

Introduction to *Kabbalah*

Rabbi Michael Lotker



Overview of Our Course

Session 1: Introduction and History of *Kabbalah*.

Session 2: The *Zohar* and the 10 *Sefirot*

Session 3: Lurianic Kabbalah, the Soul, Angels, & Enhancing Our Jewish Spirituality



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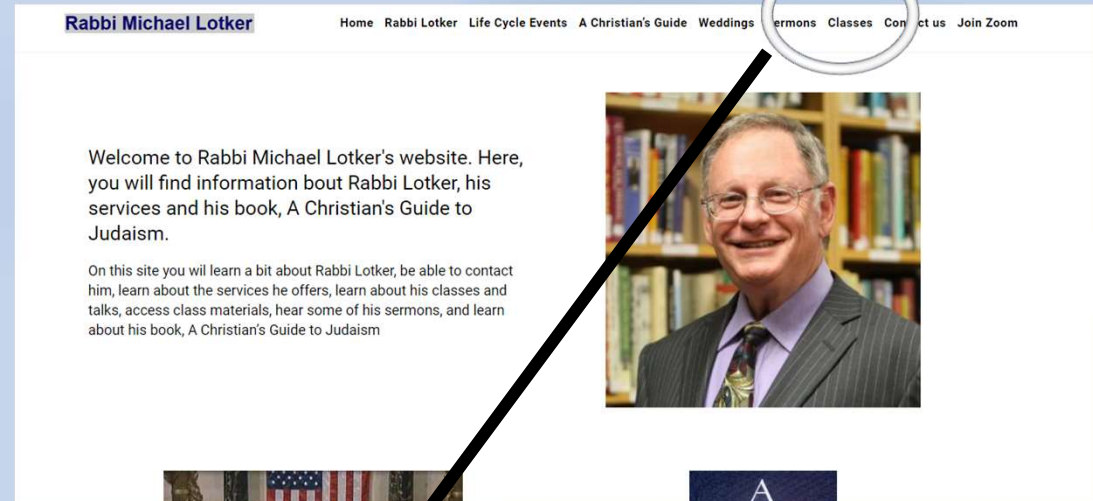
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"Introduction to Kabbalah (July 14, 21 & 28)

In our 3 week exploration of the world of *Kabbalah* we will explore the simple (is it kabb-a-LAH or ka-BAL-ah?) to the deep (how does the interpretation of word *echad* in the *Shema* affect our understanding of God's nature and our relationship with God). We will address the history and practices of *Kabbalah* and have time for questions and discussion of this fascinating subject. Our first class will be an Introduction to some of the key ideas of *Kabbalah* and to its interesting history. Class #2 will introduce the central text of *Kabbalah*, *The Zohar* which is a work of pseudepigrapha (don't know what that means? Come and find out!). We will discuss the 10 *Sefirot*, the world of *Gematria*, the mystical names of God and more. In the next class, we will explore *Lurianic Kabbalah*, the Soul, Angels, *Hasidim* and focus on enhancing our own Jewish spirituality.

- > **Copies of Slides**
- > **Suggested Reading**
- > **Learners' Guide to Blessings**
- > **Video of Session #1**



1st - Some Important Basics About Judaism

- The central focus is on acts and actions rather than belief.
 - Jews count 613 commandments (*mitzvot*) in the 1st 5 books of the Bible (the Torah) alone.
 - Big 10
 - Love your neighbor/stranger/God, don't eat pork, pay wages promptly, etc.
- Jewish focus is on this world rather than the next.
 - Salvation is about making this world better.



Intro to *Kabbalah*

- The word *Kabbalah* means “received” meaning “the received tradition”
- The goal is to get closer to and even cleave to God
- It’s built on top of Judaism
 - Not an alternative but a much deeper practice
 - Begins with Orthodox observance
- Pop *Kabbalah* is pop spirituality
 - Madonna, tattoos, red strings, etc.
 - Wearing a stethoscope doesn’t make you a MD



Intro to *Kabbalah*

- This is not supposed to be simple or easy or even quickly understandable.
- *Kabbalah* was traditionally studied only:
 - By married male scholars over 40 (so they wouldn't abandon their earthly responsibilities)
 - By those of high moral standards, prior rabbinic learning, and of mental and emotional stability.
 - One on one with a teacher (so that teachings would not be misunderstood)
- The goal of our class is to provide an introduction and orientation.



Intro to *Kabbalah* - Disclaimers

- I am a student of *Kabbalah*
 - I'm not a kabbalist for reasons I will share
- I do have some 130 books on the subject and read most of them
- I will be sharing my struggle to learn this with you.
- There's a value to hearing difficult concepts many times
 - I generally takes me about 10 hearings before I can deeply "get it"



Kabbalah & Judaism Connected

Byron Sherwin:

- “Without Judaism, Jewish mysticism is a soul without a body, a vagabond spirit. Without mysticism, Judaism is a body without a soul.”
- “Detaching kabbalistic practice from traditional Judaism would be like performing an operation with instruments that are not sterile.”

Cited in Horowitz, A Kabbalah & Jewish Mysticism Reader, pp. 98, 474



Defining Spirituality

Jewish Definitions of Spirituality

RIFAT SONSINO

Though spirituality is popularly discussed in many sources, there is no clear definition of this term. It has become like a buzzword, dealing in general with liturgy, ritual, study, meditation, community, social justice, and certainly God. Rabbi Jeffrey J. Weisblatt (z"l) of Temple Ohev Shalom in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, put it succinctly: "There is no one definition for it."¹

Although not all Jewish thinkers agree on a definition of spirituality, several have been proposed. Here are a few examples:

- "Spirituality may inclusively be regarded as the sum of the efforts of the human psyche, individually and collectively, to attune to the impulses and rhythms of the universe, whether internal to the individual or external in nature."² (Dr. Martin A. Cohen, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion)
- "Man's spiritual life can easily be thought of in three divisions: his pursuit of truth, of beauty, and of moral goodness."³ (Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn [1910–1995], Temple Israel, Boston)
- "Spirituality, as I understand it, is noticing the wonder, noticing that what seems disparate and confusing to us is actually whole."⁴ (Rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Philadelphia)

- "The striving for life in the presence of God and the fashioning of a life of holiness appropriate to such striving."⁵ (Rabbi Arthur Green, Brandeis University, Boston)
- "The cognitive and/or behavioral activities designed to help individual and community to reconnect to God."⁶ (Deanne H. Shapiro and Johanna Shapiro, psychologists at the University of California, Irvine)
- "The immediacy of God's presence."⁷ (Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, Rabbi-in-Residence, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion)
- "Spirituality is essentially a way of responding to God, becoming conscious of God."⁸ (Rabbi Jeffrey J. Weisblatt [d. 1995], Temple Ohev Shalom, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)
- "Spirituality is the process through which the individual strives to meet God."⁹ (Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, Jewish Outreach Institute, New York)
- "A highly personal outlook about what is sacred about us; it is the expression of our most deeply held values, and it is that sense of higher purpose that guides our daily lives."¹⁰ (Dr. David S. Ariel, Cleveland College of Jewish Studies)

From: The Jewish Lights Spirituality Handbook, S. M. Matlins, ed. 2001, pp. 9-10



Ka-BAL-ah or Ka-bal-AH?

- Both!
- Ka-BAL-ah is the *Ashkenazi* way of pronunciation
 - Like SHA-bes or TAH-less
 - *Ashkenazim* are Jews of Eastern European origin – 95% of American Jews
- Ka-bal-AH is the *Sephardic* way
 - Like sha-BAT or tal-EET
 - *Sepharadim* are Jews of Spanish and Middle Eastern origin.



Magic vs. Mystic

- ***Magic*** suggests that if I follow all the commandments perfectly, pray correctly, use ritual objects, keep kosher, etc.
 - I CAN GET GOD TO DO MY WILL!
- ***Mystic*** suggests that if I follow all the commandments perfectly, pray correctly, use ritual objects, keep kosher, etc.
 - I CAN GET ME TO DO GOD'S WILL!



Speaking of Magic...

The Origin of Abracadabra

- From the Aramaic

אברא כדברא “*Av-RAH k'da-BRA*”

- Meaning “I create as I speak”
- The verb *bara* is only used for God’s creation (as is Gen. 1:1)
- Maybe *Abracadabra* is God’s opening flourish to creation???



Jewish Spirituality

- Jewish spirituality begins with study of sacred texts.
 - The presumption is that our Bible and other sacred texts (*Talmud, Zohar, etc.*) are infinitely rich and deep in meaning.
 - Like a singular love letter from God.
 - So we read and re-read for messages from the most obvious to the most hidden.
 - Leads to *mitzvot*/commandments and connection to your actions in **this world**.
- Let's look at some texts.



Jewish Spirituality-Texts

STUMBLING

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

Sefer ha-Bahir, Sec. 150, 65 (twelfth century).

mysticism Hebrew, *ma'aseh vere'shit u-ma'aseh merkavah*, "the workings of creation and the workings of the chariot," the secrets of cosmology (based on Genesis 1) and the secrets of the divine realm (based on Ezekiel 1). These constitute the two branches of early Jewish mysticism; see the introduction.

"This stumbling block is in your hand" Isaiah 3:6.

unless you stumble over them Cf. Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 43a: "This stumbling block is in your hand.' One does not understand words of Torah unless one has stumbled over them."



Jewish Spirituality-Texts

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

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

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

This has also befallen some authors, who compose books with riddles, rhyme, and flowery language; their words are encumbered by excess. We need not go into this; it is improper to cast aspersions on that which is holy. The books to which you should cleave, in order to improve, are the compositions of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai, namely, the various parts of the *Zohar*. Of the books of his predecessors: *Sefer Yetsirah* and *Sefer ha-Bahir*. Of more recent works: *The Fountain of Wisdom*, *Chapters of the Chariot*, *Chapters of Creation*, and similar writings. Cleave to these in love; you will then succeed in this wisdom, provided you delve deeply and reflect intensely. Then you will discover most of what is found in the

more recent commentaries, which you will no longer need. It is not our intention, God forbid, to declare these latter writings unfit, but rather to designate for the seeker the path that is short, although it is long.

Peruse these books in two ways. First, go over the language of the text many times, taking notes to remember fluently. Do not delve deeply at first. Second, study with great concentration, according to your ability. Even if it seems that you do

not understand, do not stop, because God will faithfully help you discover hidden wisdom. As a parent trains a child, so does God purify one engaged in this wisdom, little by little. I have experienced this innumerable times.

If something in this wisdom seems doubtful to you, wait.

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

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

Moses Cordovero (sixteenth century), *Or Ne'arav*, ed. Yehuda Z. Brandwein, 1:6 (15a, 16b); 3:3 (24a-25a); see Robinson, *Moses Cordovero's Introduction to Kabbalah*, 39, 42-43, 65-68.

Let's Begin With the Beginning

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ
וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וּבְהוֹ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וּרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים
מְרַמְמֵס עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אֹרֶךְ וַיְהִי אֹרֶךְ
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאֹרֶךְ כִּי טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹרֶךְ
וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹרֶךְ יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קֶרֶךְ לַיְלָה
וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד



The First Letter of the Bible

- Is the Hebrew letter “bet” ב
- Why begin the text with this letter?
 - To teach that you can’t ask what happened before, above, or below the Torah.
 - Physicists now say that this is also true of the Big Bang – you can’t ask what happened before it.
 - To teach that there are two Torahs:
 - Written – 1st 5 Books of the Bible
 - Oral – The Talmud



We Cannot Simply Translate the Bible

- The first two words of the bible present a grammatical problem: **בראשית ברא אלהים** “*B’raysheet bara Elohim*” – Often translated: “In the beginning, God created...”
- But if we wanted to say, “in the beginning God created,” we would write **בראשונה ברא אלהים** - *B’reeshonah*...
- *B’raysheet* is half of an expression – Hebrew grammar requires the next word to be a noun – but the next word is a verb.
- *Rashi* teaches that God was teaching us that we can’t just translate – we must interpret.
- I think God put this lesson here (between word #1 & #2) so those of us with ADD wouldn’t miss it.



Genesis 1:26

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ

- “And God said, ‘let Us make humanity in Our image (*b’tzal-may-nu*), after Our likeness.”
 - Note: *tzel* can mean shadow as well as image. More on this later.
 - If we are created in God’s image what does this tell us about God? About us?
 - Why “Us/Our” and not “Me/My”
 - Traditional Jewish answer: God speaking to angels.
 - Traditional Christian answer: God speaking to Trinity

Genesis 1:26

- An answer I like:
 - God was talking to the animals!
 - We have divine and animal natures.
- I believe this is a biblical proof text for evolution!





Does God Have an Image?

- The Bible's portrayal of God is very anthropomorphic.
 - God speaks, many see God (Ex. 24:10), God's nose get's red (Ex. 4:14), God takes us out of Egypt with an outstretched arm (Ex. 6:6), etc.
 - The Jewish philosophers say these are only figures of speech
 - The Kabbalists will go overboard in the opposite direction by thinking of God in scores of physical ways.



God's Physical Measurements

- God's feet: 105 million miles
- Ankle to knees 665 million miles
- Neck size: 455 million miles
- Circumference of head: >10.5 billion miles
- Length of beard: 40,250 miles
- Each finger: 105 million miles
- The black of His eye: 40,250 miles
- **Source:** *Shi'ur Qomah* (6th century) quoted in D. Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*, pg. 74



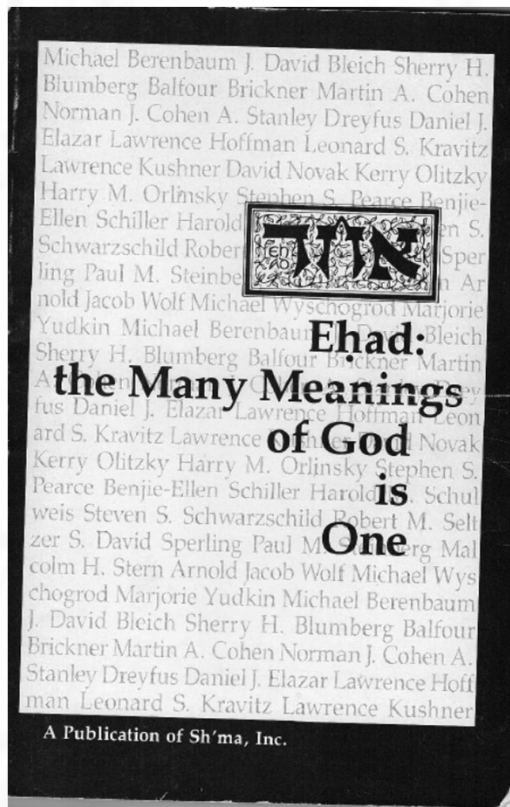
Deuteronomy 6:4

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

She-ma Yis-ra-el, Ah-do-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu, Ado-nai Eh-chad
Hear O Israel: Adonai is (now) our God, Adonai (will be) One.
Hear O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai alone.
Hear O Israel! Adonai our God, Adonai is one.
Hear O Israel! Adonai is our God, one indivisible Adonai.
Hear O Israel! Adonai our God is a unique Adonai.
Hear O Israel! Adonai our God is Ultimate.
Hear O Israel! Adonai is our God, Adonai is Unity/Everything.



The Meaning of *Echad*: 25 Essays



Eugene B. Borowitz
How This Book Came to Be v

Michael Berenbaum
An Ancient Mystery Once Discovered Often Rediscovered 1

J. David Bleich
One G-d, One People 1

Sherry H. Blumberg
Ehad: God's Unity 1

Balfour Brickner
The Oneness that Demands of Us 1

Martin A. Cohen
The Inner Way to God's Unity 1

Norman J. Cohen
Hearing the Voice of the One God 1

A. Stanley Dreyfus
The Sh'ma: A Reminiscence of Childhood 1

Daniel J. Elazar
One God's Federal Universe 1

Lawrence Hoffman
The Creature Recreating the Creator 1

Leonard S. Kravitz
God's Unity, the Future, and Hope 1

Lawrence Kushner
The Unity that is not One 1

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A Short Meditation on the Sh'ma 1

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Paul M. Steinberg
The Watchword of our Faith 87

Malcolm H. Stern
The Not-Yet-One People of the Always-One God 89

Arnold Jacob Wolf
The Clarity and Obscurity of the Sh'ma 91

Michael Wyschogrod
This One—and No Other 95

Marjorie Yudkin
The Oneness Which Allows for Otherness 99



The Meaning of *Yisrael*

ישראל

- Jacob – *Yaacov* – gets his name changed from “heel” to *Yisrael* – Israel – when he wrestles with God/angel [Gen. 32:25-33]
- *Yisrael* means one who wrestles with God.
- If you struggle with God – welcome to the club!
- Contrast with Islam – the word *Islam* mean one who submits (to God).



The Calligraphy of the *Shema*

שְׂמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד
וְאַהֲבַת אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל לִבְּךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ
וּבְכֹל מְאֹדְךָ וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצֹוֹךְ
הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְּךָ וּשְׁנֹנְתָם לְבִנְיָךְ וּדְבַרְתָּ בָּם בְּשׂוֹבְרֹתְךָ
בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתֹּךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכֶכְךָ וּבְקוֹמְךָ וּקְשַׁרְתָּם
לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטַטְפַּת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ וּכְתַבְתָּם עַל
מַזְזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ



The Calligraphy of the *Shema*

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד

She-ma Yis-ra-el, Ah-do-nai Eh-lo-hei-nu, Ado-nai Eh-chad

As written in the Torah, the large *Ayin* (ע) and *Daled* (ד) have two explanations:

1. Stand for the word “*Aid*” (עד) meaning “witness”
2. Large *ayin* ensures that we don’t read שמא (SHEM-ah), meaning “perhaps” and large *daled* ensures that we don’t read the letter as a *resh* (ר), making the last word אחר *echar* meaning “another”



The Mystics' Interpretation of *Echad*

The mystics understand *echad* to mean unity.

- So “*Adonai echad*” means God is unity
- God is the ultimate unity of the universe
- Everything is God and God is everything
 - The separations are illusions
 - Like a wave seems to be a distinct entity but is really one with the sea
 - Like the various parts of a tree. We may give these parts separate names, but the tree doesn't know where the roots end and the trunk begins, where the trunk ends and a branch begins, etc.



Where is God?

**When I count to
three, point to
God!**



Two Valid Images of God: #1: Conventional/Rational

- In this image, God is “up there” and I am “down here”
- This is reflected in conventional Jewish blessings which begin with “Blessed are You, *Adonai...*”

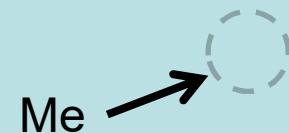




Two Valid Images of God: #2: Mystic/Kabbalist

- In this image, God is everywhere and everything (indicated by dashes)
- And my separation from God is an illusion (also indicated by dashes)

God





The Mystics' Understanding of Free Will

The mystics understand that since everything is God, then everything is under God's control, and everything is just as it should be.

- This is a theology that should not be brought into a hospital.
 - It says that the cancer, the accident, even the war (holocaust, gas chambers, etc.) are under the control and will of God.
- I personally have great difficulty with this, and this is at the heart of why I'm not a kabbalist.



Session #2

Topics for discussion this evening

- Historical overview of *Kabbalah*
- The *Zohar*
- The 10 *Sefirot*
- *Gematria* and the *Tzitzit*
- Lots of wonderful Kabbalistic texts!



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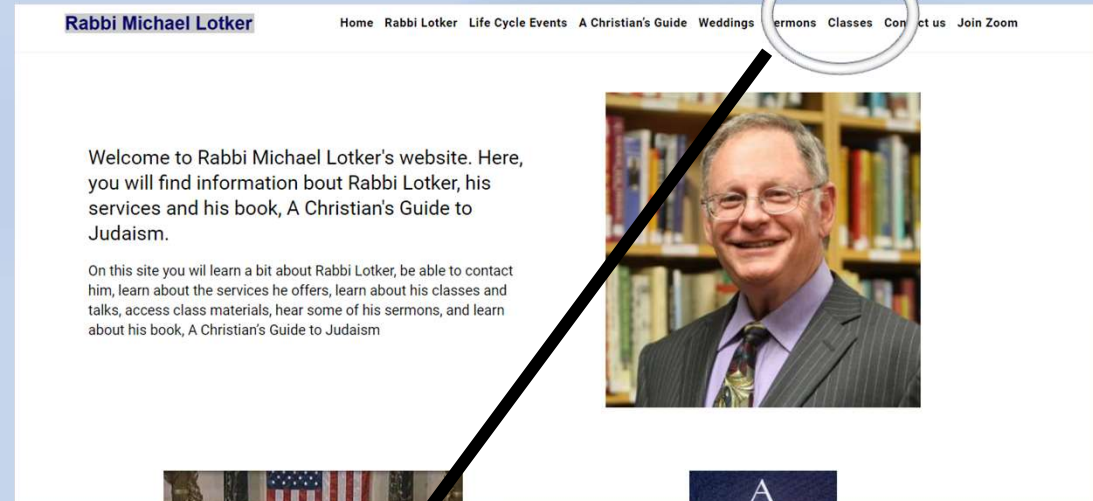
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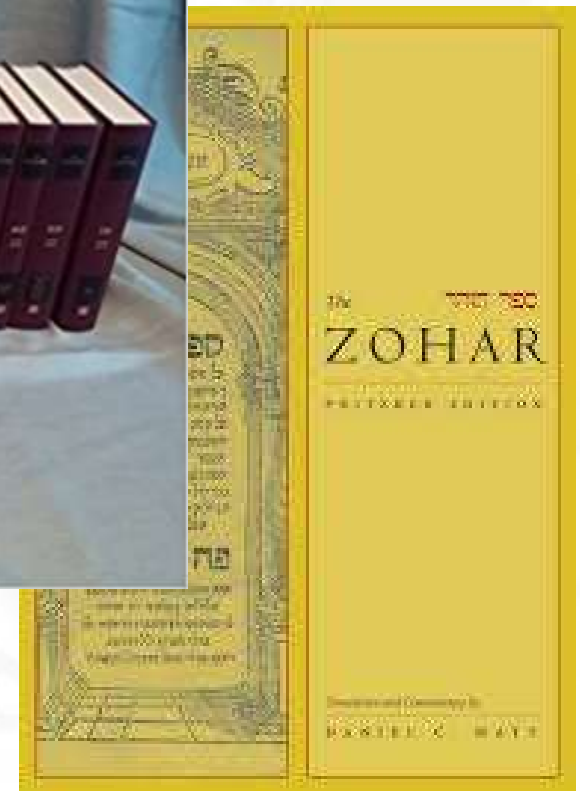
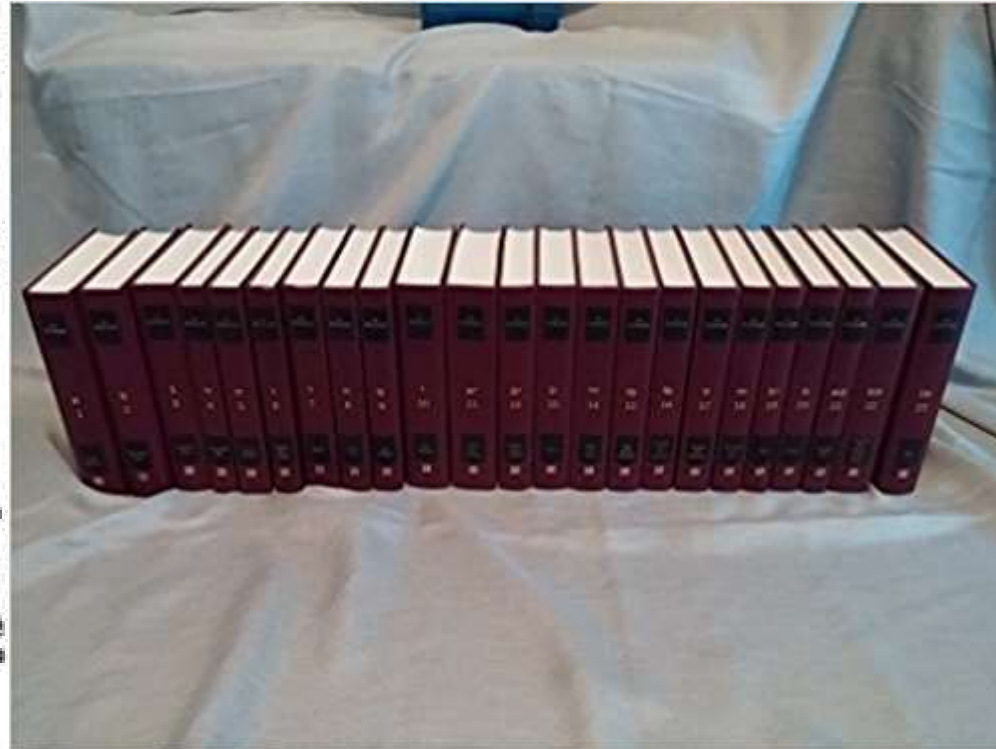
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History of Kabbalah

- Exclusively male – there were NO female kabbalists in history
- Begins in 2nd Temple times with contemplation of God's throne (as described in Ezekiel & the chariot (*Merkabah*)
 - Remnant – chanting *Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* (Isa. 6:3)
- Hasidism in Medieval Germany: 1150-1250
 - Idealization of the *Hasid* (ascetic, serene, and altruistic)
 - Christian influence – deprivation – sitting in snow
 - But never promoted sexual abstinence
- The goal is always to deepen connection with God

The Zohar: the Central Text of Jewish Mysticism





The Zohar: the Central Text of Jewish Mysticism

The Zohar is a work of pseudepigrapha.

- It reads as though it was written by Shimon Bar Yochai, a 2nd century CE *Mishna* teacher. It is written in the Aramaic of the period.
- But it was actually written in the 13th century in Spain by Moshe de Leon or his school. We see examples of 13th century Hebrew and even medieval Spanish in the text.



The Zohar

The *Zohar*:

- Is structured as a commentary on the Torah.
 - Underlying idea is that all wisdom is in Torah.
 - Is written in Aramaic.
- In it, we read of a brilliant rabbi of 2,000 years ago, wandering the Galilee with his disciples (sound familiar?)
- Provides a structure to the study and practice of *Kabbalah*.
- Introduces the 10 *Sefirot*
- Is very difficult.

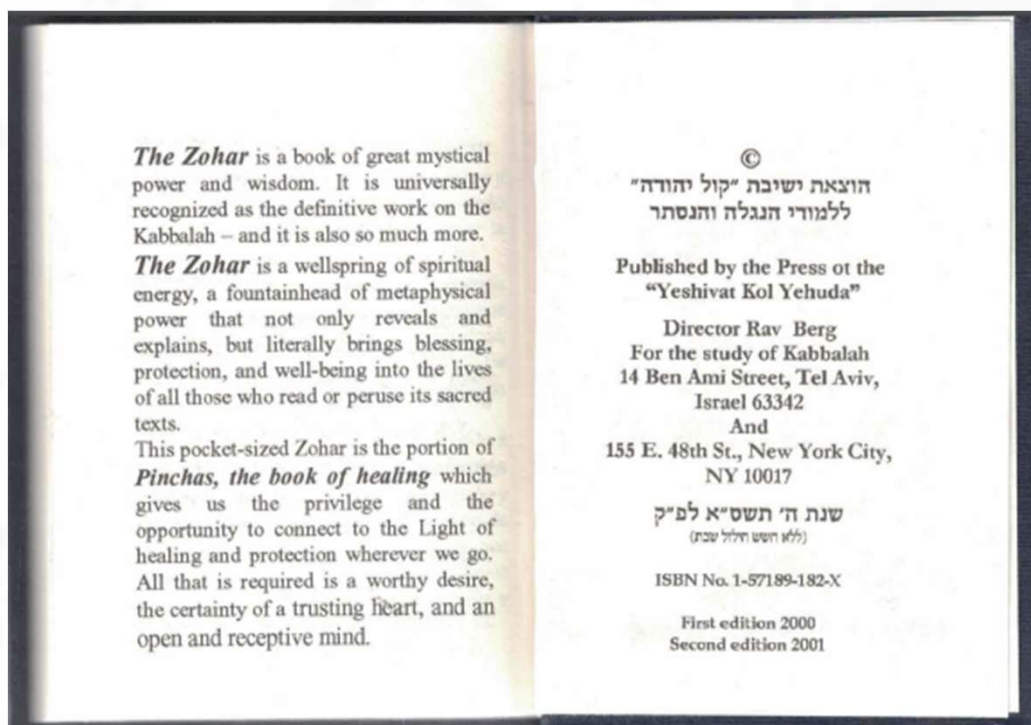


Some Zohar Text

“At the head of the potency of the King, He engraved engravings in luster on high. A spark of impenetrable darkness flashed with in the concealed of the concealed, from the head of infinity – a cluster of vapor forming in formlessness, thrust in a ring, not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all. As a cord surveyed, it yielded radiant colors. Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below, concealed within the concealed of the mystery of *Ein Sof*. It split and did not split its aura, was not known at all, until under the impact of splitting, a single concealed supernal point shone. Beyond that point, nothing is known, so it is called *Reshit*, *Beginning*, first command of all.” (*Zohar Be-Reshit*, 1:15a)

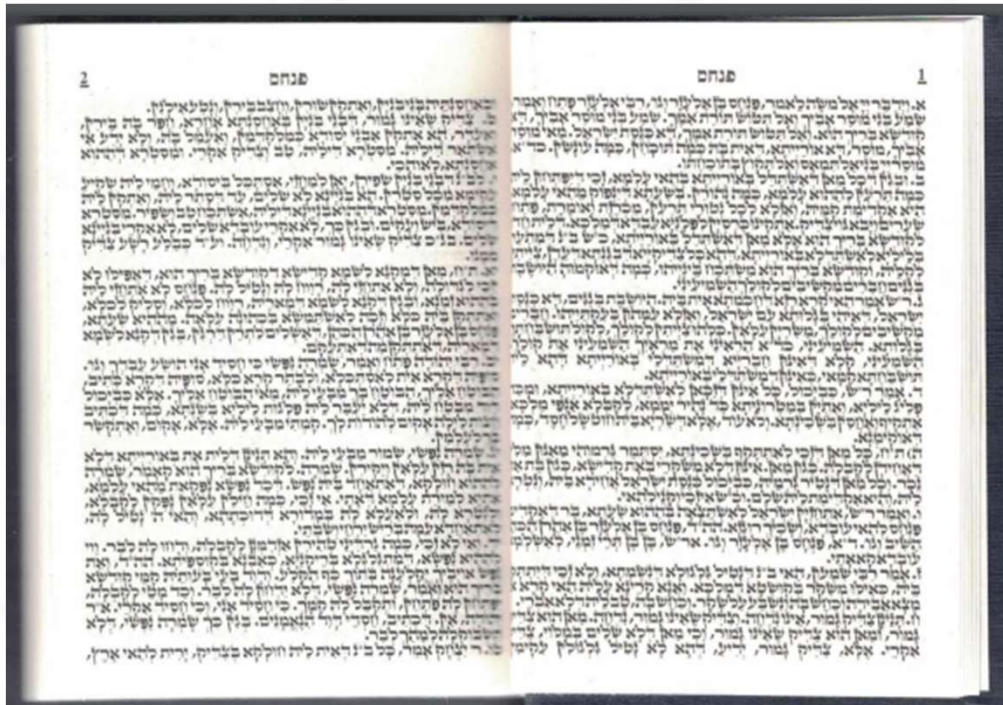
- This modern translation is accompanied by three pages of 13 footnotes.

Here's A Little Zohar





Here's A Little Zohar



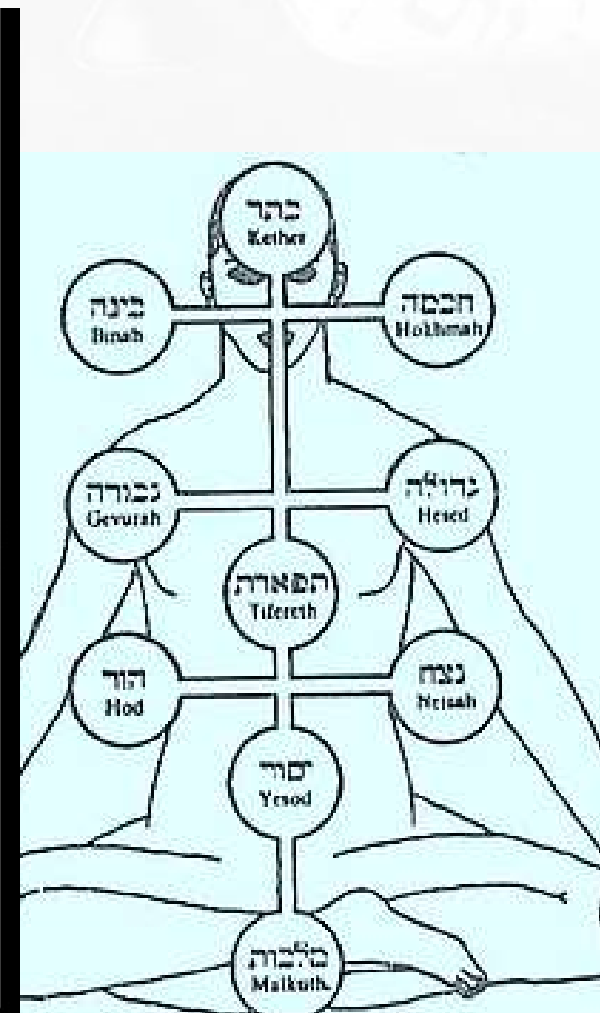
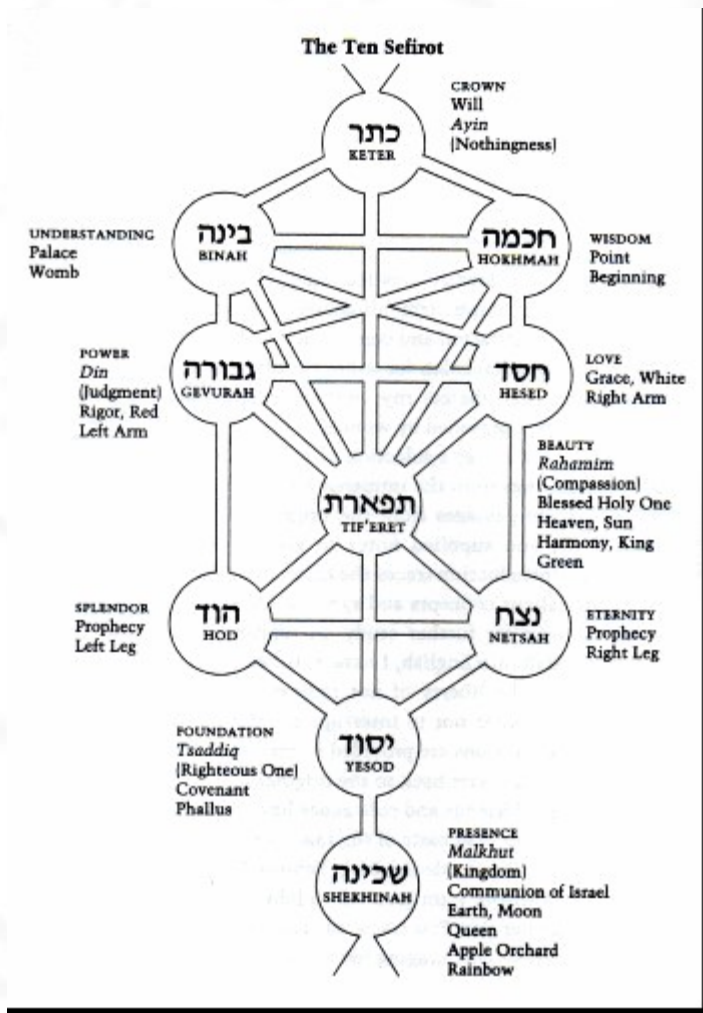
THE 72 NAMES OF GOD

1	הוה	יכו	סיט	עלם	מוזש	לכוה	אבא	כזה
2	הוי	אלר	לוא	דהע	חל	מבה	דחי	הקם
3	לוא	כלי	לוח	פוזל	לכך	יח	מלה	וזה
4	זזה	הזא	ירת	שאה	רוו	אום	לכב	ועד
5	יוח	לזוח	סוק	מוזר	אני	וועם	רהע	יו
6	דהזה	מיכ	חול	יכה	סאל	שי	עשל	מיה
7	וזה	דוי	הזש	עמם	זוא	זית	מבה	פוי
8	זמם	ייל	הרוח	מזר	זומ	יהז	ענו	מוז
9	דמם	מזק	איע	וובו	ראה	יבם	דוי	מום

The 72 names refers to a formula of 72 Hebrew letters. It is also known as the 72 names of God. Moshe used this formula to part the Red Sea. The 72 names have the power to overcome the laws of nature and the laws of human nature.

From description of this book in Amazon.com: "It is said that just owning the Zohar can protect you and aid in your healing. You do not need to know Hebrew-- in fact most of it is so condensed that you cannot read it.. The 72 names for healing can be scanned however and can elicit the energy of healing. It is a beautiful small book that can fit in your pocket, glove compartment, purse. The gold lettering on the cover is expertly done. Pinchas is a section of the Zohar, that involves healing, protection, and blessings. The energy of this small book is transmitted into your soul. It is like owning a piece of the Torah. Do yourself a favor and bring to yourself the energy and light of the Zohar."

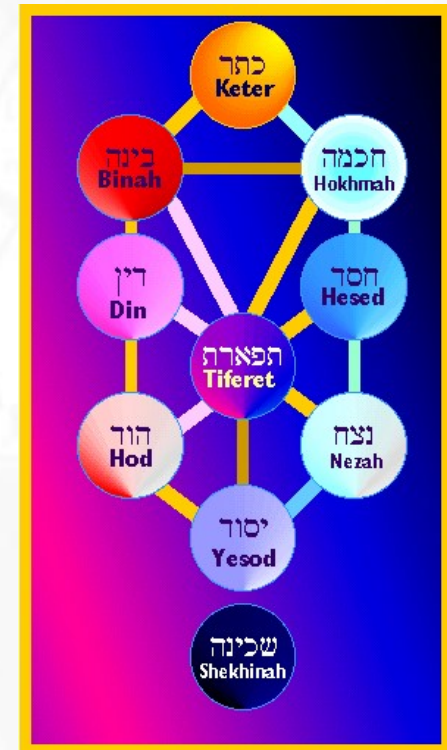
The Sefirot



The *Sefirot*

“Just as the gentiles say that He is three and the three are one, so also some of the kabbalistic masters believe and say that the Godhead is ten *sefirot* and the ten are one.”

Abraham Abulafia (13th century Spanish mystic), cited in Horwitz, p 173





Gematria: A Key to Unlocking Scriptural Secrets

Aleph	א	1	Lamed	ל	30
Bet	ב	2	Mem	מ	40
Gimmel	ג	3	Num	נ	50
Dalet	ד	4	Samech	ס	60
Heh	ה	5	Ayin	ע	70
Vav	ו	6	Pey	פ	80
Zayin	ז	7	Tzadi	צ	90
Chet	ח	8	Kof	ק	100
Tet	ט	9	Resh	ר	200
Yod	י	10	Shin	ש	300
Kaf	כ	20	Tav	ת	400

Thus *Chai* = **חי** = life = 18



Gematria of the Tallit & Tzitzit

טלית



Numbers 15:38-9



< Double Knot

< Seven Coils

< Double Knot

< Eight Coils

< Double Knot

< Eleven Coils

< Double Knot

< Thirteen Coils

< Double Knot

The Tzitzit

<8 Threads

<http://homeschooljournal-bergblog.blogspot.com/>



Gematria of the Tallit & Tzitzit

צ Tzadi = 90

י Yud = 10

צ Tzadi = 90

י Yud = 10

ת Tav = $\frac{400}{600}$

5 knots/tzitzit = 5

8 strings/tzitzit = $\frac{8}{13}$

613 Mitzvot

1st group = 7 = Number of Days in Creation

2nd group = 8 = Number of Days of *Brit Milah*

Sum of 1st 2 groups = 15 = 1st 2 letters of יהוה

3rd group = 11 = last two letters of יהוה

4th group = 13 = value of *echad* אחד

Total of windings = 39 = value of יהוה אחד

More on the Value of *Echad*

א = 1 = The one *Tallit*

ח = 8 = The 8 strings per *Tzitzit*

ד = 4 = The 4 corners of the *Tallit*



More on the Tallit & Tzitzit

5 / SHACHARIS/MORNING SERVICE

DONNING TALLIS AND TEFILLIN

Many recite the following declaration of intent before donning the tallis:

לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד For the sake of the unification* of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and His Presence, in fear and love to unify the Name* – yud-kei with vav-kei – in perfect unity, in the name of all Israel.

הֲרִנֵּי I am ready* to wrap my body in tzitzis, so may my soul, my two hundred forty-eight organs and my three hundred sixty-five sinews* be wrapped in the illumination of tzitzis which has the numerical value of six hundred thirteen. Just as I cover myself with a tallis in This World, so may I merit the rabbinical garb and a beautiful cloak in the World to Come in the Garden of Eden. Through the commandment of tzitzis may my life-force, spirit, soul, and prayer be rescued from the external forces. May the tallis spread its wings over them and rescue them like an eagle rousing his nest, fluttering over his eaglets.¹ May the commandment of tzitzis be worthy before the Holy One, Blessed is He, as if I had fulfilled it in all its details, implications, and intentions, as well as the six hundred thirteen commandments that are dependent upon it. Amen, Selah!

Unfold the tallis, hold it in readiness to wrap around yourself, and recite the following blessing:

בְּרוּךְ Blessed are You, HASHEM, our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to wrap ourselves in tzitzis.

הֲרִנֵּי ... לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד – For the sake of the unification ... I am ready. This preliminary formulation serves two purposes. It is a statement of intent that the act about to be performed is to fulfill the Torah's commandment. The second purpose, indicated by the mystical references, is a prayer that the Kabbalistic spiritual qualities of the commandment be realized. Some authorities omit the sentence beginning **לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד** and start the supplication from **הֲרִנֵּי**. Others omit the entire

prayer, but all agree that one should have intent to fulfill the mitzvah.

... לְיַחַד שֵׁם – To unify the Name ... The first half of the Divine Name, formed of the letters yud and hei, symbolizes the Attribute of Judgment, while the second half, formed of the letters vav and hei, symbolizes the Attribute of Mercy. The blend of both attributes leads to His desired goal for Creation. Since these letters form the sacred Four-Letter Name that is not to be uttered as it is spelled, and since many commentators maintain that this prohibition extends even to uttering the four letters of the Name, the commonly used pronunciation of these letters in the tallis prayer is yud-kei b'vav kei.

רַמִּיחַ אֶבְרֵי וּשְׂקִיָּה גִיד – My two hundred forty-

eight organs and my three hundred sixty-five sinews. The Sages' computation of the important organs, two hundred forty-eight, is equal to the number of positive commandments, while the three hundred sixty-five sinews equal the number of negative commandments. This symbolizes the principle that man was created to perform God's will. The total number of sinews and organs in man, and the total of Divine commandments, are each six hundred thirteen, a number symbolized by the commandment of tzitzis [צ=90; י=10; כ=90; ה=10; ה=400.

totaling 600; the 5 knots' and 8 threads of each fringe make up the other 13]. Thus, by wrapping our bodies in the tallis, we dedicate ourselves totally to the task of serving God.

Additionally, as mentioned later in this prayer, the tallis represents the concept that God protects those who serve Him.

הַנְּחֵת תְּפִילִין / PUTTING ON TEFILLIN

לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד – For the sake of the unification. In its broad outline, this introductory supplication serves the same dual purpose as the **לְשֵׁם יְחִוּד** for

Source: *the Artscroll Siddur*, Mesorah Pub. 1990, pp. 4-5



Even the Shapes of the Letters Hold Secret Meanings

Consider the Hebrew word for truth **אמת**-*emet*

- Each letter is well balanced on a firm base
- And *aleph* is the first letter, *mem* is the middle letter, and *taf* is the last letter of the alphabet.

Now consider the word for lie **שקר**-*sheker*

- Each letter is unbalanced on a wobbly base
- And *shin*, *kof* and *resh* are the 3 next to last letters of the alphabet.



The Four *Olamot* (Worlds) or Levels of Spiritual Awareness

Emotion/Relationship with God:

Fear-Awe / King

Love & Demands /
Parent

Love – Eros / Lover

self = Self / SELF

1. ***Asiyah* (Doing or Awareness):** This is the world in which we live our lives and understand our own separate identity. It is a world far from mystical insight. In this world we perceive God as a transcendent Other, outside ourselves, the object of *yir'ah* (fear/awe), as a trusted and loved and loving King.
2. ***Yetsirah* (Formation):** In this level, we begin to lose our sense of separateness, recognizing that there are higher forms of life or deeper rungs of perception. God is perceived as a loving Parent who knows and loves us fully, who accepts us with all of our shortcomings, but who also cares enough to make demands upon us. The symbol of world of *yetsirah* is the angel. To *yir'ah* is added *ahavah* (love) in our relationship with God who becomes *Aveinu Malkeinu* ("Our Father, Our King").
3. ***Beri'ah* (Creation):** Here we begin to see the great vision, that there is only one reality, there is only One. Love is the dominant motif in the relationship between God and person. God as parent is replaced by God as lover (*a la* Song of Songs – described by Rabbi Akiva as the "holy of holies" among the Scriptures). At this stage, we give vent to our longing for reunion with the Source, the embrace of our soul in the arms of the Beloved. "I hold fast to him and will not let him go until I have brought him to the house of my mother, into the chamber of her who gave me birth" (Songs of Songs 3:4). The Zohar is a key source for insight into this world. In this world, however, there is the consciousness that *I* am still present, *I* am the one who is perceiving this reality.
4. ***Atsilut* (Flowing):** In Green's words, "Here the lines between self and Self no longer exist; macrocosmic universe and microcosmic mind are a pair of mirrors that stand opposite each other; they reflect one another so fully that any attempt to distinguish between them has to be left behind. In *atsilut* there is nothing other than emanation or flow of divine grace.... We no longer speak of love between self and God because 'between' no longer exists. 'You' are not other than God. Within the human mind, *atsilut* is usually present only in brief moments, in flashes of insight that pass quickly in themselves, but remain with us in memory to light the rest of our lives."

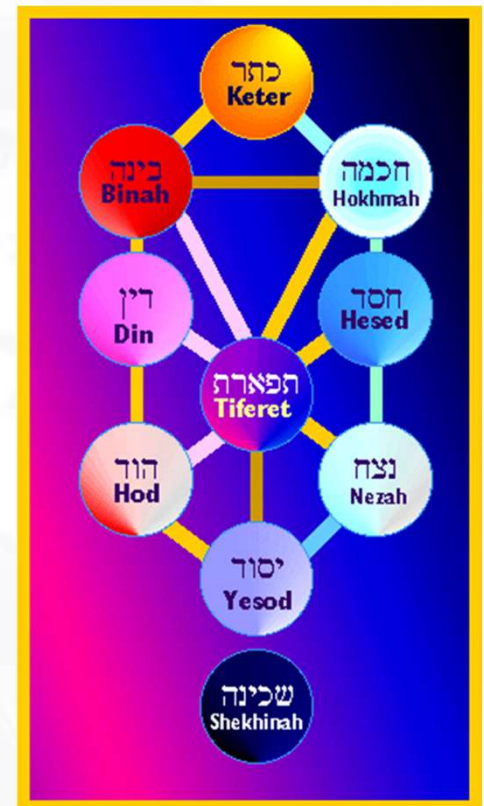
Material taken from A. Green, A Kabbalah for Tomorrow, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003, pp. 61-73.

God's Names: *Adonai* and *Elohim*

Adonai: *Adonai* is the name we say when we read God's name Y-H-V-H (*yod, hay, vov, hay*) in the Torah or prayer book. *Adonai* literally means "my Lord(s)" and is said because the actual name was only pronounced by the High Priest, in the Holy of Holies in the Temple on Yom Kippur afternoon (i.e., once per year and not since the Temple was destroyed in the year 70 CE). Traditional Jews will not even say (or write) *Adonai* except when reading the Torah from the scroll or actually praying. The mystics see meaning even in the shape of these letters. In Art Green's words: "The Name י-ו-ה-ו, Y-H-V-H, embraces the entire *sefirotic* world. The letter *yod*, smallest of the letters, represents *hokhmah* as primordial point, the beginning of existence. The tip of the *yod* points upward, hinting at *keter*, an essence so elusive that it cannot be captured in writing. The first *hay*, graphically depicted as an open structure, is *binah*, primal female into which the *yod* enters. *Vov* stands for the number six, representing the six forces centered in *tiferet*. It also represents an elongation of the *yod* and thus becomes a phallus-like embodiment of male energy within God. The second *hay*, again female, is the home of the *vov*, the ark of the covenant, and also the home of the soul."² The numerical value of the name (26) is the subject of much comment. For example, both the words *ahavah* ("love") and *echad* ("one") have the value 13; love and oneness therefore are joined to make up the name of God.

As a reminder not to try to pronounce this name of God when reading the Bible or prayer book, the rabbis wrote the vowels for *Adonai* (אָדוֹנָי) in the text (i.e., יהוה). If you try to pronounce the word as written this way, you will read "Yi'ho-vah"; this is where we get the mistaken pronunciation of Jehovah.

Elohim: *Elohim* is the generic word for God used both to describe God and false gods in the Bible. Although the form is plural, its use in the Torah is grammatically singular. Again in Green's words: "The point is that *Elohim* in this context is being used as a *collective*. All the powers that once belonged to the deities of the pantheon – love, power, wisdom, war, fruitfulness, and all the rest – are now concentrated in this single Being who contains them all."³ The mystics often assign the name *Elohim* to God's aspect of judgment and the name Y-H-V-H to God's aspect of love. The balance to the names is found in the *Shema* where the word *Eloheimu* is found between two repetitions of Y-H-V-H.





Texts and More Texts

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

•

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

* Like the Big Bang explosion. Once overall density was reduced via expansion, the universe ceased being a black hole.

* Most things can only exist in places other than on a star.

First passage: Moses Cordovero (sixteenth century), *Pardes Rimmonim*, 5:4, 25d. Second passage: Shim'on Lavi (sixteenth century), *Ketem Paz* [Jerusalem: Ahavat Shalom, 1981], 1:124c.

Material taken from D. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: the Heart of Jewish Mysticism*, Harper, 1995, p. 91.



Paradise = *Pardes* – 4 Levels of Understanding Torah

Pardes = פרדס

Pshat/Simple - פשט

Remes:Hint/Allegory [crossing sea:birth] - רמז

Drash:*Midrash* [“you brother’s bloods”] - דרש

Sod:Secret [shape of the letter “bet”] - סוד

[Insight from biblical commentator Avivah Zornberg:

- *Pshat* is what you tell your therapist
- *Drash* is what your therapist hears]



Texts and More Texts

THE ESSENCE OF TORAH

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

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

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

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

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

Material taken from D. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: the Heart of Jewish Mysticism*, Harper, 1995, p. 91.

Zohar 2:176a-b (thirteenth century); see Matt, *Zohar*, 38-39, 202-3.

Because of that view . . . The man from the mountains claims to be a master of wheat, a master of Torah. In rabbinic literature (Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 145b) the phrase "master of wheat" means one who has mastered the oral traditions. Here in the *Zohar*, wheat and its products (kernels, bread, cake, and royal pastry) apparently symbolize the four levels of meaning in Torah (simple, midrashic, allegorical, and mystical). The mountain man's mastery is superficial. He knows only *peshat*, the plain sense, and when he learns that everything emerges from *peshat*, he concludes that he needs to know nothing more. After all, doesn't he have the essence? Usually in mysticism essence is the goal, but the *Zohar's* parable indicates that essence is inadequate, unless it flowers into all that it can be. The master of wheat is wallowing in essence. Instead of venturing into the unknown, he reduces the unknown to the familiar. He misses the delights, reserved for those who savor the variety of flavors, the range of meanings.

An earlier, midrashic parable (*Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, 2) also compares Torah to wheat and insists on its creative transformation:

"There was a king who had two servants. He loved them with a complete love. He gave each of them a measure of wheat and a bundle of flax. The wise servant—what did he do? He took the flax and wove it into cloth. He took the wheat and made it into flour. He sifted it, ground it, kneaded it, and baked it. Then he arranged it on the table and spread the cloth over it. He left it until the king arrived. The foolish servant did nothing at all.

"After some time, the king came to his palace and said, 'My children, bring me what I gave to you.' One brought out the bread on the table covered with cloth. The other brought out the wheat in a box with the bundle of flax on top.

"When the Blessed Holy One gave the Torah to Israel, he gave it to them as wheat from which to produce bread, and as flax from which to produce cloth."



Texts and More Texts

12 □ The Old Man and the Ravishing Maiden

(Zohar 2: 94b-95a, 99a-b, 105b, 114a)

Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Yose met one night at the Tower of Tyre. They stayed there as guests, delighting in each other. Rabbi Yose said, "I am so glad to see the face of *Shekhinah*!¹ For just now, the whole way here, I was pestered by an old man, a donkey driver,² who kept asking me riddles the whole way:

"Who is a ravishing maiden without eyes,
her body concealed and revealed?
She comes out in the morning and is hidden all day.
She adorns herself with adornments that are not."³

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

Rabbi Yose said, "Of all the words I heard you say, there was one that really amazed me. Either you said it out of folly, or they are empty words."

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

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

Human beings are so confused in their minds!
They do not see the way of truth in Torah.
She calls out to them every day, in love,
but they do not want to turn their heads.
She removes a word from her sheath,
is seen for a moment, then quickly hides away,
but she does so only for those who know her intimately.

Material taken from D. Matt, *Zohar: Annotated and Explained*, Skylight Paths Pub. 2002, pp. 59-71.



Texts and More Texts

"A parable:

To what can this be compared?

To a beloved, ravishing maiden, hidden deep within her palace.

She has one lover, unknown to anyone, hidden too.

Out of love for her, this lover passes by her gate constantly,
lifting his eyes to every side.

Knowing that her lover hovers about her gate constantly,
what does she do?

She opens a little window in her hidden palace,
revealing her face to her lover,
then swiftly withdraws, concealing herself.

No one near him sees or reflects,⁸ only the lover,
and his heart and his soul and everything within him
flow out to her.

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

"So it is with a word of Torah:

she reveals herself to no one but her lover.
Torah knows that one who is wise of heart
hovers about her gate every day.

What does she do?

She reveals her face to him from the palace
beckoning him with a hint,

then swiftly withdraws to her hiding place.

No one there knows or reflects—

he alone does,

and his heart and his soul and everything within him
flows out to her.

This is why Torah reveals and conceals herself.

With love she approaches her lover
to arouse love with him.

"Come and see the way of Torah.

At first, when she begins to reveal herself to a human,
she beckons him with a hint.

If he perceives, good;

if not, she sends him a message, calling him simple.

Torah says to her messenger:

'Tell that simple one to come closer, so I can talk with him.'

He approaches.

She begins to speak with him from behind a curtain she has drawn,
words he can follow, until he reflects a little at a time.

This is *derasha*.⁹

Then she converses with him through a veil,
words riddled with allegory.

This is *baggadab*.¹⁰



Texts and More Texts

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

"Now he sees that nothing should be added to those words
and nothing taken away.
Now the *psbat* of the verse, just like it is.¹³
Not even a single word should be added or deleted.

"Human beings must become aware,
pursuing Torah to become her lovers!"

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

"Enough, Companions!
From now on, you know that the evil side has no power over you.
I, Yeiva Sava,¹⁴ have stood before you
to awaken your awareness of these words."

They rose as if awakened from sleep
and threw themselves down in front of him,
unable to utter a word.
After a while they began to cry.

Rabbi Hiyya opened and said,
*"Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm (Song of Songs 8:6).*
Love and sparks from the flame of our heart will escort you.
May it be the Will
that our image be engraved in your heart
as your image is engraved in ours."

He kissed them and blessed them, and they left.

When they rejoined Rabbi Shim'on
and told him everything that happened,
he was delighted and amazed.
He said, "You are so fortunate to have attained all this!
Here you were with a heavenly lion,
a fierce warrior for whom many warriors are nothing,
and you could not recognize him!
I am amazed that you escaped being punished by him.
The blessed Holy One must have wanted to save you."

He called out these verses for them:

*"The path of the righteous is like gleaming light,
shining ever brighter until full day (Proverbs 4:18).*
*When you walk, your stride will be free,
if you run, you will not stumble (Proverbs 4:12).*
*Your people, all of them righteous, will inherit the land forever—
sprout of My planting, work of My hands, in which I glory (Isaiah 60:21)."*



Session # 3

Lurianic Kabbalah, the Soul, Angels, & Enhancing Our Jewish Spirituality



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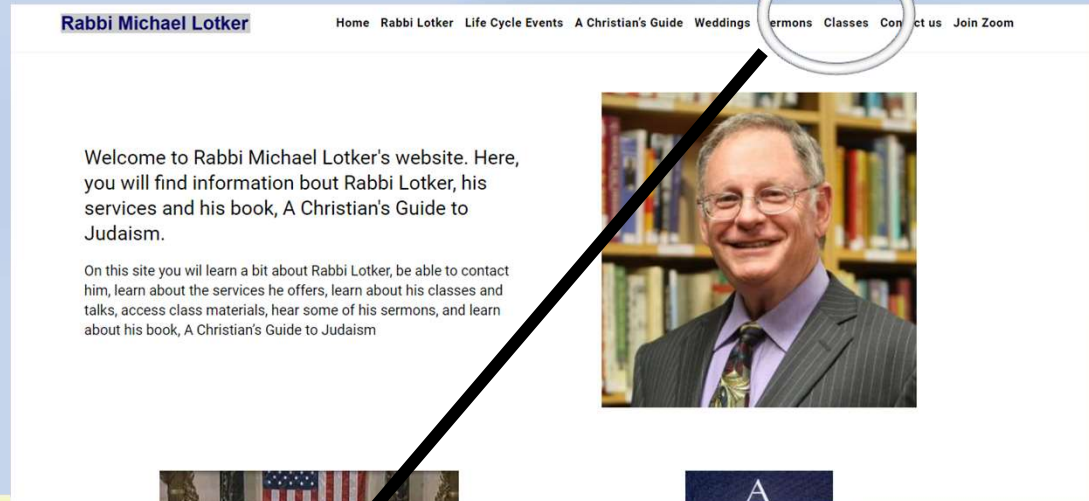
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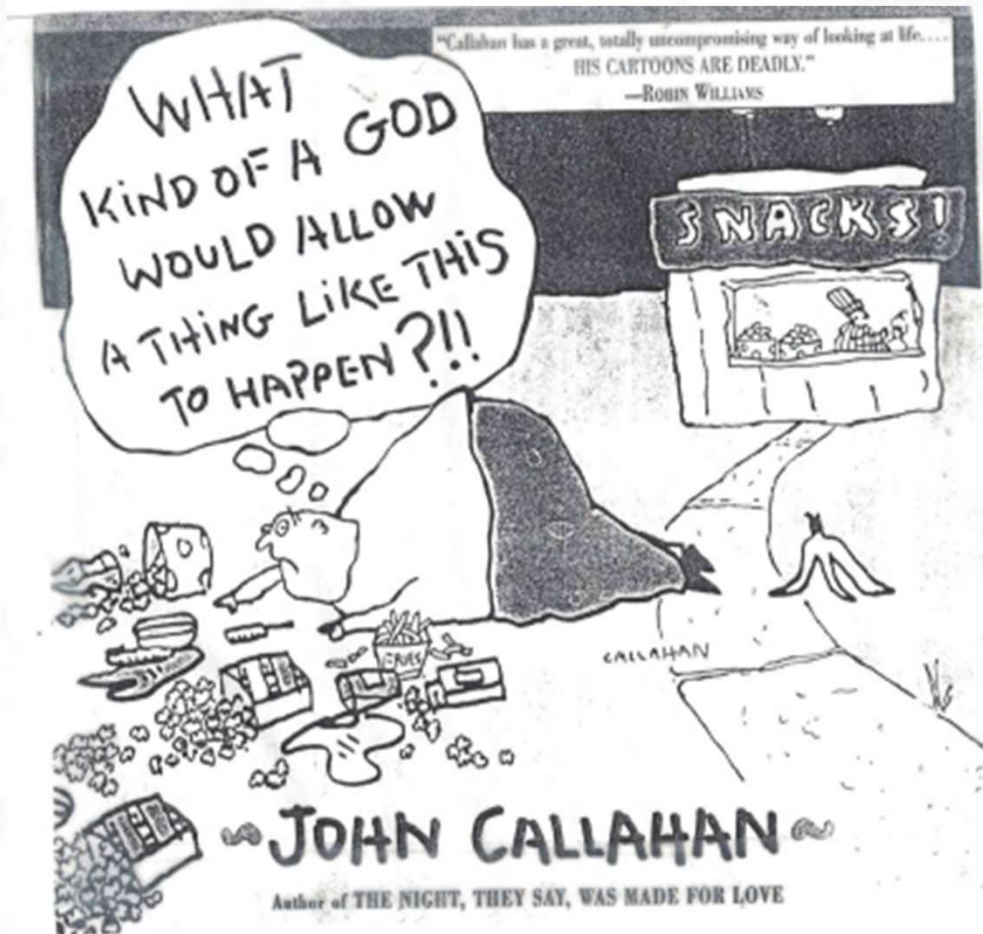
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- > **Suggested Reading**
- > **Learners' Guide to Blessings**
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- > **Video of Session #2**



Kabbalah Has an Answer!





Isaac Luria and His School

- Luria's family was expelled from Spain.
- Taught in Safed only 2.5 years before dying in an epidemic in 1572
- Called "*Ha-Ari*" – the lion – acronym for "the Ashkenazi Rabbi Isaac"
- He wrote almost nothing, but his students recorded his teachings.

Lurianic Kabbalah and Creation





Lurianic Kabbalah and Creation - Texts

ISIMISUM AND SHEVIKAR. WITHDRAWAL AND SHATTERING

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

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

To fashion pottery, the potter first takes an unformed mass of clay and then puts his hand inside the mass to shape it. So the supernal emanator put its hand into the amorphous mass, that is, a ray of light returned from above. As this light began to enter the mass, vessels were formed. From the purest light, Keter; next, Hokhmah; then, Binah; and so on through all ten sefirot. Since Keter was the purest and clearest of all the vessels, it could bear the light within it, but Hokhmah and Binah, though more translucent than those below, were not like Keter. Not having its capacity, their backs broke, and they fell from their position. As the light descended further, six points appeared—six fragments of what had been one point of light. Thus the vessels shattered. Their spiritual essence—the light—ascended back to the mother's womb, while the shattered vessels fell to the world of creation.

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

The Foundation Stone *Even Ha-shteeyah*





Lurianic *Kabbalah* and Creation

- The Breaking of the Vessels and the release of divine sparks.
- This results in a universe that needs repair.
- Every time a mitzvah is performed, a holy spark is released, and a bit of the universe is repaired.

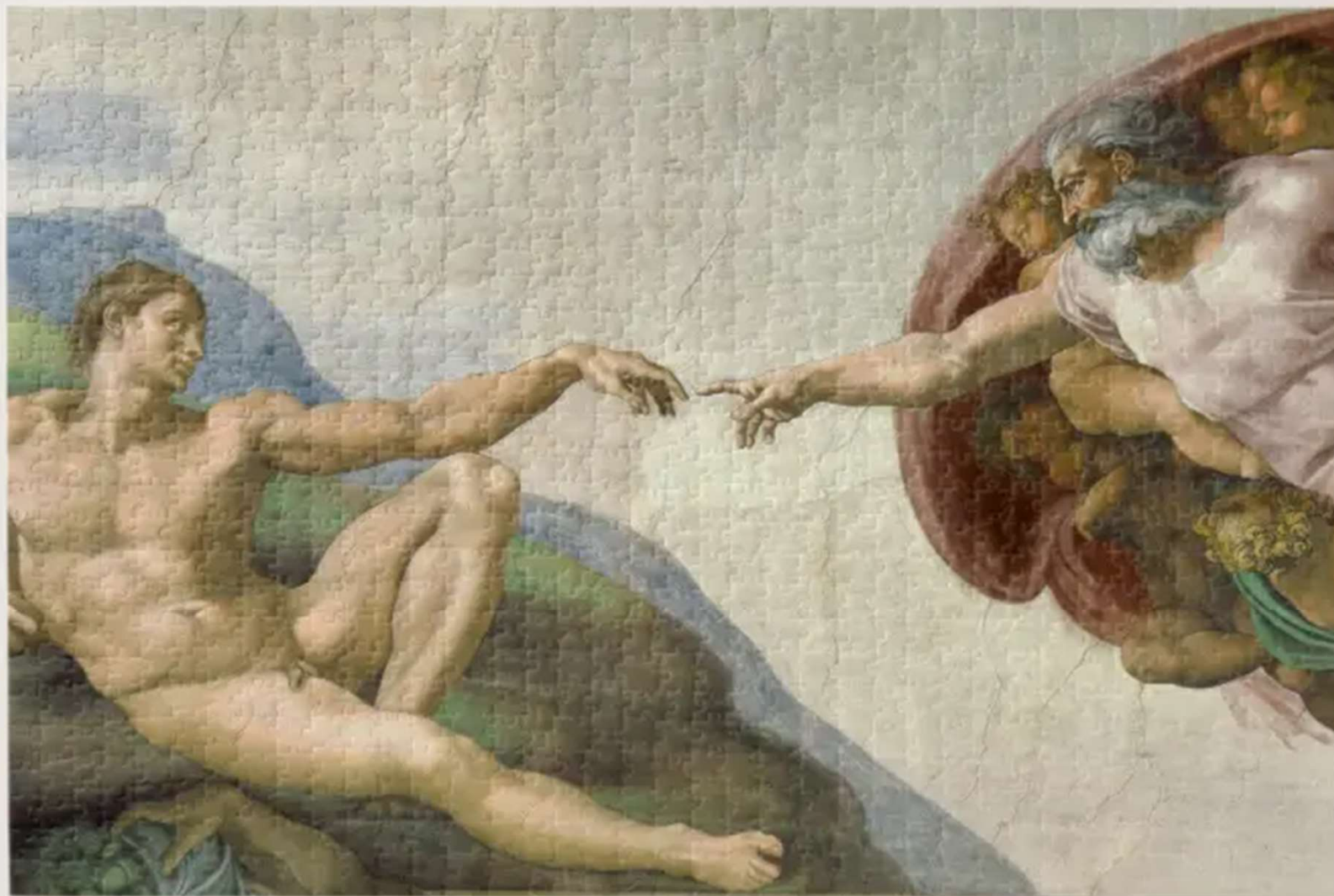




Tikkun Olam & the Messiah

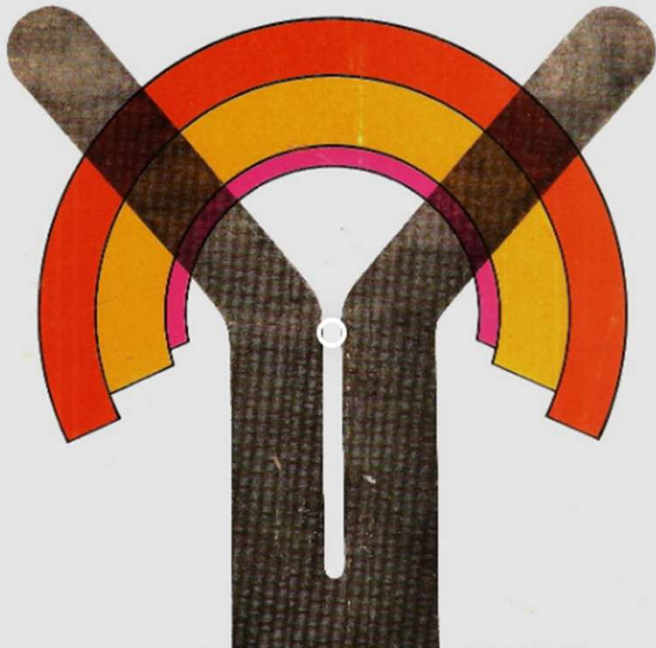
- Perhaps the most astonishing insight of *Kabbalah* is that God cannot repair the universe without our help.
- This “repair of the universe” is called *Tikkun Olam* and is the centerpiece of Reform Judaism.
- Thus, our efforts, as God’s partner, are required to bring the Messiah and redemption.

Tikkun Olam – A Bit Like a Jigsaw Puzzle



God Needs Humanity

God in Search of Man:
A Philosophy of
Judaism
Abraham Joshua Heschel





What is Soul?

What Is Soul?

From:
Elie Kaplan Spitz, *Does the Soul Survive? A Jewish Journey to Belief in Afterlife, Past Lives & Living with Purpose*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000. pp 23-27

Soul is a popular term in current American culture. Recent titles of best-selling books offer the soul chicken soup and care and claim descriptions of the soul's fire, seat, and code.¹ At the same time, these works offer scant definition of soul. *Soul* is commonly used as the term for an inner component that survives the physical plane. It is also used to describe an inner force that serves as "the font of who we are"² or "a quality or dimension of experiencing life or ourselves . . . with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance."³ *Soul's* definitions are multifaceted and elusive because it is not an object. I hoped to find in Jewish texts a more nuanced analysis of the nature of soul.

Although there are a variety of understandings of soul in the Jewish tradition, the common starting point is that soul is no less than an extension of God. In the crafting of Adam, the Torah says, "God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the *nesbamab* of life; and Adam thus became a living creature" (Genesis 2:7). In Hebrew there are three terms used for breath—*nefesb*, *ruacb*, and *nesbamab*—words that in the Jewish mystical tradition are also used to describe facets of soul. The image of breath conveys the idea that soul is intangible, animates life, and links us to the source of creation.

The rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud (largely completed by the fifth century C.E.) elaborated on the link between soul and its source as follows:

As God fills the whole world, so also the soul fills the whole body. As God sees, but cannot be seen, so also the soul sees, but cannot be seen. As God nourishes the whole world, so also the soul nourishes the whole body. As God is pure, so also the soul is pure. As God dwells in the innermost part of the Universe, so also the soul dwells in the innermost part of the body.⁴

Characterizing soul as an extension of God helps me appreciate why soul is so hard to define. God is *other*; neither object nor person. To experience God and soul entails some detachment from our own self-involvement, our "I." The image of soul as breath helps convey a paradox. Although we don't normally see our breath, if we take a mirror, breathe in deeply, and exhale, we can see our breath as film on the mirror. The more breath we see, the less reflection we see of ourselves. To define objects is to grasp them with our senses, which requires an awareness of ourselves. The more fully we encounter soul, the more our "I" of self-awareness and attachment recedes.

We engage soul with the aid of our imagination. Imagination is also the vehicle for finding the metaphors to describe our soul experiences. In that light, Dr. Peter Pitzele, a master psychodramatist and author of *Our Father's Wells*,⁵ points out that even before God created Adam, God said, "Let us make Adam in our image and in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). On this phrase Pitzele comments:

Here we see the Poet at work. Elohim, the image-maker, creates through Imagination. Adam, this first creation, resembles the Creator, for the human creature is endowed with the divine spark, made in the "image" of the Imaginator, an emanation.⁶



What is Soul?

Imagination enables us to enter the realm between understanding and the unconscious, where tradition teaches that our soul is accessed.⁷

The flame is an image that the *Zohar*, the classic mystical commentary on the Torah composed by the end of the thirteenth century, uses to express the multifaceted nature of soul. I find this image particularly helpful. Soul as divine spark possesses qualities of light. It is pure, dynamic, and the tool of awareness, which enables enlightenment. In addition, the bands of color in a flame, ranging from blue to orange to yellow, convey that the soul, too, is composed of nestled, complementary qualities. The *Zohar* describes three dimensions of soul—*nefesh*, *ruach*, and *nesbamab* (the same three words for breath)—and correlates them with facets of inner human existence.⁸ On a more cosmic level it describes them as separate realms of creation.⁹ Understanding Judaism's approach to soul requires an examination of these three dimensions of soul as described in the *Zohar*:

Soul on the most primary level of human existence is called *nefesh*, representing the realm of action and physical pleasure. Our bodies are the foundation of our lives and we are fundamentally physical beings. With our bodies we act in the world. At the next level, *nefesh* supports and connects with *ruach*, the realm of feelings, which enables personality and the expression of love. Animals, too, have a body and feelings and thus have soul, but one that is limited to the lower dimensions of soul possibility.

With *nesbamab*, the third level of soul, we evidence uniquely human capacities. The *nesbamab* is identified with analytic thought, the quest for meaning, and transcendence. Only humans ask (so we surmise), "What is the significance of my life?" This capacity for self-reflection and awareness is our link to God and is identified as the breath of life (*nishmat chayim*) that God uniquely breathed into Adam (Genesis 2:7). In traditional mystical writings, soul is often called by the term *nesbamab* because it is that part of the personality most identified with self-identity and transpersonal

relationships. As we will see later, *nesbamab* is also that dimension of soul most identified with soul survival and reincarnation.

Isaac Luria (Egypt-Israel, 1534–1572) was the most influential teacher of Jewish mysticism, with the possible exception of the author of the *Zohar*, Moses de Leon (Spain, d. 1305).¹⁰ He identified two more realms of soul—*chayah* and *yechidah*, which are often grouped together as a fourth dimension of creation.¹¹ These two higher spheres are accessed by intuition or disciplined imagination and might be called "spirit," as distinguished from soul, because of their intrinsic link to the Divine. Luria returned to the image of breath to describe the five interrelated but distinct units of soul, using a metaphor of God as glassblower:

To blow glass requires the glassblower to blow in deeply to get a breath, and then exhale through the glass tube. As the breath moves through the glass it expands and shapes it. When the work is completed the breath rests on the glass. In reverse order, the breath on the glass is *nefesh*, the most basic level of life force present in all living things. The *ruach*, which means wind, is the force that blows through the glass giving it shape. The *neshamah* is the outward breath of the glass blower. The *chayah* is the inward breath of the glassblower and *yehidah* is the soul of the glassblower. These dimensions of soul are intertwined and continuous.¹²

For Luria the three lower facets of soul were identified with the personality of the individual, the upper two (spirit) were extensions of God and hence universal.

In Hasidism the three lower levels of soul were given a more psychospiritual, developmental emphasis. The *Maggid* of Mezeritch (Rabbi Dov Baer, d. 1772), the chief disciple of the founder of Hasidism, the Ba'al Shem Tov (1698–1760), taught in the eighteenth century that the levels of soul were acquired in stages:¹³

When a man is born he has only an animal soul, the *nefesh*. When he overcomes the Evil Urge [physical compulsions such



What is Soul?

as the craving for food or sex] the person is given a *ruach*. The entire world of angels is then in his domain. If the person is even more worthy [and he learns to master his emotions, such as anger] he is given a *neshamah*, corresponding to the Divine throne. This means that his every intent and thought creates a throne for God. When a person of this level thinks about his love of God, he is placed in the Universe of Love. . . . Such a person must never remove his thoughts from God, even for an instant, for God Himself rests in his thoughts.¹⁴

In this Hasidic description soul development moves in stages and is a lifelong pursuit. How we live our lives and our level of awareness determine which rungs of soul are most profoundly engaged.

In the Jewish mystical tradition, therefore, soul is identified with more than the spiritual dimension. Soul encompasses all aspects of our inner lives as manifest in our daily human activities. When our deeds are linked to an inner core we are acting in a way that we would call soulful or authentic.

SOME NOTES

8. "The *nefesh* is bound to the *ruach*, the *ruach* to the *neshamah*, and the *neshamah* to the Blessed Holy One." *Zohar* III, 25a (top).
9. *Nefesh* is linked to *assiyah*, the physical world of action; *ruach* is in the domain of *yetzirah*, the world of feelings, *neshamah* is in the world of *beriah*, thought; the next realm of creation is *atzilut*, divine transcendence identified with intuition and later linked by Isaac Luria with the highest levels of soul, *chayah* and *yechidah*.
11. The idea of five levels of soul emerges from rabbinic commentaries from as early as first-century Palestine. See *Beresbit Rabbah* 14:9 and *Devarim Rabbah* 2:37.
13. Utilizing one of the descriptions in the *Zohar* (second section, *Parshat Mishpatim*, p. 94b).
14. Kaplan, *The Light Beyond*, pp. 110-111.



Being God's Shadow

Recall that one understanding of Gen.1:26 is that we are created as God's shadow.



- If I look at these shadows, can I tell what the people are doing?
- The shadow and its source are deeply linked.



Being God's Shadow

This leads to the mystical idea that we, God's shadows, "force" God's hands by our actions.

- So, for example, by making harmony on Earth, we make harmony in the heavens.
- And, I would add, when we do good things inspired by God and God's teachings, we bring God into the world.
- Example of feeding the hungry, visiting the sick. When we, God's shadow, do this, God is doing it. And it doesn't matter if God actually exists!



Being God's Shadow

Carrying this thought to the end of life.

- When does a shadow disappear?
 - When the image and the Maker of the image touch at last.





Angel or Messenger?

The Hebrew word for angel is, *malach* מלאך

And the Hebrew word for messenger is מלאך

Judaism teaches that God sends us into the world to complete creation:

- Are we simple messengers or divine angels?
- Speaking Hebrew, there's no difference!



Angel or Messenger?

Malachey Elyon: Messengers of the Most High

LAWRENCE KUSHNER

The Hebrew word for angel is *malach*. Which also means messenger. One who is sent.

Not cherubic creatures who adorn architecture, valentines, and fantasy. They can be anyone who is sent. Just as anyone who is sent can be an angel. It is required only that there be an errand. One message.

One angel never performs two missions just as two angels never go on one mission. (Genesis Rabba 50:2)

There is one great difference between people chosen to be God's messengers and earthly messengers. While those on errands of this world almost always know that they are sent and where and why, people chosen to be messengers of the Most High rarely even know that they are His messengers. Unsuspecting and unaware. Consumed by their own plans and itineraries. Busy at work on their own schemes. God is already sending them somewhere else.

I do not know how many times in one's life one is also a messenger. But for everyone it is at least once. One to whom it is given to know that their errand is completed is blessed and rare. Not so for most of us.

Remember only that you are not always going where you are going for the reasons you think you are.

...When the angels are sent (as messengers) by His word they are changed into winds, and when they minister before Him they are changed into fire, as it is said, "Who makes His angels into winds; His ministers, a flaming fire."

What is it like to stand into the wind?

Pretty much like talking to anyone.

What is it like to speak to a messenger of the Most High?

Like standing into the wind.

There must have been a time when you entered a room and met someone and after a while you understood that unknown to either of you there was a reason you had met. You had changed the other or he had changed you. By some word or deed or just by your presence the errand had been completed. Then perhaps you were a little bewildered or humbled and grateful. And it was over.

Each lifetime is the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

For some there are more pieces.

For others the puzzle is more difficult to assemble.

Some seem to be born with a nearly completed puzzle.

And so it goes.

Souls going this way and that

Trying to assemble the myriad parts.

But know this. No one has within themselves

All the pieces to their puzzle.

Like before the days when they used to seal

jigsaw puzzles in cellophane. Insuring that

All the pieces were there.

Everyone carries with them at least one and

Many pieces to someone else's puzzle.

Sometimes they know it.

Sometimes they don't.

And when you present your piece

Which is worthless to you,

To another, whether you know it or not,

Whether they know it or not,

You are a messenger from the Most High.

From:

Stuart M. Matlins, ed., *The Jewish Lights Spirituality Handbook: A Guide to Understanding, Exploring & Living a Spiritual Life*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2001, pp. 386-388.



Sexual Imagery in Kabbalah

70. THE SACRED BEDCHAMBER

On the very day King Solomon completed the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, God and His Bride were united, and Her face shone with perfect joy. Then there was joy for all, above and below.

As long as the Temple stood, it served as the sacred bedchamber of God the King and His Bride, the *Shekhinah*. Every midnight She would enter through the place of the Holy of Holies, and She and God would celebrate their joyous union. The loving embrace of the King and His Queen assured the well-being not only of Israel, but also of the whole world.

The King would come to the Queen and lie in Her arms, and all that She asked of Him he would fulfill. He placed his left arm under Her head, His right arm embraced Her, and He let Her enjoy His strength. Their pleasure in each other was indescribable. He made His home with Her and took His delight between Her breasts. They lay in a tight embrace, Her image impressed on His body like a seal imprinted upon a page, as it is written, *Set me as a seal upon Your heart* (S. of S. 8:6).

As long as the Temple stood, the King would come down from his heavenly abode every midnight, seek out his Bride, and enjoy her in their sacred bedchamber. But when the Temple was destroyed, the *Shekhinah* went into exile, and Bride and Groom were torn apart.

This explicit myth portrays the interaction of God and His Bride as a highly eroticized coupling, a sacred copulation (*zivvug ha-kodesh*). This is a primal image of the sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*). In *Zohar* 1:120b, this is referred to as "the one total coupling, the full coupling, as is proper." *Zohar* 3:296a expands on this: "The *Matronita* (the *Shekhinah*) united herself with the king. From this, one body resulted." This illustrates the strong sexual dimension of kabbalistic thought, especially in the *Zohar*. It also demonstrates the direct correlation between the unity and union of God and His Bride and the existence of the Temple in Jerusalem. The destruction of the Temple brings about the separation of God and the *Shekhinah* and sends the *Shekhinah* into exile. All of this comes about because of the sins of Israel. When Israel sins, these sins give power to the forces of evil, preventing the *Shekhinah* from uniting with Her husband, and forcing the divine couple to turn away from each other. When Israel repents, God and the *Shekhinah* turn back to each other.

So important is the coupling of God and the *Shekhinah* that in *Zohar* 3:296a, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, the principal speaker in the *Zohar* describes it as the deepest of all mysteries.

According to *B. Ta'anit* 16a and *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:66, one of the names for the place where the Temple was built was "the bedchamber."

Sources:

Zohar 1:120b, 3:74b, 3:296a; *Zohar Hadash*, *Midrash Eikhah*, 92c-92d.

73. THE LAMENT OF THE SHEKHINAH

Since the destruction of the Temple, the *Shekhinah* descends night after night to the place of the Temple, enters the Holy of Holies, and sees that Her dwelling-house and Her couch are ruined and soiled. And She wanders up and down, wails and laments, and weeps bitterly. She looks at the place of the cherubs and lifts up Her voice and says, "My couch, My couch, My dwelling-place, where My husband would come to Me and lie in My arms, and all that I asked of Him, He would give Me. My couch, My couch, do you not remember how I came to you in joy and contentment, and how those youths, the cherubim, came forth to meet Me, beating their wings in welcome? How has the Ark of the Covenant which stood here come to be forgotten? From here went forth nourishment for all the world and light and blessing to all. Now I seek My husband in every place, but he is not here. My husband, My husband, where have You gone? Do You not remember how You held Your left arm beneath my head and Your right arm embraced me, and You vowed that You would never cease loving Me? And now You have forgotten Me."

This myth offers a moving account of the *Shekhinah* as a spurned lover. It follows the explicit husband-wife imagery of "The Sacred Bedchamber," which derives from the same source, *Zohar Hadash*.

Sources:

Zohar Hadash, *Midrash Eikhah*, 74b.



From: Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism*, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 54-56.



Judaism and the Afterlife

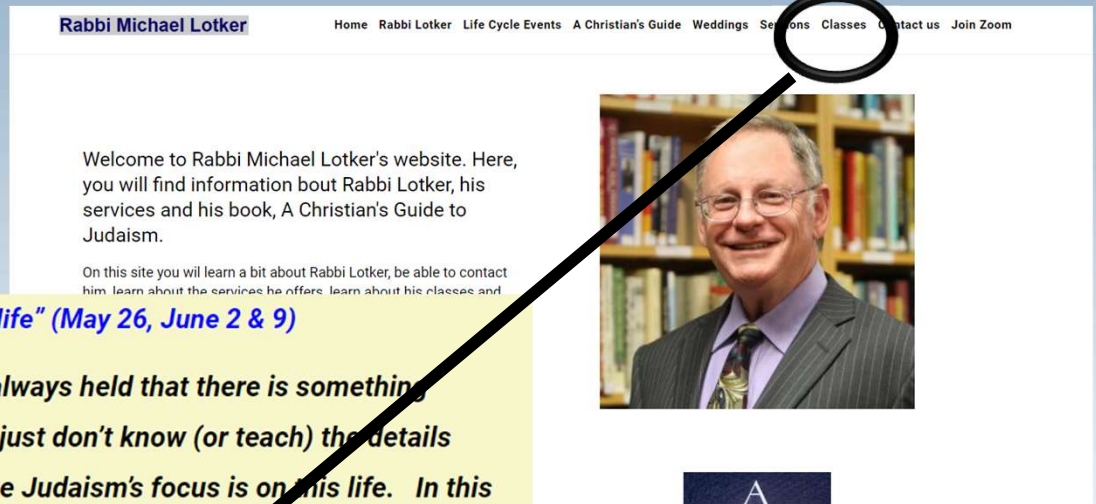
What do Jews believe about the afterlife?

- I don't know – go ask them!

What does Judaism teach about the afterlife?

- That there is one!
- Resurrection – a mainstay teaching of the rabbis.
- Reincarnation – a key element of Kabbalah
- Communication between worlds - a Talmudic teaching.

What Happens After I Die: Jewish Views of the Afterlife – on www.lotker.com



What Happens After I Die? – Jewish Views of the Afterlife” (May 26, June 2 & 9)

Many Jews are surprised to learn that Judaism has always held that there is something beyond the grave – a life in the “world to come.” We just don’t know (or teach) the details because no one has come back to tell us and because Judaism’s focus is on this life. In this class, we will explore the wide range of authentic Jewish beliefs about the afterlife and how these beliefs have affected Jewish traditions of burial and mourning. In our sessions we will examine what the Bible has to say, the Rabbinic and Talmudic thoughts and commentaries, the amazing world of medieval commentary, mystical and kabbalistic insights and well as what modern thinkers contribute. We will also explore the world of Jewish funeral and mourning customs and their origins.

- > Copies of Slides***
- > Moment Article: “What Does Judaism Have to Say About Life After Death”***
- > Video of Session #1***
- > Video of Session #2***
- > Video of Session #3***





Becoming More Spiritual

Step #1: Blessings and prayer

- The traditional blessings of Judaism:
 - “Thanks for the good stuff” blessings such as for bread, wine, and even going to the bathroom.
 - Mitzvah blessings
- Fixed liturgical prayer
 - Not because God needs our prayer
 - But because we need to pray together
- Simply talking to God.

The Learner's Guide to Blessings
Rabbi Michael Lotker

1. The opening...
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם...

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam...
Blessed are You, Yahweh/My Lord/Adonai/Ha-Shem, Our God, King of the Universe...

2. For a mitzvah.
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ...

*Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, a-sher ki-d'sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav
v'tzi-va-nu...*
Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, who has made us holy with His
commandments and commands us to...

3. Foods-bread
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא
לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, ha-mo-tzi le-chem min ha-a-retz.
Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from
the earth.

4. Foods-wine
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי
הַגֶּפֶן.

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, bo-ray p'ri ha-ga-fen.
Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

5. Foods-other
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַכֹּל
נִהְיָ בְּדַבְּרוֹ.

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, she-ha-kol nee-h'yeh beed-va-roh.
Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, whose word caused everything
into being.





6. Witness: Natural Phenomena

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, עֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה
בְּרֵאשִׁית.

Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, o-seh ma-a-say v'ray-sheet.
Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, who performs the work of creation.

7. The *Shehekiyanu*: On a special event, new clothes, furniture, seeing a friend after a
lapse of 30 days, a holiday, etc.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁחֵיָנוּ
וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֵמַן הַזֶּה.

*Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, she-hech-hey-ya-nu
v'key-y'ma-nu v'hee-gee-ya-nu laz-man ha-zeh.*
Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and
sustained us and enabled us to reach this occasion.

8. Mitzvot. Lighting Shabbat (or Chanukah) Candles

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת
(חֲנֻכָּה).

*Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, a-sheh ki-d'sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav
v'tzi-va-nu l'had-lik ner shel Shabbat (Cha-nu-kah).*

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, Who has made us holy with
His commandments and commands us to light the lights of Shabbat (Chanukah).

9. Mitzvot: For Studying Torah or any Jewish Texts:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה.

*Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, a-sheh ki-d'sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav
v'tzi-va-nu la-a-sok b'div-rey Torah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, Who has made us holy with
His commandments and commands us to occupy ourselves in words of Torah.

10. Before putting on a Tallit

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהִתְעַטֵּף בְּצִיצֵת.

*Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai, Eh-lo-hei-nu meh-lech ha-o-lam, a-sheh ki-d'sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav
v'tzi-va-nu l'hit-a-tayf bah-tzee-tzeet.*

Blessed are You, Adonai, Our God, King of the Universe, Who has made us holy with
His commandments and commands us to enwrap ourselves with the fringes.



Becoming More Spiritual

Step #2: Seeing the holy in the world.



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Becoming More Spiritual

Step #2: Seeing the holy in the world.



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Becoming More Spiritual

Step #2: Seeing the holy in the world.



God's Gift of Mustard

- If I didn't have any mustard at all, I could be happy.
- If I only had deli mustard, I would be fine.
- So how many choices of mustard do I find?



God's Gift of Mustard

One time, preparing for a sermon, I counted 39 choices of mustard at Gelson's!



God's Gift of Olive Oil

So how many choices of olive oil do you think I found at Whole Foods Market?



God's Gift of Olive Oil



But You've Got to Notice the Miracles

REVEREND FUN ©GCI, INC.



MAKE SURE YOU STOP FOR A SECOND, MOSES, AND REALIZE JUST HOW AMAZINGLY COOL THIS IS

Rabbinic story of Reuven and Shimon: They never looked up to see the miracle! All they saw was the mud and the muck (*Midrash Exodus Rabbah* 24.1)



Becoming More Spiritual

Step #2: Seeing the holy in the world.

The point:

- Notice the miracles in your life!
- Notice when you've been blessed!
- The “thank you card” for these gifts is to share your blessings with God's children.
- A gift without acknowledgement is a theft!



Becoming More Spiritual

Step #3: Religious New Year's Resolutions.

- Resolve to take on one new spiritual practice each year.
 - Prayer
 - Dietary
 - Good deeds
- Don't let the best be the enemy of the good!



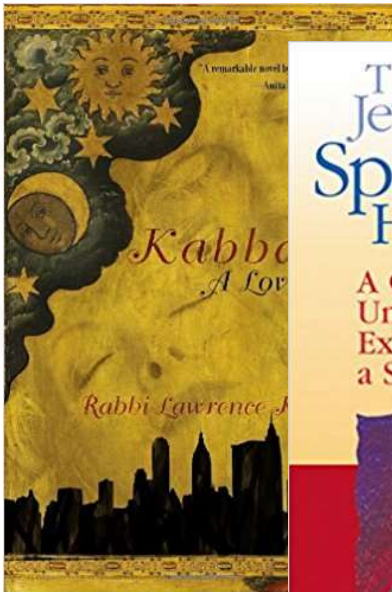
Becoming More Spiritual

Step #4: Seeing yourself as God's hands.

- Moving your prayer from
 - “Give me” to “Teach/help me” to “Use me”
 - Mystic – not Magic!
- You are God's shadow so bring God with you wherever you are.
 - Isaiah 43:12 quotes God as saying, “You are My witnesses and I am God.”
 - The rabbis say that this means God can only be God if we serve as God's witnesses!

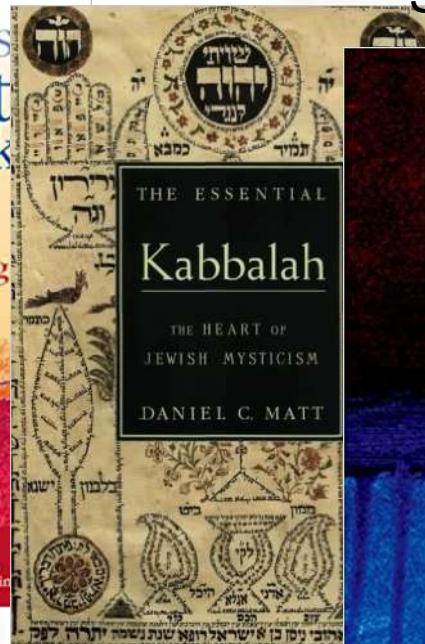
Suggested Reading

Kabbalah:
A Love Story



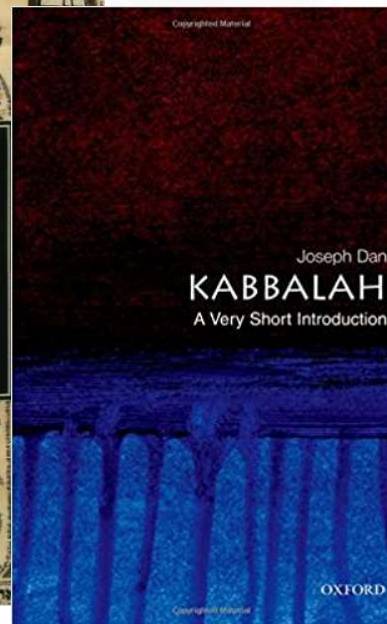
Rabbi
Lawrence
Kushner

The Essential
Kabbalah



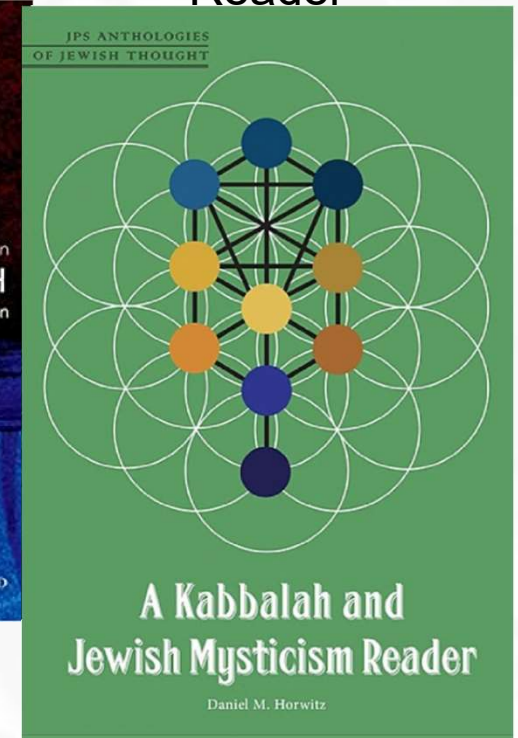
Daniel Matt

Kabbalah: A Very
Short Introduction

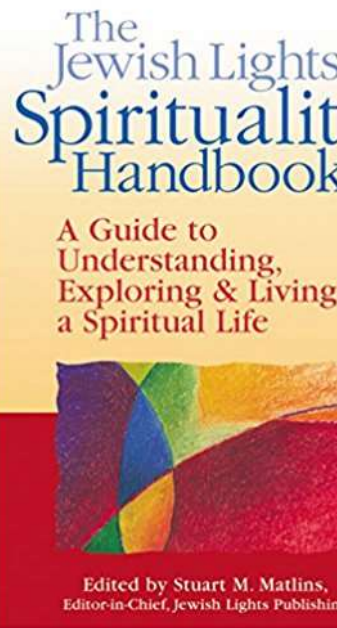


Joseph Dan

A Kabbalah &
Jewish
Mysticism
Reader



Daniel M. Horwitz



Stuart Matlins



Even More Suggested Reading (see my website)

Spirituality & Kabbalah: Further Reading [texts in bold are good places to start]

Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2006. Just what the title says.

Arthur Green is a modern Kabbalist who makes the mystical somewhat accessible to the modern, rational mind.

- *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2003. Green's perspectives on the future of Jewish Mysticism.
- *These Are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2000. Spiritual commentary on key Jewish/Hebrew terms.

Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, Summit Books, New York, 1988. A wonderful book which provides a much deeper spiritual insight into Shabbat and the Holidays.

Joel Lurie Grishaver, *And You Shall Be a Blessing: The Unfolding of the Six Words that Begin Every Brakhah*, Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, NJ, 1993. An entire book about the words *Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Olam!!*

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951. An amazingly beautiful short book on the meaning of the sabbath.

Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jewi in the Lotus*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1994. A poet's rediscovery of Jewish identity in Buddhist India.

Aryeh Kaplan, *Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide*, Schocken Books, NY, 1985.

Books By Lawrence Kushner: There are several, all wonderful and somewhat hard to follow. They include:

- ***Kabbalah – A Love Story***, Morgan Road Books, 2006. A wonderful readable work of fiction with amazing insights. Also check out this discussion guide <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/kabbalah-a-love-story-01guide>
- *God Was In This Place and I, I Did Not Know It (Finding Self, Spirituality, and Ultimate Meaning)*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1991.
- *The River of Light: Spirituality, Judaism, Consciousness*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1993.
- (Kushner and Kerry M. Olitzky) *Sparks Beneath the Surface: A Spiritual Commentary on the Torah*, Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, NJ, 1993. Contains spiritual commentaries on each Torah portion.
- *Invisible Lines of Connection: Sacred Stories of the Ordinary*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1996. A wonderful, readable collection of stories.
- ***The Book of Miracles: A Young Person's Guide to Jewish Spirituality***, Jewish Lights, 2001. A wonderful collection of stories for young and old.

Stuart M. Matlins, ed., *The Jewish Lights Spirituality Handbook: A Guide to Understanding, Exploring & Living a Spiritual Life*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2001. 51 different authors provide brief (3-10 page) essays on a wide variety of topics.

Books by Daniel C. Matt: Matt is the world's leading scholar on the Zohar and has published widely on it:

- ***The Essential Kabbalah: the Heart of Jewish Mysticism***, HarperSanFrancisco, 1995. Selections from many Kabbalistic texts with helpful notes.
- *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2004. Two volumes of this scholarly edition have been published as of 2004.
- *Zohar Annotated and Explained: Skylight Paths*, Woodstock VT, 2002. Selections from the Zohar, annotated and explained. Very accessible.
- *God and the Big Bang: Discovering Harmony Between Science and Spirituality*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 1996. Matt's theology explained.

Kerry M. Olitzky & Stuart A. Copans, *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1991. Making a Jewish connection to 12 step programs.

Simcha Paull Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, Roman & Littlefield, 2009. THE scholarly book on the wide array of Jewish views of the afterlife.

These are two incredibly wonderful and inspiring books by Rachel Naomi Remen, an oncologist who overcame her own serious medical challenges. They are a collection of brief stories, many of which have Jewish themes.

- ***Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal***, Riverhead Books, NY, 1996.
- ***My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging***, Riverhead Books, NY, 2000.

Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism*, Oxford, 2004. An extensive and wonderfully annotated compendium of Jewish myths.

Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Books, NY, 1946. This is **the** major, scholarly text in the field. Very comprehensive but not light reading.

Elie Kaplan Spitz, *Does the Soul Survive? A Jewish Journey to Belief in Afterlife, Past Lives & Living with Purpose*, Jewish Lights, 2000. A wonderful investigation into the soul and reincarnation by a Conservative Rabbi.

R. Sonsino & D. B. Syme, *What Happens After I Die*, 1990. A readable introductory overview.

David J. Wolpe, *The Healer of Shattered Hearts: A Jewish View of God*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, NY, 1990. Very deep and moving book about relationships with God.

David J. Wolpe, *In Speech and In Silence: The Jewish Quest for God*, Henry Holt and Co., New York, NY, 1992. More depth and insight.



The Last Word

The Last Word

MY MOTHER, WHO TURNED EIGHTY more than a few years ago, tells me that as you get older, it only gets worse: "No matter what you say, God always has the last word." That strikes me as wise, especially from a woman who has refined to high art the skill of getting in the last word. But it does make me wonder: What exactly is the "last word"?

If you and God have been adversaries, then the last word might be a triumphalist, "I'm God. You're not." Or, even worse, "I'm God. You're dead." If you've been friends and developed a good working relationship, the last word might be, "Thanks for all your help." But if, after all those years, you've come to understand God as "The Infinite One of whom you are a finite dimension, a unique but fleeting expression, then it would be, "I'm God. So are you." Or maybe just, "What took you so long?"

(But, of course, with all distinctions gone, the idea of a "conversation" is itself only a confusing metaphor: What can a wave say to the ocean? What can the ocean say to a wave?)

Before we begin our journey, we are one with all Creation. Once life begins, we find ourselves discrete, individuated, autonomous. And after the journey ends, God gets the last word: "Welcome." With some luck, we get glimmers of the great unity even during our lifetime. We realize that our life—and everything else—has all been part of the divine organism all along, that things are turning out "just the way God intends."

This is not to say that God is running the world like some overextended, occasionally under-performing puppeteer, depriving us of our freedom or moral responsibility. God is simply within all of it. And when we become aware of this, as we do during moments of great meaning or insight, it is as if God were the One who unites (and therefore runs) everything. Questions of free will and determinism become meaningless.

Everything exists within and derives its reality from God, including us. We are dimensions of the divine psyche, seeking to become fully self-aware. And, when we raise our consciousness, we not only realize that we have never really been apart from our divine Source at all, we realize that we also participate in the process itself. You may not be able to have an intimate relationship with such a God, but you are its pride and joy, its best hope.

My colleague, Rabbi Nehemiah Polen, taught me that the world simply is. It is the way it is supposed to be, the way it must be. Such a vision is achieved by a surrender of the ego, by submerging your self in the enveloping waters of divine being. We say the last word, "Oh my God!" to the universe and lose ourselves as we do so.

BEING IS NOT FROM OR BY GOD. IT IS OF GOD. There is only one player: God. In the words of Deuteronomy: "The Lord alone is God: There is nothing else!"

ALL THEOLOGY is autobiography.

From:
Lawrence Kushner, *Invisible Lines of Connection: Sacred Stories of the Ordinary*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1996, pp. 144-145.



We Are God's Shadow

by Rabbi Mike Lotker

We, are God's shadooooow,
strolling down the avenue.
Yes we, are God's shadooooow,
knowing that we've got a lot to do.

Creation's incomplete,
The world's a mess.
Pray with your feet.
And give mitzvot your best.

Yes, we are God's Shadow
Our work is called tikkun olam!

We, are God's shadooooow,
When we're helping people thrive.
Yes we, are God's shadooooow,
God needs us to keep God's work alive.

So if you want to see
God in this place.
Just look around
At each and every face

Cause we, are God's shadooooow,
And God is here in you and me!



Next Class: Children of Abraham

“Children of Abraham: Comparing Judaism, Christianity and Islam.” (August 4, 11, 18 & 25)

About half the people of the world worship the God of Abraham as members of faith traditions that trace themselves back 4000 years to this inspired individual. In four classes, Rabbi Lotker will introduce these three faiths with special emphasis on where they are similar and where they differ. We will read texts from the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Scripture and the Koran relating to the Garden of Eden, Abraham, Moses, and others to help understand the fascinating history and theology that shape our worlds to this day. Differences in beliefs, historical origins and the reasons behind historical and current conflicts will be explored. We will also take a detailed look at Holy Neighborhood of Jerusalem and the sacred sites to be found there.

CNN Series Of Interest



I hope that the CNN series might be interesting for our own discussions in the “Children of Abraham” series starting 8/4/21