now appear as lights, powers, and attributes, similar to the divine potencies described in Gnostic literature. They represent stages of God's inner life, aspects of the divine personality. There is no unified scheme; the sefirot are described in various and conflicting ways. Over the next hundred years, as Kabbalah spread over the Pyrenees into Catalonia and then to Castile, the symbolic system crystallized. Elements of Neoplatonic mysticism were incorporated, as well as speculations on the origin of evil.

Around the year 1280, a Spanish Jewish mystic named Moses de León began circulating booklets to his fellow kabbalists. Written in lyrical Aramaic, they were replete with nonce words, arcane symbolism, and erotic imagery. The tales and teachings were esoteric, yet enchanting. Moses claimed that he was merely the scribe, copying from an ancient book of wisdom. The original had supposedly been composed in the circle of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai, a famous disciple of Rabbi Akiva who lived and taught in the second century in the land of Israel.

These booklets were the first installments of an immense work: *Sefer ha-Zohar*, *The Book of Radiance*. De León's claim was widely accepted, and the *Zohar's* ostensible pedigree helped promote the young kabbalistic movement. Few dared to challenge the ancient teachings of Shim'on bar Yohai and the *havrayya*, his mystical companions. The *Zohar* gradually became *Ha-Zohar ha-Qadosh*, *The Holy Zohar*, the canonical text of Kabbalah, and most subsequent Kabbalah was based on its teachings. Only in relatively recent times has Moses de León's actual role in the *Zohar's* generation become more clear.

More than a scribe, De León was the composer of the *Zohar*. He drew on earlier material; he may have collaborated with other kabbalists; and he may have genuinely believed that he was transmitting ancient teachings.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, parts of the *Zohar* may have been composed through automatic writing, a technique in which the mystic would meditate on a divine name, enter a trance, and begin to "write whatever came to his hand." Such a technique was reportedly used by other thirteenth-century kabbalists. But Moses de León wove his various sources into a masterpiece: a commentary on the Torah in the form of a mystical novel. Rabbi Shim'on and the *havrayya* wander through Galilee exchanging kabbalistic insights. On one level, biblical heroes such as Abraham and Moses are the protagonists, and the rabbis interpret their words, actions, and personalities. The text of the Torah is simply the starting point, a springboard for the imagination. At times, the commentators become the main characters, and we read about

dramatic mystical sessions with Rabbi Shim'on or about the companions' encounters with strange characters on the road, such as an old donkey driver who turns out to be a master of wisdom in disguise.

## The Sefirot

The plot of the *Zohar* focuses ultimately on the sefirot. By penetrating the literal surface of the Torah, the mystical commentators transform the biblical narrative into a biography of God. The entire Torah is read as a divine name, expressing divine being.<sup>4</sup> Even a seemingly insignificant verse can reveal the inner dynamics of the sefirot—how God feels, responds, and acts, how She and He relate intimately with each other and with the world. The opening chapter of Genesis appears to describe the creation of the world, but it alludes to a more primal beginning—the emanation of the sefirot, their emergence from the Infinite, or *Ein Sof* (literally, "Endless").<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the personal God of the sefirot, *Ein Sof* represents the radical transcendence of God. Not much more than its name can be said. Here the Jewish mystics adopted the negative theology of Maimonides, who had taught:

The description of God by means of negations is the correct description—a description that is not affected by an indulgence in facile language. ... With every increase in the negations regarding God, you come nearer to the apprehension of God.<sup>6</sup>

The first sefirah shares in the negative nature of *Ein Sof* and is sometimes referred to as *Ayin*, Nothingness. As one kabbalist puts it, "Ayin is more existent than all the being of the world. But since it is simple, and every simple thing is complex compared with its simplicity, it is called Ayin."<sup>7</sup> In this primal state, God is undifferentiated being, neither this nor that, nothingness.

The first sefirah is more commonly called *Keter*, Crown. It is the crown on the head of *Adam Qadmon*, Primordial Adam. According to the opening chapter of Genesis, the human being is created in the image of God. The sefirot constitute the divine archetype of that image, the mythical paragon of the human being, our original nature. Another depiction of the sefirot is that of a cosmic tree growing downward from its roots above, from *Keter*, "the root of roots."

Out of the depths of Nothingness shines the primordial point of *Hokhmah*, Wisdom, the second sefirah. This point expands into a circle, the sefirah of *Binah*, Understanding. *Binah* is the womb, the Divine Mother. Receiving the seed, the point of *Hokhmah*, she conceives the seven lower sefirot. Created being, too, has its source in her; she is "the totality of all individuation."<sup>8</sup>

These three highest sefirot (*Keter*, *Hokhmah*, and *Binah*) represent the head of the divine body and are considered more hidden than the offspring of *Binah*. She gives birth first to *Hesed* (Love) and *Gevurah* (Power), also known as *Din* (Judgment). *Hesed* and *Gevurah* are the right and left arms of God, two poles of the divine personality: free-flowing love and strict judgment, grace and limitation. For the world to function properly, both are essential. Ideally a balance is achieved, symbolized by the central sefirah, *Tiferet* (Beauty), also called *Rahamim* (Compassion). If judgment is not softened by love, it lashes out and threatens to destroy life. Here lies the origin of evil, called *Sitra Ahra*, the Other Side. From a more radical perspective, evil originates in divine thought,

which eliminates waste before emanating goodness. The demonic is rooted in the divine.

Tiferet is the trunk of the sefirotic body. He is called Heaven, Sun, King, and the Holy One, blessed be he, the standard rabbinic name for God. He is the son of Hokhmah and Binah. The next two sefirot are *Netsah* (Eternity) and *Hod* (Splendor). They form the right and left legs of the body and are the source of prophecy. *Yesod* (Foundation) is the ninth sefirah and represents the phallus, the procreative life force of the universe. He is also called *Tsaddiq* (Righteous One), and Proverbs 10:25 is interpreted as applying to him: "The righteous one is the foundation of the world." Yesod is the axis *mundi*, the cosmic pillar. The light and power of the preceding sefirot are channeled through him to the last sefirah, *Malkhut*.

Malkhut (Kingdom) is also known as Shekhinah (Presence). In earlier Jewish literature, Shekhinah appears frequently as the immanence of God but is not overtly feminine. In Kabbalah, Shekhinah becomes a full-fledged She: daughter of Binah, bride of Tiferet, the feminine half of God. Shekhinah is "the secret of the possible," receiving the emanation from above and engendering the varieties of life below.<sup>9</sup> The union of Shekhinah and Tiferet constitutes the focus of religious life. Human righteous action stimulates Yesod, the Righteous One, and brings about the union of the divine couple. Human marriage symbolizes and actualizes divine marriage. Sabbath eve is the weekly celebration of the cosmic wedding, and the ideal time for human lovers to unite.

The mythical imagery of the sefirot is stunning. The kabbalists continually insist that these figures of speech should not be taken literally; they are organic symbols of a spiritual reality beyond normal comprehension. At the start of one of his most anthropomorphic descriptions, Rabbi Shim'on cites a verse from Deuteronomy: "Cursed be the one who makes a carved or molten image, the work of the hands of an artisan, and sets it up in secret."<sup>10</sup> Sefirotic descriptions are intended to convey something of the beyond; becoming fixated on the image itself prevents genuine communication.

Critics charge that the theory of Ein Sof and the sefirot is dualistic, that by positing and describing ten aspects of divinity, Kabbalah verges on polytheism. As one iconoclastic kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia, noted, some adherents of the sefirot have outdone Catholic adherents of the trinity, turning God into ten!<sup>11</sup> The kabbalists maintain that the sefirot and Ein Sof form a unity, "like a flame joined to a burning coal." "It is they, and they are it." "They are its name, and it is they."<sup>12</sup> From the human perspective, the sefirot appear to possess a multiple and independent existence. Ultimately, however, all of them are one, the true reality is the Infinite.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the prominent mythological character of the system cannot be denied. In a sense Kabbalah represents "the revenge of myth," its resurgence after being attacked for centuries, after being pronounced dead by rationalist philosophers.<sup>14</sup> The kabbalists appreciate the profundity of myth and its tenacious appeal.

From above to below, the sefirot depict the drama of emanation, the transition from Ein Sof to creation. In the words of Azriel of Gerona, "They constitute the process by which all things come into being and pass away."<sup>15</sup> From below to above, the sefirot constitute a ladder of ascent back to the One. The union of Tiferet and Shekhinah gives birth to the human soul, and the mystical journey begins with the awareness of this spiritual fact of life. Shekhinah is the opening to the divine: "One who enters must enter through this gate."<sup>16</sup> Once inside, the sefirot are no longer an abstract theological system; they become a map of consciousness. The mystic climbs and probes, discovering



dimensions of being. Spiritual and psychological wholeness is achieved by meditating on the qualities of each sefirah, by imitating and integrating the attributes of God. "When you cleave to the sefirot, the divine holy spirit enters into you, into every sensation and every movement."<sup>17</sup> But the path is not easy. Divine will can be harsh: Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac in order to balance love with rigor.<sup>18</sup> From the Other Side, demonic forces threaten and seduce. Contemplatively and psychologically, evil must be encountered, not evaded. By knowing and withstanding the dark underside of wisdom, the spiritual seeker is refined.

Near the top of the sefirotic ladder, meditation reaches Binah. She is called *Teshuvah*, Return. The ego returns to the womb of being. Binah cannot be held in thought. She is called Who, the meditative question, "Who am I?" The questioning yields nothing that can be grasped, but rather, an intuitive flash illuminating and disappearing, as sunbeams play on the surface of water.<sup>19</sup>

In the depths of Binah lies Hokhmah, Wisdom. The mystic is nourished from this sphere. Profound and primal, it cannot be known consciously, only absorbed. In the words of Isaac the Blind, one of the earliest kabbalists of Provence, "The inner, subtle essences can be contemplated only by sucking, not by knowing."<sup>20</sup> Beyond Hokhmah is the Nothingness of Keter, the annihilation of thought. In this ultimate sefirah human consciousness expands, dissolving into Infinity.

Only rarely does the *Zohar* explicitly discuss meditation or mystical experience. It focuses on theosophy—the interplay of the sefirot—and on human conduct. Ethical and spiritual behaviors unite the sefirot, ensuring a flow of blessing and emanation to the lower worlds; unethical or evil human activities disrupt the union above, empowering demonic forces.

### ***The Ecstatic Kabbalah***

Alongside this theosophical system, other kabbalists developed an ecstatic Kabbalah. The emphasis here is on meditative techniques, especially the recitation of divine names and combinations of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet based on *Sefer Yetsirah*. The most prominent ecstatic kabbalist was Abraham Abulafia. Born in Spain in 1240, Abulafia traveled and lived in Italy, Sicily, Greece, and the land of Israel. In his travels he may have been influenced by Sufism and yoga. He combined the teachings of *Sefer Yetsirah* with Maimonides' theory of prophecy, expounding a technique for achieving a state of inspiration through the fusion of the human and divine intellects.

According to Abulafia, the soul is part of the stream of cosmic life. Our awareness, though, is limited by sensory perceptions, our minds cluttered with sensible forms. The goal is "to untie the knots" that bind the soul, to free the mind from definitions, to move from constriction to the boundless. But how? If one meditates on abstract truths, however sublime, there is still a specific object of meditation, a limited meaning. Abulafia instead recommends focusing on the pure forms of the letters of the alphabet, or on the name of God. Here there is no concrete, particular meaning, no distraction, just the music of pure thought. As the highest form of this meditation, Abulafia recommends "jumping" or "skipping," a type of free association between various combinations of letters, guided by fairly lax rules. Thereby, consciousness expands.<sup>21</sup>

Abulafia came to see himself as playing a messianic role, and he actually

attempted to meet with Pope Nicholas III in the summer of 1280, apparently to discuss theological and political questions. The pope condemned him to death by burning, but before the sentence could be carried out, the pope himself died. After a month in prison, Abulafia was released. His prophetic and messianic pretensions aroused the opposition of a leading rabbinic authority, Solomon Adret of Barcelona, who condemned Abulafia as a charlatan. As a result, he was forced to flee to the desolate island of Comino, near Malta, and his influence on Spanish Kabbalah was minimized. In the Middle East, though, ecstatic Kabbalah was readily accepted, and kabbalists such as Isaac of Akko reveal clear traces of Abulafia's teachings. In Palestine, Abulafia's ideas were combined with Sufi elements, and in this way Sufi views were introduced into Kabbalah.<sup>22</sup>

## **The Safed Mystics: Cordovero and Luria**

In 1492, the Jews were expelled from Spain. Along with tens of thousands of other exiles, kabbalists made their way to North Africa, Italy, and the eastern Mediterranean, disseminating mystical ideas. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Kabbalah, with the *Zohar* as its nucleus, had become an important spiritual factor in Jewish life.

A growing stream of kabbalists began arriving in Palestine. Jerusalem served as their first center, but beginning in the 1540s, the village of Safed became dominant. Perched high above the Sea of Galilee, commanding immense vistas, Safed seems to verge on heaven. The mystics here believed, based on a passage in the *Zohar*, that if one community lived a life of holiness, the Messiah would soon arrive. They strove to be that ideal community, supporting and urging one another. One of their ritual innovations was welcoming the Sabbath on Friday evening. Walking out to the fields before sunset, they would sing greetings to the Sabbath bride and queen, who was none other than Shekhinah, the feminine presence of God. A poem written in Safed for this occasion, "*Lekhah Dodi*," opens with the words: "Come, my beloved, to greet the bride! Let us welcome the presence of the Sabbath." Today this poem is sung weekly in synagogues and Jewish homes throughout the world.

A leading figure in the mystical community of Safed was Moses Cordovero (1522-1570), who blended the *Zohar* with ecstatic Kabbalah, already flourishing in Jerusalem. His magisterial *Paides Rimmonim* (*The Pomegranate Orchard*), completed by the time he was twenty-seven, synthesized the teachings of the previous three centuries. On a more popular

level, he wrote *Or Ne'erav* (*The Sweet Light*), an introduction to Kabbalah, and Tomer *Devorah* (*The Palm Tree of Deborah*), a book of mystical ethics, showing how one can imitate God by embodying the qualities of the various sefirot. Soon a whole genre of mystical ethical literature developed, spreading kabbalistic thought and practice widely.

After Cordovero's death in 1570, one of his students, Isaac Luria, was acknowledged as the mystical master. Born in Jerusalem, Luria lost his father at a young age, and his mother took him to Egypt, where he was brought up in the home of his wealthy uncle. He spent a considerable time in seclusion on an island in the Nile near Cairo, studying the *Zohar* and the works of Cordovero. Arriving in Safed in 1569 or 1570, he was able to study with Cordovero for only a short time before his teacher passed

away.

Luria's profound influence was due to his saintly behavior, his occult powers, and his novel teachings. He would reveal to each of his disciples the root of his particular soul, its ancestry, and the transmigrations through which it had journeyed. Luria taught in Safed for only about two-and-a-half years before dying in an epidemic in the summer of 1572 at the age of thirty-eight. His fame spread quickly, and he became known as *Ha-Ari*, "the Lion," an acronym for "the divine Rabbi Isaac."

Unlike the prolific Cordovero, Luria wrote hardly anything. When asked by one of his disciples why he did not compose a book, Luria is reported to have said: "It is impossible, because all things are interrelated. I can hardly open my mouth to speak without feeling as though the sea burst its dams and overflowed. How then shall I express what my soul has received? How can I set it down in a book?"<sup>23</sup> We know of Luria's teachings from his disciples' writings, especially those of Hayyim Vital.

Luria pondered the question of beginnings. How did the process of emanation start? If Ein Sof pervaded all space, how was there room for anything other than God to come into being? Elaborating on earlier formulations, Luria taught that the first divine act was not emanation, but withdrawal. Ein Sof withdrew its presence "from itself to itself," withdrawing in all directions away from one point at the center of its infinity, as it were, thereby creating a vacuum. This vacuum served as the site of creation. According to some versions of Luria's teaching, the purpose of the withdrawal was cathartic: to make room for the elimination of harsh judgment from Ein Sof.

Into the vacuum Ein Sof emanated a ray of light, channeled through vessels. At first, everything went smoothly; but as the emanation proceeded, some of the vessels could not withstand the power of the light, and they shattered. Most of the light returned to its infinite source, but the rest fell as sparks, along with the shards of the vessels. Eventually, these sparks became trapped in material existence. The human task is to liberate, or raise, these sparks, to restore them to divinity. This process of *tiqqun* (repair or mending) is accomplished through living a life of holiness. All human actions either promote or impede *tiqqun*, thus hastening or delaying the arrival of the Messiah. In a sense, the Messiah is fashioned by our ethical and spiritual activity. Luria's teaching resonates with one of Franz Kafka's paradoxical sayings: "The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival."<sup>24</sup>

### ***Kabbalah's Continuing Influence***

The Lurianic myth of *tsimtsun* ("contraction" or withdrawal), *shevirah* (shattering), and *tiqqun* became central to Kabbalah. Whereas Spanish Kabbalah had been restricted to an aristocratic elite, by the middle of the seventeenth century elements of Luria's theology and a number of his ritual innovations had spread throughout much of the Jewish world. Later, Lurianic Kabbalah strongly influenced Hasidism, the eighteenth-century revivalist movement in Eastern Europe. Hasidism popularized and psychologized various kabbalistic ideas. In the words of Dov Baer, the Maggid (Preacher) of Mezritch, "I teach everyone that all the things described in the book *Ets Hayyim* pertain also to this world and to the human being."<sup>25</sup>

"Raising the sparks" served as a frequent Hasidic motif. Since all material existence is animated by the divine, even the most mundane activity can serve as an opportunity to discover God. This attitude also characterized the life and thought of the

most original kabbalist of the twentieth century, Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), who taught that all existence is the body of God.<sup>26</sup> As chief rabbi of Palestine, he blended profound mystical speculation with social and political activism. For Kook, the secular and the holy are not fundamentally distinct; secularism participates in the larger scheme of religious evolution. Even heresy plays a spiritual role, challenging us to continually expand our concept of God.<sup>27</sup>

Although Kabbalah emerged within Judaism, and has deeply affected Jewish thought and religious observance, its influence extends far beyond. Italian Renaissance humanist Pico della Mirandola immersed himself in Latin translations of Kabbalah, believing it to be the original divine revelation. Long lost and now finally restored, Kabbalah would enable Europeans to comprehend Pythagoras, Plato, and the secrets of Catholic faith. Pico claimed that "no science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and the Kabbalah."<sup>28</sup> His controversial, syncretistic 900 *Theses* drew heavily on Kabbalah and laid the foundation for Christian kabbalistic literature.

Pico's follower, Johannes Reuchlin, produced the first systematic work of Christian Kabbalah, *De aite cabalistica*. In the seventeenth century, Knorr von Rosenroth assembled translations of many important texts in *Cabbala denudata*

(*The Kabbalah Unveiled*), an anthology widely read by European thinkers. Figures such as Gottfried Leibniz, Gotthold Lessing, Emanuel Swedenborg, and William Blake absorbed kabbalistic ideas. In the twentieth century, traces of Kabbalah can be found, for example, in the fiction and poetry of Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges, in the thought of Walter Benjamin, and in Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction. For the contemporary spiritual seeker, Kabbalah has become a rich and vital resource.

TRADITIONALLY, RESTRICTIONS have been placed on the study of Kabbalah. Some kabbalists insisted that anyone seeking entrance to the orchard must be at least forty years old, though Moses Cordovero stipulated twenty years. Other requirements included high moral standards, prior rabbinic learning, being married, and mental and emotional stability. The point is not to keep people away from Kabbalah, but to protect them. Mystical teachings are enticing, powerful, and potentially dangerous. The spiritual seeker soon discovers that he or she is not exploring something "up there," but rather the beyond that lies within. Letting go of traditional notions of God and self can be both liberating and terrifying. In the words of Isaac of Akko, "Strive to see supernal light, for I have brought you into a vast ocean. Be careful! Strive to see, yet escape drowning."<sup>29</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Moses de Le6n, *The Book of the Pomegranate: Sefer ha-Rimmon*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 388; see Daniel C. Matt, "The Mystic and the Mitsvot," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 390.
2. Babylonian Talmud, *Hagigah* 14b.
3. On the complex question of the composition of the *Zohar*, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Schocken, 1961), 156-104; Daniel C. Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 3-10; 25-32, - Isaiah Tishby and Fischel Lachower, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), I, introduction; Yehuda Liebes, "How the *Zohar* Was Written," in *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 85-138.
4. See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, 1965), 37-44.
5. See "The Creation of God," pp. 52-53.
6. Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

1963), 1:58-59.

7. David ben Abraham ha-Lavan, *Masoret ha-Berit*; see "Ayin," p. 66.

8. *Zohar* 3:65b.

9. On Shekhinah as "the secret of the possible," see David ben Judah he-Hasid, *The Book of Mirrors: Sefer Mar'ot ha-Tsove'ot*, ed. Daniel C. Matt (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), introduction, 29.

10. *Zohar* 3:127b-128a (*Idia Rabba*), citing Deuteronomy 27:15.

11. See Matt, *Zohar*, 20.

12. *Zohar* 3:703, IIb; *Sefer Yetsirah* 1:7 (see "The Ten Sefirot," p. 76).

13. See "The Wedding Celebration," p. 60.

14. On "the revenge of myth," see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 35.

15. See "Ein Sof," p. 29.

16. *Zohar* 1:7b.

17. Joseph ben Hayyim; see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 350, n. 333.

18. See *Zohar* 1:119b; Matt, *Zohar*, 72-74.

19. See "Ripples," p. 114.

20. See "Beyond Knowing," p. 113.

21. See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), passim; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 119-55; "Letters of the Alphabet," pp. 101-108.

22. See Moshe Idel, "Qabbalah," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 11:121-22.

23. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 254.

24. Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1961), 81.

25. Dov Baer, *Or ha-Emet*, ed. Levi Yitshaq of Berdichev (Bnei Brak: Yahadut, 1967), 36c-d. *Ets Hayyim* (*The Tree of Life*), compiled by Hayyim Vital, is the most widely disseminated version of Lurianic Kabbalah.

26. Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1963-64), 2:356: "Kol ha-yesh ... shi'ur qomah rabbati."

27. See "Heretical Faith," pp. 32-35.

28. See Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 197.

29. See "Drowning," p. 131.

## THE PURPOSE

THE PURPOSE OF the marriage of a woman and a man is union.

The purpose of union is fertilization.

The purpose of fertilization is giving birth.

The purpose of birth is learning.

The purpose of learning is to grasp the divine.

The purpose of apprehending the divine is to maintain the endurance of the one who apprehends with the joy of apprehension.

## THE NATURE OF GOD

AN IMPOVERISHED person thinks that God is an old man with white hair, sitting on a wondrous throne of fire that glitters with countless sparks, as the Bible states: "The Ancient -of-Days sits, the hair on his head like clean fleece, his throne—flames of fire." Imagining this and similar fantasies, the fool corporealizes God. He falls into one of the traps that destroy faith. His awe of God is limited by his imagination.

But if you are enlightened, you know God's oneness; you know that the divine is devoid of bodily categories—these can never be applied to God. Then you wonder, astonished: Who am

I? I am a mustard seed in the middle of the sphere of the moon, which itself is a mustard seed within the next sphere. So it is with that sphere and all it contains in relation to the next sphere. So it is with all the spheres—one inside the other—and all of them are a mustard seed within the further expanses. And all of these are a mustard seed within further expanses. Your awe is invigorated, the love in your soul expands.

## **Ein Sof: God as Infinity**

### **NONDUALITY**

THE ESSENCE of divinity is found in every single thing— nothing but it exists. Since it causes every thing to be, no thing can live by anything else. It enlivens them; its existence exists in each existent.

Do not attribute duality to God. Let God be solely God. If you suppose that Ein Sof emanates until a certain point, and that from that point on is outside of it, you have dualized. God forbid! Realize, rather, that Ein Sof exists in each existent. Do not say, "This is a stone and not God." God forbid! Rather, all existence is God, and the stone is a thing pervaded by divinity.

BEFORE ANYTHING emanated, there was only Ein Sof. Ein Sof was all that existed. Similarly, after it brought into being that which exists, there is nothing but it. You cannot find anything that exists apart from it. There is nothing that is not pervaded by the power of divinity. If there were, Ein Sof would be limited, subject to duality, God forbid! Rather, God is everything that exists, though everything that exists is not God. It is present in everything, and everything comes into being from it. Nothing is devoid of its divinity. Everything is within it; it is within everything and outside of everything. There is nothing but it.

### **GOD'S ENCAMPMENT**

WHEN YOU contemplate the Creator, realize that his encampment extends beyond, infinitely beyond, and so, too, in front of you and behind you, east and west, north and south, above and below, infinitely everywhere. Be aware that God fashioned everything and is within everything. There is nothing else.

### **THE CHAIN OF BEING**

GOD is unified oneness—one without two, inestimable. Genuine divine existence engenders the existence of all of creation. The sublime, inner essences secretly constitute a chain linking everything from the highest to the lowest, extending from the upper pool to the edge of the universe.

There is nothing—not even the tiniest thing—that is not fastened to the links of this chain. Everything is catenated in its mystery, caught in its oneness. God is one, God's

secret is one, all the worlds below and above are all mysteriously one. Divine existence is indivisible.

The entire chain is one. Down to the last link, everything is linked with everything else; so divine essence is below as well as above, in heaven and on earth. There is nothing else.

## **EIN SOF AND YOU**

EACH OF us emerges from Ein Sof and is included in it. We live through its dissemination. It is the perpetuation of existence. The fact that we sustain ourselves on vegetation and animal life does not mean that we are nourished on something outside of it. This process is like a revolving wheel, first descending, then ascending. It is all one and the same, nothing is separate from it. Though life branches out further and further, everything is joined to Ein Sof, included and abiding in it.

Delve into this. Flashes of intuition will come and go, and you will discover a secret here. If you are deserving, you will understand the mystery of God on your own.

## **YOU ENLIVEN EVERYTHING**

THERE MUST be a contraction of God's presence. For if we believe that Bin Sof emanated the emanation and does not clothe itself within, then everything that emanated is outside of it, and it is outside of everything. Then there are two, God forbid. So we must conclude that nothing is outside of God. This applies not only to the sefirot but to everything that exists, large and small—they exist solely through the divine energy that flows to them and clothes itself in them. If God's gaze were withdrawn for even a moment, all existence would be nullified. This is the secret meaning of the verse: "You enliven everything." So divinity flows and inheres in each thing that exists. This is the secret meaning of the verse: "God's presence fills the entire world." Contemplating this, you are humbled, your thoughts purified.

## **EIN SOF**

ANYTHING VISIBLE, and anything that can be grasped by thought, is bounded. Anything bounded is finite. Anything finite is not undifferentiated. Conversely, the boundless is called Ein Sof, Infinite. It is absolute undifferentiation in perfect, changeless oneness. Since it is boundless, there is nothing outside of it. Since it transcends and conceals itself, it is the essence of everything hidden and revealed. Since it is concealed, it is the root of faith and the root of rebellion. As it is written, "One who is righteous lives by his faith." The philosophers acknowledge that we comprehend it only by way of no.

Emanating from Ein Sof are the ten sefirot. They constitute the process by which all things come into being and pass away. They energize every existent thing that can be quantified. Since all things come into being by means of the sefirot, they differ from one another; yet they all derive from one root. Everything is from Ein Sof; there is nothing outside of it.

One should avoid fashioning metaphors regarding Ein Sof, but in order to help you understand, you can compare Ein Sof to a candle from which hundreds of millions of

other candles are kindled. Though some shine brighter than others, compared to the first light they are all the same, all deriving from that one source. The first light and all the others are, in effect, incomparable. Nor can their priority compare with its, for it surpasses them; their energy emanates from it. No change takes place in it—the energy of emanation simply manifests through differentiation.

Ein Sof cannot be conceived, certainly not expressed, though it is intimated in every thing, for there is nothing outside of it. No letter, no name, no writing, no thing can confine it. The witness testifying in writing that there is nothing outside of it is: "I am that I am." Ein Sof has no will, no intention, no desire, no thought, no speech, no action—yet there is nothing outside of it.

## **DIVINE LIFE**

IN THE FLOW of the holy spirit, one feels the divine life force coursing the pathways of existence, through all desires, all worlds, all thoughts, all nations, all creatures.

## **EVOLUTION AND KABBALAH**

THE THEORY of evolution accords with the secrets of Kabbalah better than any other theory. Evolution follows a path of ascent and thus provides the world with a basis for optimism. How can one despair, seeing that everything evolves and ascends? When we penetrate the inner nature of evolution, we find divinity illuminated in perfect clarity. Ein Sof generates, actualizes potential infinity.

## **HERETICAL FAITH**

ALL CONCEPTUAL entanglements among human beings and all the inner, mental conflicts suffered by each individual result solely from our cloudy concept of the divine. All thoughts, whether practical or theoretical, flow out of the endless divine ocean and return there.

Constantly clarify the mind, so that it be free of the dross of deceptive fantasies, groundless fears, bad habits, and deficiencies. By cleaving in love and full awareness to the source of life, the soul shines from the supernal light, and all feelings, thoughts, and actions are refined. As this fundamental awareness becomes clearer in the recesses of the soul, the sensation and excitement of cleaving to the divine is activated, conducting the entire course of your life.

The essence of faith is an awareness of the vastness of Infinity. Whatever conception of it enters the mind is an absolutely negligible speck in comparison to what should be conceived, and what should be conceived is no less negligible compared to what it really is. One may speak of goodness, of love, of justice, of power, of beauty, of life in all its glory, of faith, of the divine—all of these convey the yearning of the soul's original nature for what lies beyond everything. All the divine names, whether in Hebrew or any other language, provide merely a tiny, dim spark of the hidden light for which the soul yearns when it says "God." Every definition of God leads to heresy; definition is spiritual idolatry. Even attributing mind and will to God, even attributing divinity itself, and the name "God"—these, too, are definitions. Were it not for the subtle awareness that all these are just sparkling flashes of that which transcends definition—these, too, would



engender heresy.

If consciousness is torn from its source it becomes impoverished, without value. The only remedy for it to shine vibrantly is to be joined to the illumination of faith, which transcends all specific values, thereby establishing all values. Everything attributed to God other than the vastness of Infinity is simply an explanation by which to attain the source of faith. One must draw a distinction between the essence of faith and its explanatory aids, as well as between the various levels of explanation.

From learning and knowing too little, the mind becomes desolate, which leads to much thinking about the essence of God. The deeper one sinks into the stupidity of this mental insolence, the more one imagines that one is approaching the sublime knowledge of God, for which all the world's great spirits yearn. When this habit persists over many generations, numerous false notions are woven, leading to tragic consequences, until eventually the individual, stumbling in darkness, loses material and spiritual vitality. The greatest impediment to the human spirit results from the fact that the conception of God is fixed in a particular form, due to childish habit and imagination. This is a spark of the defect of idolatry, of which we must always beware.

All the troubles of the world, especially spiritual troubles such as impatience, hopelessness, and despair, derive from the failure to see the grandeur of God clearly. It is natural for each individual creature to be humble in the presence of God, to nullify itself in the presence of the whole—all the more so in the presence of the source of all being, which one senses as infinitely beyond the whole. There is no sadness or depression in this act, but rather delight and a feeling of being uplifted, a sense of inner power. But when is it natural? When the grandeur of God is well portrayed in the soul, with clear awareness, beyond any notion of divine essence.

We avoid studying the true nature of the divine, and as a result, the concept of God has dimmed. The innermost point of the awareness of God has become so faint that the essence of God is conceived only as a stern power from whom you cannot escape, to whom you must subjugate yourself. If you submit to the service of God on this empty basis, you gradually lose your radiance by constricting your consciousness. The divine splendor is plucked from your soul.

Every sensitive spirit feels compelled to discard such a conception of God. This denial is the heresy that paves the way for the Messiah, when the knowledge of God runs dry throughout the world. The crude complacency of imagining divinity as embodied in words and letters alone puts humanity to shame. Heresy arises as a pained outcry to liberate us from this strange, narrow pit, to raise us from the darkness of letters and platitudes to the light of thought and feeling. Such heresy eventually takes its stand in the center of morality. It has a temporary legitimacy, for it must consume the filthy froth clinging to mindless faith. The real purpose of heresy is to remove the particular forms from the thought of the essence of all life, the root of every single thought. When this condition persists over several generations, heresy inevitably emerges as cultural expression, uprooting the memory of God and all religious institutions. But what type of uprooting is intended by divine providence? Removing the cross that separates us from genuine divine light. On the desolate ruins wrought by heresy, the sublime knowledge of God will build her temple. Utter heresy arises to purify the air of the wicked, insolent filth of thinking about the essence of divinity—an act of peeping that leads to idolatry. In itself this heresy is no better than what it attacks, but it is absolutely opposed to it, and out

of the clash of these two opposites, humanity is aided immensely in approaching an enlightened awareness of God, which draws it toward temporal and eternal bliss. Instead of wasting one's thought trying to break through to the essence of divinity, the mind will be illumined by pure morality and sublime power, which sparkle from the divine light and chart the paths of life.

Pure belief in the oneness of God has been blurred by corporeality. From time to time, this confusion is exposed. Whenever a corporeal aspect falls away, it seems as if faith itself has fallen, but afterward it turns out that, in fact, faith has been clarified. As the human spirit verges on complete clarity of faith, the final subtle shell of corporeality falls away—attributing existence to God. For truly, existence, however we define it, is immeasurably remote from God. The silhouette of this denial resembles heresy but when clarified is actually the highest level of faith. Then the human spirit becomes aware that the divine emanates existence and is itself beyond existence. What appeared to be heresy, now purified, is restored to purest faith. But this denial of existence in God—this return to the source of all being, to the essential vibrancy of all existence—requires exquisite insight. Each day one must trace it back to its authentic purity.

The infinite transcends every particular content of faith.

## **Ein Sof and the Sefirot**

### **WATER, LIGHT, AND COLORS**

IN THE BEGINNING Ein Sof emanated ten sefirot, which are of its essence, united with it. It and they are entirely one. There is no change or division in the emanator that would justify saying it is divided into parts in these various sefirot. Division and change do not apply to it, only to the external sefirot.

To help you conceive this, imagine water flowing through vessels of different colors: white, red, green, and so forth. As the water spreads through those vessels, it appears to change into the colors of the vessels, although the water is devoid of all color. The change in color does not affect the water itself, just our perception of the water. So it is with the sefirot. They are vessels, known, for example, as *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*, each colored according to its function, white, red, and green, respectively, while the light of the emanator—their essence—is the water, having no color at all. This essence does not change; it only appears to change as it flows through the vessels.

Better yet, imagine a ray of sunlight shining through a stained-glass window of ten different colors. The sunlight possesses no color at all but appears to change hue as it passes through the different colors of glass. Colored light radiates through the window. The light has not essentially changed, though so it seems to the viewer. Just so with the sefirot. The light that clothes itself in the vessels of the sefirot is the essence, like the ray of sunlight. That essence does not change color at all, neither judgment nor compassion, neither right nor left. Yet by emanating through the sefirot—the variegated stained glass—judgment or compassion prevails.

## EIN SOF AND THE SEFIROT

FIRST, YOU should know that the Creator, Ein Sof, is the cause of causes, one without a second, one that cannot be counted. Change and mutability, form and multiplicity, do not apply to it. The word "one" is used metaphorically, since the number one stands on its own and is the beginning of all numbers. Every number is contained within it potentially, while it inheres in every number in actuality.

The Creator is called one from this aspect: Ein Sof is present in all things in actuality, while all things are present in it potentially. It is the beginning and cause of everything. In this way oneness has been ascribed to the Creator; nothing can be added to this oneness or subtracted from it. Ein Sof is necessary being, just as the number one is necessary for all numbers, since without it no number can exist. If the number one were nullified, all numbers would be nullified, whereas if the numbers were nullified, the number one would not. Such is the power of one.

So it is with the Creator of all, the one who acts and sustains existence. If an action were nullified, the actor would not be nullified, since Ein Sof does not need anything. If existence were nullified, Ein Sof would not be nullified, since it does not need space and exists on its own.

Furthermore, you should know that Ein Sof emanated its sefirot, through which its actions are performed. They serve as vessels for the actions deriving from Ein Sof in the world of separation and below. In fact, its existence and essence spread through them.

These qualities possess unerasable names. *Ketei* (Crown) is named Eheyeh; *Hokhmah* (Wisdom) is named Yah; *Binah* (Understanding) is named YHVH with the vowels of Elohim; Hesed (Love) is named El; Gevurah (Power) is named Elohim; Tiferet (Beauty) is named YHVH; *Netsah* (Eternity) is named

Tseva'ot; *Yesod* (Foundation) is named Shaddai or El Hai; *Malkhut* (Kingdom) is named Adonai.

These names are the sefirot. It is not that the names are merely ascribed to the sefirot, God forbid; rather, the names *are* the sefirot. These sefirotic names are names of Ein Sof, according to its actions.

Ein Sof is not identical with Keter, as many have thought. Rather, Ein Sof is the cause of Keter; Keter is caused by Ein Sof, cause of causes. Ein Sof is the primal cause of all that exists; there is no cause higher than it. Keter is the first to derive from it. From Keter the rest of emanation is drawn forth. This does not contradict the fact that Keter is counted as one of the sefirot. It is reckoned as one of the ten, considered similar to the emanated ones. On account of its loftiness, however, Keter does not reveal itself in the emanated totality of ten. The decade is kept complete by including *Da'at* (Knowledge) in place of Keter.

It is inappropriate to say of Ein Sof "blessed be he," "glorified be he," "praised be he," or similar expressions, since it cannot be blessed, praised, or glorified by another. Rather, it is the one who blesses, praises, glorifies, and animates from the first point of its emanation to the farthest. Before the formation of the universe, it had no need of emanation. It was concealed in its holy, pure simplicity. No letter, vowel, or image can be applied to it, for even Keter, the beginning of emanation, is devoid of name and image in letter or vowel. How much more so with Ein Sof, whom we cannot depict, of whom we cannot speak, of whom we cannot posit either judgment or compassion, excitement or anger, change or limit, sleep or motion, or any quality whatsoever, either prior to the

emanation or now.

At the very beginning, Ein Sof emanated the subtle emanation, namely, ten sefirot—noetic forms—from its essence, uniting with it. It and they together constitute a complete union. These sefirot are souls, which clothe themselves in the ten sefirot called by name, which serve—as vessels for the ten essences. Within these ten named sefirot are found judgment and compassion and the aforementioned actions, which we would not ascribe to Ein Sof.

Before these qualities emanated, they were utterly concealed within Ein Sof, utterly united with it. No image can be applied to them—not even a point; rather, they were united with it. Afterward, Ein Sof emanated one point from itself, one emanation. This is Keter, called *Ayin*, Nothingness, on account of its extreme subtlety, its cleaving to its source, such that being cannot be posited of it. From Keter a second point emanated in a second revelation. This is Hokhmah (Wisdom), called *Yesh*, Being, for it is the beginning of revelation and existence. It is called *yesh me-ayin*, "being from nothingness." Because it is the beginning of being and not being itself, it required a third point to reveal what exists. This is Binah (Understanding).

From these three sefirot emerged the six dimensions of providence, the sefirot from Hesed (Love) and below. First, Hesed from Hokhmah; then Gevurah (Power) emanated from Binah; then Tiferet (Beauty) emanated from Keter. The revelation of all three of these came about through Binah, but the essential roots of Hesed and Tiferet derived from Hokhmah and Keter respectively. Hidden within these three were Ne-tzah (Eternity), *Hod* (Splendor), and Yesod (Foundation). Ne-tzah was revealed from Hesed, Hod from Gevurah, and Yesod from Tiferet. Malkhut (Kingdom) emanated along with the six dimensions.

The process of emanation can be pictured in three different ways, each of which is true. Either one after the other: Keter, Hokhmah, Binah, Hesed ... to Malkhut. Or else Keter, Tiferet, Yesod, and Malkhut constitute one point, emanating to the end of Malkhut, while Hokhmah, Hesed, and Netsah constitute a second point, emanating until Netsah; and Binah, Gevurah, and Hod constitute a third point, emanating until

Hod. Alternatively, Keter, Hokhmah, and Binah, followed by Hesed, Gevurah, and Tiferet, followed by Netsah, Hod, and Yesod. Malkhut is the entirety.

Among the kabbalists, the most widely accepted depiction of the sefirot is as follows: Keter, Hokhmah, and Binah in the form of a triangle. Beneath them, also in the form of a triangle, Hesed, Gevurah, and Tiferet, followed by another triangle of Netsah, Hod, and Yesod. Centered beneath them is Malkhut. The upper sefirot need the lower ones, and the lower sefirot need the upper ones. So the power of the lower sefirot is in the upper ones, and the power of the upper sefirot is in the lower ones. All of them need Bin Sof, while it needs none of them.

These sefirot have no specific location, God forbid, though we depict them in such a way as to make them fathomable. In truth, though, Ein Sof is the location of its sefirot, and Keter is the location of nine sefirot, and Hokhmah is the location of eight, and Binah is the location of seven, and so on. Malkhut is the location of the world of creation, which is the location of the world of formation, which is the location of the world of actualization, until the emanation reaches the earth.

Various channels have been ascribed to these sefirot, signifying the path of the ray of illumination from the first sefirah to its recipient, and the pathway from the recipient

back to the emanating sefirah, so that it can receive. The joining of these two aspects of light constitutes a channel. The various types of channels are actually innumerable.

Among them are the following:

One from Keter to Hokhmah, one from Keter to Binah, and one from Keter to Tiferet, totaling three.

One from Hokhmah to Binah, one from Hokhmah to Hesed, one from Hokhmah to Gevurah, and one from Hokhmah to Tiferet, totaling four.

One from Binah to Hesed, one from Binah to Gevurah, and one from Binah to Tiferet, totaling three.

One from Hesed to Netsah, one from Hesed to Gevurah, and one from Hesed to Tiferet, totaling three.

One from Gevurah to Hod, and one from Gevurah to Tiferet, totaling two.

One from Tiferet to Netsah, one from Tiferet to Hod, and one from Tiferet to Yesod, totaling three.

One from Netsah to Hod, and one from Netsah to Yesod, totaling two.

One from Hod to Yesod, and one from Yesod to Malkhut.

Malkhut receives solely from Yesod, through whom she receives from them all. Without him, she cannot receive from any of them; without her, none of the sefirot can emanate to the lower worlds, for she is the essence of those worlds, conducting them. These are the major channels; their facets are infinite.

The sefirot have the power to perform opposite actions, at times manifesting judgment, at times compassion. They always agree on each action, for each sefirah acts only along with all the others, with their consent, through Malkhut.

Each sefirah is composed of all ten, yet they manifest particular combinations:

Sometimes a combination of three: Hesed, Din, and *Ra-hamim* (Love, Judgment, and Compassion).

Sometimes a combination of four: the three already mentioned and one composed of them all.

Sometimes five: Hesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netsah, and Hod.

Sometimes six: the six dimensions.

Sometimes seven: the sefirot from Hesed to Malkhut.

Sometimes eight, including Binah.

Sometimes ten, from Keter on down, or from Hokhmah on down, with Da'at (Knowledge) completing the decade.

These various combinations are not what they seem to be, for the sefirot are never less than ten. Rather, all ten combine in these various modes, revealing themselves in illumination.

The origin of Judgment is on high, in the will of the emanator. However, it is concealed, as all of the qualities are concealed and unified within Keter and Ein Sof, to such an extent that they cannot be considered individual qualities. Similarly, the activity of Judgment is concealed in the first three sefirot, and it is not considered Judgment until its manifestation in Gevurah.

It is improper for the seeker to probe the essence of the first three sefirot, since they constitute the Divine Mind, Wisdom, and Understanding. It is also improper to probe the essence of the hidden substance that creates all that exists. Since it is one with its Will, Wisdom, and Understanding—its essential qualities—it is not proper to probe.

However, it is not wrong for us to explore from Hesed and Gevurah on down, for these qualities have been emanated to conduct the beings below. Whoever explores them thoroughly is rewarded for his zeal. Concerning this it is written: "Let the mother go," referring to Binah (Understanding); "the children you may take," to search and explore.

The activities of Hesed abound; we will mention here what is apt for the seeker. First, grace—as indicated by its name—benefiting us, being good to us. Also, nullifying the power of the aliens, who accuse and vex us. The effects of this quality are found in all things that partake of whiteness, such as gems whose color is white, whose virtue derives from Hesed. Among its actions is love. Although love is aroused by the left, its essential purpose is on the right. Another of its actions is drawing a person toward wisdom through the power of Hokhmah, above on the right. Another is including Gevurah within itself in order to execute judgment tinged with love.

Among the actions of Gevurah are harsh judgment, as indicated by its name. It is a lash to discipline humanity. From here stem all the aliens that seduce and denounce. Its effects are found in all things that partake of the mystery of redness and heat, such as fire and the power of gems whose color is red, whose virtue is striking terror. Yet, as we have noted, love is also aroused by this quality. Wealth and sustenance, too, emanate from here, with the help of Binah, above. Every time that God listens to a prayer or a cry of distress, it is through this quality, with the help of Binah.

Among the actions of Tiferet are beauty and splendor, as attested by its name. The reason is that splendor and beauty are composed of white and red, as it is written, "My beloved is white and ruddy." Within the mystery of this quality are all things compounded of red and white, fire and water, warmth and wetness, judgment and grace. Also derived from here is the color yellow in gems—like the yellow of the yolk of an egg. All of these emanate from this quality, and their virtues derive from its power. The Torah and the study of Torah both depend on Tiferet. The birth of children depends on the upper sefirot, while its locus is here. The manna descended to Israel from this quality. Souls emanate from here as well, through the mysterious union of this quality with Malkhut. Such union takes place between these two sefirot, as well as between Hokhmah and Binah, but between none of the others.

Hokhmah and Binah are called man and woman, father and mother. Just as human sexual union requires the medium of genitalia, so above, these two qualities unite by means of the mystery of primordial Da'at, which mediates between father and mother. This union maintains and renews the sefirot, which are continually revitalized through their root, sunk deep within Binah and Hokhmah. The soul, which derives from Binah, shares in this renewal. However, every union requires an arousal below, and the arousal of Binah stems from Malkhut.

This manner of union may be found in Tiferet and Malkhut, who are male and female, groom and bride, lower father and mother, son and daughter of the upper couple, king and queen, the Holy One, blessed be he, and *Shekhinah*. All these are metaphors. Their union, however, requires an arousal from the lower world, from the souls of the righteous.

Foreplay ushers in the union. There is embrace at the hands of Hesed and Gevurah, as intimated in the Song of Songs: "His left hand beneath my head, his right arm embracing me." This implies that the emanation of Hesed flows into Tiferet, uniting with it. Then Tiferet flows into Gevurah, uniting with it. Now the groom is joined with

both his arms. Then he receives the bride with his left arm, and Gevurah extends to Malkhut, emanating to her. Then the abundance of Hesed, the right arm, flows to her. Thus the left is below, and the right embraces above.

Accompanying the union is the aspect of the kiss. Undoubtedly, this kiss is the cleaving of spirit to spirit, the mystery of the union of the inner essence of the sefirot, illuminating one another through the mystery of the mouth, Malkhut being in Tiferet, Tiferet in Malkhut.

The benefits of this union are immense. From it derive male souls from the male side and female souls from the female side. Accompanying this union are Netsah and Hod, the two testicles of the male, along with Yesod, the mystery of the covenant. Thus the union is enacted.

THERE IS A balance between the two extremes, that is, between Hesed and Din, Love and Judgment. This balance is Rahamim, Compassion. Such extremes appear in three places, each of which includes a balance. The first polarity is between Netsah and Hod, and the harmonizer is Yesod. The second polarity is Hesed and Gevurah, and the harmonizer is Tiferet. The third polarity is Hokhmah and Binah, and the harmonizer is Tiferet in the mystery of Da'at. Such harmonization entails mediating between the two extremes.

COLORS ARE ascribed to the various sefirot, according to their actions. Thus white indicates compassion, red indicates judgment, and so on, as is well known. Regarding Keter, some say that it has no color, while others say that the whitest of whites is appropriate for it. Still others construe its color as black. These three colors correspond to its three aspects. First, by virtue of being with the emanator, it is black. Second, in and of itself, since it is not revealed to what is emanated, no color pertains to it. Third, in its aspect of emanating compassion through the other sefirot, it partakes of the mystery of whiteness.

The color of Hokhmah is the first of all the colors, just as this sefirah is the beginning of all activity. The colors commence with Hokhmah, and thus its color is blue, the first color to emerge out of black. Black is opened by blue. Some construe its color as sapphire, which is close to blue.

The color of Binah is green like grass, the reason being that this color includes red and white and their blend, namely, Hesed, Gevurah, and Tiferet. It also includes the color blue, from Hokhmah. Thus all these qualities blend together in Binah.

YOU SHOULD realize that holy, spiritual entities are unlike lowly, human actions. For when a human being performs an action, the object acted upon acquires the desired form and by necessity loses its previous form and nature. Having been transformed, its previous state of existence is no longer recalled. This is not the case with the sefirot and with everything that develops from them, for their previous mode of existence is not absent. Rather they evolve from one mode of existence to another. For example, when the sefirot were concealed within Keter, all of them were present there, and even after their emanation, they remain existent there. Keter does not lack and does not change. So it is with the emanation of the sefirot from Hokhmah, and on and on. They transform themselves and multiply without end.

THE LIGHT of the sefirot emanates and radiates from above to below in a direct path: Keter, Hokhmah, Binah, Hesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netsah, Hod, Yesod, Malkhut. Having descended to the site of its status, the light is reflected back, from below to above: Keter in Malkhut, Hokhmah in Yesod, Binah in Hod, Hesed in Netsah, Gevurah in Tiferet, Tiferet in Gevurah, Netsah in Hesed, Hod in Binah, Yesod in Hokhmah, Malkhut in Keter. Here lies the mystery of the reflection of light from below to above, the mystery of the reversal of light, striking a mirror and returning to its source. Between each two qualities a conduit runs up and down. Within the quality itself, some flows from below to above, some from above to below.

THE EXISTENCE stemming from God, extending to the lowest point, is divided into four divisions. The first is *Atsi-lut*, Emanation, namely, the ten emanated sefirot, through which spreads the light of Ein Sof. The second is the realm of the Throne of Glory, called *Beri'ah*, Creation. The light of the ten sefirot spreads through it—called here the sefirot of Creation. Thus the light of Ein Sof clothes itself in them through the medium of emanated light.

The third realm comprises ten bands of angels and the celestial palaces. The light of the ten sefirot spreads also through them, through the light of the ten sefirot of Creation. This realm is called *Yetsirah*, Formation, and as the sefirot spread through them, they are called the ten sefirot of Formation. Thus the light of Ein Sof clothes itself through emanated light.

The fourth realm is the heavens and the entire material world. This is called *Asiyyah*, Actualization, and it includes ten heavens. The light of the sefirot spreads through them, and they are called the ten sefirot of Actualization. Here holiness pervades physical matter.

So these four are called Atsilut, Beri'ah, Yetsirah, Asiyyah; Emanation, Creation, Formation, Actualization. Their acronym is *ABiYA*. Emanation transcends Creation, Creation transcends Formation, Formation transcends Actualization. All four divisions are found in each one, since the degrees descend from cause to caused.

WHILE THERE are many unerasable names—the ten divine names of the ten sefirot—there exists one name that comprises all ten sefirot. This is the four-letter name: YHVH. Y symbolizes Hokhmah; H, Binah; V includes six sefirot; the final H, Malkhut. Ein Sof is concealed within Keter, while its light spreads through these four letters, from *yod* to *he*, from *he* to *vav*, from *vav* to final *he*.

THE RIGHTEOUS are capable of becoming a vehicle for the sefirot, through the mystery of the emanation of their souls, their actions in this world, and their inclination toward one side and toward one of the sefirot. Thus Abraham was a man of Hesed, Isaac a man of Gevurah, Jacob master of Tiferet, Moses master of Netsah, Aaron master of Hod, Joseph master of Yesod, and David master of Malkhut.

## DIVINE QUALITIES

ELIJAH OPENED and said, "Master of the worlds! You are one—but not in counting. You



are higher than the high, concealed from the concealed. No thought grasps you at all. It is you who generated ten adornments—called by us the ten sefirot—by which concealed, unrevealed worlds are conducted, and revealed worlds. In them you conceal yourself from human beings, while you are the one who binds and unites them. Since you are within, whoever separates one of these ten from another—it is as if he divided you.

"These ten sefirot proceed in order: one long, one short, one between. It is you who conducts them, and no one conducts you—neither above nor below nor in any direction. You have prepared garments for them, from which souls fly to human beings. You have prepared various bodies for them—called bodies in contrast to the garments covering them. These bodies are named according to this arrangement: Hesed, the right arm; Gevurah, the left arm; Tiferet, the trunk of the body, Netsah and Hod, the two legs; Yesod, completion of the body, sign of the holy covenant; Malkhut, the mouth—we call her oral Torah. Hokhmah is the brain, inner thought. Binah is the heartmind, through which the [human] heartmind understands. The highest crown, *Ketei Elyon*, is the royal crown, the skull, inside of which is: yod he vav he, path of emanation, sap of the tree, spreading through its arms and branches—like water drenching a tree, which then flourishes.

"Master of the worlds! You are the cause of causes, who drenches the tree with that flow—a flow that is like a soul for the body, life for the body. In you there is neither likeness nor image of anything within or without. You created heaven and earth, bringing forth sun, moon, stars, and constellations. And on earth: trees, grass, the Garden of Eden, animals, birds, fish, and human beings. So that the beyond might be known—how above and below conduct themselves and how they become known.

"About you, no one knows anything. Apart from you, there is no union above and below. You are known as Lord of all. Every one of the sefirot has a name that is known, by which the angels are called, but you have no known name, for you pervade all names; you are the fullness of them all. When you disappear from them, all those names are left like a body without a soul.

"You are wise—not with a known wisdom. You understand—not with known understanding. You have no known place—just making known your power and strength to human beings, showing them how the world is conducted by justice and compassion, according to human action. But actually you have no known justice or compassion, nor any quality at all."

## THE CREATION OF GOD

### *In the beginning*

WHEN THE KING conceived ordaining  
he engraved engravings in the luster on high.  
A blinding spark flashed within the concealed of the  
concealed  
from the mystery of the Infinite,  
a cluster of vapor in formlessness, set in a ring,  
not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all.  
When a band spanned, it yielded radiant colors.  
Deep within the spark gushed a flow, imbuing colors below,  
concealed within the concealed of the mystery of the

Infinite.

The flow broke through and did not break through its aura.

It was not known at all

until, under the impact of breaking through,

one high and hidden point shone.

Beyond that point, nothing is known.

So it is called Beginning.

"The enlightened will shine like the *zohar* of the sky,

and those who make the masses righteous

will shine like the stars forever and ever."

*Zohar*, concealed of the concealed, struck its aura.

The aura touched and did not touch this point.

Then Beginning emanated, building itself a glorious palace.

There it sowed the seed of holiness

to give birth for the benefit of the universe.

Zohar, sowing a seed of glory

like a seed of fine purple silk.

The silkworm wraps itself within, weaving itself a palace.

This palace is its praise, a benefit to all.

With Beginning, the unknown concealed one created the  
palace,

a palace called God.

The secret is: "With Beginning, \_\_\_\_\_created God."

## THE AROMA OF INFINITY

EIN SOF DOES NOT abide being known,

does not produce end or beginning.

Primordial Nothingness brought forth beginning and end.

Who is beginning?

The highest point, beginning of all,

the concealed one abiding in thought.

It also engenders end, the culmination of the word.

But there, no end.

No desires, no lights, no sparks in that Infinity.

All these lights and sparks are dependent on it but cannot  
comprehend.

The only one who knows, yet without knowing,

is the highest desire, concealed of all concealed,

Nothingness.

And when the highest point and the world that is coming  
ascend,

they know only the aroma,

as one inhaling an aroma is sweetened.

## THE WEDDING CELEBRATION

ON THE DAY that Rabbi Shim'on was to leave the world,  
while he was arranging his affairs,  
the companions assembled at his house.  
Present were Rabbi El'azar, his son, Rabbi Abba, and the  
other companions.  
The house was full.  
Rabbi Shim'on raised his eyes and saw that the house was  
filled.  
He cried, and said,  
"The other time I was ill, Rabbi Pinhas son of Ya'ir was in  
my presence.  
I was already selecting my place in paradise next to Ahiyah  
of Shiloh  
when they extended my life until now.  
When I returned, fire was whirling in front of me;  
it has never gone out.  
No human has entered without permission.  
Now I see it has gone out, and the house is filled."

While they were sitting  
Rabbi Shim'on opened his eyes and saw what he saw;  
fire whirled through the house.  
Everyone left;  
Rabbi El'azar, his son, and Rabbi Abba remained;  
the other companions sat outside.  
Rabbi Shim'on rose and laughed in delight.  
He asked, "Where are the companions?"  
Rabbi El'azar rose and brought them in.  
They sat in front of him.  
Rabbi Shim'on raised his hands and prayed a prayer.

Rejoicing, he said,  
"Those companions who were present at the threshing house  
will convene here."  
Everyone left;  
Rabbi El'azar, his son, Rabbi Abba, Rabbi Judah,  
Rabbi Yose, and Rabbi Hiyya remained.  
Rabbi Abba sat behind him and Rabbi El'azar in front.  
Rabbi Shim'on said, "Now is a time of favor.  
I want to enter without shame into the world that is coming.  
Holy words, until now unrevealed, I want to reveal in the presence of Shekhinah,  
so it will not be said that I left the world deficiently.  
Until now they were hidden in my heart  
as a password to the world that is coming.  
I will arrange you like this:

Rabbi Abba will write; Rabbi El'azar, my son, will repeat;  
the other companions will meditate within."

Rabbi Abba rose from behind him;  
Rabbi El'azar, his son, sat in front.  
Rabbi Shim'on said, "Rise, my son, for someone else will sit  
in that place."  
Rabbi El'azar rose.  
Rabbi Shim'on enwrapped himself and sat down.  
He opened and said,  
"It is so different now than at the threshing house.  
There the Blessed Holy One and his chariots convened.  
Now he is accompanied by the righteous from the Garden of  
Eden!  
This did not happen before.  
The Blessed Holy One wants the righteous to be honored  
more than he wants himself to be honored.  
So it is written concerning King Jeroboam.  
He offered incense to idols and worshiped them;  
yet the Blessed Holy One was patient.  
But as soon as he stretched out his hand against Ido the  
prophet,  
his hand dried up.  
Not because he worshiped idols,  
but because he threatened Ido the prophet.  
Now the Blessed Holy One wants *us* to be honored  
and all of them are coming with him!  
Here is Rav Hamnuna Sava  
surrounded by seventy of the righteous adorned with  
crowns,  
each one dazzling with the luster of the Holy Ancient One,  
concealed of all concealed.  
He is coming to hear in joy these words I am about to speak."

Rabbi Shim'on was about to sit down, when he exclaimed:  
"Look! Here is Rabbi Pinhas son of Ya'ir! Prepare his place!"  
The companions trembled;  
they got up and moved to the periphery of the house.  
Rabbi El'azar and Rabbi Abba remained with Rabbi Shim'on.

Rabbi Shim'on said,  
"In the threshing house, we were found to be:  
all the companions speaking, I among them.  
Now I alone will speak;  
all are listening to my words, those above and those below.  
Happy is my portion this day!"

Rabbi Shim'on opened and said,  
" 'I am my beloved's, his desire is upon me.'  
All the days that I have been bound to this world  
I have been bound in a single bond with the Blessed Holy One.

That is why now his desire is upon me.  
He and his holy entourage have come to hear in joy  
concealed words and praise for the Holy Ancient One, concealed of all  
concealed.  
Separate, separated from all, yet not separate.  
For all is joined to it, and it is joined to all.  
It is all!  
Ancient of all ancients, concealed of all concealed.  
Arrayed and not arrayed.  
Arrayed to sustain all;  
not arrayed, for it is not to be found.  
Arrayed, it radiates nine lights,  
blazing from it, from its array.  
Those lights, sparkling, flashing, emanate in every direction.

"Until now these words were concealed,  
for I was scared to reveal;  
now they have been revealed!  
Yet it is revealed before the Holy Ancient One  
that I have not acted for my own honor  
nor for the honor of my family  
but rather so I will not enter his palace in shame.  
Furthermore, I see that the Blessed Holy One  
and all these righteous ones approve:  
I see all of them rejoicing in this, my wedding celebration!  
All of them are invited, in that world, to my wedding  
celebration. Happy is my portion!"

Rabbi Abba said,  
"When the Holy Spark, the High Spark, finished this word  
he raised his hands, cried and laughed.  
He wanted to reveal one word.  
He said, 'I have been troubled by this word all my days  
and now they are not giving me permission!'"

"Summoning up his courage,  
he sat and moved his lips and bowed three times.  
No one could look at his place, certainly not at him.  
He said, 'Mouth, mouth, you have attained so much!  
Your spring has not dried up.

Your spring flows endlessly.  
Of you it is written:  
"A river issues from Eden."  
"Like a spring whose waters do not fail."  
Now I avow:  
All the days I have been alive, I have yearned to see this day.  
Now my desire is crowned with success.  
This day itself is crowned.  
Now I want to reveal words in the presence of the Blessed  
Holy One;  
all those words adorn my head like a crown.  
This day will not miss its mark like the other day,  
for this whole day is mine.  
I have now begun revealing words  
so I will not enter shamefully into the world that is coming.  
I have begun! I will speak!

'I have seen that all those sparks flash from the High Spark,  
hidden of all hidden.  
All are levels of enlightenment.  
In the light of each and every level  
there is revealed what is revealed.  
All those lights are connected:  
this light to that light, that light to this light,  
one shining into the other,  
inseparable, one from the other.

'The light of each and every spark,  
called Adornments of the King, Crowns of the King—  
each one shines into, joins onto the light within, within,  
not separating without.  
So all rises to one level,  
all is crowned with one word;  
no separating one from the other.  
It and its name is one.

'The light that is revealed is called the Garment of the King.  
The light within, within is a concealed light.  
In that light dwells the Ineffable One, the Unrevealed.  
All those sparks and all those lights sparkle from the Holy  
Ancient One,  
concealed of all concealed, the High Spark.  
Upon reflecting,  
all those lights emanating—  
there is nothing but the High Spark, hidden and  
unrevealed.'"

Rabbi Abba said,  
"Before the Holy Spark finished, his words subsided.  
I was still writing, intending to write more  
but I heard nothing.  
I did not raise my head:  
the light was overwhelming; I could not look.  
Then I started trembling.  
I heard a voice calling:  
'Length of days and years of life.'  
I heard another voice:  
'He asked you for life, and you granted it.'

"All day long, the fire in the house did not go out.  
No one reached him; no one could:  
light and fire surrounded him.  
All day long, I lay on the ground and wailed.  
After the fire disappeared  
I saw the Holy Spark, Holy of Holies, leaving the world,  
enwrapped, lying on his right, his face smiling.

"Rabbi El'azar, his son, rose, took his hands and kissed  
them.  
As for me, I licked the dust from the bottom of his feet.  
The companions wanted to cry but could not utter a sound.  
Finally they let out a cry,  
but Rabbi El'azar, his son, fell three times, unable to open his  
mouth.  
Finally he opened and cried, 'Father! Father!'"

Rabbi Hiyya rose to his feet and said,  
"Until now the Holy Spark has looked after us;  
now is the time to engage in honoring him."  
Rabbi El'azar and Rabbi Abba rose.  
They carried him on a trundle made out of a gangplank—  
Who has seen the companions' confusion?—  
and the whole house was fragrant.  
They lifted him onto his bed;  
only Rabbi El'azar and Rabbi Abba attended him.  
Truculent stingers and shield-bearing warriors from  
Sepphoris  
came and beset them.  
The people of Meron banded together and shouted,  
for they feared he would not be buried there.

After the bed emerged from the house, it rose into the air;

fire blazed before it.  
They heard a voice:  
"Come and enter!"

Assemble for the wedding celebration of Rabbi Shim'on!  
'He shall enter in peace;  
they shall rest on their couches.'"

As he entered the cave, they heard a voice from inside:  
"This is the man who shook the earth, who made kingdoms  
tremble!  
His Lord prides himself on him every day.  
Happy is his portion above and below!  
Many sublime treasures lie in store for him.  
'Go to the end and take your rest;  
you will rise for your reward at the end of days.'"

## **OBLIVION**

EIN SOF is a place to which forgetting and oblivion pertain. Why? Because concerning all the sefirot, one can search out their reality from the depth of supernal wisdom. From there it is possible to understand one thing from another. However, concerning Ein Sof, there is no aspect anywhere to search or probe; nothing can be known of it, for it is hidden and concealed in the mystery of absolute nothingness. Therefore forgetting pertains to the comprehension of this place. So open your eyes and see this great, awesome secret. Happy is one whose eyes shine from this secret, in this world and the world that is coming!

## **Ayin: Mystical Nothingness**

### **AYIN**

AYIN, NOTHINGNESS, is more existent than all the being of the world. But since it is simple, and every simple thing is complex compared with its simplicity, it is called Ayin.

THE INNER power is called Ayin because thought does not grasp it, nor reflection. Concerning this, Job said, "Wisdom comes into being out of ayin."

### **THE NAME OF NOTHINGNESS**

THE DEPTH of primordial being is called Boundless. Because of its concealment from all creatures above and below, it is also called Nothingness. If one asks, "What is it?" the answer is, "Nothing," meaning: No one can understand anything about it. It is negated of every conception. No one can know anything about it—except the belief that it exists. Its existence cannot be grasped by anyone other than it. Therefore its name is "I am becoming."



## BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

YOU MAY be asked: "How did God bring forth being from nothingness? Is there not an immense difference between being and nothingness?"

Answer as follows: "Being is in nothingness in the mode of nothingness, and nothingness is in being in the mode of being." Nothingness is being, and being is nothingness. The node of being as it begins to emerge from nothingness into existence is called faith. For the term "faith" applies neither to visible, comprehensible being, nor to nothingness, invisible and incomprehensible, but rather to the nexus of nothingness and being. Being does not stem from nothingness alone but rather, from being and nothingness together. All is one in the simplicity of absolute undifferentiation. Our limited mind cannot grasp or fathom this, for it joins infinity.

## THE WISDOM OF NOTHINGNESS

THE TEN SEFIROT are the secret of existence, the array of wisdom, by which the worlds above and below were created. Corresponding to this secret are the ten utterances by which the world was created, and the ten commandments, which epitomize the holy Torah. Indeed, the ten sefirot constitute the secret of divine existence; they comprise above and below, every single thing. They are ancient and concealed. From them emerges the mystery of the supernal chariot—a matter concealed and sealed for those who discover knowledge.

Keter Elyon, highest crown, is called the pure ether that cannot be grasped. It is the sum of all existence, and all have wearied in their search for it. One should not ponder this place. It is secretly named Ein Sof—Infinity—for it engenders everything that is. The belt of the wise is burst by this mysterious cause of causes.

Arouse yourself to contemplate, to focus thought, for God is the annihilation of all thoughts, uncontainable by any concept. Indeed, since no one can contain God at all, it is called Nothingness, Ayin. This is the secret of the verse, "Wisdom comes into being out of ayin." Anything sealed and concealed, totally unknown to anyone, is called ayin, meaning that no one knows anything about it. Similarly, no one knows anything at all about the human soul; she stands in the status of nothingness, as it is written: "The superiority of the human over the beast is ayin." By means of this soul, the human being ascends higher than all other creatures and attains the glory of Ayin.

At times, a breeze blows by, delighting the heart and the mind. You do not know what it is or why; it cannot be grasped. Similarly, when this sefirah is aroused, it radiates and sparkles and cannot be grasped at all.

How precious it is to know that God generates all of existence. From one bit of existence, the soul can perceive the existence of God, which has neither beginning nor end. The highest crown is not a beginning, yet from there emerged the point of concealment, the head of all levels, of all the other mirrors, the beginning of all existence. If you have eyes to see, you can search this matter meticulously and waft the mind in imagination to the secret power of this sefirah. Contemplate, understand, dedicate yourself to know that this sefirah returns to its original state. To whom does it belong?

The beginning of existence is the secret concealed point, primordial wisdom, the

secret conceptual point. This is the beginning of all the hidden things, which spread out from there and emanate, according to their species. From a single point you can extend the dimensions of all things. Similarly, when the concealed arouses itself to exist, at first it brings into being something the size of the point of a needle; from there it generates everything.

Contemplate this: When the emanation was emanated out of Ayin, all things and all sefirot were dependent on thought. God's secret existence emerged from this single point. That which abides in thought yet cannot be grasped is called wisdom: Hokhmah. What is the meaning of Hokhmah? *Hakkeh mah*. Since you can never grasp it, hakkeh, "wait," for mah, "what" will come and what will be. This is the sublime, primordial wisdom emerging out of Ayin.

## **THINK OF YOURSELF AS AYIN**

THINK OF yourself as Ayin and forget yourself totally. Then you can transcend time, rising to the world of thought, where all is equal: life and death, ocean and dry land. Such is not the case if you are attached to the material nature of this world. If you think of yourself as something, then God cannot clothe himself in you, for God is infinite. No vessel can contain God, unless you think of yourself as Ayin.

## **EFFACEMENT**

THE ESSENCE of serving God and of all the *mitsvot* is to attain the state of humility, that is, to understand that all your physical and mental powers and your essential being depend on the divine elements within. You are simply a channel for the divine attributes. You attain this humility through the awe of God's vastness, through realizing that "there is no place empty of it." Then you come to the state of Ayin, the state of humility. You have no independent self and are contained in the Creator. This is the meaning of the verse: "Moses hid his face, for he was in awe." Through his experience of awe, Moses attained the hiding of his face, that is, he perceived no independent self. Everything was part of divinity.

## **The Ten Sefirot**

### **THE BODY OF GOD**

RABBI ISHMAEL said, "I saw the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be he, sitting on a throne, high and exalted, with his soldiers standing before him, on his right and on his left. The Prince of the Countenance, Metatron, spoke to me.

"What is the measure of the stature of the Holy One, blessed be he, concealed from all creatures?

"The soles of his feet fill the entire universe; their height is 30 million parasangs. From the sole of his foot to his ankle is 10 million parasangs. From his ankle to his knees is 190 million parasangs. From his knees to his thighs is 120 million parasangs. From his

thighs to his neck is 240 million parasangs. His neck extends 130 million parasangs. The circumference of his head is over 3 billion parasangs—something the mouth cannot express, nor the ear hear. His beard is 11,500 parasangs. His face and cheeks are like spirit and soul, which no soul can perceive.

"His body is like aquamarine. His radiance scintillates, awesome from within the darkness. Dense clouds surround him. All the angels of the Presence pour themselves out before him as water pouring from a pitcher.

"His tongue extends from one end of the universe to the other. The width of his forehead is 130 million parasangs; on it are written seventy letters. The black of his right eye is 11,500 parasangs, and so on the left. From his right shoulder to his left shoulder is 160 million parasangs. From his right arm to his left arm is 120 million parasangs. His arms are folded. The fingers on each of his hands are 150 million parasangs, each finger 30 million. His palms are each 40 million parasangs. His toes are 100 million parasangs, each one 2,0 million. Therefore he is called 'the great, mighty, and awesome God.'

"But then Metatron told me how to calculate the parasangs. What is their measure? Each parasang is three miles, each mile is 10,000 cubits, each cubit is two spans—measured according to God's span, which spans the entire universe."

## THE TEN SEFIROT

YAH YHVH TSEVA'OT engraved thirty-two wondrous paths of wisdom, creating the universe in three ciphers: boundary, language, and number.

Ten *sefirot belimah*—numerals of nothingness, entities of emptiness—and twenty-two elemental letters.

Ten sefirot belimah, corresponding to the ten fingers, five opposite five, with the covenant of oneness precisely in the middle, in the word of the tongue and in circumcision.

Ten sefirot belimah, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand in wisdom, be wise in understanding. Examine them, explore them. Know, contemplate, and visualize. Establish the matter thoroughly, and restore the Creator to his abode. Their measure is ten, yet infinite.

Ten sefirot belimah. Bridle your mind from imagining, your mouth from speaking. If your mind races, return to the place you departed. Remember what is written: "The creatures darting to and fro." Concerning this a covenant has been made.

Ten sefirot belimah. Their measure is ten, yet infinite. Their end is embedded in their beginning, their beginning in their end, like a flame joined to a burning coal. Know, contemplate, and visualize that the Creator is one, without a second. Before one what can you count?

Ten sefirot belimah. Their measure is ten, yet infinite. Depth of beginning, depth of end, depth of good, depth of evil, depth of above, depth of below, depth of east, depth of west, depth of north, depth of south. God alone rules them all from his holy abode to eternities of eternity.

Ten sefirot belimah. A vision flashing like lightning. Their limit has no end. God's word surges through them.

## **THE COSMIC TREE**

I AM the one who planted this tree for all the world to delight in. With it I spanned the All, calling it All, for all depends on it, all emanates from it, all need it, all gaze upon it and await it. From here souls fly forth in joy.

Alone I was when I made it. When I spread out my earth, in which I planted and rooted this tree—giving them joy in one another, rejoicing along with them—who was with me? To whom could I reveal this secret of mine?

## **THE RIGHTEOUS PILLAR**

ONE PILLAR extends from earth to heaven. Its name is Righteous One, named for the righteous. If there are righteous people in the world, the pillar is strengthened; if not, it is weakened. It upholds the entire world, as it is written: "The righteous one is the foundation of the world." If it weakens, the world cannot endure. So if the world contains just one righteous person, that person sustains the world.

## **THE POWER OF THE RIGHTEOUS**

THE RIGHTEOUS ONE stands gazing out at humanity. When he sees human beings engaged in Torah and mitzvot, seeking to refine themselves, to conduct themselves in purity, then the Righteous One expands, filling himself with all kinds of flowing emanation from above, to pour into Shekhinah, the divine presence, in order to reward those purifying themselves, those cleaving to Torah and mitzvot. Thus, the entire world is blessed by those righteous humans, and Shekhinah is likewise blessed through them.

But if, God forbid, humans defile themselves by distancing themselves from Torah and mitzvot, by perpetrating evil, injustice, and violence, then the Righteous One stands to gaze at what they have done. When he sees, he gathers and contracts himself, ascending higher and higher. Then the flow of all the channels ceases, and Shekhinah is left dry and empty, lacking all good.

One who understands this secret understands the immense power a human has to build and to destroy. Now, come and see the power of the righteous: they can unite all the sefirot, harmonizing the upper and the lower worlds.

## **THE SECRET OF SABBATH**

THE SECRET of Sabbath: She is Sabbath.

United in the secret of one

to draw upon her the secret of one.

When Sabbath enters she is alone,

separated from the Other Side, all judgments removed from her.

Basking in the oneness of holy light,

she is crowned over and over to face the holy King.

All powers of wrath and masters of judgment flee from her.

There is no power in all the worlds aside from her.

Her face shines with a light from beyond;

she is crowned below by holy people,  
all of whom are crowned with new souls.  
Then the beginning of prayer,  
blessing her with joy, with beaming faces.

## **HUMAN AND DIVINE LIMBS**

THE TRUE ESSENCE of God cannot be grasped by anyone but God. There is not a single angel in heaven who knows God's location—and certainly not God's true essence. Don't you realize what the angels say: "Blessed be the presence of YHVH from his place"? In other words, wherever God's place may be. If the celestial creatures do not know, then how could earthly creatures ever know?

So all those descriptions that we read in the Torah, of God's hand, foot, ear, and eye—what do they mean? Know and believe that although those descriptions indicate God's true being, no creature can know or contemplate the essence of what is called "hand," "foot," "ear," or the like. Though we are made in the divine image and likeness, do not imagine that the divine eye is actually in the form of an eye or the divine hand in the form of a hand. Rather, these are inner—innermost—aspects of the divine reality, from which the fountain flows to all creatures through the divine decree. But the essence of the divine hand is not like the essence of the human hand, nor is their form the same, as it is written: "To whom can I be compared?"

Know and understand that there is no similarity in substance or structure between God and us—except for the intention of the forms of our organs and limbs, which are fashioned as symbols of hidden, supernal realities. The mind cannot know these realities directly, - it can only be reminded of them. As when one writes "Reuben son of Jacob." The form of these letters is not the form, structure, and essence of the real Reuben son of Jacob but simply a mnemonic device. "Reuben son of Jacob" is a symbol of the particular entity called by that name.

Since God wanted to purify us, he created in the human body various organs and limbs—hidden and revealed—as symbols of the divine structure. If one succeeds in purifying a particular organ or limb, it becomes a throne for the sublime, inner reality called by that name: "eye," "hand," or any other one.

## **THE PALM TREE OF DEBORAH**

IMITATE YOUR CREATOR. Then you will enter the mystery of the supernal form, the divine image in which you were created. If you resemble the divine in body but not in action, you distort the form. People will say of you: "A lovely form whose deeds are ugly." For the essence of the divine image is action. What good is it if your anatomy corresponds to the supernal form, while your actions do not resemble God's? So imitate the acts of Keter, the thirteen qualities of compassion alluded to by the prophet Micah: "Who is a God like you, delighting in love? You will again have compassion upon us. You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea."

You should desire the well-being of your fellow creature, eying his good fortune benevolently. Let his honor be as precious to you as your own, for you and your fellow are one and the same. That is why we are commanded: "Love your neighbor as yourself." You should desire what is right for your fellow, - never denigrate him or wish for his

disgrace. Just as God desires neither our disgrace nor our suffering, because of our close relationship with him, so you should not desire someone else's disgrace, suffering, or ruin. You should feel as bad for such suffering as if it were your own. Similarly, rejoice over another's good fortune as if you were basking in it.

God does not behave as a human being normally behaves. If one person angers another, even after they are reconciled the latter cannot bring himself to love the one who offended him as he loved him before. Yet if you sin and then return to God, your status is higher. As the saying goes, "Those who return to God occupy a place where even the completely righteous cannot stand." So when you return to God, and God restores the divine presence to you, his love for you is not the same as before but all the greater. This is the meaning of:

"You will again have compassion upon us." God will increase his compassion, mending us, bringing us closer.

This is how you should behave toward your fellow human being. Do not bear a grudge from the anger you felt. When you see that he wants to make up, be much more compassionate and loving than before. Say to yourself: "He is like one of those who return to God, unrivaled by even the completely righteous." Cultivate a more intimate relationship with him than with those who have been completely righteous with you, who have never offended you.

These are some of the qualities by which you resemble your Creator. The sublime qualities of compassion have a precious characteristic: just as you conduct yourself below, so are you worthy of opening the corresponding sublime quality above. Exactly as you behave, so it emanates from above. You cause that quality to shine in the world.

THE QUALITY of humility includes all qualities, since it pertains to Keter. Although Keter transcends all the other qualities, it does not exalt itself; on the contrary, it descends, constantly gazing below. Its emanator constantly gazes into it, bestowing goodness, while it gazes at those beneath.

God nourishes everything, from the horned buffalo to nits, disdaining no creature—for if he disdained creatures due to their insignificance, they could not endure for even a moment. Rather, he gazes and emanates compassion upon them all. So should you be good to all creatures, disdaining none. Even the most insignificant creature should assume importance in your eyes; attend to it. Do good to whomever needs your goodness.

YOUR FOREHEAD should not be tense at all but rather always resemble the forehead of the Will, so that you soothe everyone. Even if you come across angry people, soothe and calm them with your goodwill. For the forehead of the Will constantly accepts and soothes the harsh powers, reintegrating them. So should you soothe those overwhelmed by anger. Induce them with goodwill, drawing on great wisdom to extinguish their anger before it transgresses the boundary and causes damage, God forbid. Model yourself on the Will, which emanates from the wondrous wisdom in the forehead of the Ancient One, from where it soothes everything. Derive the power to be genial with others. If your character is somewhat harsh, people will not be soothed. This is why the Mishnah teaches: "If the spirit of people delights in someone, so does the spirit of God."

Your ears should always be tuned to hear the good, while rumors and gossip should never be let in, according to the secret of sublime listening. There, no harsh shouting enters,

no tongue of evil leaves a blemish. So listen only to positive, useful things, not to things that provoke anger.

Your eyes should not gaze at anything disgraceful. Rather, they should always be open to notice those who suffer, to be compassionate toward them as much as possible. When you see a poor person suffering, do not close your eyes in the slightest. On the contrary, keep him in mind as much as you can, arouse compassion for him—from God and from people.

Your face should always be shining. Welcome each person with a friendly countenance. For with regard to Keter Elyon, the supernal crown, it is said: "In the light of the king's face is life." No redness or harsh judgment gains entrance there. So, too, the light of your face should never change; whoever looks at you will find only joy and a friendly expression. Nothing should disturb you.

Your mouth should produce nothing but good. The words you speak should be Torah and an expression of goodwill. Never generate angry or ugly words, curses, or nonsense. Let your mouth resemble the upper mouth, which is never closed, never silent, never withholding the good. Speak positively, always with benevolent words.

All of these good qualities gather under the banner of humility, each one constituting a limb in Keter above. When you wish to draw near to the upper worlds, to resemble God, to open the fountains to those beneath, you must become proficient in these chapters.

It is impossible, of course, to conduct yourself according to these qualities constantly. Accustom yourself to them little by little. The essential quality to attain, the key to them all, is humility, for this is the very first aspect of Keter, under which all the rest are subsumed. If you constantly strive to attain this quality, all the others follow in its wake. For the first quality of Keter is that it considers itself as nothing in the face of its emanator. So, too, you should consider yourself as actually nothing. This will lead to the attainment of all the good qualities.

I have found an effective potion for the cure of pride. This consists of training yourself to do two things. First, respect all creatures, recognizing in them the sublime nature of the Creator, who fashions human beings in wisdom and whose wisdom inheres in each created thing. Second, train yourself to bring the love of your fellow human beings into your heart, even the wicked, as if they were your brothers and sisters, even more, until the love of all human beings is firm in your heart. Love even the wicked, thinking: "I wish that they were righteous, turning back to God, making themselves desirable to the Omnipresent." In this way your heart will turn toward the good, and you will train yourself to contemplate the various good qualities.

**HOW SHOULD** you train yourself in the quality of Hokhmah, Wisdom?

Supernal wisdom, though concealed and transcendent, spreads over every single thing that exists. Concerning this, it is said: "How manifold are your works, O God! In wisdom you have made them all." So should your wisdom be accessible to all. Teach people what will be useful to them, according to each one's capacity, pouring out to each as much wisdom as you can. Don't let anything deter you.

Wisdom has two faces. The upper face turns toward Keter; not gazing below, it receives from above. The second face, the lower one, turns below to gaze at the sefirot, emanating its wisdom to them. You too should have two facets. The first is your aloneness with God, to increase and refine your wisdom. The second, to teach others some of the wisdom that God has poured out upon you. As Wisdom emanates to each

sefirah according to its dimensions and need, so should you emanate to each person according to the dimensions of his mind, whatever he can handle, what addresses his needs. Be careful not to give more than the mind of the recipient can hold, to prevent any mishap, just as the highest sefirah does not exceed the limits of its recipient.

Let your compassion extend to all creatures, neither despising nor destroying any of them. For Wisdom spreads over all created things: mineral, vegetable, animal, and human. Each was created in Wisdom. Do not uproot anything that grows, unless it is necessary. Do not kill any living creature, unless it is necessary.

HOW SHOULD you train yourself in the quality of Binah, Understanding?

By returning to God. Nothing is more important, for this corrects every flaw. As Binah, Understanding, sweetens all powers of judgment, neutralizing their bitterness, so should you return to God and correct each flaw. If you meditate on returning every day, you stimulate Binah to illumine each day. In consequence all your days join in returning, that is, you integrate yourself within Binah, who is called Returning. Each day of your life is adorned with the mystery of supernal return.

Do not say that returning is good only for the holy portion within you; the evil portion, too, is sweetened, in the manner of this quality. Do not think that because you incline toward evil there is no remedy. This is false. If you do well, rooting yourself in Returning, you can ascend there through the goodness rooted there. For the root of every supernal bitterness is sweet; you can enter through this root and make yourself good. Thereby you transform the bad deeds themselves into good; your intentional sins turn into merits. The misdeeds you committed have been accusing you from the Left Side. Once you return completely, you raise those deeds and root them above. Those accusers are not annihilated but ameliorated, rooted in holiness.

HOW SHOULD you train yourself in the quality of Hesed, Love? The basic way you enter the mystery of Hesed is by loving God to the extreme, not abandoning devotion for any reason at all, since nothing attracts you in the least, compared to loving God. So first attend to the demands of your devotion; the remainder of your time is for whatever else you need.

"Who is a *hasid*? One who acts in love toward God." In expressing love to creatures here below, intend that you are mending up above, after the same pattern. You thereby bestow love on God.

## Creation

### THE HIDDEN LIGHT

*God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light.  
God saw how good the light was*



*and God separated the light from the darkness.*  
Rabbi Isaac said,  
"The light created by God in the act of Creation  
flared from one end of the universe to the other  
and was hidden away,  
reserved for the righteous in the world that is coming,  
as it is written:  
'Light is sown for the righteous.'  
Then the worlds will be fragrant, and all will be one.  
But until the world that is coming arrives,  
it is stored and hidden away."  
Rabbi Judah responded,  
"If the light were completely hidden,  
the world would not exist for even a moment!  
Rather, it is hidden and sown like a seed  
that gives birth to seeds and fruit.  
Thereby the world is sustained.  
Every single day, a ray of that light shines into the world,  
keeping everything alive,-  
with that ray God feeds the world.  
And everywhere that Torah is studied at night  
one thread-thin ray appears from that hidden light  
and flows down upon those absorbed in her.  
Since the first day, the light has never been fully revealed,  
but it is vital to the world,  
renewing each day the act of Creation."

## **CONCEALING AND REVEALING**

WHEN POWERFUL LIGHT is concealed and clothed in a garment, it is revealed. Though concealed, the light is actually revealed, for were it not concealed, it could not be revealed. This is like wishing to gaze at the dazzling sun. Its *dazzle* conceals it, for you cannot look at its overwhelming brilliance. Yet when you conceal it looking at it through screens—you can see and not be harmed. So it is with emanation: by concealing and clothing itself, it reveals itself.

WITH THE APPEARANCE of the light, the universe expanded. With the concealment of the light, the things that exist were created in all their variety. This is the secret of the act of Creation. One who understands will understand.

## **THE DIVINE BREATH**

WHEN A glassblower wants to produce glassware, he takes an iron blowpipe, hollow as a reed from one end to the other, and dips it into molten glass in a crucible. Then he places the tip of the pipe in his mouth and blows, and his breath passes through the pipe to the

molten glass attached to the other end. From the power of his blowing, the glass expands and turns into a vessel—large or small, long or wide, spherical or rectangular, whatever the artisan desires.

So God, great, mighty, and awesome, powerfully breathed out a breath, and cosmic space expanded to the boundary determined by divine wisdom, until God said, "Enough!"

How DID God create the world? Like a person taking a deep breath and holding it, so that the small contains the large. Similarly God contracted his light to a divine hand-breadth, and the world was left in darkness. In the darkness God carved cliffs and hewed rocks to clear wondrous paths of wisdom.

## **TSIMTSUM: CREATIVE WITHDRAWAL**

WISDOM is the end of what you can ponder in thought, for Keter, the highest sefirah, fills more than the mind can conceive. It contracted the essence of its presence into a handbreadth, and darkness appeared over everything, for the absence of light is darkness. Then from the source of all, it emanated the bright light of Wisdom in thirty-two paths, each path penetrating the darkness. With them the engraver engraved the darkness.

BEFORE THE creation of the world, Ein Sof withdrew itself into its essence, from itself to itself within itself. It left an empty space within its essence, in which it could emanate and create.

## **TSIMTSUM AND SHEVIRAH: WITHDRAWAL AND SHATTERING**

WHEN THE supernal emanator wished to create this material universe, it withdrew its presence. At first Ein Sof filled everything. Now, still, even an inanimate stone is illuminated by it; otherwise the stone could not exist at all—it would disintegrate. The illumination of Ein Sof clothes itself in garment upon garment.

At the beginning of creation, when Ein Sof withdrew its presence all around in every direction, it left a vacuum in the middle, surrounded on all sides by the light of Ein Sof, empty precisely in the middle. The light withdrew like water in a pond displaced by a stone. When a stone is dropped in a pond, the water at that spot does not disappear—it merges with the rest. So the withdrawn light converged beyond, and in the middle remained a vacuum. Then all the opacity and density of judgment within the light of Ein Sof—like a drop in the ocean—was extracted. Descending into the vacuum, it transformed into an amorphous mass, surrounded in every direction by the light of Ein Sof. Out of this mass emanated the four worlds: emanation, creation, formation, and actualization. For in its simple desire to realize its intention, the emanator relumined the mass with a ray of the light withdrawn at first—not all of the light, because if it had all returned, the original state would have been restored, which was not the intention.

To fashion pottery, the potter first takes an unformed mass of clay and then puts his hand inside the mass to shape it. So the supernal emanator put its hand into the amorphous mass, that is, a ray of light returned from above. As this light began to enter the mass, vessels were formed. From the purest light, Keter; next, Hokhmah; then, Binah;

and so on through all ten sefirot. Since Keter was the purest and clearest of all the vessels, it could bear the light within it, but Hokhmah and Binah, though more translucent than those below, were not like Keter. Not having its capacity, their backs broke, and they fell from their position. As the light descended further, six points appeared—six fragments of what had been one point of light. Thus the vessels shattered. Their spiritual essence—the light—ascended back to the mother's womb, while the shattered vessels fell to the world of creation.

When the light emanated once again—regenerated, arrayed anew— it extended only to the end of the world of emanation. "Emanation" denotes this extension of the light of Ein Sof during the time of regeneration. Emanation consists of five visages. These visages are reconfigurations of the points of light, capable now of receiving the light, so that no shattering occur, as at first. Below these visages the light of Ein Sof appears only through a screen. As when you sit in the shade: though the sun does not shine on you directly, it illuminates the shaded area. In a similar manner, the light of Ein Sof illuminates the world of creation through a screen, indirectly.

## **SHATTERING AND GROWTH**

THE SUPERNAL vacuum is like a field, in which are sown ten points of light. Just as each grain of seed grows according to its fertile power, so does each of these points. And just as a seed cannot grow to perfection as long as it maintains its original form—growth coming only through decomposition—so these points could not become perfect configurations as long as they maintained their original form but only by shattering.

## **TRACES**

TRACES OF the light adhered to the shards of the shattered vessels. This may be compared to a vessel full of oil. If it breaks and the oil spills out, a bit of the liquid adheres to the shards in the forms of drops. Likewise in our case, a few sparks of light adhered. When the shards descended to the bottom of the world of actualization, they were transformed into the four elements—fire, air, water, and earth—from which evolved the stages of mineral, vegetable, animal, and human. When these materialized, some of the sparks remained hidden within the varieties of existence. You should aim to raise these sparks hidden throughout the world, elevating them to holiness by the power of your soul.

## **CREATIVE AROUSAL**

THE WORLD could be created only by virtue of the action of the righteous, the arousal of those below. So God contemplated the good deeds of the righteous—yet to be created—and this act of thinking was enough to actualize the thought. God drew forth light from within himself and delighted himself with holy people, like those who would eventually be. This joy engendered undulation, greater delight. In the bliss of contemplating the righteous, of imagining holy people—in this fluctuation, the power to create was born.

## RENEWAL

AN EPIPHANY enables you to sense creation not as something completed, but as constantly becoming, evolving, ascending. This transports you from a place where there is nothing new to a place where there is nothing old, where everything renews itself, where heaven and earth rejoice as at the moment of Creation.

## Letters of the Alphabet

### LETTERS OF CREATION

TWENTY-TWO elemental letters. God engraved them, carved them, weighed them, permuted them, and transposed them, forming with them everything formed and everything destined to be formed.

Twenty-two elemental letters. God set them in a wheel with 231 gates, turning forward and backward. How did God permute them? *Alef* with them all, all of them with alef; *bet* with them all, all of them with bet; and so with all the letters, turning round and round, within 231 gates. Thus all that is formed, all that is spoken emerges from one name.

Out of chaos God formed substance, making what is not into what is. He hewed enormous pillars out of ether that cannot be grasped.

When Abraham our father, peace unto him, gazed— looking, seeing, probing, understanding, engraving, carving, permuting, and forming—he succeeded in creation. Immediately God manifested to him, embracing him, kissing him on the head, calling him "Abraham, my beloved."

### UNSHEATHING THE SOUL

PREPARE TO meet your God. Prepare to devote your heart. Purify your body and select a special place where no one in the world can hear your voice. Be totally alone. Sit in one spot in the room or the loft, and do not reveal your secret to anyone. If you can, do this by day, even for a little while, but the best way is to do it at night. As you prepare to speak with your Creator, to seek the revelation of his power, be careful to empty your mind of all mundane vanities. Wrap yourself in your *tallit* and put *tefillin* on your head and your hand so that you will be filled with the awe of Shekhinah, who is with you at this moment. Wear clean garments, all white if you can. All this helps immensely in focusing your awe and love. If it is night, light many candles, until your eyes shine brightly.

Then take hold of ink, pen, and tablet. Realize that you are about to serve your God in joy. Begin to combine letters, a few or many, permuting and revolving them rapidly until your mind warms up. Delight in how they move and in what you generate by revolving them. When you feel within that your mind is very, very warm from combining the letters, and that through the combinations you understand new things that you have not attained by human tradition nor discovered on your own through mental reflection,

then you are ready to receive the abundant flow, and the abundance flows upon you, arousing you again and again.

Now turn your thoughts to visualizing the Name and its supernal angels, imagining them as if they were human beings standing or sitting around you, with you in the middle like a messenger about to be sent on a royal mission, waiting to hear about it from their lips, either from the king himself or from one of his ministers. Having imagined this vividly, prepare your mind and heart to understand the many things about to be conveyed to you by the letters being contemplated within you. Meditate on them as a whole and in all their detail, like one to whom a parable, a riddle, or a dream is being told, or like one perusing a book of wisdom, pondering a passage beyond his grasp. Interpret what you hear in an uplifting manner, approximating it as best you can. Based on what you understand of it, evaluate yourself and others. All this will happen after you fling the tablet from your hands and the pen from your fingers, or after they fall by themselves due to the intensity of your thoughts.

Realize that the stronger the mental flow, the weaker will become your organs and limbs. Your entire body will begin to tremble violently. You will think that you are about to die because your soul, overjoyed at what she has attained, will depart from your body. Consciously choose death over life, knowing that such death affects only the body and that thereby the soul lives eternally. Then you will know that you are capable of receiving the flow. If you then wish to honor the glorious Name by serving it with the life of body and soul, hide your face, fear to gaze at God, and come no closer, like Moses at the burning bush. Return to the physical dimension; rise, eat and drink a little, inhale a fragrant aroma. Return your spirit to its sheath until another time. Rejoice in what you have, and know that God loves you.

## THE PROOF OF WISDOM

WHY DO we utter letters and move them around? I a fledgling, will tell you what I experienced. Know, my friends, that from the beginning I felt a desire to study Torah. I learned parts of it and some of the rest of the Bible. But I found no one to guide me in the study of Talmud—not for any lack of teachers, but because I longed to be home, to enjoy being with my father and mother. Finally, God gave me strength to search for Torah. I went out, searched, and found. For several years I studied Talmud abroad. Still the fire of Torah burned within me—though I could not sense it.

I returned to my native land, and God brought me together with a Jewish philosopher with whom I studied some of Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. This only added to my desire. I began to explore logic and natural science; this wisdom tasted sweet for, as you know, nature attracts nature. God is my witness: If I had not previously acquired strength of faith through the little I had learned of Torah and Talmud, many of the mitsvot would have been ruined for me—even though the fire of pure intention blazed in my heart.

What this teacher revealed on the path of philosophy was inadequate. Then God had me meet a divine man, a kabbalist, who taught me the outlines of Kabbalah. Nevertheless, because of my smattering of natural science, the path of Kabbalah seemed to me nearly impossible.

Then my teacher said to me, "My son, why do you deny something you have not tried? You should try it. If you do not discover anything—and you are not perfect enough to attribute the fault to yourself—then say nothing is there." Wherever he guided me, he would always define the matter for me in scientific terms—to sweeten it for me, so that my rational mind would accept it and I could enter enthusiastically.

I reasoned as follows: I have much to gain here and nothing to lose. If I discover something, I have gained; if not, what I already have will still be mine. So I placed myself on the path, and he showed me how to permute the letters of the alphabet, transpose them, play with their numerical values, and the other techniques outlined in *Sefer Yetsirah*. He let me explore each path for two weeks—until each form was engraved in my heart. So he drew me on for about four months. Then he commanded me to erase everything. He said to me, "My son, the intention is not to grasp any finite form—even the highest. Rather, this is the path of the names: Their intrinsic value is proportional to their degree of incomprehensibility. The less comprehensible, the higher. Eventually you will reach an energy that is not in your control; rather your mind and thought are in its control."

I replied, "If this path is incomprehensible, then why do you compose books combining natural science with the divine names?"

He said, "For you and those like you among the philosophizers, to attract your human minds naturally. Perhaps this attraction will bring you to the knowledge of the Name."

My mind did not accept it. But after about two months of meditation, my thought had been stripped, and I became aware of something sublime arising within. I set my mind to combine the letters at night, conducting them in contemplation—just a little differently than I do now. I continued this for three nights without telling him. The third night, after midnight, I was sitting with the quill in my hand and the paper on my knees. I nodded off—then suddenly saw the candle about to go out, as often happens when you wake from a nap. I rose to trim the candle, and I saw that the light persisted. I was amazed. As I gazed and contemplated, the light seemed to be issuing from me. I said, "I don't believe it." I walked throughout the house—and look, the light moves with me! I lay down on the couch and covered myself. Look, the light is with me still!

Those who know a little about this—and especially those to whom something has been revealed experientially—will rejoice in what I have written and find it fitting. But their difficulty will be that I have revealed all this explicitly. As for me, God knows and is my witness! My intention is for the sake of heaven. I wish that every person in our holy nation excelled me in this, that everyone was purer than I. Then, perhaps, things unknown to me could be revealed. For God, who is truly one, teaches all who are ready to receive—freely and in love. Since God desires us to imitate the divine perfectly, I cannot bear not to lavish upon another what God has lavished upon me. That is why I had to tell the story of my experience, because the only genuine proof of this wisdom is experience itself.

## **ALONENESS AND ABUNDANCE**

THE DIVINE mind pours upon us constantly, emanating its sacred abundance to us, for more than the calf wants to suck, the cow wants to suckle. Let us do good deeds and

engage in aloneness—sitting in a loft with books, myrtle, ink, pen, paper, and tablet, to combine the letters and draw the divine mind into us.

When you fulfill the conditions of aloneness in your room, you will attain the flowing abundance of the six sefirot emanating to the diadem, whose splendor dwells within your soul, and the abundance of the three upper sefirot, drawing them to the diadem and into your soul. These abundant flows, hidden from the senses, will appear to the eye of your mind as cascading water; they are nothing but sparks of light—white, pure, and dazzling—emanating to the diadem, from there to Moses, and from there to the mind within your soul. Enjoy this abundant rain. Offer thanks to God with neither speech nor thought. As it says in *Sefer Yetsirah*, "If your mind races, return to the place," return to where you were before the thought. Return to the site of oneness.

## **Mind, Meditation, And Mystical Experience**

### **IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE LIGHT**

WHATEVER ONE implants firmly in the mind becomes the essential thing. So if you pray and offer a blessing to God, or if you wish your intention to be true, imagine that you are light. All around you—in every corner and on every side—is light. Turn to your right, and you will find shining light; to your left, splendor, a radiant light. Between them, up above, the light of the Presence. Surrounding that, the light of life. Above it all, a crown of light—crowning the aspirations of thought, illumining the paths of imagination, spreading the radiance of vision. This light is unfathomable and endless.

### **AN EXTRA SPIRIT**

YOU FEEL an extra spirit—arousing you, flowing over your entire body, bringing pleasure. It seems as if fine balsam oil has been poured over you from your head to your feet—once, maybe more. You are overjoyed, in delight and trembling: the soul in delight, the body in trembling. Like a rider racing a horse: the rider is joyful and exuberant, while underneath, the horse quivers.

### **JOINING THE DIVINE**

*Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister."*

Join thought to divine wisdom, so she and he become one.

*Taste and see that God is good.*

The soul will cleave to the divine mind, and the divine mind will cleave to her.

For more than the calf wants to suck, the cow wants to suckle. She and the divine mind become one, like pouring a jug of water into a gushing spring: all becomes one.

## **THE MIRROR OF THOUGHT**

THOUGHT is like a mirror. One looking at it sees his image inside and thinks that there are two images, but the two are really one.

## **THE ANNIHILATION OF THOUGHT**

THOUGHT RISES to contemplate its own innerness until its power of comprehension is annihilated.

## **BEYOND KNOWING**

THE INNER, subtle essences can be contemplated only by sucking, not by knowing.

## **RIPPLES**

THOUGHT REVEALS itself only through contemplating a little without content, contemplating sheer spirit. The contemplation is imperfect: you understand—then you lose what you have understood. Like pondering a thought: the light of that thought suddenly darkens, vanishes; then it returns and shines—and vanishes again. No one can understand the content of that light. It is like the light that appears when water ripples in a bowl: shining here, suddenly disappearing—then reappearing somewhere else. You think that you have grasped the light, when suddenly it escapes, radiating elsewhere. You pursue it, hoping to catch it—but you cannot. Yet you cannot bring yourself to leave. You keep pursuing it.

It is the same with the beginning of emanation. As you begin to contemplate it, it vanishes, then reappears; you understand—and it disappears. Even though you do not grasp it, do not despair. The source is still emanating, spreading.

## **MENTAL ATTACHMENT**

IN MEDITATION, everything depends on thought. If your thought becomes attached to any created thing—even something unseen or spiritual, higher than any earthly creature—it is as if you were bowing down to an idol on your hands and knees.

## **IMAGINATION**

THE FIERCE power of imagination is a gift from God. Joined with the grandeur of the mind, the potency of inference, ethical depth, and the natural sense of the divine, imagination becomes an instrument for the holy spirit.



## **GATHERING MULTIPLICITY**

ONE WHO descends from the root of roots to the form of forms must walk in multiplicity. One who ascends from the form of forms to the root of roots must gather the multiplicity, for the highest form unites them all, and the root extends through every form that arises from it at any time. When the forms are destroyed, the root is not destroyed.

## **EQUANIMITY**

WHOEVER ATTAINS the mystery of cleaving to God will attain the mystery of equanimity, and if one attains the mystery of equanimity, one will attain the mystery of aloneness. Having attained the mystery of aloneness, this person will attain the holy spirit. And from there, prophecy, and he will prophesy the future.

As for the mystery of equanimity, Rabbi Avner told me the following:

A lover of wisdom came to one who secluded himself in meditation and asked to be accepted as one of them. The master of meditation replied, "My son, may you be blessed from heaven, for your intention is good. But let me know: Have you attained equanimity or not?"

He responded, "Master, clarify your words."

He explained, "My son, if one person honors you and another humiliates you, are the two equal in your eyes or not?"

He answered, "By the life of your soul, my master! I do feel pleasure and satisfaction from the one who honors me and pain from the one who humiliates me—but I am not vengeful nor do I bear a grudge."

The master said, "My son, go away in peace. For as long as you have not attained equanimity and still feel humiliation from something done to you, you are not ready for your thought to be linked on high. You are not ready to come and seclude yourself in meditation. But go and humble your heart further, genuinely, until you attain equanimity. Then you can experience aloneness."

## **KINDLING THE HEART**

THOSE WHO practice aloneness and unify the divine name kindle the fire on the altar of their hearts. By their pure thought, all the sefirot are unified and linked to one another until they are drawn to the source of the infinitely sublime flame. Here lies the secret of the unification that a person performs in the morning and evening prayers, raising all the sefirot and unifying them into a single cluster. Thereby one cleaves to the divine name.

## **GAZING AT THE LETTERS**

REMEMBER GOD and God's love constantly. Let your thought not be separated from God. I declare, both to individuals and to the masses: If you want to know the secret of binding your soul above and joining your thought to God—so that by means of such continuous contemplation you attain incessantly the world that is coming, and so that God be with you always, in this life and the next—then place in front of the eyes of your mind the

letters of God's name, as if they were written in a book in Hebrew script. Visualize every letter extending to infinity. What I mean is: when you visualize the letters, focus on them with your mind's eye as you contemplate infinity. Both together: gazing and meditating.

## **CLIMBING THE LADDER**

I, RABBI ISAAC of Akko, was contemplating, according to the method I received from the great one of his generation—great in humility, the wisdom of Kabbalah, philosophy, and the science of permutation of letters. He insisted that I set the ten sefirot in front of me, as it is written: "I set YHVH before me always." I saw them today above my head like a pillar, with their feet on my head and their heads high above, beyond all the four worlds: emanation, creation, formation, and actualization. As long as I was contemplating this ladder—the name of the Blessed Holy One—I saw my soul cleaving to Ein Sof.

## **GATES OF HOLINESS**

To ATTAIN you must be alone, so that your contemplation not be disturbed. In your mind, cultivate aloneness to the utmost. Strip your body from your soul, as if you do not feel that you are clothed in matter at all—you are entirely soul. The more you strip yourself of material being, the more powerful your comprehension. If you sense any sound or movement that breaks your meditation, or if any material imagining arises within you, then your soul's contemplation will be severed from the upper worlds. You will attain nothing, since supernal holiness does not abide with anyone attached by even a hair to the material realm. Therefore prophecy or the holy spirit is called deep sleep, dream, or vision. To sum up, even if you are worthy for the holy spirit to rest upon you, if you do not train yourself to completely strip your soul from your body, the spirit will not rest upon you. This is the secret reason that a band of prophets has timbrels, flutes, and other instruments, for through the sweetness of melody, aloneness descends upon them and they strip their souls. Then the musicians stop the melody, and the prophets remain in that supernal state of union and they prophesy.

If you wish to attain aloneness, you must first return to God from having strayed and missed the mark. Be careful not to miss again. Train yourself to eliminate negative habits such as anger, depression, impatience, and chatter.

If you wish to attain aloneness and to receive the holy spirit, regard every insight you gain and every light you perceive as darkness. When you see that you have attained a little, concentrate more deeply in your meditation, until you experience a pure spirit speaking within you words of Torah, wisdom, devotion, purity, and holiness—on its own, without your will. Having attained this, impel yourself to draw forth the holy spirit often, until you weaken and verge on fainting. Then strengthen yourself and pray this prayer with perfect intention:

"Master of all the worlds! To you it is revealed and known that I am not engaged in all of this for my own glory, but rather for the glory of your name, for the glory of the oneness of your being, so that I will know you, how to serve you and bless your name. Enable me to search for you, discover you. Strengthen me, embolden me. Enlighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Create a pure heart for me, O God; rejuvenate within me a steadfast spirit."

Draw forth the spirit until you see and know for certain that it is bound to you perpetually, inseparably, engraved within you.

Sanctify your limbs and adorn them with good deeds, making yourself into a throne for the divine presence, your body an ark for Shekhinah. When you do a good deed, you sanctify yourself.

## **WHAT ARE WE?**

THE GREATER you are, the more you need to search for your self. Your deep soul hides itself from consciousness. So you need to increase aloneness, elevation of thinking, penetration of thought, liberation of mind—until finally your soul reveals itself to you, spangling a few sparkles of her lights.

Then you find bliss, transcending all humiliations or anything that happens, by attaining equanimity, by becoming one with everything that happens, by reducing yourself so extremely that you nullify your individual, imaginary form, that you nullify existence in the depth of your self. "What are we?" Then you know every spark of truth, every bolt of integrity flashing anywhere.

Then you gather everything, without hatred, jealousy, or rivalry. The light of peace and a fierce boldness manifest in you. The splendor of compassion and the glory of love shine through you. The desire to act and work, the passion to create and to restore yourself, the yearning for silence and for the inner shout of joy—these all band together in your spirit, and you become holy.

## **THE VOICE OF GOD**

WHEN YOU train yourself to hear the voice of God in everything, you attain the quintessence of the human spirit. Usually the mind conceals the divine thoroughly by imagining that there is a separate mental power that constructs the mental images. But by training yourself to hear the voice of God in everything, the voice reveals itself to your mind as well. Then right in the mind, you discover revelation.

## **THE RIVER OF ALREADY**

*"As I was among the exiles on the River Kever, the heavens opened and I saw visions of God."*

As Ezekiel was gazing at the river, Holiness opened the seven heavens for him, and he saw the Power.

A parable has been told. To what can this be compared? To someone who went to the barber. The barber cut his hair and handed him a mirror. As he was looking in the mirror, the king was passing by. He saw the king and his entourage in the mirror as they passed the doorway. The barber exclaimed, "Turn around! See the king!" He replied, "I've already seen him in the mirror."

So, Ezekiel was standing on the River Kever. As he was gazing at the water, the seven heavens were opened for him and he saw the Glory of Holiness, along with celestial creatures, ministering angels, bands of angels, seraphs, and angels with sparkling wings, all joined to the heavenly chariot. As they were passing through heaven, Ezekiel saw them reflected in the water. As it is written, "on the River Kever," the River of Already.

## **GO TO YOUR SELF**

*God said to Abiam, "Go forth."*

God said to Abram, "Go to your self, know your self, fulfill your self."

THIS VERSE is addressed to every person. Search and discover the root of your soul, so that you can fulfill it and restore it to its source, its essence. The more you fulfill yourself, the closer you approach your authentic self.

## **BEYOND CAPACITY**

GOD LAVISHES according to the divine force. The one receiving, however, is bounded. If so, the good would be limited. So God lavishes the good immeasurably, according to the divine gauge. Thus the good is divine, limitless, although the created receiver cannot receive it—unless he is completely shattered, and then repaired through his desire to return to the limitless source, to become one with divinity. Thereby the creature realizes himself, attaining the perfection of the Creator, transcending the boundary of the created. This would be impossible—were it not for overflowing goodness, beyond one's capacity to receive.

## **Dangers of Contemplation**

### **THE ORIGIN OF THOUGHT**

WHEN YOU are praying, imagine God speaking with you, teaching and conducting you. You receive his words in awe, trembling, and sweat. Contemplate that everything God teaches humanity is infinite, yet thought expands and ascends to her origin. Upon reaching there, she is stopped and can ascend no further.

By way of parable: a spring of water emerging from its source. If you dig beneath it, to prevent the water spreading out in all directions, the water will rise to the level of the source and no further. Similarly, thought can ascend no higher than her origin.

If you dare to contemplate that to which thought cannot expand and ascend, you will not escape one of two consequences. From forcing thought to grasp that which cannot be comprehended, your soul will ascend, be severed, and return to her root, or else your mind will become confused.

### **DROWNING**

WHEN OUR master Moses, peace unto him, said to God, "Show me your Presence," he sought death so that his soul would obliterate the barrier of her palace, which separated her from the wondrous divine light she had aroused herself to see. But since the people of Israel still needed Moses, God did not want Moses' soul to leave her palace to attain this light of his.

Now you, my child, strive to see supernal light, for I have brought you into a vast ocean. Be careful! Keep your soul from gazing and your mind from conceiving, lest you drown. Strive to see, yet escape drowning. Your soul will see the divine light—actually cleave to it—while dwelling in her palace.

## **Revelation and Torah**

### **THE ESSENCE OF TORAH**

THERE WAS a man who lived in the mountains. He knew nothing about those who lived in the city. He sowed wheat and ate the kernels raw.

One day he entered the city. They brought him good bread. He said, "What is this for?" They said, "Bread, to eat!" He ate, and it tasted very good. He said, "What is it made of?" They said, "Wheat."

Later they brought him cakes kneaded in oil. He tasted them and said, "What are these made of?" They said, "Wheat."

Finally they brought him royal pastry made with honey and oil. He said, "And what are these made of?" They said, "Wheat." He said, "I am the master of all of these, for I eat the essence of all of these: wheat!"

Because of that view, he knew nothing of the delights of the world; they were lost to him. So it is with one who grasps the principle and does not know all those delectable delights deriving, diverging, from that principle.

### **HOW TO LOOK AT TORAH**

RABBI SHIM'ON said,  
"Woe to the human being who says  
that Torah presents mere stories and ordinary words!  
If so, we could compose a Torah right now with ordinary  
words,  
and better than all of them.  
To present matters of the world?  
Even rulers of the world possess words more sublime.  
If so, let us follow them and make a Torah out of them.  
Ah, but all the words of Torah are sublime words, sublime  
secrets!

"Come and see:  
The world above and the world below are perfectly balanced:  
Israel below, the angels above.

Of the angels it is written: 'He makes his angels spirits.'  
But when they descend, they put on the garment of this world.

If they did not put on a garment befitting this world,  
they could not endure in this world and the world could not endure them.  
If this is so with the angels, how much more so with Torah,  
who created them and all the worlds,  
and for whose sake they all exist.  
In descending to this world,  
if she did not put on the garments of this world,  
the world could not endure.

"So this story of Torah is the garment of Torah.  
Whoever thinks that the garment is the real Torah  
and not something else—may his spirit deflate!  
He will have no portion in the world that is coming.  
That is why David said:  
'Open my eyes, so I can see wonders out of your Torah/  
what is under the garment of Torah.

"Come and see: There is a garment visible to all.  
When those fools see someone in a good-looking garment  
they look no further.  
But the essence of the garment is the body;  
the essence of the body is the soul.

"So it is with Torah.  
She has a body: the commandments of Torah,  
called 'the embodiment of Torah.'  
This body is clothed in garments: the stories of this world.  
Fools of the world look only at that garment, the story of  
Torah;  
they know nothing more.  
They do not look at what is under that garment.  
Those who know more do not look at the garment,  
but rather at the body under that garment.  
The wise ones, servants of the King on high,  
those who stood at Mount Sinai,  
look only at the soul, root of all, real Torah.  
In the time to come, they are destined to look at the soul of  
the soul of Torah.

"Come and see: So it is above.  
There is garment, body, soul, and soul of soul.  
The heavens and their host are the garment.  
The Communion of Israel is the body,

who receives the soul, Beauty of Israel.  
So she is the body of the soul.  
The soul we have mentioned is Beauty of Israel, real Torah.  
The soul of the soul is the Holy Ancient One.  
All is connected, this one to that one.

"Woe to the wicked who say that Torah is merely a story!  
They look at this garment and no further.  
Happy are the righteous who look at Torah properly!  
As wine must sit in a jar, so Torah must sit in this garment.  
So look only at what is under the garment.  
All those words and all those stories are garments."

## **THE OLD MAN AND THE RAVISHING MAIDEN**

RABBI HIYYA and Rabbi Yose met one night at the Tower of Tyre.  
They stayed there as guests, delighting in each other.  
Rabbi Yose said, "I am so glad to see the face of Shekhinah!  
For just now, the whole way here, I was pestered by an old man,  
a donkey driver, who kept asking me riddles the whole way:

" 'Who is a serpent that flies in the air and wanders alone,  
while an ant lies peacefully between its teeth?  
Beginning in union, it ends in separation.

" 'Who is an eagle that nests in a tree that never was?  
Its young who have been plundered,  
who are not created creatures,  
lie somewhere uncreated.  
Going up, they come down; coming down, they go up.  
Two who are one, and one who is three.

" 'Who is a ravishing maiden without eyes,  
her body concealed and revealed?  
She comes out in the morning and is hidden all day.  
She adorns herself with adornments that are not.'

"All this he asked on the way; I was annoyed.  
Now I can relax.  
If we had been together, we would have engaged in words of Torah  
instead of strange words of chaos."

Rabbi Hiyya said, "That old man, the donkey driver,

do you know anything about him?"

Rabbi Yose answered, "I know that there is ^thing in his words.

If he knew anything, he should have opened with Torah;  
then the way would not have been empty!"

Rabbi Hiyya said, "That donkey driver, is he here?

For sometimes in those empty fools,  
you discover bells of gold!"

Rabbi Yose said, "Here he is, fixing some food for his donkey."

They called him, and he came over.

He said to them, "Now two are three, and three are like one!"

Rabbi Yose said, "Didn't I tell you that all his words are empty nonsense?"

He sat before them and said,

"Rabbis, I turned into a donkey driver only a short  
time ago.

Before, I wasn't one.

But I have a small son, and I put him in school;

I want him to engage Torah.

When I find one of the rabbis traveling on the road,

I guide his donkey from behind.

Today I thought that I would hear new words of Torah,  
but I haven't heard anything!"

Rabbi Yose said, "Of all the words I heard you say,  
there was one that really amazed me.

Either you said it out of folly, or they are empty words."

The old man said, "And which one is that?"

He said, "The one about the ravishing maiden."

The old man opened and said, "

'YHVH is on my side; I have no fear.

What can any human do to me?

YHVH is by my side, helping me.

It is good to take refuge in YHVH.'

"How good, pleasant, precious, and high are words of Torah!

But how can I say them in front of rabbis

from whose mouths, until now, I haven't heard a single  
word?

But I should say them



because there is no shame at all in saying words of Torah  
in front of everyone!"

The old man covered himself.  
The old man opened and said,  
" 'Moses went inside the cloud and ascended the mountain.'  
What is this cloud?  
The same one of which it is written:  
'I have placed my bow in the cloud.'  
We have learned that the rainbow took off her garments  
and gave them to Moses.  
Wearing that garment, he went up the mountain;  
from inside it he saw what he saw,  
delighting in the all, up to that place."

The companions approached  
and threw themselves down in front of the old man.  
They cried, and said, "If we have come into the world  
only to hear these words from your mouth,  
it is enough for us!"

The old man said,  
"Companions, not for this alone did I begin the word.  
An old man like me doesn't rattle with just a single word.  
Human beings are so confused in their minds.  
They do not see the way of truth in Torah.  
She calls out to them every day, in love,  
but they do not want to turn their heads.  
She removes a word from her sheath,  
is seen for a moment, then quickly hides away,  
but she does so only for those who know her intimately.

"A parable.  
To what can this be compared?  
To a beloved, ravishing maiden, hidden deep within her  
palace.  
She has one lover, unknown to anyone, hidden too.  
Out of love for her, this lover passes by her gate constantly,  
lifting his eyes to every side.  
Knowing that her lover hovers about her gate constantly,  
what does she do?  
She opens a little window in her hidden palace,  
revealing her face to her lover,  
then swiftly withdraws, concealing herself.  
No one near him sees or reflects, only the lover,  
and his heart and his soul and everything within him

flow out to her.  
He knows that out of love for him  
she revealed herself for that one moment  
to awaken love in him.

"So it is with a word of Torah:  
she reveals herself to no one but her lover.  
Torah knows that one who is wise of heart  
hovers about her gate every day.  
What does she do?  
She reveals her face to him from the palace  
and beckons him with a hint,  
then swiftly withdraws to her hiding place.  
No one there knows or reflects—  
he alone does,  
and his heart and his soul and everything within him  
flows out to her.  
This is why Torah reveals and conceals herself.  
With love she approaches her lover  
to arouse love with him.

"Come and see the way of Torah.  
At first, when she begins to reveal herself to a human,  
she beckons him with a hint.  
If he perceives, good;  
if not, she sends him a message, calling him simple.  
Torah says to her messenger:  
'Tell that simple one to come closer, so I can talk with him.'  
He approaches.  
She begins to speak with him from behind a curtain she has  
drawn,  
words he can follow, until he reflects a little at a time.  
This is *deiasha*.  
Then she converses with him through a veil,  
words riddled with allegory.  
This is *haggadah*.

"Once he has grown accustomed to her,  
she reveals herself face to face  
and tells him all her hidden secrets,  
all the hidden ways,  
since primordial days secreted in her heart.

Now he is a complete human  
being, husband of Torah, master of the house.  
All her secrets she has revealed to him,

withholding nothing, concealing nothing.

"She says to him, 'Do you see that word,  
that hint with which I beckoned you at first?  
So many secrets there! This one and that one!'

'Now he sees that nothing should be added to those words  
and nothing taken away.  
Now the *peshat* of the verse, just like it is.  
Not even a single letter should be added or deleted.

"Human beings should become aware,  
pursuing Torah to become her lovers."

The old man was silent for a moment.  
The companions were amazed;  
they did not know if it was day or night,  
if they were really there or not.

"Enough, companions!  
From now on, you know that evil has no power over you.  
I, Yeiva Sava, have stood before you  
to awaken your awareness of these words."

They rose as if awakened from sleep  
and threw themselves down in front of him,  
unable to utter a word.  
After a while they began to cry.  
Rabbi Hiyya opened and said,  
" 'Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm.'  
Love and sparks from the flame of our heart will escort you.  
May it be the Will  
that our image be engraved in your heart  
as your image is engraved in ours."

He kissed them and blessed them, and they left.

When they rejoined Rabbi Shim'on  
and told him everything that happened,  
he was delighted and amazed.  
He said, "You are fortunate to have attained all this.  
Here you were with a heavenly lion,  
a fierce warrior for whom many warriors are nothing,  
and you could not recognize him!  
I am amazed that you escaped his punishment.

The Blessed Holy One must have wanted to save you."

He called out these verses for them:

"The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,  
growing brighter and brighter until the day is full.

When you walk, your stride will be free;  
if you run, you will not stumble.

Your people, all of them righteous, will inherit the land  
forever—a sprout of my planting, the work of my hands, making me  
glorious."

## **UNRIPE FRUIT OF WISDOM**

LET us awaken to the mystery of Torah, musing on her day and night. The written Torah and the oral Torah are joined together like an almond bud and its blossom—neither one concealed from the other, growing on a single stalk, like male and female joined in love. Both emerge from the sheer, inner voice, to exist as one. From there the written Torah draws, and the oral Torah suckles from the written. Clasp one another, they are inseparable. One is general, the other specific. You cannot have one without the other.

However, the written Torah is an unripe fruit of supernal wisdom. Wisdom is the root: the all-inclusive, noetic point, from which all paths diverge. Both the written and oral Torah arise in Binah, the sheer voice that ordains and sustains everything. From there they emerge into being through the power of wisdom, hidden and concealed. Therefore the sages have said, "Torah is an unripe fruit of supernal wisdom."

But isn't the Torah the source of life? How can you say that she is unripe? What is unripe is inferior! Like fruit that falls prematurely from a tree and ripens on the ground: it isn't as good as fruit that ripens on the branch.

Look! The root of Torah is supernal wisdom—hidden and concealed, perceived only through its wondrous pathways. How wondrous are the offshoots! But since the root is wisdom, who can ever reach it? That is why Israel's sweet singer sang, "Open my eyes, so I can see wonders out of your Torah!"

## **WITHOUT VOWELS**

THE SCROLL of the Torah is written without vowels, so you can read it variously. Without vowels, the consonants bear many meanings and splinter into sparks. That is why the Torah scroll must not be vocalized, for the meaning of each word accords with its vowels. Once vocalized, a word means just one thing. Without vowels, you can understand it in countless, wondrous ways.

## **Living in the Material World**

## THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

THE PURPOSE of the soul entering this body is to display her powers and actions in this world, for she needs an instrument. By descending to this world, she increases the flow of her power to guide the human being through the world. Thereby she perfects herself above and below, attaining a higher state by being fulfilled in all dimensions. If she is not fulfilled both above and below, she is not complete.

Before descending to this world, the soul is emanated from the mystery of the highest level. While in this world, she is completed and fulfilled by this lower world. Departing this world, she is filled with the fullness of all the worlds, the world above and the world below.

At first, before descending to this world, the soul is imperfect; she is lacking something. By descending to this world, she is perfected in every dimension.

## BRINGING FORTH SPARKS

You CAN mend the cosmos by anything you do—even eating. Do not imagine that God wants you to eat for mere pleasure or to fill your belly. No, the purpose is mending.

Sparks of holiness intermingle with everything in the world, even inanimate objects. By saying a blessing before you enjoy something, your soul partakes spiritually. This is "food for the soul. As the Torah states: "One does not live on bread alone, but rather on all that issues from the mouth of God." Not just the physical, but the spiritual—the holy sparks, springing from the mouth of God. Like the soul herself, breathed into us by God.

So when you are about to eat bread, say the *motsi*: "Blessed are you, YHVH our God, sovereign of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth." Then by eating, you bring forth sparks that cleave to your soul.

## TASTING THE SPARKS

WHEN YOU eat and drink, you experience enjoyment and pleasure from the food and drink. Arouse yourself every moment to ask in wonder, "What is this enjoyment and pleasure? What is it that I am tasting?"

Answer yourself, "This is nothing but the holy sparks from the sublime, holy worlds that are within the food and drink."

## THE GREATEST PATH

WHEN YOU desire to eat or drink, or to fulfill other worldly desires, and you focus your awareness on the love of God, then you elevate that physical desire to spiritual desire. Thereby you draw out the holy spark that dwells within. You bring forth holy sparks from the material world. There is no path greater than this. For wherever you go and whatever you do—even mundane activities—you serve God.

## RAISING THE SPARKS

WE CONSTANTLY aspire to raise the holy sparks. We know that the potent energy of the

divine ideal—the splendor at the root of existence—has not yet been revealed and actualized in the world around us. Yet the entire momentum of being approaches that ideal.

The ideal ripens within our spirit as we ascend. As we become aware of the ideal, absorbing it from the abundance beyond bounded existence, we revive and restore all the fragments that we gather from life—from every motion, every force, every dealing, every sensation, every substance, trivial or vital. The scattered light stammers in the entirety, mouthing solitary syllables that combine into a dynamic song of creation. Sprinkling, then flowing, this light of life is suffused with holy energy.

We raise these scattered sparks and arrange them into worlds, constructed within us, in our private and social lives. In proportion to the sparks we raise, our lives are enriched. Everything accords with how we act. The higher the aspiration, the greater the action; the deeper the insight, the higher the aspiration.

## **EVERYTHING ASPIRES**

WE CANNOT identify the abundant vitality within all living beings, from the smallest to the largest, nor the hidden vitality enfolded within inanimate creation. Everything constantly flows, vibrates, and aspires. Nor can we estimate our own inner abundance. Our inner world is sealed and concealed, linked to a hidden something, a world that is not our world, not yet perceived or probed.

Everything teems with richness, everything aspires to ascend and be purified. Everything sings, celebrates, serves, develops, evolves, uplifts, aspires to be arranged in oneness.

## **SECULAR AND HOLY**

THERE is a secular world and a holy world, secular worlds and holy worlds. These worlds contradict one another. The contradiction, of course, is subjective. In our limited perception we cannot reconcile the sacred and the secular, we cannot harmonize their contradictions. Yet at the pinnacle of the universe they are reconciled, at the site of the holy of holies.

## **THE SONG OF SONGS**

THERE is one who sings the song of his soul, discovering in his soul everything—utter spiritual fulfillment.

There is one who sings the song of his people. Emerging from the private circle of his soul—not expansive enough, not yet tranquil—he strives for fierce heights, clinging to the entire community of Israel in tender love. Together with her, he sings her song, feels her anguish, delights in her hopes. He conceives profound insights into her past and her future, deftly probing the inwardness of her spirit with the wisdom of love.

Then there is one whose soul expands until it extends beyond the border of Israel, singing the song of humanity. In the glory of the entire human race, in the glory of the human form, his spirit spreads, aspiring to the goal of humankind, envisioning its consummation. From this spring of life, he draws all his deepest reflections, his searching, striving, and vision.

Then there is one who expands even further until he unites with all of existence, with all creatures, with all worlds, singing a song with them all.

There is one who ascends with all these songs in unison—the song of the soul, the song of the nation, the song of humanity, the song of the cosmos—resounding together, blending in harmony, circulating the sap of life, the sound of holy joy.

## SEXUAL HOLINESS

SEXUAL UNION is holy and pure, when performed in the right way, at the right time, and with the right intention. Let no one think that there is anything shameful or ugly in such union. God forbid! The right kind of union is called *Iknowing*. It isn't called that for nothing. Unless it were very holy, it would not be called *knowing*.

This matter is not as Rabbi Moses Maimonides, of blessed memory, imagined and thought in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, where he praises Aristotle for stating that the sense of touch is shameful. God forbid! This matter is not as that Greek said; what he said smacks of subtle heresy. If that Greek scoundrel believed that the world was created with divine intention, he would not have said what he said. But we, who possess the holy Torah, believe that God created everything as divine wisdom decreed. God created nothing shameful or ugly. If sexual union is shameful, then the genitals are too. Yet God created them! How could God create something blemished, disgraceful, or deficient? After all, the Torah states: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold: very good!"

The evidence is clear. In the account of Creation we read: "The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame." Before they ate from the Tree of Knowledge, they were contemplating the pure forms, and their intention was entirely holy. To them, the genitals were like eyes or hands or other parts of the body.

When sexual union is for the sake of heaven, there is nothing as holy or pure. The union of man and woman, when it is right, is the secret of civilization. Thereby, one becomes a partner with God in the act of Creation. This is the secret meaning of the saying of the sages: "When a man unites with his wife in holiness, the divine presence is between them."

Human thought has the power to expand and ascend to its origin. Attaining the source, she is joined with the upper light from which she emanated. She and he become one. Then, when thought emanates once again, all becomes a single ray: the upper light is drawn down by the power of thought. In this way the divine presence appears on earth. A bright light shines and spreads around the place where the mediator is sitting. Similarly, when a man and a woman unite, and their thought joins the beyond, that thought draws down the upper light.

You should welcome her with words that draw her heart, calm her mind, and bring her joy. Then her mind will be linked with yours, and your intention with hers. Speak with her in words that arouse desire, love, and passionate union—and in words that draw her to the awe of God.

## HOLY PLEASURE

I ONCE heard a chaste man bemoaning the fact that sexual union is inherently pleasurable.

He preferred that there be no physical pleasure at all, so that he could unite with his wife solely to fulfill the command of his Creator: "Be fruitful and multiply."

What he said helped me understand a saying of our rabbis, may their memory be a blessing: "One should hallow oneself during sexual union." I took this to mean that one should sanctify one's thought by eliminating any intention of feeling physical pleasure. One should bemoan the fact that pleasurable sensation is inherent to this act. If only it were not so!

Sometime later, God favored me with a gift of grace, granting me understanding of the essence of sexual holiness. The holiness derives precisely from feeling the pleasure. This secret is wondrous, deep, and awesome.

## **THE GIFT OF HOLINESS**

HOLINESS is twofold. It begins as service to God, but it ends as a benefit. At first it is effort, then a gift. In other words, if you strive to be holy, you are eventually endowed with holiness. The effort consists in separating and removing yourself from the material aspect of things and linking yourself with the divine. Even when dealing with your body and its needs, your soul should not stir from her union.

But it is impossible to attain this state on your own. After all, you are physical—flesh and blood. So ultimately, holiness is a gift. What you *can* do is strive to pursue true knowledge. Be persistent in learning how to sanctify what you do. In the end, the Blessed Holy One will guide you on the path that it wishes and impart holiness to you, so that you become holy. Then you will succeed, attaining union continuously. Even your bodily actions are transformed into holy deeds. You are walking in the presence of God while being right here in this world. You become a dwelling place of the divine.

## **The Wisdom of Kabbalah**

### **HOW TO APPROACH KABBALAH**

WHAT SHOULD your intention be as you draw near to this wisdom?

Pursuing the straight path, dividing your time between Bible, Talmud, and this wisdom, partaking of each. Learning this wisdom for its own sake: to enter its mysteries, to know your Creator, to attain a wondrous level of comprehension of the Torah, to pray in the presence of your Creator, to unite the Blessed Holy One and Shekhinah by enacting the mitzvot. This is the worship pleasing to God. Then you will walk the path safely. When you lie down, you will not fear. Faithfully God will make you aware of aspects of the divine Torah that no one else has yet attained. For each soul has a unique portion in the Torah.

Try to learn from someone who has followed paths of integrity, as far as possible, for the treasures of God have been entrusted in that person's hands. Do not chase after those who boast of their knowledge. Their voices roar like the waves of the sea, but they have only a few spoonfuls of wisdom. Many times I have experienced this myself.



This has also befallen some authors, who compose books with riddles, rhyme, and flowery language; their words are encumbered by excess. We need not go into this,- it is improper to cast aspersions on that which is holy. The books to which you should cleave, in order to improve, are the compositions of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai, namely, the various parts of the *Zohar*. Of the books of his predecessors: *Sefer Yetsirah* and *Sefer ha-Bahir*. Of more recent works: *The Fountain of Wisdom*, *Chapters of the Chariot*, *Chapters of Creation*, and similar writings. Cleave to these in love; you will then succeed in this wisdom, provided you delve deeply and reflect intensely. Then you will discover most of what is found in the more recent commentaries, which you will no longer need. It is not our intention, God forbid, to declare these latter writings unfit, but rather to designate for the seeker the path that is short, although it is long.

Peruse these books in two ways. First, go over the language of the text many times, taking notes to remember fluently. Do not delve deeply at first. Second, study with great concentration, according to your ability. Even if it seems that you do not understand, do not stop, because God will faithfully help you discover hidden wisdom. As a parent trains a child, so does God purify one engaged in this wisdom, little by little. I have experienced this innumerable times.

If something in this wisdom seems doubtful to you, wait. As time passes, it will be revealed to you. The essential reward of this wisdom is derived from waiting for the secrets that will be revealed to you in the course of time. This is demonstrated in several passages in the *Zohar*, - often something that had been doubtful to them for a long time would suddenly be seen anew. They had a saying for this: "I have been pursuing this word all the days of my life!"

Those who persevere in this wisdom find that when they ponder these teachings many times, knowledge grows within them—an increase of essence. The search always leads to something new.

## HIDDEN WISDOM

SOMETHING YOU cannot explain to another person is called *nistar*, "hidden," like the taste of food, which is impossible to describe to one who has never tasted it. You cannot express in words exactly what it is—it is hidden. Similarly with the love and awe of God: It is impossible to explain to another what the love in your heart feels like. This is hidden.

But calling the wisdom of Kabbalah "hidden" is strange. How is it hidden? Whoever wants to learn—the book is readily available. If one does not understand, he is ignorant. For such a person, the Talmud is also hidden! Rather, the secrets hidden throughout the *Zohar* and the writings of the *Aii* are based entirely on cleaving to God—for one worthy to cleave.

## STUMBLING

WHOEVER DELVES into mysticism cannot help but stumble, as it is written: "This stumbling block is in your hand." You cannot grasp these things unless you stumble over them.