



The Ziegler School
of Rabbinic Studies

בית המדרש ע"ש זיגלר

Walking with God

Edited By
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דרכיה דרכי נעם

In Memory of Louise Held

The Held Foundation

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DEAN AND VICE PRESIDENT

IN THE GLORY DAYS OF THE MIDDLE AGES, TWO TITANS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, Rabbi Moses Maimonides (the Rambam) and Rabbi Moses Nachmanides (the Ramban) sparred. Their argument: was the obligation to believe in God one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, or was it the ground on which all the 613 commandments stood? Neither disputed that Jewish life flows from the fountain of faith, that connecting to God is a life-long journey for the seeking Jew and a pillar of Jewish life and religion.

Not only the Middle Ages, but the modern age affirms that same conviction. Conservative Judaism, in *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, affirms, “We believe in God. Indeed, Judaism cannot be detached from belief in, or beliefs about God. ... God is the principal figure in the story of the Jews and Judaism.” In the brochure, *Conservative Judaism: Covenant and Commitment*, the Rabbinical Assembly affirms, “God and the Jewish People share a bond of love and sacred responsibility, which expresses itself in our biblical *brit* (covenant).”

It is to aid the contemporary Jew in the duty and privilege of exploring that relationship, of enlisting the rich resources of Judaism’s great sages through the ages, that the **Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at the American Jewish University**, in partnership with the **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism** and the **Rabbinical Assembly**, has compiled and published this adult education course focused on Jewish apprehensions of God. 12 essays and worksheets will open a wide range of insights and conceptualizations of the One who is beyond all words, beyond all conceptualizations, yet – paradoxically – who is as close as the human heart and who permeates all space and time. Typical of Conservative Judaism, these essays integrate traditional and academic insights and approaches, celebrate the pluralism of Jewish diversity throughout history, and insist that open-minded and critical study can energize a faith attained without blinders.

It remains our happy duty to thank the **Held Family Foundation**, and especially **Mr. Harold Held**, dear friend to the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies and the American Jewish University, and a philanthropic visionary, for making the production and dissemination of this remarkable tool possible. I’d also like to thank **Dr. Robert Wexler**, President of the American Jewish University for his steady support and encouragement of this project from its inception, and **Rabbi Jerome Epstein** and the **United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism**, and **Rabbi Joel Meyers** and the **Rabbinical Assembly**, for their partnership in producing the project. Thanks to Rami Wernik, Acting Dean of the Fingerhut School of Education, for his expertise as a pedagogue. And it is also a personal pleasure to thank my student and colleague, **Ms. Deborah Silver**, whose professionalism, insight, patience and diligence have produced a work of real excellence.

May the Holy Blessing One enliven your study, awaken your heart, and open your soul to the wonders of the Divine, and may the essays and worksheets which follow help you to walk the time honored path of Torah and mitzvot in a spirit of wonder, pluralism, openness, intellectual honesty, and strengthened faith.

B’virkat Shalom,

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

Dean, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

Vice President, American Jewish University

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

INTRODUCTION

This book is the first in the Ziegler Adult Learning series. Our aim is to provide high quality, stimulating and challenging materials to enable adults to expand their understanding of the basic concepts and tenets of Conservative Judaism – and to expose them to the thinkers, texts and ideas which underpin our tradition. The audience we have in mind is the questioning adult congregant who might not be entirely familiar with Jewish sources.

The book will enable you to teach a series of twelve adult education classes on the subject of God. It contains twelve self-contained units, which are arranged chronologically. Eleven of these comprise:

- an essay
- a set of four texts, with questions
- a fifth text for further/creative study
- session suggestions

The final unit has no essay: instead, it provides an opportunity for participants to reflect upon and consolidate their learning.

RESOURCES

For each session you will need:

- the essays (for session 1, essays 1 and 2; for the rest, the essay for the subsequent session to hand out at the end)
- copies of the texts

It will also be useful to have copies of the Tanakh, in Hebrew and in English.

For the first session, you might also wish to provide every participant with a notebook. This will serve as a journal, in which the participant's own thoughts and insights can be recorded. If your budget will not accommodate this, it is nevertheless strongly recommended that participants be encouraged to bring their own resources so that they can journal, and/or for you to bring spare paper to every session. Busy congregants are unlikely to be able to keep these materials in their minds from session to session, and a journal will provide them with tangible evidence of their learning, as well as something to refer to after the course is over. You might also wish to provide a ring binder, or a folder of some kind, in which participants can keep the essays and texts.

SUGGESTED SESSION FORMAT

Below is a basic format, with timings, for a two-hour session. Please feel free to amend it as it suits you – you might wish to allow more time for chavruta and less for group work, for example.

INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

Orientation – recap and consolidate what happened in the last session. Elicit the main points of the essay for today/issues/questions/problems the essay raises (we strongly recommend eliciting rather than 'teaching' – easier on you, and it involves the participants more. It will also be quicker and allow more time for chavruta.)

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

CHAVRUTA (30 MINS)

Study of texts in chavruta

GROUP WORK (35 MINS)

- Presentation from the chavruta groups
- Consolidation of what has been learned from the texts

BREAK (10 MINS)

- (If you use a text for part 2 of the session, you can hand it out here)

GROUP STUDY (40 MINS)

- Various options are provided: see individual session suggestions

CLOSEDOWN/JOURNAL (10 MINS)

- What did we learn?
- How does what we learned today sit in the context of previous sessions?
- Journal entries
- Hand out the essay for next time.

A FEW POINTS TO NOTE:

- We recognize you are busy! The session notes have been designed to enable you to prepare your teaching quickly and easily, so you might want to read them even before you begin to prepare the essay and texts. Basically, if you read the essay & have some answers to the questions on the chavruta texts you will be ready to run the session.
- Four chavruta texts are provided per session, with questions to help guide the study. The idea is that you split your participants into four chavruta groups. Initially, give each group one of the texts. When the time comes to report back, give every group all of the texts so that they can study them as their colleagues report on them, and take them home. This technique enables a lot of learning to be covered in a comparatively short time, and has the added benefit of empowering participants to teach each other. Then again, the sessions are packed and the material is rich, so you might want to be selective.
- You may wish to use only two, or only one, of the texts for chavruta. The session has been designed to work whatever you decide. We only have one plea – please let the participants interact with the actual texts. Even when they are complex – and some of them are – there is a magic in people studying together which invariably means that precious insights arise and are shared. If you wish to change the questions at the bottom of every text to help focus the discussion, please feel free – they are only suggestions.
- It is entirely up to you what you do with the second part of the session. You can use the fifth text, or come up with something of your own – we give some ideas in the session outlines. We have sometimes made the fifth text one with which the participants might already be familiar so they can look at it with new eyes.
- Finally, please do not feel limited by the texts we have provided. There is a huge amount of material outside this book which could be used, and which, for reasons which include copyright and space limitations, we have not been able to include. Popular song lyrics, for example, are a rich resource.

GOD IN KABBALAH

RABBI PINCHAS GILLER, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION

God in Kabbalah is the same God as elsewhere in the Jewish tradition. There is really no special category, since kabbalistic ideas grow out of the most normative and widespread teachings. What is unique to kabbalistic ways of thinking is the various ways it perceives of reaching and understanding God.

EMANATION

The most essential teaching of Kabbalah is that God emanates into the phenomenal world. This godliness flows into the world as a form of Divine energy and it is the task of the kabbalist to receive and direct that energy. The presence of the Divine flow in the world also creates many signs and symbols which can be interpreted and understood by those who are versed in kabbalistic ideas.

Accordingly, there are many metaphors and symbols in kabbalah for the way that reality flows into the world. The process is compared to a flame, attached tenuously to a wick.¹ Other kabbalistic works describe lights that flow out of the throne rooms of Heaven, angels that journey up and down the ladder of Creation, and a series of chambers in a multi-leveled palace, which may be accessed by a Divine chariot. All of this imagery has its origins in the classical literature of Judaism, the Bible and the Talmud. The common aspect is that God emanates Divine essence to the physical reality of everyday life. The flow of Divine energy into the world is known as *Atzilut*.

The most popular and recognized system was that of ten successive stages of God's emanation into the world. These stages are called the *sefirot*, the Divine spheres or emanations. God is infinite and the individual can never experience God directly, but the sefirot are the intermediary that sentient beings do experience and with which they relate.

THE SEFIROT

The Kabbalah teaches that God's divine energy emanates into the world through the medium of the sefirot. The sefirot are realms or levels of existence, a series of emanations and gradations of Divine light that cascades into the world. They are the intermediary bridge between the abstract, infinite God and the material world.

The sefirot first appear in the mysterious little work *Sefer Yetzirah* ("Book of Formation") some time in late antiquity, between the year 200 to 500 C.E. With the subsequent emergence of kabbalah in the 12th century the sefirot came to be understood as each harboring a certain power or aspect of God. According to this view, every sefirah is an aspect of God that can also be symbolized by dozens of euphemisms and associations. Hence, each of the sefirot spins off a host of subsidiary associations and meanings.

The sefirotic system thus explains how the perfection of God could radiate into the imperfection of present existence. Besides being a map of the workings of the Divine and the structure of the Universe, the sefirot are also a map of the human soul.

MALKHUT AND THE SHEKHINAH

The most immediate of the Sefirot is *Malkhut* ("Kingdom"). Malkhut is the simple fact of existence, and all things, animate and inanimate, share this dimension. To exist in Malkhut is simply to be, and in this way, even inanimate things are infused with a degree of being part of the existence that emanates from God. Hence, some kabbalistic systems taught that human beings could be reincarnated into rocks and streams, because everything shares the quality of Malkhut.

¹ *Azriel of Gerona, Perush ha-Aggadot le-Rabbenu Azriel. Edited by Isaiah Tishby. Jerusalem, 1945, p. 118*

GOD IN KABBALAH

The *Shekhinah*, the existence of God in the world, is the main association with the sefirah Malkhut. The traditions of the Shekhinah are some of the most widespread understandings to have come from kabbalah. Originally, the Shekhinah was thought of as simply part of God, the aspect of God that literally “dwelt” (*shachan*) in the first and Second Temples in Jerusalem, in the innermost part of the Temple that was known as the Holy of Holies. In the Bible, it is called the “kavod”, or glory, that descends with Moses as he receives the tablets; its physical nature is like sapphire, an ongoing metaphor for the existence of a transcendent light with a physical body. With the destruction of the Temple, that presence went into exile with the people. In the Torah and generally in Talmud, the Shekhinah is understood as equivalent to the nature of God’s formal presence among the Jews.

In exile, wandering, the Shekhinah came to be understood as the immanent factor in God. Understood that way, the Shekhinah was a spectral, ephemeral presence in the lives of the Jewish people. When ten people prayed together, when three recited the grace after meals, when two people studied together or when even one man stood enrobed in his prayer shawl and tefillin, the Shekhinah was understood as resting upon them.

Constant reference to the Shekhinah, with its attendant feminine vocalization, led to her being conceived as a female presence. This, in turn, led to the Shekhinah’s association with all of the images of suffering femininity in the Hebrew Bible: Rachel dying in childbirth, the childless widow of the book of Lamentations, the ruined city of Jerusalem in the book of Isaiah. The image of the suffering woman was a metaphor for the existential state of exile, until gradually, in the public mind, the Shekhinah became a woman, apposite to God. Finally the later midrashim began to refer to her as entirely separate from God, God’s consort, bride and wife. As God’s consort, the Shekhinah drifts in and out of union with God, Their unification came to be seen as the time that divine energy suffuses the world, while their separation was seen as the deathly alienation of the Diaspora experience.

The Bahir, the first kabbalistic text,² wedded the immanent notion of God’s presence exemplified by the Shekhinah to feminine symbols such as bride, princess, mother and daughter. Gradually, a number of archetypal Freudian or mystic images also came to be equated with her, such as date and stone. By the time of the Zohar, the Shekhinah is understood as presiding over the phenomenal world, symbolized by all mystical images of archetypal femininity: the hazelnut, the pomegranate, the dove, the well, the cave, the moon, the rose, the sea, the land and its fields. Because of the influence of the cult of the Shekhinah, there are more symbols for Malkhut than any other of the sefirot.

The experience of Malkhut is fundamentally emptiness. This fuels its primary association with the Shekhinah’s femininity. The sense of the Shekhinah as a receptacle, to be filled up by the aggregate maleness of the upper sefirot, led to the Zohar reinforcing the trend of the late midrashim and conceiving of her as the consort, wife and lover of God. While the Bahir’s paradigm for the relationship of God and the Shekhinah was the paradigm of the father and the daughter, the Zohar emphasized the sexual union of the divine and the corporeal. In due course these ideas evolved into the rite of the Divine marriage celebrated during the Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat service, the singing of the hymn *Lecha Dodi* and the joyous march to escort the Sabbath bride or queen.

YESOD, HOD AND NETZACH

The sefirah immediately above Malkhut, and the point of conjunction with it, is referred to as *Yesod* (“Foundation”). Yesod governs the realm of sexuality. In practical terms, an entity that lacks the ability to reproduce, such as a rock, would not have an aspect of Yesod in its existence, since only creations that have the quality of sexual reproduction can possess it.

Above the realm of pure existence, as exemplified by Malkhut, and the added realm of sexuality, as embodied in Yesod, are two further, parallel aspects of physical existence. *Hod* (“Grandeur”) refers to the physical scope of a sentient being’s existence, while *Netzach* (“Eternity”) refers to how long they will live. Hod is generally placed on the left of the sefirotic tree, with Netzach on the right. All of the bottom four sefirot in the world soul, the cosmic order and the human soul are called the *nefesh*, or earthly soul of existence.

² The date of the Bahir is in dispute. It was probably written somewhere between the 3rd and 10th centuries.

GOD IN KABBALAH

HESED, DIN AND RACHAMIM

While, as we have seen, the lowest four sefirot address the aspects of pure physical existence, the next set governs the emotions. This set is made up of the three sefirot: *Hesed*, *Din* and *Rahamim*. *Hesed* (“Lovingkindness”; also *Gedulah*) represents the spirit of pure lovingkindness, while *Din* (“Judgment”; also *Gevurah*) is the realm of judging and withdrawal. Together they comprise the psychological and emotional dimension of the soul, which is called the *ruach*.

Hesed implies the quality of lovingkindness, but it is also a spirit of pure giving. Hence any interaction, even to the point of violence, is also a form of Hesed. By contrast, Din is literally judgment, marked by the quality of detachment. As a Divine quality, it refers to God’s stern behavior to the world and the Jews. The vicissitudes of life might seem to be trials and punishments but, in the larger scheme of things, they are only outcomes of what, justifiably, according to humankind’s respect for God’s law, ought to happen. Judgment, then, is really what happens when God withdraws to let things take their course.

The world only operates through a combination of Hesed and Din. If, in one’s personal life, one wanted to be an entity of pure lovingkindness one would only end up as a slave, totally subservient to the needs of others. If, on the other hand, one withdrew into a world governed by Din, one’s behavior would be altogether imploded, with no relation to events of the phenomenal world.

The middle way between the two extremes is called Rahamim, or *Tiferet* (“Splendor”). On the personal level, Tiferet is the unifying sefirah. It represents the combination of Din and Hesed. The term “Tiferet” also refers to the aggregate power of the six middle sefirot, Hesed, Din, Rahamim, Netzach, Hod and Yesod. Together they form an entity that is viewed as the consort of Malkhut, the Shekhinah. It is perhaps for this reason that the six sefirot of Tiferet are symbolized by the sixth Hebrew letter, Vav, which is also a phallic symbol.

HOKHMAH, BINAH AND DA’AT

The highest sefirot may be grouped together as being analogous to the highest levels of the soul, namely the *Neshamah*. While Hesed, Din and Rachamim compose the psychological function of the universe, the sefirot *Hokhmah* (also spelled Chokhmah), *Binah* and *Da’at* (acronym: ChaBaD), by contrast, compose the highest levels of Divine intellect.

Hokhmah (“Wisdom”) is empirical wisdom; the accumulation of facts and figures, the ideas that can be demonstrated by experience. It is often portrayed as the Divine seed that is nurtured in the engendering womb of the feminine sefirah, Binah (“Intuition”).

Binah is intuitive wisdom. It is simultaneously the knowledge of how things interact, without a prior assessment of their natures. Because of this intuitive quality, it is also a feminine archetype. All images of the womb are understood of being symbols of Binah. In many creation narratives, the sefirot are portrayed as being born out of the womb of Binah. Binah is often considered an older mentor to the Shekhinah.

Da’at (“Knowledge”) is the highest attainment of wisdom, the union of Hokhmah and Binah. It is therefore, the highest human attainment. Sitting at the apex of human spiritual attainment, it is also the Malkhut of God, the root and base of the beginning of the Divine reality, a system of sefirot whose nature is seen as being beyond human comprehension.

GOD IN KABBALAH

THE EVOLUTION OF KETER AND PLURAL SEFIROT

The idea of the sefirot could not remain just as it was; the idea, when queried by the essential tenets of Judaism, bred contradictions that had to be resolved. For example, querying the nature of Da'at raised a theological problem. Just as Malkhut is the ground of all sentient existence, so Da'at, the highest level of the sefirot, in the ground of God's existence, was understood as being simultaneously the highest achievement of human consciousness and the first given of where God begins. Yet God, by definition according to Jewish theology, should be infinite, abstract and unbounded by limitation. Human beings, by definition, are limited and concrete, and their minds are limited as well. If one argues that God's ground of being is the human mind, then one is limiting God, for the human consciousness is necessarily limited. Such limitation of God is necessarily idolatry, as is any limitation of God. Hence, God cannot be in Da'at.

So, early in the development of the doctrine of the sefirot, a distinction was made between Da'at, which is the sefirah that is the highest attainment of human consciousness, and *Keter*, which is a parallel sefirah that is the beginning of the purely divine realm of God. Da'at and Keter are often used interchangeably in discussions of the sefirot, but, when examined closely, they refer to two different, parallel realms.

Another adjustment of the sefirotic system occurred while trying to resolve the contradictions of the Zohar. The Zohar contains many apparently contradictory traditions, and readers of the Zohar had a difficult time trying to sort them out and synthesize one consistent mystical system. One idea that became current over the course of the Zohar's reception was that every sefirah is within a set of ten sefirot, so that there are sefirot within sefirot. This tradition became normative in Tzfat, at the hands of Moshe Cordovero. It also became part of one of the most popular kabbalistic rites, namely that of counting the Omer, the intermediate days between Passover and Shavuot.

ATZMUT AND KELIM

A second question arose from the problem of the limitation of the purely abstracted God. That question was, are the sefirot *actually* God? Or is God ultimately separate from the sefirot, and therefore God just pours God's divinity in to the sefirot, as if they are instruments or vessels of Godly energy and flow? The first point of view, that the sefirot were essential to God and actually part of God, was called the doctrine of *atzmut* ("essence"). The second, the idea that the sefirot were vessels for God to pour into, and that God remained essentially abstracted and separate from the sefirot, was called *kelim* ("vessels").

In Jewish theological terms, the idea of kelim was certainly preferable, as it backed away from characterizing God in physical terms. While the early kabbalists up to and including the main sections of the Zohar in general, followed the tradition of atzmut, the later strata of the Zohar, namely the sections called *Tiqqunim* and *Ra'aya Meheimna*, followed the understanding of kelim. The influential Tzfat kabbalist Moshe Cordovero made the understanding of kelim normative in Tzfat, which in turn set the stage for his student, Isaac Luria, to develop the doctrine of "the breaking of the vessels."

THE FOUR WORLDS

Tension over the Jewish idea of the abstraction of God versus the symbolic and mythic aspect of the doctrine of the sefirot led to a further spin on the nature of the sefirotic system. The doctrine of the four worlds posited that there were at least three sefirotic systems, overlapping on one another, with a highest system above the other three which was not subject to sefirotic portrayal. This highest system was the wholly abstracted God posited by Maimonides and the other Jewish philosophers.

GOD IN KABBALAH

The names of the worlds are taken from the principal verbs used in the Creation accounts of Genesis. The lowest level, consonant with the most prosaic reality, is the world of action, *'Assiyah*. Above the world of action is the phenomenal world, the world of formation, *Yezirah*. Above that is the world of pure creation, *B'riah*. The highest is the world of abstracted and inaccessible divinity, as posited by Maimonides, the world of *'Azilut*.

The doctrine of the four worlds is hinted at in early kabbalah, and the term “worlds” was used as a euphemism for the sefirot in a number of early sources as well as the main sections of the Zohar. The normative conception of the four worlds emerged in a number of sources that began to circulate in the fourteenth century, such as in the later strata of the Zohar, the sections called Tiqqunim and Ra'aya Meheimna, as well as a short contemporary work known as the *Masekhet Azilut*.

THE COSMIC FAMILY

The final sections of the Zohar are called the *Idras* (“gatherings”). These texts detail the death of the various members of the Zohar’s cohort of mystics. These deaths come about as they visualize a new structure of the cosmic order, in which the ten sefirot and four worlds are subsumed to a larger vision of a Cosmic Family.

The uppermost of these is *Attika Kadisha*, the “Ancient Holy One” who is a patriarchal figure. Beneath this is his disciple or grandchild, *Zeir Anpin*. *Zeir Anpin* has a consort as well, who is called *Nukvah*. In their purest form, these three initial countenances are counterparts to three groupings of the sefirot. *Attika Kadisha* (who is also called *Arikh Anpin* (“the long face”) and *Attik Yomin* (“the Ancient of Days”, from chapter 12 of the book of Daniel) represents the grouping of the sefirot Hokhmah, Binah and Da'at. *Zeir Anpin* represents the middle six sefirot that had previously been grouped under the rubric of Tiferet. *Nukvah* is analogous to the Shekhinah.

This structure is further embellished in the *Idra Zuta* (“the smaller gathering”) with the addition of two further Personae, Abba and Imma. Together, they bear and nurture their child, *Zeir*. This extended family and their trials become a theme in Lurianic kabbalah.

BIBLICAL PARADIGMS

All of the sefirot were subject to symbolization, but no system of symbols was more widespread than the associating of the sefirot with different Biblical paradigms. If certain figures from the Bible were associated with given sefirot, then one could read the Bible as an enormous code for the interaction of the sefirot.

The paradigm of Hesed is Abraham. He was always giving of himself. He sprang up to host the angels who came to visit him after his circumcision, he pleaded for God’s mercy on Sodom and Gomorrah, he even gave his wife away to other men on two occasions, the Pharaoh and Avimelekh. Obediently he follows God’s command to bring his only son as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. So Abraham is always a paradigm of loving, as it links to the giving of oneself.

Isaac, on the other hand, is the paradigm of Din. Repeatedly he assesses a situation without interacting with it. On the way to Mt Moriah, he asks his father, “Here is the fire and the knife, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” At the end of his life, old and blind, when Jacob presents himself to steal Esau’s blessing, he exclaims, “The hands are the hands of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob.” In each situation, Isaac does not respond to what he knows. He continues walking with his father, he gives the blessing to Jacob in spite of the discrepancy. This is the essential emotional quality of Din. Isaac is detached from what he knows, like a judge who doesn’t argue the case before but sits on the side mainly passively listening, then dispassionately rendering the verdict.

GOD IN KABBALAH

The middle way between the extreme of Din and Hesed is the middle path of Rahamim or Tiferet, and that sefirah is linked to Jacob. Jacob's life is defined by upheavals and rank untruths, his deception of Esau and Laban, the pain of the loss of his son Joseph and the death of Rachel. His life is the hardest and most complex and he is least easy to characterize for, essentially, the dilemmas that Jacob had are the same dilemmas that conventional people deal with.

Each patriarch's spouse complements his sefirotic identity. Therefore, just as Abraham is the paradigm of Hesed, so Sarah is the paradigm of Din. She is a judgment specialist. When she hears Abraham discussing her having a child with the angels, she laughs bitterly and says, "How can I have a child when my husband is so old?" When Abraham palms her off as his sister to Pharaoh and Avimelekh, she goes along without protest or interaction. According to a tradition in the Midrash, when she hears that Abraham has taken Isaac up to the mountain to be sacrificed, she dies immediately of a broken heart, not being able to imagine any divine intervention or mercy. Hence, Sarah is clearly the paradigm of Din.

Rebekah, Isaac's spouse, is the paradigm of Hesed, just as Isaac is the paradigm of Din. In every situation, she is outgoing and interactive. At the well, when she is first spotted by Abraham's servant Eliezer, she is peripatetic; running to and fro, washing his feet, watering the camels; she is like a giving spring of Hesed herself. Similarly, as she prepares to help Jacob steal the blessing from Esau, she slaughters the goats, skins them, prepares them as a meal. In every way she is an energetic font of activity as opposed to Isaac's imploded Din and passivity.

Jacob is more complex and so his spousal relationships are more complex. Rachel, his apparent true love and erotic ideal, is the paradigm of Malkhut. Yet Leah, the apparently despised first wife, is indicative of something higher, for she is the paradigm of Binah, the next sefirah up, which is a transformative, intuitive feminine wisdom. So it is that Jacob's relationship with Leah is not devoid of spiritual qualities, but they are tucked away in the higher realms of the sefirotic tree, and therefore difficult or impossible for an outsider to understand.

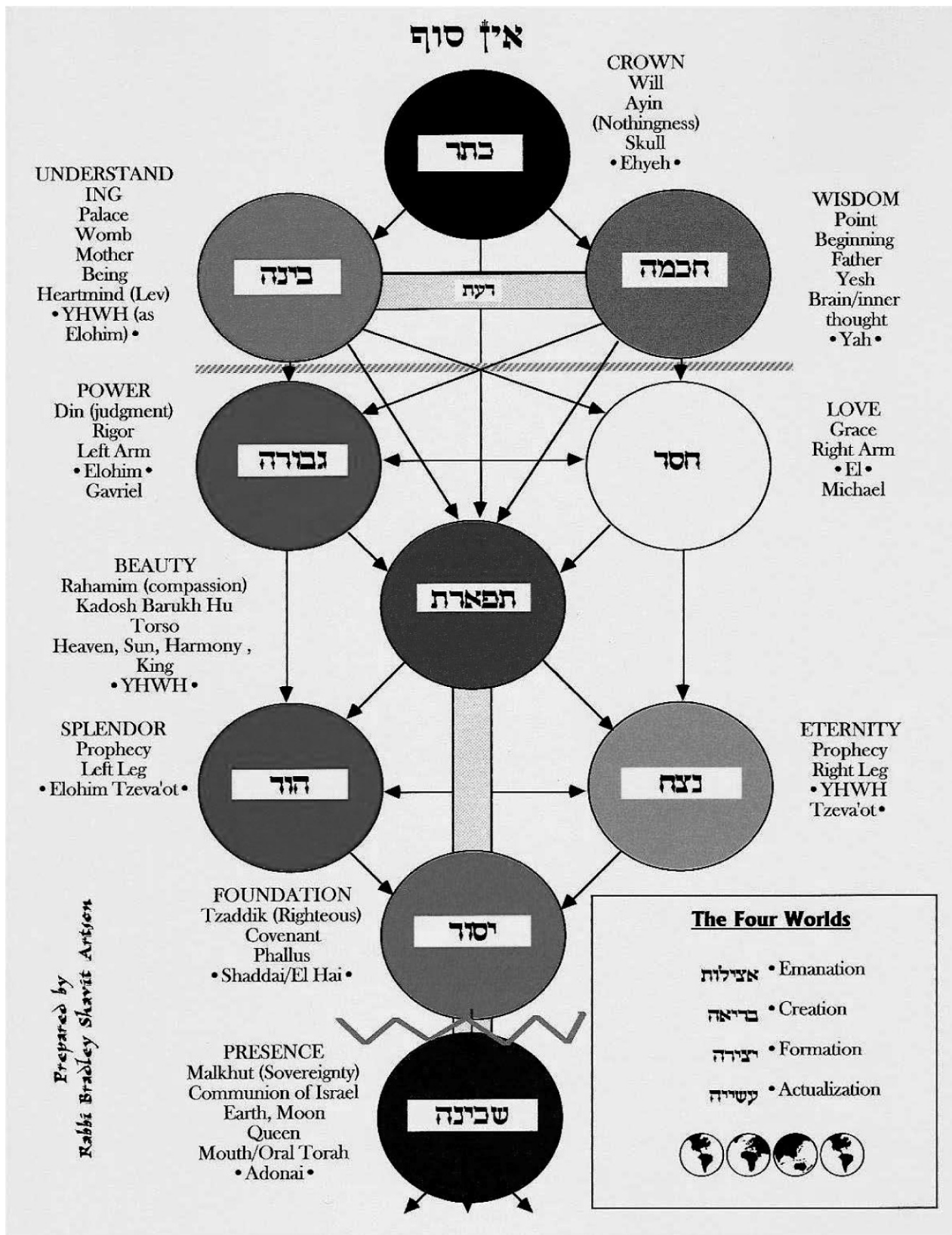
The lower sefirot of the cosmic Nefesh also have paradigmatic identities. Aaron, as the original high priest, represents the sefirah Hod, as there is no earthly grandeur, in the Jewish context, greater than the Temple. Moses, who forever will be the greatest of the prophets, is the paradigm of everlastingness or Netzach. Joseph, because of his great forbearance in the attempted seduction by his master's wife is considered the paradigm of Yesod, for sexual energy is a mute force that must be conquered and channeled. Finally, David, the once and future king, is the central paradigm of Malkhut, as he is the founder of the messianic line.

The most direct ritual reflection of these paradigmatic relationships occurs on the holiday of Sukkot when over the course of the seven days of the holiday, each one of the "seven shepherds" are invited into the Sukkah for one of the festive meals. This ceremony, the inviting of the "guests" really is an invocation of the shaping and "fixing" of each of the dimensions of existence, just as the cube-shaped booth itself denotes six directions and the four species of plants are waved in various directions in the synagogue service.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the kabbalistic tradition provides a number of systems and paradigms for human beings to find their way to God. The paradigms are complex, requiring study and effort to understand, and a lot of terminology is involved. Yet the message of the kabbalistic tradition is not that God is inaccessible. On the contrary, while it wrestles frankly with the difficulty and fragmentation of staying in relationship with God, it is also infused with images of ecstatic union and love.

GOD IN KABBALAH



GOD IN KABBALAH – TEXT 1

זוהר דף רנז עמוד ב

ואית למנדע דאיהו אתקרי חכם בכל מיני חכמות ומבין בכל מיני תבונות וחסיד בכל מיני חסדים וגבור בכל מיני גבורות ויועץ בכל מיני עצות וצדיק בכל מיני צדקות ומלך בכל מיני מלכות עד אין סוף עד (ס"א כתר) אין חקר ובכל אליו דרגין בחד אקרי רחמן ובהד אקרי דיין והכי בכמה דרגין עד אין סוף, אי הכי שנוי אית בין רחמן לדיין אלא קודם דברא עלמא אתקרי הוא בכל אליו דרגין על שם בריין דהו עתידין להבראות דאי לאו בריין דעלמא אמאי אתקרי רחום דיין אלא על שם בריין דעתידין, ובג"ד כל שמהן אינן כנויין דיליה על שם עובדין דיליה כגוונא דא ברא נשמתא בדיוקנא דיליה דאתקריאת על שם פעולות דילה בכל אבר ואבר דגופא דאתקרי עלמא זעירא כגוונא דמארי עלמא אתנהיג בכל בריין ובכל דרא כפום עובדיו, כך נשמתא כפום עובדיו דכל אבר ואבר, ההוא אבר דעביד ביה פקודא אתקרי נשמתא לגבי חמלה וחסדא הנא ורחמי ובההוא אבר דעביד ביה עבירה אתקרי נשמתא לגבי דינא וחומה וכעס אבל לבר מן גופא למאן תהא חמלה או אכזריות, אוף הכי מארי עלמא קדם דברא עלמא וברא בריין דיליה למאן אתקרי רחום והנן או דיין, אלא כל שמהן דיליה אינן כנויין ולא אתקרי בהון אלא על שם בריין דעלמא ובג"ד כד מארי דרא אינן טבין איהו אתקרי לגביהו יהו"ה במדת רחמים וכד מארי דרא אינן חייבין אתקרי אדני במדת הדין לכל דרא ולכל ב"נ כפום מדה דיליה אבל לאו דאית ליה מדה ולא שם ידע כגוונא דספיראן.

ZOHAR III 257B

One must know that He is called "Wise", with all kinds of wisdom, "Understanding", with all kinds of understanding, "Saintly", with all kinds of saintliness, "Heroic", with all kinds of heroism, "Counsel", with all kinds of counsel, "Righteous", with all kinds of righteousness, and "King," with all kinds of royalty, until infinity. At the various levels of His existence, He might be called "compassionate", while elsewhere He will be called "Judge", and so forth on a number of levels until infinity. There is a distinction between "Compassionate" and "Judge"! Before the world was created, however, He was known by those qualities that had yet to exist, for if there was no world, how could He be the Compassionate Judge? His qualities were potential. Hence, all of God's names are His symbols because of His actions.

He therefore created the soul in His image, to be known through its functions, so that every limb of the body is a microcosm (of the Godly body). The Master of the World does this with every creature and in every generation according to its acts. The soul is defined according to the actions of its limbs. A limb that fulfills a commandment causes the soul to be called "compassion", "kindness", "grace" and "mercy", while that limb that commits a transgression is compelled by a soul that is known as "anger", "judgment", and "rage." It is known apart from the body for its compassion or cruelty. Therefore, the Master of the World created the World and its phenomena, whether they are compassionate, or gracious or judging, His names are symbols. They do not point to God, rather, every name is a creation of this world. Therefore, when a generation is good, they know Him as YHVH, with the quality of compassion, and when they are sinful, they call Him ADNY with the quality of judgment, according to every generation and individual, but not that He has any particular quality or personal name.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Is this text different from previous texts you have seen which discuss God's qualities? How?
- What do you understand by the 'limbs' of the soul?
- What does it mean for the soul to be created in the image of God?
- Do you think that this idea is a useful one today? Why/why not?

GOD IN KABBALAH – TEXT 2

זוהר דף רנז עמוד ב

דכל ספירה אית לה שם ידיע ומדה וגבול ותחום ובאלין שמהן מארי עלמא איהו אתפשט ואמליך בהון ואתקרי בהון ואתכסי בהון ודר בהון כנשמתא לגבי אברים דגופא, ומה רבון עלמין לית ליה שם ידיע ולא אתר ידיע אלא בכל סטרא שולטנותיה, אוף הכי לית לה לנשמתא שם ידיע ולא אתר ידיע בכל גופא אלא בכל סטר שולטנותה ולית אבר פנוי מנה, ובג"ד לית לרשמא לה בחד אתר דאי לאו הא חסר שולטנותא בשאר אברים ולא לאתקרי לה בשמא חד או בתרין או בג' למימר דאיהי חכמה מבינה ואית לה דעת ולא יתיר דאי עביד הכי הא חסר לה משאר דרגין כ"ש למארי עלמא דלית לרשמא ליה באתר ידיע או לאתקרי ליה בשמהן...

ZOHAR III 257B

Each sefirah has a personal name and quality and limit and realm. The Master of the World extends through these names, dominates them, is called by them and dwells in them, as the soul dwells in the limbs of the body. The Master of the World has no personal name, or specific place, but every place is His realm. The soul, as well, has no personal name or place in the body, rather the whole body is its realm, and there is no limb empty of it. Therefore, one cannot contain the soul in one place, for then it would be absent in other jurisdictions, nor may one call it by one, two, or three names, to say that it is only *Hokhmah*, or *Binah*, or *Da'at*, but not more, for that would deny its other aspects. How much more so with the Master of the World, that one must not fix Him in any one place, to call Him by His names...

פרדסרמונים קו:א

הספירות יבחנו אל כמה בחינות ואל כמה ענינים וכמה מצויות. לכל בחינה ובחינה שם וכנוי ומה שיורה הכנוי הזה לא יורה הכנוי הזה.

MOSHE CORDOVERO, SEFER PARDES RIMMONIM 106A

The sefirot represent various aspects, issues and realities. Every aspect has a name and expression, so that one symbol teaches what another might not.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- According to the first text, why do we need multiple understandings of the soul?
- Does the second text have a different reason? If so – what is it, and why do you think the two texts are different?
- Why do we need multiple understandings of God?
- What names would you use today for the various aspects of the soul? of God?

GOD IN KABBALAH – TEXT 3

הכתובה השביעית – כתיבת האר"י

קודם האצילות היה הוא ושמו א' לבד והיה ממלא כל העולמות כולם. עלה ברצונו הפשוט לברא העולמות כולם ולהטיב לזולתו. צמצם שכינתו ונסתלק אורו למעלה. נשאר המקום שבו יבראו העולמות פנוי. חזר ההוד ונסתלק למעלה ע"י כח הדין שהיה שם, כי כל חזרת ההוד אינו כי אם מצד הדין. מאותו כח של הדין שהיה שם נעשה הכלי... ונשאר רשימו מן האור שנסתלק במקום הפנוי שבו היה האור מטפשת בתחילה. נעשה כלי ראשון בזה הרשימו שנשאר שם. היה הכלי הזה ממלא המקום הפנוי. היה הכלי, שהוא נעשה ע"י כח ושרש הגבורות, והרשימו, שהוא האור, מעורבים. היה הכלי גדול. חזר האור לברא העולמות ולהחיותם. לא ירד השעור שהיה בו קודם שאם כן אי אפשר לברא עולם. חזר מעט מזעיר ממנו והוא י'. נכנס לכלי הזה. ברר הרשימו שהוא האור מהכלי. נשאר הכלי קטן. נתלבש האור שהוא הרשימו בכלי ההוא. נשאר למטה מקום פנוי שעוד להאציל האצילות. כלוהו במחשבה אתברירו, שהמחשבה הזאת היה היו"ד המבררת הכל. כלי ראשון אויר קדמון נקרא טהירו לפי שהוא זך ומבהיק ביותר, ואינו כלי כי אם בערך האין סוף המאיר בתוכו. בוצינא דקרדינותא, הוא קו המדה, והוא כח הגבורות שהם נותנים המדה, חקק את הכלי. יוצאים ומתגלים אלו הה' גבורות, שהם ה' הגבורות דאימא הנעלמות במאד מאד למעלה, בתוך הסתום שבסתום, והוא אור אין סוף שהוא הסתום, והוא בתוך הסתומו שהוא טהירו. הכלי הזה נעלם מאד, עד שאינו ניכר בו כי אם בחינת כתר לבד אע"פ שהוא כלול מ"י. בקעה היו"ד הכלי. ירדה למטה במקום הפנוי. חזרה ונסתלקה לתוך הכלי הראשון. בחזרתה נעשה כלי האצילות בזה המקום הפנוי, וזהו מטי ולא מטי, שבתחילה יורד האור עד למטה, ולא מטי שחזור ומסתלק כדי שיעשה הכלי ההוא ויבראו העולמות. הכלי השני חשוך מהראשון, שזה נעשה מחזרת האור הגדול וזה מחזרת אור קטן, וזה מכח חזרת א' של אור וזה מכח ב' חזרות. כשירד האור למטה לכלי השני לא היה בו פרצוף כי אם מכח התפשטות הנשמה שבתוכו. בא כח הגבורה ומכה ביו"ד, שהיא בחינת סלע שהוא גולם, ומתפשטת לכאן ולכאן. כפי תפשטתה כך מתרחב הכלי ונכנסת לתוכו.

ISAAC LURIA, COMMENTARY TO THE ZOHAR I 15A

Before the emanation, He and His Name were one alone and they would fill all of the worlds. It arose in His simple will to create all the worlds and to benefit others beside Himself. He contracted his *Shekhinah* and withdrew his light upward. The remaining place in which He could create the Worlds was left vacant. The light returned and withdrew upward through the power of the Judgment that was there, for all the return of the light was only from the side of *Din*. From that same power of the *Din* that was there, a vessel was created. ... There the residue (*reshimu*) remained from the light that had left, in the vacant place to which the light had initially extended. The residue that remained was made into the first vessel. This vessel filled all of the empty space. The vessel, which was made through the force and root of all the *gevurot*, and the residue, which was the light, mingled. The vessel was large, and the light returned to it, to create the worlds and give them life. The light that had been emanated to did not fully return, for were it so, it no worlds would have been created. A tiny bit of it returned, which was (the Hebrew letter) *Yud*. It entered this vessel, sorted the residue, which was the light, from the vessel, and the vessel was made smaller. The light, which is the residue, was clothed in this vessel. Below, there remained an empty measure for the emanation. Everything was clarified in thought, for thought is the *Yu"d* that clarifies everything. The first vessel is the primordial ether called the luster, for it is clear and very glistening, and it is not a vessel except for the merit of the Infinity that shines within it. The *Yu"d* split the vessel. It descended into the empty space, returned and withdrew into the first vessel. Upon its return it was made into the vessel of emanation in this empty place. This is "descending and not descending" for in the beginning, the light descended, yet it returned and withdrew, in order that He could create the vessel and create the Worlds. The second vessel is darker than the first, for it was made from the return of the great light and the other from the return of the small light, this one from one return of light and this one from two returns. When the light descends below to the second vessel, it had no countenance except for the power of the extent of the soul that is within it. The power of the Judgment came from the power of the *Yu"d*, which is the inert rock that extends this way and that. According to its potential, thus does the vessel expand to receive the light.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- How does Luria understand the process of creation?
- What does it mean that the second vessel is darker than the first?
- What does it mean that a vessel expands to receive light according to its potential?
- What do you think the place of human beings might be in this scheme? Why?

GOD IN KABBALAH – TEXT 4

זוהר דף כז עמוד ב

אשכול הכופר דודי לי (שיר א'), אשכול דא אימא עלאה, מה אשכול מתקשט בכמה עלין בכמה זמורות לישראל דאכלין ליה, הכי שכנינתא עלאה מתקשמת בכמה קשומין דשמנה כלים מכמה קרבנין מכמה מיני תכשיטין דכפרה לבנהא ואיהי קמת בהון קמי מלכא ומיד (בראשית ט') וראיתיה לזכור ברית עולם, ויהיבת (ס"א לון שאלתין דלהון) לן שאלתין דילה באלין ברכאן דתקיננו רבנן בצלותא למשאל קמי מלכא בההוא זמנא כל דינין דשכינתא תתאה דאיהי דוד"י אדנ"י מתהפכן לרחמי כגוונא דא ידו"ד לקיים (ישעיה א') אם יהיו המאיכם כשנים כשלג ילבינו ידו"ד, אם יאדימו כתולע דוד"י, כצמר יהיו ידו"ד בכל דינין דא (נ"א כל דינין דדא) מתלבנין משכינתא עלאה, ואיהי שכנינתא דוד"י (בראשית ג') להט החרב המתהפכת לשמור את דרך עין החיים, ואוקמוה רבנן דמהפכא זמנין רחמי זמנין דינא פעמים אנשים פעמים נשים זמנין דינא כגוונא דא דוד"י זמנין רחמי כגוונא דא ידו"ד דהא איהו מסטרא דאילנא דחיי כל דינין מתהפכין לרחמי ומסטרא דעין הדעת טוב ורע כל רחמי מתהפכין לדינא למידן בהו לאינן דעברי על פתגמי אורייתא ועין דא בעלמא דאתי דאיהו בינה כל שמהן דינא מתהפכין בה (לדינא) רחמי ובנין דא אוקמוה רבנן לא כהעולם הזה העולם הבא ובנין דא בינה איהי להט החרב המתהפכת דמתהפכת מדינא לרחמי לצדיקים למיהב לון אנרא בעלמא דאתי.

ZOHAR II 27B

A cluster of henna is my beloved to me (Song of Songs 1:14) The cluster is the transcendent Mother. Just as the cluster of grapes is bedecked with leaves and vines to nourish Israel, the transcendent Shekhinah is bedecked with the vessels of the eight sacrifices and their pure atonement. So bedecked, she goes up to the king with the petitions of Israel, the prayers offered by the Rabbis. At that, the judgments of the lower Shekhinah change to acts of mercy... This beloved Shekhinah is (Genesis 3:24) *the swirling double edged sword*. Sometimes it swings sometimes to mercy, sometimes to Judgments, sometimes male, sometimes female, sometimes judgment, sometimes mercy. For it is from the realm of the tree of life, all Judgments turning to mercy, and from the realm of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, all mercy turning to Judgment, judging those who transgress the commandments of the Torah. This tree is in the World-to-Come, which is intuitive understanding, in which all the names of Judgment turn to mercy. So it is, as the Rabbis maintained, that this world is not like the world to come, because of this understanding, which is the swinging double-edged sword that swings from Judgment to Mercy for the Righteous, to bring them a reward in the next world.

זוהר דף רמג עמוד ב

וכל אתר דישראל משתכחין נטירו אשתכח ונייחא ובג"ד אסור למחרש בארעא ולמעבד בה גומות דהוי כאילו עביד פנימו בארעא קדישא דאיהי שכנינתא ואסור לאשתמשא בכלים דארעא בשבת ואפילו למלטל אבן...

ZOHAR III 243B

Wherever Israel are, they are protected and tranquil. Therefore it is forbidden to plow the earth and to make furrows on the Sabbath, for it is like a blemish in the Holy Land, the *Shekhinah*. Therefore it is forbidden to use agricultural tools on the Sabbath, even to carry a stone...

STUDY QUESTIONS

- How many images of the Shekhinah are present in the first text? How are they different?
- How does the second text contrast with the first?
- Can you think of other ways the Shekhinah might manifest in the world?
- Do you have a personal way that you perceive 'Shekhinah'? If so – what is it?

GOD IN KABBALAH – TEXT FOR GROUP STUDY

ZOHAR IV 206A

When the Torah scroll is put there, every person should make prepare themselves below, with awe and dread, trembling and shivering. They should direct their hearts as if they were at this very moment standing at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. They should listen with full attention and incline their ears. They are not permitted to open their mouths, even to speak words of Torah, and all the more so if they want to discuss other matters. Rather, they should all be in awe, as if they were speechless [lit. mouthless]....

Rabbi Shimon said that when the Torah scroll is brought out for public reading, the heavenly gates of Mercy open and awaken the love above. A person should then pray as follows:

Blessed is your name, Master of the Universe. Blessed is your crown and your place. Let your favor be with your people Israel forever, and let the deliverance of your right hand be seen by your people in your Temple. Grant us your good light, and receive our prayers with compassion. May it be your will [lit. from before you] that you lengthen our lives with goodness, and may I be counted among the righteous so that you have compassion upon me and guard all that is mine, and your people Israel's. You are the One who feeds all and sustains all; you are the One who rules over all. You rule over kings, and the kingdom is yours. I am a servant of the Holy Blessed One, and before him and his glorious Torah at all times. I do not trust in any man, I do not rely on any angel; rather, I trust and rely on the God of Heaven, who is a God of truth, whose Torah is truth, whose prophets are truth, and who is mighty to work goodness and truth. In him I trust; and to his holy and precious name I utter praises. May it be your will [lit. from before you] that you open my heart to Torah and fulfill the wishes of my heart and those of all your people Israel, for good, and for life, and for peace. Amen.

Only one person is may read from the Torah. Everyone else should listen attentively and be silent so they can hear the words of his mouth as if at that very moment they were receiving them at Mount Sinai. One person should stand next to the reader, and remain silent, so that only one set of words can be heard, not two. The holy tongue is one, singular: not two, and if two voices happen to be heard when the Torah is being read it removes something from the secret of belief and from the preciousness of the Torah. It is a requirement that there be only one voice. And there should only be one translator; and the secret of this is the shell [*kelippah*] and the fruit [the translator is being thought of as the shell and the reader the fruit].

SESSION SUGGESTIONS – GOD IN KABBALAH

In this session the group will consider God in Kabbalah. The texts for this session have been chosen so as to familiarize people with some basic kabbalistic concepts. This is an esoteric area, which is why the text for creative study is a familiar one – the *b'rich shmei* from the Torah service. While the texts in this area are complex, there is great potential for creativity – some ideas are suggested at the end of this session plan.

INTRODUCTION

Briefly remind people of the content of the essay. Some questions to generate a brief recap might be:

- What is Kabbalah?
- How does the kabbalistic tradition understand the process of creation?
- What are some key concepts from kabbalah (sefirot, Shekhinah, etc)?

GROUP STUDY

Split the class into [up to] 4 chavruta groups and hand out the texts. The questions provided should help generate the discussion. You may wish to let groups begin working on their own, and then put them together, two and two, so that they can compare and contrast the texts they have been working on. It is likely that people will find the texts complex and it will be useful to ask them to refer back to the essay.

You might wish to have copies of the Sefirot diagram available for people to use.

This may be a session where you want all groups to work on a single text. If so, the first text is probably the one which will generate most responses; also, the Luria text is good background for the session on Hassidut.

Allow each group to report back on their understanding of the text(s) and their answers to the questions, and then draw the discussion together.

CREATIVE STUDY

Text based: Ask people about the Torah service. What does it do/represent? Why might a text from the Zohar resonate with it?

Then refer people to the text (*B'rich Shmei*, in context) and let them read & digest it. (The Aramaic is in the Siddus, if you need it.) Now that participants understand the origin of the text, do they see any aspects of the Torah service differently? Why, according to the Zohar, do we read Torah on Shabbat? What does the imagery of the shell and the fruit convey? You might wish to refer to the equivalent prayers which are said on the chagim, for comparison. What might participants expect to see in a prayer before Torah is read? Why?

Free-form: there are endless possibilities here. Images and art related to kabbalah abound on the internet and can provide a jump-off point for discussion, meditation or art. A good exercise, if you can provide resources, is to ask people to draw/paint/create their own Sefirot diagram using whatever medium they like. Or ask them to write a guided meditation; or guide one yourself, if they are amenable. Or use Reuven Kimelman's book to take a closer look at the Kabbalat Shabbat service and the *lecha dodi*.

CONCLUSION

Hand out the essay for next time and conclude the session.

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