Kabbalah: A Sourcebook and Guide
Compiled by Yosef Rosen
2015
Contents

A Map Of Jewish Secrets
5

Part One
Whispers and Depths: The Emergence of Jewish Secrets in Ancient Judaism
6

Part Two
Seeing God:
Heavenly Ascents and Merkavah Mysticism in the First Millennium
13

Part Three
Divine Immanence: Kavod, Shekhina, and Metatron
21

Part Four
The Ten Sephirot: A History
27

Part Five
After Infinity: The Theological Revolution of Medieval Kabbalah
32

Part Six
The Zohar: Imagination and Literature
34

Part Seven
B’lekhitekha Baderekh: Walking as a Mystical Practice in the Zohar
38

Part Eight
The Eros Of Kabbalah
44
Part Nine
_Tikkun_: The Dynamic God
  45

Part Ten
From Lurianic Kabbalah to Hassidut: The Modern Turn to Personal Experience
  48

Part Eleven
Trends of Modern Kabbalah
  52
A Map of Jewish Secrets

Jewish secrets answer four important questions whose answers are not explicit in exoteric Jewish literature.

How does divinity create?
emergence, transformation, growth, order, balance, newness, cosmos
Ma’aseh Bereishit

How does divinity appear?
forms, colours, motion, texture, heat, spaces, aesthetics
Ma’aseh Merkava

How does divinity feel?
presence, sensation, stimulation, emotion, embodiment, union, eros
Devekut

How does divinity break and become weakened?
How does divinity heal and flourish?
excess, imbalance, dependence
humanity, redemption, action
Shvirah/Tikkun
Mysticism and Spirituality as Terms

Although the word *mysticism* is fairly recent, created in the seventeenth century and not popular until the nineteenth century, the adjective *mystical* (“hidden” in Greek) has been widely used among Christians since at least the late second century CE. Christians used *mystical* to refer to the secrets realities of their belief, rituals, and practices, especially to the “mystical meaning” of the Bible, that is, the inner message about attaining God that may be found beneath the literal sense of the scriptural texts and stories. They also spoke about “mystical contemplation” and, from 500 CE on, of “mystical theology,” that is, the knowledge of God attained not by human rational effort but by the soul’s direct reception of a divine gift.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the term “spirituality” underwent a major discursive shift. The binary opposition of the spiritual on the one hand and the corporeal and material on the other, which was central to the earlier perception of spirituality, became blurred; instead, a new defining dichotomy emerged, juxtaposing spirituality with the category it was previously closely related to, namely the religious.

Kabbalah as History

Values:

- **Pluralism** (There are many schools, traditions, and region-specific trends of Kabbalah.)
- **Transformation** (Kabbalah emerges out of earlier forms of Jewish imagination, and continues to develop and change, even today.)
- **Otherness** (Honor and value the differences of the past.)

Timeline of Ancient Judaism:

- c. 1200 BCE Israelites settle in Canaan.
c. 1020 BCE Saul anointed first king of Israel. **Period of the Jewish Kings**

- c. 1000–961 BCE King David rules over a united Israel.
- c. 965 BCE King Solomon begins building the First Temple in Jerusalem.
- 586 BCE Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylonia conquers Judah, destroys the Temple, and exiles thousands to Babylon.
- 538 BCE King Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylonia and allows Jews to return to the land of Israel (though many choose to remain in Babylonia). **Persian period begins.**
- c. 516 BCE The Second Temple is built in Jerusalem.
- c. 458 BCE Ezra returns from Babylonia and renews Torah-centered culture in Israel.
- 332 BCE Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire, including the land of Israel. **Hellenistic period begins.**
- c. 167 BCE The Maccabean revolt against the Syrian Greeks achieves relative independence for the Jews. Hanukkah celebrates this event.
- 63 BCE The Roman Empire controls the land of Israel; the area called Judea (including Jerusalem) becomes a client kingdom of Rome. **Roman period begins.**
- 66 CE The first Jewish revolt against Rome begins.
- 70 The Romans destroy Jerusalem and the Second Temple. **Rabbinic period begins.**
- c. 210 Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi edits the Mishnah.
- 550-700 The Babylonian Talmud is composed.
- By 850 most Jews live in Islamo-Arabic culture. **Medieval period begins**

**II: Judaism After Prophecy**

**Ezra, 7 (c. 5th Century BCE)**
Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Torah of Moses, which the Lord,
the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him...Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Torah of the Lord [liddrosh Torat YHVH], and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

*Compare Ezra to these Biblical Intertexts:*

- There is one more man through whom we can inquire of the Lord [liddrosh et YHVH] [1 Kings 22:8].
- The word of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel...and the hand of the Lord came upon him [Ezekiel 1:3].

**Apocalyptic Literature**

*Daniel*

*1 Enoch*

*4 Ezra*

*2 - 3 Baruch*

*Apocalypse of Abraham*

*Testament of Abraham*

*Revelations*

**Definition:** “A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.” [Semia 14, 1979]


The main means of revelation are visions and otherworldly journeys, supplemented by discourse or dialogue and occasionally by a heavenly book. The constant element is the presence of an angel who interprets the vision or serves as guide on the otherworldly journey. This figure indicates that the revelation is not intelligible without supernatural aid. In all the Jewish apocalypses the human recipient is a venerable figure from the distant past, whose name is used pseudonymously.

**4 Ezra, 14 [c. 125 CE]**

On the third day, while I was sitting under an oak, behold, a voice came out of a bush opposite me and said, "Ezra, Ezra."

And I said, "Here I am, Lord," and I rose to my feet.

Then he said to me, "I revealed myself in a bush and spoke to Moses, when my people were in bondage in Egypt; and I sent him and led my people out of Egypt; and I led him up on Mount Sinai,
where I kept him with me many days; and I told him many wondrous things, and showed him the
secrets of the times and declared to him the end of the times.

Then I commanded him, saying, “These words you shall publish openly, and these you shall keep
secret.”

And now I say to you - Lay up in your heart the signs that I have shown you, the dreams that you
have seen, and the interpretations that you have heard; for you shall be taken up from among men...

Then I answered and said, "Let me speak in thy presence, Lord. For behold, I will go, as thou hast
commanded me, and I will reprove the people who are now living; but who will warn those who will
be born hereafter?

For the world lies in darkness, and its inhabitants are without light. For thy law has been burned,
and so no one knows the things which have been done or will be done by thee. If then I have found
favor before thee, send the Holy Spirit into me, and I will write everything that has happened in the
world from the beginning, the things which were written in thy law, that men may be able to find the
path, and that those who wish to live in the last days may live."

He answered me and said, "Go and gather the people, and tell them not to seek you for forty days.
But prepare for yourself many writing tablets, and take with you Sarea, Dabria, Selemia, Ethanus,
and Asiel -- these five, because they are trained to write rapidly; and you shall come here, and I will
light in your heart the lamp of understanding, which shall not be put out until what you are about to
write is finished. And when you have finished, some things you shall make public, and some you
shall deliver in secret to the wise; tomorrow at this hour you shall begin to write..."

So I took the five men, as he commanded me, and we proceeded to the field, and remained there.
And on the next day, behold, a voice called me, saying, "Ezra, open your mouth and drink what I
give you to drink."

Then I opened my mouth, and behold, a full cup was offered to me; it was full of something like
water, but its color was like fire. And I took it and drank; and when I had drunk it, my heart poured
forth understanding, and wisdom increased in my breast, for my spirit retained its memory; and my
mouth was opened, and was no longer closed.

And the Most High gave understanding to the five men, and by turns they wrote what was dictated,
in characters which they did not know. They sat forty days, and wrote during the daytime, and ate
their bread at night. As for me, I spoke in the daytime and was not silent at night.

So during the forty days ninety-four books were written.

And when the forty days were ended, the Most High spoke to me, saying, "Make public the
twenty-four books that you wrote first and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; but keep the
seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people. For in them is
the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge."

And I did so.
III: Rabbinic Secrets

Mishnah Haggiga 2:1 (200 CE)

A. The [passage on] forbidden relations may not be expounded (dorshin) before three; [the passage on] the work of creation may not be expounded before two; [the passage on] the chariot may not be expounded even before one, unless he is a sage and understands on his own.

B. Anyone who contemplates (mistakel) four matters, it is worthy that he never came to this world:
   What is above; what is below; what is ahead; and what is behind.

C. And anyone who does not respect the honor of his creator, it is worthy that he never came to this world.

Ben Sira, 3:21-22 (200 BCE)

For abundant is the mercy of God, and to the humble he reveals his secrets (sodo). What is too sublime (pla’ot) for you, seek not (al ti-drosh); what is hidden from you, search not (al tekhlkor). What has been permitted to you, look upon (hitbonen); have no business with mysteries (nistarot).

Origen, Commentary to the Song of Songs (c. 185-253 CE)

It is said that the custom of the Jews is that no one who has not reached full maturity is permitted to hold this book [Song of Songs] in his hands. And not only this, but although their teachers and sages (doctores et sapientes) are wont to teach all the scriptures as well as [the texts] that they call deuteroseis to the young boys, they defer to the last the following four [texts]: the beginning of Genesis, where the of the world is described; the beginning of the prophet Ezekiel, where (the story) of the Cherubim is told; the end (of the same book) which contains (the description of) the building of the (future) Temple; and this book of the Song of Songs.

IV. Medieval Models of the Hidden

Abraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to the Bible (1098-1167)

Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands (mitzvotai) and my instructions (torotai)? [Exodus 16:28]

The reason for the plural form in mitzvotai and torotai is that all the commandments and teachings are undoubtedly true in their apparent meaning, yet they contain secrets concerning matters of the soul, which only the instructed may understand; thus each commandment is double.

Know that whenever one of the perfect wishes to mention - either orally or in writing, something that he understands of these secrets, according to the degree of his perfection - he is unable to explain with complete clarity and coherence even the portion that he has apprehended, as he could do with the other sciences whose teachings are generally communicable. Rather when he teaches another person there will befall him that which he had undergone when learning himself. I mean to say that the subject matter will appear, flash, and then be hidden again, as though this were the nature of this subject matter, be there much or little of it. For this reason, all the Sages possessing the knowledge of God the Lord, knowers of truth, when they aimed at teaching something of this subject matter, spoke of it only in parables and riddles.

**V: Secrets and Creativity**


We have stated several times that it is our primary object in this treatise to expound, as far as possible, the Biblical account of the Creation (*Ma‘aseh Bereshit*) and the description of the Divine Chariot (*Ma‘aseh Merkavah*) in a manner adapted to the training of those for whom this work is written. We have also stated that these subjects belong to the mysteries of the Law. You are well aware how our Sages blame those who reveal these mysteries, and praise the merits of those who keep them secret, although they are perfectly clear to the philosopher... The Sages have clearly stated that the Divine Chariot includes matters too deep and too profound for the ordinary intellect. It has been shown that a person favoured by Providence with reason to understand these mysteries is forbidden by the Law to teach them except orally, and on condition that the pupil possess certain qualifications, and even then only the heads of the sections may be communicated. This has been the cause why the knowledge of this mystery has entirely disappeared from our nation, and nothing has remained of it. This was unavoidable, for the explanation of these mysteries was always communicated orally, it was never committed to writing. Such being the case, how can I venture to call your attention to such portions of it as may be known, intelligible, and perfectly clear to me? But if, on the other hand, I were to abstain from writing on this subject, according to my knowledge of it, when I die, as I shall inevitably do, that knowledge would die with me, and I would thus inflict great injury on you and all those who are perplexed [by these theological problems]. I would then be guilty of withholding the truth from those to whom it ought to be communicated, and of jealously depriving the heir of his inheritance. I should in either case be guilty of gross misconduct.

To give a full explanation of the mystic passages of the Bible is contrary to the Law and to reason; besides, my knowledge of them is based on reasoning, not on divine inspiration [and is therefore not infallible]. I have not received my belief in this respect from any teacher, but it has been formed by what I learnt from Scripture and the utterances of our Sages, and by the philosophical principles
which I have adopted. It is therefore possible that my view is wrong, and that I misunderstood the passages referred to.

Nahmanides, *Introduction to his Commentary on the Torah (1260’s)*

Now behold I bring into a faithful covenant and give proper counsel to all who look into this book not to reason or entertain any thought concerning any of the hints which I write regarding the hidden matters of the Torah, for I do hereby firmly make known to him [the reader] that my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise Kabbalist speaking into the ear of an understanding recipient. Reasoning about them is foolishness; any unrelated thought brings much damage and withholds the benefit.

Gates of the Anonymous Elder (late 13th century)

We asked the elder: “What is the meaning of the tradition that Elijah never tasted the taste of death?” The elder took the hand of one of the students and brought him into the most private room (heder b’heder), and said to him: “Have I not yelled at you many times, so that you should not ask me questions like this before your friends.” The student shook. The master said: “Place you head between your thighs, and I will whisper into your ears what I received in regards to Elijah.”

Abraham Abulafia, “The Knowledge of the Messiah and the Meaning of the Redeemer” [MS Munich 285](1240-1291)

A man who gains his understanding of the essentials of reality from books is called *Hakham*, a scholar. If he obtains it from a tradition [*kabbalah*] from one who has himself obtained it from the contemplation of the divine names or from another Kabbalist, then he is called *Mevin*, one who has insight. But if his understanding is derived from his own heart, through a give-and-take dialogue that he has with himself over what has come to his hands regarding the matters of existence, he is called a *Da’atan*, a gnostic.
[2] Seeing God:  
Heavenly Ascents and Merkavah Mysticism in the First Millennium

I: An Imageless God

Exodus 20:4  
You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

Deuteronomy 4:12  
Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.

Jose Faur, Golden Doves with Silver Dots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Culture (1986), pp. 29-30  
The Hebrew and Greek types of truth correspond to two different levels of reality. The Greek truth is visual. Therefore it is related to the spatial World-Out-There. For the Hebrews the highest form of truth is perceived at the auditory level...Verbal representation of God, even in anthropomorphic terms, is common both to Scripture and to the Rabbis. What was offensive to the Hebrews was “to see” God; that is, to express His reality at the visual level.

The underlying conceptual assumption here (in the Bible) is clear enough: God possesses no visible form and therefore cannot be worshiped through created images. While the figural representation of the deity is deemed offensive or even blasphemous, the hearing of a voice is an acceptable form of anthropomorphic representation, for, phenomenologically speaking, the voice does not necessarily imply an externalized concrete shape that is bound by specific spatial dimensions...Hence, representing God anthropomorphically in auditory images is not theologically offensive, for that mode of representation does not violate the basic principle of God’s irreducible otherness. Indeed, it is alone the speech of God that bridges the gap separating humanity and the divine.

II: Visions of the Divine

Exodus 24:10-12  
Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet the like of a paved work of sapphire stone, and
the like of the very heaven for clearness...and they beheld God, and did eat and drink.

**Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Bahodesh, 2**

The Israelites said to Moses: It is our desire to see our king, for the one who hears cannot be compared to the one who sees.

**Ezekiel 1**

1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

2 In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity,

3 the word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

4 And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind (rı́yāh) came out of the north, a great cloud, with a fire flashing up, so that a brightness was round about it; and in middle of it was the colour of electrum, in middle of the fire.

5 And in middle of it - the likeness (demut) of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.

6 And every one had four faces, and every one of them had four wings.

7 And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.

8 And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and as for the faces and wings of them four,

9 their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.

10 As for the likeness of their faces, they had the face of a man; and they four had the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four had also the face of an eagle.

11 Thus were their faces; and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.
12 And they went every one straight forward; whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went.

13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like coals of fire, burning like the appearance of torches; it flashed up and down among the living creatures; and there was brightness to the fire, and out of the fire went forth lightning.

14 And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.

15 Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel at the bottom by the living creatures, at the four faces thereof.

16 The appearance of the wheels and their actions was like the colour of beryl (tarshish); and they four had one likeness; and their appearance and their actions was like a wheel within a wheel.

17 When they went, they went toward their four sides; they turned not when they went.

18 As for their rings, they were high and they were dreadful; and they four had their rings full of eyes round about.

19 And when the living creatures went, the wheels went with them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the land, the wheels were lifted up.

20 Wherever the wind (rua) was to go, so they went; and the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the movement (rua) of the living creature was in the wheels.

21 When those went, these went, and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them; for the motion (rua) of the living creature was in the wheels.

22 And over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, like the colour of the terrible ice, stretched forth over their heads above.

23 And under the firmament their wings were straight, the one next to the other; this one of them had two which covered, and that one of them had two which covered, their bodies.

24 And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, like the voice of Shadai, a noise of tumult like the noise of a camp; when they stood, they let down their wings.

25 There was a voice above the firmament that was over their heads; as they stood, they let down their wings.
And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness (demut) of a throne, as the appearance (mar'el) of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above.

And I saw - like the colour of electrum, like the appearance of fire round about enclosing it, from the appearance of his loins and upward; and from the appearance of his loins and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him.

As the appearance of the rainbow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke.

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple (heikhal). Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory.”

III. Heavenly Ascents

Genesis 5:21-24

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he begot Methuselah. After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years; and he begot sons and daughters. All the days of Enoch came to 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him.

1 Enoch 14 (3rd Century BCE)

I saw in my sleep what I will now say with a tongue of flesh and with the breath of my mouth: which the Great One has given to men to converse therewith and understand with the heart...

And the vision was shown to me thus: Behold, in the vision clouds invited me and a mist summoned me, and the course of the stars and the lightnings sped and hastened me, and the winds in the vision caused me to fly and lifted me upward, and bore me into heaven. And I went in till I drew nigh to a wall which is built of crystals and surrounded by tongues of fire: and it began to frighten me. And I went into the tongues of fire and drew close to a large house built of crystals: and the walls of the house were like a mosaic floor made of crystals, and its groundwork was also of crystal. Its ceiling was like the path of the stars and the lightning, and between them were fiery cherubim, and the heaven was clear as water. A flaming fire surrounded the walls, and its openings blazed with fire. And I entered into that house, and it was hot as fire and cold as ice. There were no
delights of life therein. Fear covered me, and trembling took hold upon me. And as I quaked and trembled, I fell upon my face. And I beheld a vision: There was a second house, greater than the former, and the entire entrance stood open before me, and it was built of flames of fire. And in every respect it so excelled in splendour and magnificence and extent that I cannot describe to you its splendour and its extent. And its floor was of fire, and above it were lightnings and the path of the stars, and its ceiling also was flaming fire. And I looked and saw therein a lofty throne: its appearance was as crystal, and the wheels looked like the shining sun, and there was the vision of cherubim. And from underneath the throne came streams of flaming fire so that I could not look thereon. And the Great Glory sat thereon, and His garments shone more brightly than the sun and were whiter than any snow. None of the angels could enter and could behold His face by reason of the magnificence and glory and no flesh could behold Him. The flaming fire was round about Him, and a great fire stood before Him, and none around could draw nigh Him: ten thousand times ten thousand (stood) before Him, yet He needed no counselor. And the most holy ones who were near to Him did not leave by night nor depart from Him. And until then I had been prostrate on my face, trembling: and the Lord called me with His own mouth, and said to me: “Come close, Enoch, and hear my word.” And one of the holy ones came to me and waked me, and He made me rise up and approach the door: and I bowed my face downwards.

2 Enoch 22:1-4
And on the tenth heaven, Aravoth, I saw the view of the face of the Lord, like iron made burning hot in a fire and brought out, and it emits sparks and is incandescent. Thus even I saw the face of the Lord. But the face of the Lord is not to be talked about, it is so marvelous and supremely awesome and supremely frightening. And who am I to give an account of the incomprehensible being of the Lord, and of His face, so extremely strange and indescribable?... Who can give an account of His beautiful appearance, never changing and indescribable, and His great glory? And I fell down flat and gave respect to the Lord.

IV: Merkavah Mysticism in Rabbinic Culture

Tosefta, Megilla 3:17
A blind person is allowed/required to recite the Shema and to translate (the Torah portion into Aramaic). Rabbi Yehudah says: One who has never seen the lights in his life may not recite the Shema. They said to him [R. Yehudah]: Many have expounded the Merkavah and never saw it in their life.

Talmud Bavli, Megilla 24b
We taught: They said to him R. Yehudah - Many have expounded the Merkavah and never saw it in their life. And R. Yehudah [would answer], there [by the Merkavah] the matter depends upon the understanding of the heart, and behold he has intention and and understands. Here [by the Shema]
the matter depends upon benefit, and he [the blind] does not have benefit [from the lights].

Babylonian Talmud, Haggiga 14b
It was taught: A story about Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai who was mounted on a donkey and R. Eleazer ben Arakh was travelling behind him: Eleazer said to Yoḥanan, Rabbi teach me one chapter of the work of the Merkavah. He replied: did I not say to you from the beginning, the Merkavah may not be taught to an individual, unless he is wise and capable of understanding on his own? Eleazer said to Yoḥanan: Rabbi, permit me to speak before you one matter that you taught me. He replied: speak. Immediately Yoḥanan ben Zakkai descended from the donkey, surrounded himself [with his talit], and sat on the stone below the olive tree. Eleazer said, Rabbi, why did you descend from the donkey. He said: Is it fitting that you should explicate the work of the chariot, and the Shekinah is with us, and the sovereign angels accompany us, and I should ride on a donkey?! Immediately R. Eliezer began to expound on the work of the chariot, and fire descended from heaven and surrounded all the trees in the meadow. They all began to sing. What song did they utter? “Then all the trees of the forest shall shout with joy” (Psalms 96).
One angel answered from the midst of the fire and said: Yes, yes, these are the work of the chariot. R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai stood and kissed Eleazer on his head, and said - blessed is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who has given to Abraham our forefather a child that knows how to understand, examine, and expound on the work of the chariot.

V: Heikhalot Literature

Hekhalot Rabbati, 81
Which are the hymns recited by one who wishes to behold the vision of the Merkavah [le-histakel bitzfiyat merkavah], to descend in peace and to ascend in peace?

Geniza Fragment, 103
You should write and set the Seal of the Descent to the Merkavah for the people of the world, for you, and for everyone who wishes to descend and gaze at the king in His beauty. He should take this path and descend, and see, and he will not be harmed.

Ma’aseh Merkavah, Synopse, 118
When I ascended to the first palace, I was righteous; in the second palace, I was pure; in the third palace, I was upright; in the fourth palace, I was perfect; in the fifth palace, I brought holiness before the King of Kings, blessed be His name. In the sixth palace, I said the sanctification before Him who spoke and fashioned and commanded all living beings, so that the angel would not destroy me. In the seventh palace, I stood in all my power. I trembled in all my limbs.

Hekhalot Rabbati, Synopse, 247-251
... and whenever one wishes to descend to the Merkavah, Anafi’el, the prince, opens the doors of
the gate of the seventh palace for him. This man enters and stands at the threshold of the gate to the
seventh palace. The holy living creatures raise to him five hundred and twelve eyes ... and that man
then trembles, shakes, and shudders. He is stricken and faints and he falls backwards. And the prince
Anafi’el supports him, and sixty-three other gatekeepers of the seventh pal- aces. They support him
and say: “fear not, son of the be- loved seed, enter and behold the King in his beauty and you will
not be destroyed and you will not be burned.” ... They give him strength and immediately a horn is
sounded above the firmament over their heads and the holy living creatures cover their faces and the
Cherubim and Ophanim turn their faces around. And he enters and stands before the throne of His
glory. ... As soon as he stands before the throne of glory, he opens and says songs that the throne
of glory chants every day.

Hekhalot Rabbati, 159
Lovely countenance/ adorned countenance/ countenance of beauty/ countenance of flame[s]/ is
the countenance of the Lord, the God of Israel/ when He sits upon the throne of His glory...
His beauty is more lovely than the angels of might/ his adornment is more exquisite than the
splendor of the bridegroom and bride in the house of their wedding.
He who looks at Him will immediately be torn/ he who views His beauty will immediately be
poured out like a jug.

Hekhalot Rabbati, 189
Every day
when the afternoon prayer (minhå) approaches,
the adorned king sits
and praises the angelic creatures.
Even before the speech from his mouth is completed,
the sacred beasts (hayyot ha-qodesh) come forth
from under the throne of glory,
from their mouths - the fullness of rejoicing,
with their wings - the fullness of exaltation;
their hands play instruments, and their feet dance;
they walk around and surround their king,
one from the right and one from the left,
one from in front and one from behind.
They embrace and kiss him, and reveal their countenance;
they reveal, but the King of Glory covers His countenance.
And the seventh heaven (arevot raqia) is torn asunder
in front of the adornment,
the splendor, the beauty, the form, the wish, the longing, and desire
for the brilliance of the tiara,
in which the view of their countenance [appears],
as it is written, "holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3).

**Midrash Mishle, 34a**

If there comes before God a person who is learned in the Talmud, the Holy One, praise be to Him, says to him: “my son, since you have studied Talmud, why have you not also studied the Merkabah and perceived my splendor? For none of the pleasures I have in My creation is equal to that which is given to me in the hour when the scholars sit and study Torah and they see and behold and meditate [on] these questions: How the throne of My glory stands; what the first of its feet serves as; what the second foot serves as; what the third and fourth serves as; how the hashmal (seen by Ezekiel in his vision) stands; how many expressions he takes on in an hour, and which side he serves; how the heavenly lightning stands; how many radiant faces are visible between his shoulders, and which side he serves; and even greater than all this: the fiery stream under the throne of My glory, which is round like a stone made of brick; how many bridges are spanned across it, how great is the distance between one bridge and the next, and, if I cross it, over which bridge do I cross; which bridge do the wheels (ofanim) cross; even greater than all this: how I stand from the nails of My feet to the parting of my hair; how great is the measure of My palm, and what is the measure of My toes. Even greater than all this: how the throne of My glory does stand, and which side it does serve on every day of the week. And is this not My greatness, is not this My glory and My beauty that My children know My splendor through these measurements?”

**Rav Hai Gaon, Otzar ha-Geonim, V. 4, p. 14, (Iraq, 939-1038)**

Many scholars thought that one who is distinguished by many qualities described in the books, when he seeks to behold the Merkavah and the palaces [Heikhalot] of the angels on high, he must follow a certain procedure. He must fast a number of days and place his head between his knees and whisper many hymns and songs whose texts are known from tradition. Then he perceives within himself and in the chambers [of his heart] as if he saw the seven palaces with his own eyes, and it is as though he entered one palace after another and saw what is there. And there are two mishnayot, which the tannaim taught regarding this topic, called the Greater Heykhalot and the Lesser Heykhalot, and this matter is well known and widespread. Regarding these contemplations, the tanna taught: “Four entered Pardes” - those palaces were alluded to by the term Pardes, and they were designated by this name... For God shows to the righteous, in their interior, the visions of His palaces and the position of His angels.

**Rabbi Nathan of Rome, Aruch Completum 1:14, (Rome, 1035-1106)**

They did not ascend on high but rather in the chambers of their heart they saw and contemplated like a person who sees and contemplates something clearly with his eyes, and they heard and spoke with a seeing eye, by the divine spirit. This is the explanation of R. Hai Gaon.

I: The Closeness of God

Psalm 145
The Lord is near to all who call Him, to all who call Him with sincerity.

Deuteronomy 4:7
For what great nation has god(s) (elohim) so near (krovim) like the LORD our God whenever we call to him?

Jerusalem Talmud, Brakhot 9:1
The heretics asked: What do you make of what is written, “Who is a great nation which has gods so near.” He replied - “it does not say (in the continuation of that verse) ‘when we call to them’ but ‘when we call to Him.’” The students said to him - “to those you shoved aside with a straw, but what will you answer us?” He replied - “He is close in many types of closeness.” For R. Pinheas said in the name of R. Yehudah b. Simon - Idols appear close but are really far...but the Holy One, blessed be He, appears far but there is none closer than Him. For it was said - from the earth to the raqiyyah is 500 years away, and from raqiyyah to raqiyyah is 500 years away, and the clouds of the raqiyyah 500 years, and so with every raqiyyah...See how far above this earth He is, but a human enters the synagogue and stands behind the amud and prayers in whispers and the Holy One, blessed be He, hears his prayer. As it says, “And Hana was talking in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.” And God listened to her prayer. And so for every creature, as it is written “prayer for a poor person when he faints and pours out his prayer before God,” like a man who converses into the ear of his friend, and he hears. And is there any God closer than this, for he is close to his creatures like a mouth to an ear.

II: Kavod

Exodus 40:34
And the glory [kavod] of YHVH filled the tabernacle.

Isaiah 6:3
And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts the whole earth is full of His glory.”

Sa’adia Gaon, Book of Doctrines and Beliefs, 120
One might bring against us the following argument: How is it permissible to assume that the anthropomorphic expressions and what is related to them bear a metaphorical sense, when Scripture itself explicitly mentions a form like that of human beings that was seen by the prophets and spoke to them and to which they attributed God’s words, let alone the description of God being carried by
the angels on top of a firmament, as it is said, “and above the firmament that was over their heads
was a likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the
throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above” (Ezekiel 1:26). This form was seen
by them likewise upon the throne with angels standing by Him on His right hand and on His left, as
it is said, “I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the hosts of heaven standing by Him on His
right hand and on His left” (1 Kings 22:19). Our answer is that this form is something created, and
that likewise the Throne, the firmament, as well as the carriers of the Throne are all created. God
created them out of Light in order to verify to His prophet that it was He who inspired them with
His words. It is a form more magnificent even than [that of] the angels, of overpowering majesty
and transcendent splendour.

It is called Glory of God, and it is the form which one of the prophets described as follows:
"I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit" (Daniel 7:9), and which
the sages called Shekhina. Sometimes, however, this specially created being consists of light without
the form of a person. It was, therefore, an honor that God had conferred on His prophet by
allowing him to hear the oracle from the mouth of a majestic form created out of fire that was called
the Glory of God, as we have explained.

If, however, it (Scripture) mentions the name 'God' but does not attach to it the word 'glory'
or 'angel' but only such expressions as 'vision' or 'throne' or some human attribute, there can be no
doubt but that there is something suppressed in the utterance, the full form of which should be
'Glory of God' or 'angel of the Lord', in accordance with the practice of the language of Scripture to
leave out words by ellipsis.

Nahmanides, Commentary to the Torah (Genesis 46:1)
And God forbid that what is called Shekhina or the Created Glory is outside of the divine Name,
may He be blessed as the Rabbi [Maimonides] believed. . . and if one claims that it is the Created
Glory according to the Rabbi's view of the verse [Exod 40:34] "And the Glory of God filled the
tabernacle," then how can blessings be offered to it? And he who blesses and prays to the Created
Glory is as an idolater [because] the many statements of the Sages have dictated that the Shekhina is
God, may He be blessed.

III: Shekhina

Exodus 25:8
Make for me a temple and I will dwell (v'shabkanti) amongst you.

Targum Onkelos, ad locum
Make before me a temple and I will place my shekhina amongst you.

Exodus 34:6
And YHVH passed before him and spoke: YHVH YHVH, a god of mercy and graciousness,
patience and great kindness and truthfulness.
Targum Onkelos, *ad locum*
And YHVH passed His Shekhina before him....

*Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, Masekhet de-Pisha, 14*
Wherever Israel went into exile, the Shekhina, as it were, was exiled with them...they were exiled to Egypt, the Shekhina was with them...they were exiled to Babylon, the Shekhina was with them...

*Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, Masekhet de-Bahodesh, 6*
For whoever is humble will ultimately cause the Shekhina to dwell with man upon earth...but whoever is haughty brings about the defilement of the earth and the departure of the Shekhina.

*Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana, Va-Yehi Be-Yom*
Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, reveal Himself to Moses in a thorn-bush? It teaches us that there is no place upon earth void of the Shekhina.

*Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin, 39a*
The Emperor said to Rabbanan Gamliel: “You say that wherever there is a gathering of ten (Jews) the Shekhina abides in their midsts. How many Shekinas are there? Rabbanan Gamliel called to his servant...he said to him: “Why is the sun present in the Emperor's home?” He answered: “The sun shines upon the whole world.” And if the sun, which is one of the thousand servants before the Holy One, blessed be He, shines upon the whole earth, the Shekhina of the Holy One, blessed be He, all the more so.

*Midrash Proverbs 22:29*
“Seest thou a man diligent in his business?” When the Sanhedrin wished to count him [King Solomon] with the three kings and four commoners, the Shekhina stood before the Holy One, blessed be He, and said to Him: “Sovereign of the universe! Seest Thou a man diligent? They wish to count him with ‘mean men.”’ At that moment a Heavenly Voice went forth and said to them: “He shall not stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

*Bereishit Rabbati*
R. Akiva said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, scrutinized the action of the generation, and saw that they were corrupt and bad, He withdrew Himself and His Shekhina from among them.

*R. Ele'azar ha-Darshan, Sod ha-Yihud [13th century]*
And one should be careful not to pray and bow except before the Holy One, blessed be He, and not to the Shekhina, for indeed the Shekhina herself prays before the Holy One.
**IV: Metatron**

1 *Enoch* 70-71 [*c. 1st Century BCE*]
And it came to pass after this that his name was elevated during his lifetime to that Son of man, to the Lord of the spirits, away from those who dwell on the earth...
And that angel came to me and greeted me with his voice and said to me: "Thou art a son of man who was born to justice, and justice dwells over thee, and the justice of the Head of days will not depart from thee."

*Ascension of Isaiah* 9:9 [*late 1st C. CE*]
Enoch and all who were with him stript of their garments of the flesh and clothed in the garments of the upper world, and they were like angels, standing there in great glory.

2 *Enoch* 22:8 [*late 1st C. CE*]
And the Lord said to Michael: Take Enoch and strip him of his earthly garments and anoint him with the holy oil, and clothe him in garments of glory. And Michael stripped me of my garments and anointed me with the holy oil...And I looked at myself, and I was as one of the glorious ones, and there was no difference.

*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* *Genesis* 5:24 [*date unknown, 8th-12th C.*]
Enoch worshiped in truth before the Lord, and behold he was not with the inhabitants of the earth because he was taken away and he ascended to the firmament at the command of the Lord, and he was called Metatron, the Great Scribe.

3 *Enoch* [*c. 450-850 CE*]
"And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him (Genesis 5:24)."
[Ch. 1] R. Ishmael said: When I ascended on high to behold the vision of the Merkava and had entered the six heikhalot, one within the other, as soon as I reached the door of the seventh heikhal I stood in prayer before the Holy One, blessed be He, and, lifting up my eyes on high, I said: "Lord of the Universe, I pray to thee, that the merit of Aaron...be valid for me this hour, so that Qafsiel, the prince, and the angels with him may not get power over me nor throw me down from the heavens."
Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, sent me Metatron, his servant, the angel, the Prince of the Presence [sa'ar ba-panim], and he, spreading his wings, with great joy came to meet me so as to save me from their hands. And he took me by his hand in their sight, saying to me: "Enter in peace before the high and exalted King and behold the image of the Merkava."
[Ch. 4] R. Ishmael said: I asked Metatron and said to him: "Why are you called by the name of the your creator, by seventy names? You are greater than all the princes, higher than all the angels, beloved more than all the servants, honoured above all the mighty ones in kingship, greatness and
glory: Why do they call you ‘Youth’ in the high heavens?”
He answered and said to me: “Because I am Enoch, the son of Jared. For when the generation of the flood sinned and were confounded in their deeds, saying unto God: ‘Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of your ways (Job xxi.14),’ then the Holy one, blessed be He, removed me from their midst to be a witness against them in the high heavens...

[Ch. 7] R. Ishmael said: Metatron, the Angel, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: When the Holy One, blessed be He, took me away from the generation of the flood, he lifted me on the wings of the Shekina to the highest heaven and brought me into the great palaces of the Araboth Raqia on high, where are the glorious Throne of Shekina, the Merkava, the troops of anger, the armies of vehemence, the fiery Shin’anim, the flaming Keruvin, and the burning Ophanim, the flaming servants, the flashing Chashmalim and lightening Seraphim. And he placed me (there) to attend the Throne of Glory day after day...

[Ch. 9] R. Ishmael said: Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: After all these things the Holy One, blessed be He, put His hand upon me and blessed me with 5360 blessings. And I was raised and enlarged to the size of the length and width of the world. And He caused 72 wings to grow on me, 36 on each side...

[Ch. 10] R. Ishmael said: Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: All these things the Holy One, blessed be He, made for me: He made me a Throne, similar to the Throne of Glory. And he spread over me a curtain of splendour and brilliant appearance, of beauty, grace, and mercy, similar to the curtain of the Throne of Glory; and on it were fixed all kinds of lights in the universe...And the herald went forth into every heaven, saying: This is Metatron, my servant. I have made him into a prince and a ruler over all the princes of my kingdom and over all the children of heaven...

[Ch. 12] R. Ishmael said: Metatron, the Prince of the Presence, said to me: By reason of the love with which the Holy One, blessed be He, loved me more than all the children of heaven, He made me a garment of glory on which were fixed all kinds of lights, and He clad me in it. And He made me a robe of honour on which were fixed all kinds of beauty, splendour, brilliance, and majesty. And He made me a royal crown in which were fixed forty-nine costly stones like unto the light of the globe of the sun...And He put it on my head. And He called me THE LESSER YHVH in the presence of all His heavenly household; as it is written (Exodus 23:21): “For my name is in him.”

R. Shem Tov b. Simha, Commentary to Prayers, 14th C. [Moscow MS, fols. 181b-182a]
When one enters the synagogue in the morning to pray, he should direct his prayers so that they will be accepted by the Creator, may He be exalted, through the agency [koah] of the Cherub which is emanated and created from the great fire, fire which consumes fire. And when the Holy One, blessed be He, sends efflux to the Cherub through the emanated potencies [midot], the Cherub sends the efflux to Israel on high and from there to Israel that is below. And behold this is sufficient for the initiates. And so they should not err with their prayers and “cut” and separate [a potency] by saying - God forbid - that there are two ruling powers, because we have strong faith that all [exists] by the cause of the Creator whom thoughts cannot comprehend. And He is called the Cause of
Causes.
One intends his prayer to the cherub which is blessed from above, from the cause of causes; and from the cherub the efflux descends to the youth [nāʿār] and from the youth to Israel.
Mishnah Avot, 5:1
With ten sayings (mamarot) the world was created. Could it not have been created by one? What does this teach us? In order to emphasize the guilt of the wicked who destroy a world that was created with ten sayings and the merit of the righteous who preserve a world that was created with ten sayings.

Talmud Bavli, Hagiga 12a
R. Zutra b. Tobiah said that Rab said: “With ten things (devarim) the world was created: with wisdom (hokhmah) and with understanding (tevuna), and with reason (da’al), and with strength (koah), and with rebuke (ge’arah), and with might (gevurah), with righteousness (tzedek) and with judgment (mishpat), with lovingkindness (hesed) and with compassion (rahamim).”

With wisdom and understanding, for it is written: “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; and by understanding established the heavens.”

With reason, for it is written: “By His reason the depths were broken up.”

With strength and might, for it is written: “Who by His strength setteth fast the mountains, Who is girded about with might.”

With rebuke, for it is written: “The pillars of heaven were trembling, but they became astonished at His, rebuke.”

By righteousness and judgment, for it is written: “Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of Thy throne.”

By lovingkindness and compassion, for it is written: “Remember, O Lord, Thy compassions and Thy mercies; for they have been from of old.”

Sefer Yetzirah
With thirty two wondrous paths of wisdom did YAH the Lord of Hosts engrave His world - Ten Sefirot of nothingness plus twenty two letters.

There are Ten Intangible Sefirot, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven; understand with wisdom, and be wise with understanding; test them and explore them, and understand the matter thoroughly, and restore the creator to His place.

There are Ten Intangible Sefirot whose measure is ten without end (bli sof):
Depth of First and Depth of Last
Depth of Good and Depth of Evil
Depth of Above and Depth of Below
Depth of East and Depth of West
Depth of North and Depth of South.
Lord, Only One, El, Faithful King, rules all of them from His Holy Dwelling-Place unto Eternity.
There are Ten Intangible Sefirot.
One: Spirit of Living Elohim, blessed and blessed is the Name of Him who lives forever, Voice and Spirit and Word. This is the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaQodesh).
Two: Air from Spirit.
He engraved and hewed out through it twenty-two letters as a foundation: three Mothers, seven Doubles, and twelve Simple; and they are of One Spirit.
Three: Water from Air.
He engraved and hewed out through it Emptiness and Void, Mud and Mire. He engraved it like a kind of garden bed; He raised it like a kind of wall, He surrounded it like a kind of ceiling.
Four: Fire from Water.
He engraved and hewed out through it the Throne of Glory, Fiery Angels, and Ofanim, and Holy Beings, and Ministering Angels. And from the three of them He established His Dwelling-Place; as it is said: "Who makes winds His messengers, the flaming fire His ministers."
Three letters from the Simple ones - He sealed Air through three, and set them into His Great Name YHV , and sealed through them the six extremities:
Five: He sealed Above, and He turned upward and sealed it with YHV.
Six: He sealed Below, and He turned downward and sealed it with YVH.
Seven: He sealed East, and He turned forward and sealed it with HYV.
Eight: He sealed West, and He turned backward and sealed it with HVY.
Nine: He sealed South, and He turned right and sealed it with VYH.
Ten: He sealed North, and turned left and sealed it with VHY.

These Ten Intangible Sefirot are one -
Spirit of Living Elohim
Air from Spirit
Water from Air
Fire from Water
Above and Below,
East and West,
North and South.

Azriel of Gerona, Commentary on the Ten Sephirot (Early 13th C.)
QUESTION: If the inquirer persists and asks (about the sephirot): What are their names, their order, and their rank?
ANSWER: The names of the powers are as follows: The first is called Elevated Height (ram ma’alah), for it is elevated above the probing of an investigator. The second is called Wisdom (hokhmah), for it is the beginning of conceptualization. The third is called Understanding (binah). Up to this point is the World of Intelligence (’olam ha-sekhel).
The fourth is called Loving Kindness (hesed). The fifth is called Fear (pahad). The sixth is called
Beauty (tiferet). Up to this point is the World of the Soul (‘olam ha-nefesh).
The seventh is called Victory (nezah). The eighth is called Majesty (hod). The ninth is called the
Righteous One, Foundation of the World (saddiq yesod ‘olam). The tenth is called Justice (sedeq).
Up to this point is the World of the Body (‘olam ha-guf).
Following is the order of their activity: The first is the Divine Power. The second is for Angelic
Power. The third is for Prophetic Power. The fourth extends Loving Kindness to the heights. The
fifth passes Judgment with the Fear of His Strength. The sixth has compassion in fear upon the
lower worlds. The seventh nurtures and strengthens the vegetative soul. The eighth weakens it. The
ninth draws together all their powers, sometimes for one purpose, sometimes for another. The tenth
is the lower attribute of severity. It is composed of the power of all the others to judge the lower
worlds [i.e., called Asiyah].
The energy of the human soul is drawn from them and their powers in the following way: Elevated
Heights exists as the power of that soul which is called "only one" (yebidah). Wisdom exists in the
soul as the animating soul. Understanding exists in the power of spirit. Fear in the power called
'animus,' or neshama. Beauty in the power of the blood. Majesty in the flower of flesh. Foundation of
the World in the power of sinew. Justice in the power of the skin.
And their placement above is as follows: Elevated Height encompasses and encircles Wisdom and
Understanding which, in turn, surround all that is beneath them. Loving Kindness is drawn to
Eternity -- which is on the right side. Fear is drawn to Majesty -- which are in the middle. Justice is opposite
them.

Joseph Gikatilla, Sha’arei Orah, A Summary of the First Chapter (Spain, late 13th C.)

Gate 1 [Malkhut]
"O Lord [Adonai], open my lips and let my mouth give You praise." (Psalms 51:17)

| Adonai (Lord) | Berakbah (Blessing) |
| Bereikhah (Pool, Receptacle) | Be’er (Well) |
| Be’er Sheva (Well of Seven, Seventh Well) | Yam (Sea) |
| Yam HaHokhmah (Sea of Wisdom) | Kol (All) |
| Even (Stone) | Even Sappir (Sapphire Stone) |
| Beit HaMikdash (The Holy Temple) | Shekhinah (Dweller, Immanent Presence) |
| Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting) | Tzedek (Righteousness) |
| Elohim (G-d) | Ani (I) |

Malkhut (Kingdom)
Malkhut Beth David (Kingdom of the House of David)
Nesher (Eagle)
Mikveh HaMayim (Pool of Water)
Yabashab (Dry Land)
Tefillin Shel Yad (Phylacteries of the Hand)
Kab (Thus)
Etz HaDa'ath (Tree of Knowledge)
Eretz HaChayyim (The Land of Life)
Sefer HaChayyim (The Book of Life)
Zot (This)
Amirah (Saying, Utterance)
Shaddai (Almighty)
Heh Acharonah Shel Shem (Final “Heh” of the Four Letter Name of God)
Knesset Yisrael (Community of Israel)
Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel)
Kallah (Bride)
Yerushalayim (Jerusalem)
Gan (Garden)
Hekhal (Palace)
Aron (Ark)
Torah SheBa' al Peh (Oral Torah)
Rachel (Rachel, the Matriarch)
Bat (Daughter)
Ishah (Wife)
Shemittah (Sabbatical Year, the Seventh Year)
Eit (Time, Season)
Shamor (Keep, Guard)
Tefillah (Prayer)


Kabbalah represents a radical departure from any previously known version of Judaism, especially in the realm of theology. While Kabbalists remained loyal followers of normative Jewish praxis as defined by halakhah, the theological meaning system that underlay their Judaism was entirely reconstructed. The God of the Kabbalists is not the powerful, passionate Leader and Lover of His people found in the Hebrew Bible; not the wise Judge and loving Father of the rabbinic aggadah; not the enthroned King of the merkavah visionaries. The Kabbalists’ God also differs sharply from the increasingly abstract notions of the deity created by Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages...

The image of God that first appeared in Sefer ha-Bahir, to be elaborated by several generations of Kabbalists until it achieved its highest poetic expression in the Zohar, is a God of multiple mythical potencies, obscure entities eluding precise definition but described through a remarkable web of images, parables, and scriptural allusions. Together these entities constitute the divine realm; “God” is the collective aggregate of these potencies and their inner relationships. The dynamic interplay among these forces is the essential myth of Kabbalah, the true inner meaning, as far as its devotees are concerned, both of the Torah and of human life itself.
Maimonides, *Mishnah Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah, 10:6*
It is a well-known and clear matter that love of the Holy One, blessed be He, is not secured in a person’s heart until he is constantly enraptured in it in an appropriate manner and abandons everything else in the world, save it, as it is written “[you shall love the Lord your God] with all your heart and all your soul” (Deut. 6:5)—[that is] only through the knowledge by which one knows Him. Love will be proportionate to knowledge (ve-'al pi ha-de'ah 'al pi ha-'ahavah)—if little, then little, and if great, then great. Therefore a person must devote himself to understand (leha'avin) and study (u-leha'skil) the wisdoms and the sciences that inform him regarding his Maker, insofar as that person has the ability to understand (leha'avin) and apprehend (u-leha'ssig).

Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed, 1:59*
Praised be He! In the contemplation of His essence, our comprehension and knowledge prove insufficient; in the examination of His works, how they necessarily result from His will, our knowledge proves to be ignorance, and in the endeavour to extol Him in words, all our efforts in speech are mere weakness and failure!

You must bear in mind, that by affirming anything of God, you are removed from Him in two respects; first, whatever you affirm, is only a perfection in relation to us; secondly, He does not possess anything superadded to this essence; His essence includes all His perfections, as we have shown. Since it is a well-known fact that even that knowledge of God which is accessible to man cannot be attained except by negations, and that negations do not convey a true idea of the being to which they refer, all people, both of past and present generations, declared that God cannot be the object of human comprehension, that none but Himself comprehends what He is, and that our knowledge consists in knowing that we are unable truly to comprehend Him. All philosophers say, "He has overpowered us by His grace, and is invisible to us through the intensity of His light," like the sun which cannot be perceived by eyes which are too weak to bear its rays. Much more has been said on this topic, but it is useless to repeat it here. The idea is best expressed in the book of Psalms, "Silence is praise to Thee" (lxv. 2). It is a very expressive remark on this subject; for whatever we utter with the intention of extolling and of praising Him, contains something that cannot be applied to God, and includes derogatory expressions; it is therefore more becoming to be silent, and to be content with intellectual reflection, as has been recommended by men of the highest culture, in the words "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still" (Ps. iv. 4).

Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, pp. 88-89*
Once the fear of sullying God’s sublimity with earthly images becomes a paramount concern, less and less can be said of God. The price of God’s purity is the loss of His living reality. For the living God can never be subsumed under a pure concept. What makes Him a living God in the mind of a believer is precisely what involves Him in some part of the of the human world, what makes it
possible for man to see Him face to face in a great religious symbol. Reformulated in rational terms, all this vanishes. To preserve the purity of the concept of God without loss of His living reality - that is the never-ending task of theology.

Azriel of Gerona, *Commentary to the Ten Sefirot*

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 from 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 speech, no action - yet there is nothing outside of it.


Within the hidden reaches of infinite, in a way that of necessity eludes human comprehension, there stirs a primal desire, the slightest rippling in the stillness of cosmic solitude. That desire (not a change, the more philosophically oriented Kabbalist hastens to add, but an aspect of reality that had been there before) draws the infinite well of energy called Ein Sof toward self-expression, a becoming manifest or a concretization that begins with subtlest of steps, moves toward the emergence of “God” as divine persona, manifests its spectrum of energies in the “fullness” of the ten sefirot, and then spills over with plenitude to create all the “lower” worlds, including, as its very lowest manifestation, the material universe. The sefirot are thus a revelation, a rendering more accessible, of that which has existed in Ein Sof all along.
Yehudah Liebes, “Zohar as Eros” (1994)

It is common to define the Zohar as a mystical book. But, in my opinion, the Zohar is more than mysticism. Mysticism is about cleaving to the upper worlds and to the truth that is found there. But in the Zohar, the focus is not just on truth as it is in itself, existent already and only now revealed to the mystic - but also on truth that is new in its essence, which the kabbalistic creates. All the more so, the zohar is not about principles of truth that have been passed on by men, like a tradition, a “Kabbalah.” Perhaps this is the reason that the word “Kabbalah” is absent from the Zohar.

Zohar 1:103a-b

*He [Abraham] was sitting in the opening of the tent...*  
*Sarah heard from the opening of the ten.*  
(*Genesis 18:1,10*)

Rabbi Judah opened:  
“ ‘Her husband is known in the gates  
when he sits among the elders of the land.’ (Proverbs 31:23)

Come and see:  
The Blessed Holy One has ascended in glory.  
He is hidden, concealed, far beyond.  
there is no one in the world, nor has there ever been,  
who can understand His wisdom or withstand Him.  
He is hidden, concealed, transcendent, beyond, beyond...

How then can you say:  
“How her husband is known in the gates”?  
Her husband is the Blessed Holy One!

Indeed, He is known in the gates.  
He is known and grasped  
to the degree that one opens the gates of imagination (*m’sha’er b’libei*)!  
The capacity to connect with the spirit of wisdom,  
to imagine in one’s heart-mind -  
this is how God becomes known.

Therefore “Her husband is known in the gates,”  
through the gates of the imagination.  
But that He be known as he really is?
No one has ever been able to attain such knowledge of Him.”

Rabbi Shim'on said
“Her husband is known in the gates.”
who are these gates?
The ones addressed in Psalm:
‘O gates, lift up your heads!
Be lifted up, opening of eternity,
so the King of Glory may come! (Psalms 24:7)
Through these gates, these spheres on high,
the Blessed Holy One becomes known.
Were it not so, no one could commune with Him.

Come and see:
Neshamah of a human being is unknowable
except through the limbs of the body,
subordinates of neshamah who carry out what she designs.
Thus she is known and unknown.

The Blessed Holy One too is known and unknown.
For he is Neshamah of neshamah, Spirit of spirit,
completely hidden away;
but through these gates, openings for neshamah,
the Blessed Holy One becomes known.

Come and see:
There is opening within opening,
level beyond level.
Through these the Glory of God becomes known.

‘The opening of the tent’ is the opening of Righteousness,
as the Psalmist says:
‘Open for me the gates of righteousness...’ (Psalms 118:19)
This is the first opening to enter.
Through this opening, all other high openings come into view.
One who attains the clarity of this opening
discovers all the other openings,
for all of them abode there.
Now that Israel is in exile, this opening is unknown; all the openings have abandoned Her. It is impossible to know, impossible to grasp. But when Israel comes forth from exile, all the soaring spheres will touch down upon this opening, one by one. Then human beings will perceive wondrous, precious wisdom never known by them before... All this is destined to alight upon the opening below, the Opening of the Tent... Therefore when Abraham received the good news, this sphere delivered it, as has been said, for it is written:

‘Then the one said, “I will return to you when life is due” (Genesis 18:10)
‘One said,’
who is it was is not spelled out.
It was the Opening of the Tent.

Zohar 2:99a-b

A parable: To what can this (the Torah) be compared? To a beloved maiden, beautiful in form and appearance, and hidden deep within her palace. She has one lover, unknown to anyone; he is hidden too.

Out of his love for her, this lover passes her gate constantly. What does she do? She open a little window in her hidden palace and reveals her face to her love, then swiftly withdraws, concealing herself. No one near the lover sees or notices, 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 he 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 who is there knows or reflects; he alone does, and his heart and his soul and everything within him flow out to her. That is why Torah reveals and conceals herself. With love she approaches her love to arouse love within him.
Come and see! This is the way of the Torah:
At first, when she begins to reveal herself to a human she beckons to him with a hint.
If he knows, good; if not she sends him a message, calling him a fool.
Torah says to her messenger: Tell that fool to come closer, so that I can talk with him! As it is written: *Who is the fool without a heart? Have him turn in here!* (Proverbs 9:4).
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 *derasha*.
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, present in her heart since time primordial.
Now he is a perfect 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! ...
Human beings must become aware!
They must pursue Torah to become her lovers!

*Zohar 3:166b [as sung by Victoria Hannah]*

[1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flXrfUTK15c)
[7] B’lekhtekha Baderekh: Walking as a Mystical Practice in the Zohar

Psalm 116:9
I shall walk before the LORD in the lands of the living.

Deuteronomy 6:7
And you shall talk of them when you sit in thy house, and when you walk on the road, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Judah Aryeh de Modena (1571-1648), Ari Nohem Ch. 22
(The author of the Zohar) acted shrewdly [bithakem] so that the reader would not get fed up with the heavy riddles and mysteries bound and bunched together. Therefore, he mixed in with these...stories to no purpose, such as Rabbi Pinhas and Rabbi Shim’on were walking on the road, they came to a field, they saw an animal, they saw a snake, and many miracles and wonders - not that the matter is unworthy of being believed - that God did wondrously for His devotees in what happened...How beautiful, how pleasant they are! So that I may therefore praise and extol the composition of the Sefer ha-Zohar as to its style over everything composed in our nation from three hundred years ago until now. Indeed, they show and inform everyone that they are not the work of either Tannaites or Amoraites, but rather are by a sage, a beloved later stylist.

Israel Ta-Shma, Ha-Nigleh She-ba-nistar (1995), p. 38
Attention should be paid to the fact that the Zohar turned upside-down all the fundamentals of yeshivah scholarship, establishing the complete opposite. Most of the teachings - and perhaps all of them - are stated “as you walk on the road” [Deut. 6:7] by a small group of two to three sages who walk together - walking on the road is considered to be the preferred opportunity to converse about Torah matters - or at night, in general near midnight, when the sages who were walking together from place to place during the day and who were exposed to all kinds of dangers on the way, natural and unnatural, took lodging in a convenient Jewish inn, in one of the villages that were along the route of their travel, and awoke close to midnight - which is also a particularly auspicious time for this - to converse in Torah matters.

Zohar 2:251a
The path of the righteous - what is the difference between “path” and “way”?
They have already clarified the matter; but a path is that which has just now been opened and revealed, and was made in that place a path, where no feet have trodden before.
Way (derekh), as it is written, as one who treads (dorekh) in the winepress (Isaiah 63:1), where the feet of all who wish to tread.
That is why where the righteous walk is called a path (orah), since they were the first to open that place. And even when others, the people of the world, walk in that place, now that the righteous walk there it becomes a new place, for now that place is new and though never trod upon by any before, because the righteous invigorate that place through the sublime words in which the blessed Holy One delights.

And what’s more, Shekhinah goes in that place, which was not the case before. And that is why it is called the path (orah) of the righteous, because the sublime, holy guest (orea) visits there.

Way (derekh) - is open to all, all who wish to tread (dorekh) there, even the wicked.

And you sublime, holy ones have entertained a holy, supernal guest; and sublime, supernal words were arranged before the Ancient of Days. Happy is your portion.

Zohar 3:59a
It was taught: Rabbi Yosi said: Once (upon a time) the world needed rain.
Rabbi Yeisa, Rabbi Hizkiya, and all of the other friends came before Rabbi Shimon.
It just so happened that he (Rabbi Shimon) was going to see Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair, he and Rabbi Eliezer his son. When he saw them he opened [patach] and said:
“A song of ascent, how good and pleasant it is when brothers do dwell together [abim gam yahad]” (Psalms 133:1).

But why (should it say) “when brothers do [gam] dwell together”? It is because of what it says: “the faces (of the cherubim) shall be facing each other [ish el ahiv]” (Exodus 25:20).
Whenever they are intimate [had b-had; literally, one with one], facing each other, (then, of this) it is written: “how good and pleasant...”

But when the male turns his face from the female, woe to the world! And of this it does write:
“There is no substance without mishpat [moderation, justice, tiferet]” (Proverbs 13:23). Without mishpat, certainly!
And it is written: “Righteousness [tzedek] and justice [mishpat] are the base of Your throne” (Psalms 89:15). For one does not go without the other. And when mishpat distances itself from tzedek, woe to the world!

Now, I see that you have come on account that the male is not present with the female.
If you have come to me for this, you may leave, for on this day I have seen that all will turn to become face-to-face. But if you have come for Torah, stay by me.
They said: We have come before the master for all.
Let one of us go report to the other friends and we will remain before the master.

Before they set out he opened and said...
Another reading: “How good and pleasant it is ect.” these are the friends at the hour when they sit as one and do not separate from each other.
At first they appear like warriors battling towards death, afterwards they become transformed in comradely love.
What does the Holy one, blessed be He, say? “How good and pleasant it is when brothers do \textit{gam} dwell together,” [the word] \textit{gam} is to include Shekhinah with them. And more than this, the Holy one, blessed be He, listens to your words and it appeases Him and He delights in them. As it is written “Then those who revere the Lord talked among each other, and the Lord paid heed and heard it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest etc” (Malachi 3:16). And you friends gathered here, as you were in endearment and love before this, so too from henceforth do not separate from each other, so that the Holy One, blessed be He, may rejoice with you and call upon you “whole” \textit{shalem}, and wholeness will be present in the world on your account. This is what is written: “For the sake of my brother and friend, I speak of peace \textit{shalom} for you” (Psalms 122:8).


Human contact with the divine (in the \textit{Zohar}) is not the fruit of the soul’s seclusion with its divine source, but rather the product of the resonances and echoes among human beings speaking with one another. The spoken word among the companions, the response, the conversation of Torah, and its explication, are all the ladder for the soul’s exaltation and for the possibility of touching the divine world. The connection between people - between a man and a woman, a sage and his colleague, or a person and a stranger chanced upon “the way” who together open words of Torah - are of mystical value in the \textit{Zohar}. Their joining in love on earth is a kind of healing \textit{(tikkun)}, which in turn generates healing and mending in the upper worlds. The presence of the other person is not an obstacle to mystical life, but rather a necessary condition for it.

Nathan Wolski, \textit{A Journey into the Zohar} (2010), p.11

Whatever the origins of this literary motif, it is, as Melila Hellner Eshed has so beautifully observed, the consciousness of the way that is decisive. According to the \textit{Zohar}, the world is best experienced from the changing vantages of a wanderer. Only the traveler has the fresh eyes, the unique perspective, from which the deepest dimensions of reality and Torah can be fathomed. One must know how to read the Torah \textit{be-orha keshet}, according to the true way, and to do so, one must \textit{azil be-orha}, walk on the way...

‘Walking on the way’ also demands a special state of consciousness, and the Companions are able to both notice and then decipher seemingly innocuous signs and symbols. In this heightened mystical-poetic state everything is meaningful with all of reality grasped as a semantic field where everything is a sign pointing beyond itself.


These characterizations are beautiful but inaccurate. They betray a desire to imagine the Companions exclusively as enjoining a continuous state of mystical elevation. But in acceding to that
desire they let go too quickly of the actuality of walking itself, however fleeting or insubstantial it may be, for the sake of other elements that may not attend the act in any given example. To understand the walking of the Companions as a spatial practice is to recover the reality of the act itself and the very space in which it is performed and which it concurrently produces... (The Zohar's) use of the motif of aimless walking through a landscape....introduces the aspect of unintentional, the undirected, the fortuitous, and the meandering...

As the Zohar constructs its vertical, theurgical-visionary system, it also sends its heroes into the landscape to test the boundaries of happenstance and order, of land and sea, mountain and cave. These friends and disciples are tested as well, as any mystic might be, by the challenge of walking through the mundane world with delight.

Rabbi Yitzhaq Isaac Yehudah Yehiel Safrin of Komarno (1806-1874), Asirit Ha-Efah, 
B'huqqotai 3:3

“If you walk in My statutes...I will walk among you and I will be your Almighty” [Lev. 26:3, 12]: They told a parable. To what can this be compared? A king went out to stroll with his tenant in the orchard. The tenant would hide from him. Said the king to that tenant: Why are you hiding from me? I am just like you!...Could it be that My reverence would not be upon you? The verse teaches: And I will be your Almighty.

What does the strolling mean? And what does “I am like you” mean? And what does “My reverence upon you” mean? This is not the place to explain it, for they are cosmic secrets. But the enlightened will understand and will shine [yazbiru] like the splendor [zohar] of the firmament.
Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoy Teshuvah, 10:5* [12th C.]
What is the proper love [of God]? One should love God with an exceedingly great and powerful love until one’s soul is bound up in the love of God, continuously preoccupied with it like one who is lovesick, one whose mind is never free of thinking about that woman, whether sitting or standing, even when eating or drinking. Even more than this should the love of God constantly preoccupy the hearts of those who love Him. Thus He has commanded us: “With all your heart and with all your soul (Deut. 6:5).” Solomon spoke of this allegorically when he said: “For I am sick with love (Cant. 2:5).” The entire Song of Songs is an allegory concerning this matter.

**Genesis Rabbah 8:1 [4th C.]**
R. Yirmiya b. Eleazer said, When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He created him as an androgyne, as it is written, “male and female He created them.”
R. Samuel bar Nahman said, When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, he created him "du-parzufin" [two-faced]. Then he split him and made two bodies, one on each side, and turned them about. Thus it is written, “He took one of his sides.”

**Todros ben Joseph Abulafia, *Ozar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw, 1879), 9b [13th C.]**
Know that all the elements of the proper tradition (*ha-qabbalah ha-nekhonah*), in their principles and details, are all built upon this foundation (*du-parzufin*), and they revolve around this point. It is a deep secret upon which are hanging very high mountains.

**Genesis Rabbah, 13:13**
R. Levi said: The upper waters are male and the lower waters female. And these say to those, “receive us, you are creatures of the Holy One, blessed be He, and we are his messengers.” Immediately they receive them. As it is written: “let the land open and bring salvation” (Isaiah 45:8); “let the land open,” like this female that opens before the male; “and bring salvation,” this is sex; “And righteousness will sprout,” this is rainfall; “I, God, have created it,” for this I created it, for the establishment and settlement of the world.

**Zohar 1:35a**
Come and see: Adam and Hava were created side-by-side. Why were they not created face-to-face? Because it is written, “for YHVH had not yet brought rain upon the earth.” And intimacy [*zivuga*] was not yet properly established [*b’tiqun*]. And when the lower were made
proper, and they turned face-to-face, then was it so above.
From where do we know this? From the tabernacle, for it is written “the tabernacle was erected,”
because another tabernacle was erected with it, and until the lower was not raised the upper was not
raised.
So too here, when the lower is properly established then it so above.
And because until here it was not proper above, they were not created face-to-face.
And the verse supports this - “for YHVH had not yet brought rain upon the earth” - therefore,
“and Adam was not,” because he was not properly established. And when Hava was completed,
then Adam was completed, and before hand he was not complete...
This world which we spoke of is dependent upon the lower world. And when the lower world is not
proper neither is the upper world. “For YHVH had not yet brought rain upon the earth,” for each is
co-dependent. The lower world when it is made proper and returns face-to-face, it is then a helper
["samakh" for above. For beforehand the world was not proper. And these are co-dependent.
What is written afterwards, “and a mist ascended from the earth,” this is the "tigun" of below.
Afterwards [it is written] “and He watered the whole face of the earth.” “And a mist ascended from
the earth” - that is the desire of the feminine before the male.

Zohar 2:99a-b
A parable: To what can this (the Torah) be compared?
To a beloved maiden, beautiful in form and appearance and hidden deep within her palace. She has
one lover, unknown to anyone; he is hidden too.
Out of his love for her, this lover passes her gate constantly.
What does she do?
She open a little window in her hidden palace and reveals her face to her love, then swiftly
withdraws, concealing herself.
No one near the lover sees or reflects, only the lover, and his heart and his soul and everything
within him flow out to her.
And 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 he 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 who is there knows or reflects; he alone does, and his heart and his soul and everything
within him flow out to her.
That is why Torah reveals and conceals herself. With love she approaches her love to arouse love
within him.
Come and see! This is the way of the Torah: At first, when she begins to reveal herself to a human
she beckons to him with a hint. If he knows, good; if not she sends him a message, calling him a
fool. Torah says to her messenger: Tell that fool to come closer, so that I can talk with him! As it is written: *Who is the fool without a heart? Have him turn in here!* (Proverbs 9:4).
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 *derasha*.
Then she converses with him through a veil, words riddled with allegory. This is *haggadah*.
Once he has grown accustomed to her, she reveals her self 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 perfect 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! ...
Human beings must become aware! They must pursue Torah to become her lovers!

**Zohar 3:247**
“Mingled with pressed oil” (Num. 28:5) -
“oil” - with the oil that descends and streams from above.
R. Shimon said: You have spoken well, but what is “pressed”?
It is a supernal secret that alludes to servicing (*shamsa*) the female, to draw out from her pressed oil, as is proper for her.
If so, it is pressed, emerging from olives, which are the limbs of the body. And it is drawn down from that emergence from above into every limb.
And Tzadik is the one who presses presses and draws out from all those supernal limbs, which are the sacred olives. He anoints with full desire before the female.
And if he does not press, then the oil will be drawn out, but without desire from the limbs.
And what comes out will not pleasure the female, and it will not be as it should be until it is mixed from all the limbs.
And therefore, “mingled with pressed oil,” to be pleased and satisfied from it.
Lamentations Rabbah
R. Azariah said in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish: “When [the people of Israel] are worthy, it is as if they give power to the Gevurah, as it is said, ‘In God we shall make power.” But when they transgress, they, so to speak, weaken the power of the Gevurah, as it is written, ‘and they go without strength before the pursuer.

Sefer Ha-Yihud, 13th C.
The pious people and the men of deeds know how to direct the powers. And what is meant by “men of deeds”? As is the saying: “Whoever keeps my commandments, I regard as if he has made me, as it is written ‘It is a time to make God’ - literally, [since] whoever blemishes below, blemishes above, and whoever purifies below, adds strength...above.

Bahya ben Asher, Numbers 14:17
“And now, I pray thee, let the power of my Lord be great,” that the inner power be emanated and drawn into the attributes lest it retreat to the highest heights. The meaning of the matter is that when [the people of] Israel observe the Torah and the commandments, God rides upon the heavens, as it is [written], “Who rides upon the heaven with thy help” -- that is, with the help of [the people of] Israel He emanates power in His attributes, and thereby they [Israel] add power to the supernal Gevurah, as it is said, “In God we shall make power.” But when they do not observe the Torah and the commandments, he retreats from his attributes, as it is said, “and in his excellency on the clouds” - that is, he mounts up and retreats to the remotest heights. By [the observance] He emanates His power onto the attributes, and by [the negligence] they weaken the supernal power, as it is said, “you have weakened [the power of] the Rock that formed thee.”

Zohar 3:113a-b
“And you do them:” Why is it written, “And you do them,” after it is written “If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments”?... The answer is: whoever performs the commandments of the Torah and walks in its ways is regarded as if he makes the one above. The Holy One, blessed be He, says, “as if he made me.” And [the question] is raised: “And you do them” - the spelling is “And you do with them [itam].” This is certainly the correct form, and when they are stirred to link to one another, so that the name will be in a proper state. This is certainly the meaning [of the spelling] “And you do with them.”
II: Safed: Historical Context

- Moses Cordovero (1522-1570)
- Isaac Luria (1534-1572)
- Hayim Vital (1543-1620)

Moses Prager, *Vayyaqhel Moshe* (Dessau, 1699), fol. 58d

Since the year 335 [1575] the souls from the world of *tikkun* shone forth, and the Emanator granted him [Luria] permission to open the supernal sources and channels with the mysteries of Torah; and he expressly told us that at the present time esoteric knowledge has become like that which was formerly esoteric knowledge. Although Luria's disciples discreetly concealed his teachings from the years 335-390 [1575-1630], which is the mystery of pure oil [*shemen* is numerically equivalent to 390]. The year 390 contains the mystery of drawing the pure oil down on the head of the kingdom of the House of David which is the perpetual union of *Ze’ir Anpin* with his consort, the mystery of redemption and freedom, the shining forth of the souls from the world of *tikkun* according to the degree attained by these souls in 390, as is known to us [kabbalists]. From 390 onward we are in duty bound, every one of us, to achieve the *tikkun* of our souls in their aspects of *nefesh, ruah*, and *neshamah*, and to accomplish, together with our own *tikkun*, that of the whole world. . . [and] to refine and purify the holy sparks by the study of the Zohar and the *Tiqqunei Zohar* according to their Lurianic interpretation.

III: The History of Everything: Lurianic Mythology

*Ein Sof* > *Zimzum* > *Tehiru/Reshimu* > *Emanation* [circles and lines] > *Adam Kadmon* > *Shvirah* [vessels made from the reshimu] > *Tikkun* > *Partzufim* > *Mahan*

- The self-manifestation of divinity (theogony) goes hand in hand with the manifestation of the cosmos (cosmogony).
- “The origin of failure, exile, and sin, is the fractured process of creation itself.” [Shaul Magid]
- The process of emanation is one of (1) decomposition [*kalkul*], (2) correction [*tikkun*], and (3) addition of consciousness [*mahn*].

IV: Lurianic Tikkun

- “Luria is driven to something very much like a mythos of God giving birth to Himself; indeed, this seems to me to be the focal point of this whole involved and frequently rather obscure and inconsistent description. The development of man through the stages of conception, pregnancy, birth and childhood, to the point where the the developed
personality makes full use of its intellectual and moral powers, this whole process appears as a bold symbol of the Tikkun in which God evolves His own personality... The process in which God conceives, brings forth and develops Himself does not reach its final conclusion in God. Certain parts of the process of restitution are allotted to man.” [Scholem, MTJM, p. 271]

“Redemption is no longer primarily a liberation from the yoke of servitude in exile, but a transformation of the essence of Creation. It is conceived as a process which runs through all the visible and the hidden worlds, for it is nothing but Tikkun, the restoration of that great harmony which has shattered by the Breaking of the Vessels and later by Adam’s sin. Redemption implies a radical change in the structure of the universe. Its significance is seen to be, not so much the end of that exile which began with the destruction of the Temple, as rather the end of that inner exile of all creatures which began when the father of mankind was driven out of paradise. The Kabbalist laid far greater emphasis on the spiritual nature of Redemption than on its historical and political aspects. These are by no means denied or discounted, but they tend more and more to become symbols of that mystical and spiritual process of which I have spoken.” [GS, MTJM, p.305]

“Of classical Lurianism it can be said that it has no interest at all in the person of the Messiah. It is therefore not at all surprising that when a Messiah appeared who succeeded in winning general recognition, his comparative lack of personal magnetism, to say nothing of his mental peculiarities, was not regarded as a defect.” [ibid, p.308]

“In the popular mind, the history of the world was essentially the drama of God seeking to perfect His true image and “configuration” [partzuf] and of man seeking to promote this iam by means of good works.”

Hayyim Vital, *Sefer ha-Liqqutim* (written in the late 16th Century, printed in Jerusalem, 1913), *fol. 89a*

“When the kings fell, some fell into the mineral realm; and because they were seven in number there are also seven kinds of metals. Minerals grow because they contain sparks of holiness. Others fell into the vegetable realm; therefore, there are seven kinds of trees. Others again feel among the seventy nations. And because Egypt is “nakedness of the land” and the place to which the qelliphot principally adhere, many sparks got entangled there and Israel too was enslaved there; even the Shekhinah was exiled with it in order to raise the sparks that were there...When Israel went out of Egypt, all holiness was purged from there. For that reason Israel has been condemned to bondage among the seventy nations, so that it might extract the holy sparks that have fallen among them Our Sages have taught that is a single Jew is taken prisoner by a nation, this is sufficient and is accounted as if the whole of Israel had been in bondage there...for the purpose of raising all the sparks that has fallen among the particular nation. Therefore it was necessary that Israel be scattered to the four winds in order to raise everything.”
From Lurianic Kabbalah to Hassidut: The Modern Turn to Personal Experience

I: Introduction

- Sabbatai Zevi (1625-1676)
- By mid 18th century, Kabbalists were uncomfortable with some of Lurianic Kabbalah’s major elements: its diffusion in print, its radical anthropomorphism, the acceptance of Luria’s authority as divinely inspired, and the obtuse nature of Lurianic prayer kavanot.
- As part of this process, Cordovero’s Kabbalah [the Ramak] undergoes a revival, which focused more on the immanence of the Divine, than on the Lurianic processes of sehvirah/tikkun.
- Although Hassidut emphasizes key Lurianic themes - such as Yihudim, kavvanot, zimzum, shevirah, ba’ala’at nizzozot, mittuq ba-dinim, tikkun - it espouses key elements not central to Lurianic Kabbalah - such as derequt (cleaving), biikkalelut (mystical absorption), hishtawwut (equanimity), hitbodedut (contemplation), hitpashtut ba-gashminut (removal of materiality), rubaniyut (spirituality), and hiyyut (life-force).

History of Early Hassidut:
Ba’al Shem died in 1760, leaving a small group of 20-30 adherents in Podolia, a remote corner of southeastern Poland, near the Russian and Turkish borders. The Besht is from Miedzybozh. Just 50 years later, large parts of eastern Europe considered themselves followers of the Besht.

2nd generation -Dov Baer, the Magid, of Mezritch [1704-1772]. His main students:
- R. Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk [c.1730-1788]: In 1777 migrated to Tiberias and founded sect there. Peri ba-Arets, 1814.
- R. Aharon of Karlin [1736-1772]
- R. Elimelekh of Lizensk [c. 1717-1786]: No’am Elimelekh, 1788.
- R. Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl [c. 1730-1797]: Me’or ‘Ezynayim

End of 3rd generation = 1809-1815, when many key leaders died.

Arthur Green, Speaking Torah: Spiritual Teachings from Around the Maggid's Table

Hasidism is primarily a devotional mysticism. The question asked over and over again in the sources
is not “What is the nature of Being?” but rather “How do I properly serve God?” Unlike the medieval Kabbalist, who depicted esoteric lore as “the way of truth,” the Hasidic authors speak of “the way of service” or devotion...Devekut or intimate attachment to God is the goal of religious life, that toward which both prayer and the life of commandments are to lead. Arriving at it is mostly a matter of breaking down walls, especially those of ego, defensiveness, and self-delusion that keep us from relaizing the divine oneness that flows through all of being. This inward goal of joyous attachment replaces the prior Kabbalistic hierarchy of tikkun, or cosmic repair. Its focus is on the inner life of the person praying and the present moment, including the uplifting of the shekinah, rather than on the future-oriented redemption process of restoring the cosmic order.

**Martin Buber, 1878-1965**

Hassidut is primarily a “mode of life” that is comprised of four primary life-forces: hitlabavut (fervor/love), avodah (service), kawwanah (mystical intention), and shiflut (humility). [In Ma'aseh Tsaddikim it is written, “The roots of Hasidism are three: shiflut, simahab, and hitlabavut in all things of worship.”]

**II: Ayin**

- Shift from focus on shekinah-tiferet, to shekinah-bokhmah/ ayin.


At the core of hasidic thought lies the idea of the dual nature of reality...

The deity is perceived as a dialectical process of reversible and variable opposites. The unity of opposites is expressed in pairs of contradictory concepts: ‘expansion and limitation,’ ‘emanation and withdrawal,’ ‘revelation and concealment,’ ‘creation and annihilation,’ ‘unity and differentiation,’ ‘being and non-being, ‘yesh and ayin.’ All these concepts clearly derive from the kabbalistic heritage of hasidism. But while the kabbalistic interest in dialectical opposites relates only to the heavenly realm, the new hasidic concern encompasses all aspects of reality. The principles of yesh and ayin are thus projected in hasidism from the domain of the Godhead onto the domain of religious awareness and divine service.

The concern with these dialectical processes has found diverse expression and emphasis in hasidism. The Maggid of Mezhirech, for example, was concerned primarily with the mutual transformation of the two poles. Bratslav hasidism expressed the tragic dimension of this paradox. HaBaD is more concerned with the dialectical movement between yesh and ayin. Polish hasidism has highlighted the embodiment of the opposites in the figure of the zaddik.

**Arthur Green**

This primal pair, the potential and actual, or non-being and being, is the essential dyad of Hasidic mysticism. The realization of their oneness, the realization that yesh is ayin and ayin is yesh is the
essential goal of mystical awareness.

R. Shne'ur Zalman of Lyady [c. 1745-1812], *Tanya, Sh'ar Ha-yihud V'Ha-emunah*, Ch.3
Every intelligent person will understand clearly that each creature and being is actually considered naught and absolute nothingness in relation to the Activating Force and the "Breath of His mouth" which is in the created thing, continuously calling it into existence and bringing it from absolute non-being into being. The reason that all things created and activated appear to us as existing and tangible, is that we do not comprehend nor see with our physical eyes the power of G-d and the "Breath of His mouth" which is in the created thing. If, however, the eye were permitted to see and to comprehend the life-force and spirituality which is in every created thing, flowing into it from "That which proceeds out of the mouth of G-d" and "His breath," then the materiality, grossness and tangibility of the creature would not be seen by our eyes at all, for it is completely nullified in relation to the life-force and the spirituality which is within it, since without the spirituality it would be naught and absolute nothingness, exactly as before the Six Days of Creation. The spirituality which flows into it from "That which proceeds out of the mouth of G-d" and "His breath"— that alone continuously brings it forth from naught and nullity into being, and gives it existence. Hence, there is truly nothing besides Him.

III: Torah vs Tefillah

Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812)
Even though normally the study of Torah is of greater value than prayer, in this time prayer is of greater importance.”

Mendel of Przemysl (1711-1781)
As a general rule, one ought not to engage overly much in study. We, whose intellects are limited, if we remove our thoughts from *dvekut* with God may He be blessed, and study too much, we may, heaven forefend, forget the fear of God.

Gaon of Vilna (1720-1797)
Our Sages have said: What is the cure for unanswered prayers? The study of Torah. This is because prayer is concerned with matters of this world and is therefore temporary. But Torah study is the path to eternal life and the world to come. It can happen that God will not provide man with his requests in this world, such that he has only heartache. Thus, they advised that its cure is the study of Torah, which bestows eternal life; and through Torah study, man will most certainly attain his requests and desires. For this reason they call the Torah a tree of life.
IV: Hassidic Secrets

R. Menahem Mendel of Premyslyany [cited in Yosher Divrie Emet, fol. 122a]

Nistar is the name given to a matter which one cannot transmit to another person; just as the taste of a particular food cannot be described to a person who has never tasted this taste, so is it impossible to explain in words how it is and what it is; such a thing is called setter [hidden]. Thus is the love and fear of God, blessed be He - it is impossible to explain to another person the love of God in one's heart; therefore, it is called nistar. But the attribution of the term nistar to the lore of the Kabbalah is strange, as whoever wishes to study Kabbalah, the book is available to him, and if he does not understand he is an ignoramus, as indeed for such a person, the Gemara and Tosafot are also nistar. But the concealed matters in the Zohar and the writings of R. Isaac Luria are those based upon the cleaving to God, for those who are worthy to cleave and to see the supernal Merkavah, like R. Isaac Luria, to whom the paths of the firmament were clear and he walked on them seeing his way with his mental eyes, like the four sages who entered the Pardes.

I. Shalom Sharabi (Ha-Reshasha) [Yemen 1720-1777]
   - Yitzhak Kaduri [1898-2006]
   - Beit El Yeshiva in Jerusalem

II. Lithuanian Kabbalah
   - Abraham Isaac Kook [1865-1935]
   - Shlomo Eliashov, Ba’al Ha-Lehem [1841-1925]
   - Aryeh Kaplan [1934-1983]

III. Yehuda Ashlag [1885 - 1954]
   - Zvi Yehuda Brandwein [1904-1969]
   - Phillip Berg [1927-2013]
   - Kabbalah Center [1965 - ]
   - Bnei Baruch [founded by Michael Laitman, student of Ashlag’s son, Baruch, in 1990]
   - Or Haganutz [founded by Mordechai Scheinberger, student of Brandwein]

IV. Hassidut
   - Yitzhak Ginzburg [1946 - ]
   - Shloimo Carlebach [1925 -1994]
   - Zalman Schechter-Shalomi, Jewish Renewal [1924 - ]

V. Academic Kabbalah

Today, we are witnessing the beginning of a new age of revelation. Today, more than at any other time in history, the Lightforce is demanding to be revealed. This is the secret of the Age of Aquarius… The awesome power of the Lightforce to which we are connected by the Zohar, is the ultimate connection. During the Age of Aquarius, humankind can again connect with the Lightforce. Through this connection we can achieve an altered state of consciousness in which we, the past and the future are here now, where our youth is again upon us, where we will benefit from the Fountain of Youth, where death has been terminated.

In contrast to the centrality of “belief” in modern religious movements, postmodern
spirituality primarily consists of practical knowledge. It offers its consumers techniques and spiritual experience rather than articles of faith, myths or grand narratives. Contemporary Kabbalah, like other postmodern spiritual movements, concentrates mainly on practices such as meditation, spiritual and physical exercises, proper nutrition and healing...The legitimacy and value of practices in postmodern spirituality, as in postmodern culture in general, is dependent on their perception as efficient rather than on their belonging to a compelling and authoritative religious or ideological system.

**Features of New-Age Culture**

- Paradigm shift, anticipation of a spiritual cosmic transformation
- Self-spirituality, shift towards individualisation
- Simplicity of language and concepts
- Use of meditative and healing techniques
- Psychological renderings of religious notions