

Haqdamat Sefer ha-Zohar

INTRODUCTION TO THE ZOHAR

Rabbi Hizkiyah opened, “Like a rose¹ among thorns, so is my beloved among the maidens (Song of Songs 2:2). Who is a rose? Assembly of Israel.² For there is a rose, and then there is a rose! Just as a rose among thorns is colored red and white,³ so Assembly of Israel includes judgment and compassion. Just as a rose has thirteen petals, so Assembly of Israel has thirteen qualities of compassion surrounding Her on every side.⁴ Similarly, from the moment אלהים (Elohim),

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1. *rose* שושנה (Shoshanah) probably means “lily” or “lotus” in Song of Songs, but here Rabbi Hizkiyah has in mind a rose.

See *Vayiqra Rabbah* 23:3; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 2:2; *Zohar* 1:137a, 221a; 2:20a (MhN), 189b; 3:107a, 180b, 233b, 286b; Ezra of Gerona, *Peirush Shir ha-Shirim*, 489 (lily); Joseph ibn Akhnin, *Peirush Shir ha-Shirim*, 63–65 (rose); Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 183–84; *Zoharei Ya’bets*.

A Ladino translation of the verse (*The Ladino Five Scrolls*, ed. Lazar, 4–5) reads: *Commo la roza entre los espinos, ansi mi compañera entre las dueñas*.

2. **Assembly of Israel** כנסת ישראל (Keneset Yisra’el). In rabbinic Hebrew, this phrase denotes the people of Israel. The midrash on the Song of Songs describes an allegorical love affair between the maiden (the earthly community of Israel) and her lover (the Holy One, blessed be He). See *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 2:1. In the *Zohar*, *Keneset Yisra’el* can refer to the earthly community but also (often primarily) to *Shekhinah*, the divine feminine counterpart of the people, the aspect of God most intimately connected

with them. The lovers in the Song of Songs are pictured as the divine couple: *Tif’eret* and *Shekhinah*.

3. **colored red and white** As is *Rosa gallica versicolor* (also known as *Rosa mundi*), one of the oldest of the striped roses, whose flowers are crimson splashed on a white background. The striping varies and occasionally flowers revert to the solid pink of their parent, *Rosa gallica*. The parent was introduced to Europe in the twelfth or thirteenth century by Crusaders returning from Palestine. Both parent and sport were famous for their aromatic and medicinal qualities. Elsewhere (2:20a–b) the *Zohar* alludes to the process of distilling oil from the petals of the flower to produce rose water, a popular remedy. During this process the color gradually changes from red to white.

4. **thirteen petals...thirteen qualities of compassion...** A rose blossom can have thirteen petals in its second tier. In rabbinic tradition, God’s thirteen attributes of compassion are derived from Exodus 34:6–7. See BT *Rosh ha-Shanah* 17b. According to Kabbalah, these qualities originate in Keter, the

God, is mentioned, it generates thirteen words to surround Assembly of Israel and protect Her; then it is mentioned again.⁵ Why again? To produce five sturdy leaves surrounding the rose.⁶ These five are called Salvation;⁷ they are five gates.⁸ Concerning this mystery it is written: *I raise the cup of salvation* (Psalms 116:13). This is the cup of blessing, which should rest on five fingers—and no more⁹—like the rose, sitting on five sturdy leaves, paradigm of five fingers. This rose is the cup of blessing.

“From the second אלהים (*Elohim*) till the third, five words appear. From here on: light—created, concealed, contained in the covenant,¹⁰ entering the rose, emitting seed into Her. This is the *tree bearing fruit with its seed in it* (Genesis 1:12).¹¹ That seed endures in the actual sign of covenant. Just as the image of the covenant is sown in forty-two couplings of that seed, so the engraved, explicit name¹² is sown in forty-two letters of the act of Creation.”¹³

highest *sefirah*, the realm of total compassion untainted by judgment.

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5. אלהים (*Elohim*), *God*, is mentioned... The divine name אלהים (*Elohim*), *God*, refers here to *Binah*, the Divine Mother. Between its first and second occurrences in the opening verses of Genesis there are thirteen words, which allude to the thirteen qualities of compassion originating in *Keter*, emanating from *Binah* and surrounding the rose of *Shekhinah*.

6. **five sturdy leaves**... The leaves of rose plants grow in clusters of five, nine, or thirteen leaves. And between the second and third occurrences of אלהים (*Elohim*) in Genesis are five words, alluding to five divine leaves: the five *sefirot* emanating from *Binah* and transmitting the flow to *Shekhinah*. These *sefirot* are *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tif'eret* (including *Yesod*), *Netsah*, and *Hod*.

7. **Salvation** The flow of emanation saves the rose of *Shekhinah* from the demonic thorns surrounding Her.

8. **five gates** By which one enters the divine realm.

9. **cup of blessing... on five fingers**... According to the Talmud, the cup of wine is held in the right hand during the blessing after food. See BT *Berakhot* 51a: “One takes it with both hands and places it on the right hand.” Cf. *Zohar* 1:156a (*ST*), 250a; 2:138b, 143b, 157b.

10. **light—created, concealed**... See BT *Hagigah* 12a: “Rabbi El’azar said, ‘With the light created by the blessed Holy One on the first day, one could gaze and see from one end of the universe to the other. When the blessed Holy One foresaw the corrupt deeds of the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion [the generation of the Tower of Babel], He immediately hid it from them, as is written: *The light of the wicked is withheld* (Job 38:15). For whom did He hide it? For the righteous in the time to come.’”

Elsewhere, the Midrash links the hidden light with Psalms 97:11: *Light is sown for the righteous*. See *Tanḥuma*, *Shemini* 9; *Shemot Rabbah* 35:1; *Midrash Tehillim* 27:1.

Rabbi Ḥizkiyah now specifies *where* the primordial light was concealed: in the covenant, which is a name for the *sefirah* of *Yesod*—the divine phallus, site of the covenant of circumcision. *Yesod* is also known as Righteous. See *Zohar* 1:21a, 31b–32a, 45b; 2:35a, 148b–149a; 166b–167a, 230a.

11. **tree bearing fruit**... The tree symbolizes male divinity.

12. **explicit name** The Ineffable Name, *YHVH*. See *Devarim Rabbah* 3:8; *Midrash Tehillim* 114:9; *Zohar* 2:48a.

13. **forty-two couplings... forty-two letters of the act of Creation** The forty-two-letter name is mentioned in the name of

Rabbi Shim'on opened, "The blossoms have appeared on the earth, the time of pruning has arrived; the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land (Song of Songs 2:12). The blossoms are the act of Creation, which appeared on the earth. When? On the third day, as is written: *The earth brought forth vegetation* (Genesis 1:12). Then they appeared on the earth. The time of pruning has arrived—the fourth day, on which the pruning of tyrants (Isaiah 25:5) took place.¹⁴ מארת (Me'orot), lights, spelled deficiently.¹⁵ The voice of the turtledove is the fifth day, as is written: *Let the waters swarm [with a swarm of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth, across the expanse of the sky]* (Genesis 1:20), generating offspring. Is heard is the sixth day, as is written: *Let us make a human being* (Genesis 1:26), who was destined to declare acting before hearing, for here is written: [1b] נעשה (Na'aseh), *Let us make, a human being*, and there is written: נעשה (Na'aseh), *We will do, and we will listen* (Exodus 24:7).¹⁶ In our land is the Sabbath day, paradigm of the land of eternal life.¹⁷

Rav, though not recorded, in BT *Qiddushin* 71a. According to one later view, it consists of the first forty-two letters of the Torah, from the ב (bet) of בראשית (Be-reshit) through the ב (bet) of בהו (bohu), void (Genesis 1:2).

See *Tosafot*, *Ḥagigah* 11b, s.v. *ein doreshin*; KP 1:46c–d; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 94–95; cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 1:62. Cordovero (*OY*) describes how the name YHVH ("the engraved, explicit name") can be permuted into a forty-two-letter name; cf. *Zohar* 2:260a. In *Zohar* 1:9a, Moses' staff is described as "radiating the engraved name in every direction with the radiance of the wise who engraved the explicit name in forty-two colors." Cf. *Zohar* 1:15b, 30a; 2:130b, and 175b: "... the forty-two holy letters of the holy name, by which heaven and earth were created."

14. *pruning of tyrants*... זמיר (Zemir) is usually translated "singing of" in this verse, but Rabbi Shim'on understands it as "pruning of," i.e., the pruning of the demonic powers, the tyrants (KP; cf. *Zohar* 3:4b), or

the pruning of humans by the demonic tyrants (*OY*).

15. מארת (Me'orot), lights, spelled deficiently In Genesis 1:14, the word מארת (me'orot) is written without vavs, the vowel letters. (Such variant spelling is common in the Torah and affects neither pronunciation nor the plain meaning of the words.) This deficient spelling implies that something was missing on the fourth day of Creation, a lack representing the potential for evil or "curse": מארה (me'erah).

See Proverbs 3:33; JT *Ta'anit* 4:4, 68b; *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 5:1; *Soferim* 17:4; Rashi and *Minḥat Shai* on Genesis 1:14; *Zohar* 1:12a, 19b, 33b.

16. *We will do and we will listen* Spoken by the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. With these words, Israel demonstrated true faith by committing themselves to fulfill and enact God's word even before hearing the details. See BT *Shabbat* 88a.

17. *paradigm of the land*... According to BT *Berakhot* 57b, the Sabbath is "a reflection of the world to come."

“*The blossoms* are the Patriarchs, who entered the divine mind before Creation¹⁸ and entered the world that is coming,¹⁹ where they were treasured away. From there, they emerged secretly and were concealed within prophets of truth.²⁰ When Joseph was born, they were concealed within him.²¹ When Joseph entered the Holy Land, he planted them there. Then they *appeared on earth*, were revealed there. When are they visible? When the rainbow is revealed in the world.²² When the rainbow appears, they are revealed. Then, *the time of pruning has arrived*, time to excise the wicked from the world. Why are they spared? Because *the blossoms have appeared on the earth*. Had they not *appeared*, they would not remain in the world,²³ nor would the world endure. Who sustains the world, enabling the Patriarchs to be revealed? The voice of children engaging in Torah.²⁴ For the sake of those children, the world is saved. Corresponding to them, *We will make you wreaths of gold* (Song of Songs 1:11).

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18. **Patriarchs, who entered...** See *Be-reshit Rabbah* 1:4: “Six things preceded Creation... The Patriarchs arose in thought [i.e., were intended] to be created.” In the Kabbalah, the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) represent the triad of *sefirot*: *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif’eret*. Cf. *Zohar* 1:39b, 97a–b; 3:4b.

19. **the world that is coming** עלמא דאתי (*Alma de-atei*), the Aramaic equivalent of the rabbinic Hebrew העולם הבא (*ha-olam ha-ba*), “the world that is coming.” This concept is often understood as referring to the hereafter and is usually translated as “the world to come.” From another point of view, however, “the world that is coming” already exists, occupying another dimension. See *Tanḥuma*, *Vayiqra* 8: “The wise call it *ha-olam ha-ba* not because it does not exist now, but for us today in this world it is still to come.” Cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:8; and Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 37: “‘The world to come’ does not succeed ‘this world’ in time, but exists from eternity as a reality outside and above time, to which the soul ascends.”

In Kabbalah “the world that is coming” often refers to *Binah*, the continuous source of emanation, who gives birth to the lower *sefirot*. See *Zohar* 3:29ob (*IZ*): “the world that is coming, constantly coming, never ceasing.”

Cf. *Bahir* 106 (160); Asher ben David, *Peirush Shelosh Esreh Middot*, in *Kabbalah* 2 (1997): 293; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 26 (30); idem, *Sod Eser Sefirot*, 375; *Zohar* 1:83a, 92a.

20. **prophets of truth** The *sefirot* of *Netsah* and *Hod*, the source of prophecy.

21. **Joseph...** Joseph symbolizes the *sefirah* of *Yesod*, the divine phallus, since he withstood the test of sexual temptation in Egypt (Genesis 39). The upper triad of *sefirot* (*Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif’eret*) flow into him, and when *Yesod* enters *Shekhinah* (“the Holy Land,” “earth”), the *sefirotic* triad is planted there and revealed. Though Joseph never returned to the land of Israel, his bones did. See Joshua 24:32.

22. **When the rainbow is revealed...** The rainbow symbolizes both *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*, in whose union *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif’eret* are revealed in their respective colors: white, red, and green.

23. **they would not remain...** The wicked would not remain.

24. **voice of children...** See BT *Shabbat* 119b: “Resh Lakish said in the name of Rabbi Yehudah the Prince, ‘The world endures only for the sake of the breath of children in the house of study.’” Cf. *Zohar* 1:146b; 3:17b.

These are little children, youngsters, as is written: *Make two cherubim of gold* (Exodus 25:18).²⁵

בראשית (Be-reshit), *In the beginning*. Rabbi El'azar opened, "*Lift your eyes on high and see: Who created these?*" (Isaiah 40:26). *Lift your eyes on high.*

To which site? The site toward which all eyes gaze. Which is that? *Opening of the eyes.*²⁶ There you will discover that this concealed ancient one, susceptible to questioning, *created these*. Who is that? *Who.*²⁷ The one called End of Heaven above,²⁸ whose domain extends over everything. Since it can be questioned, yet remains concealed and unrevealed, it is called *Who*. Beyond, there is no question.²⁹

25. *Make two cherubim...* In BT *Sukkah* 5b, Rabbi Abbahu interprets the word כרוב (keruv), "cherub," as כרביא (ke-ravya), "like a child." The plump childlike angels of Christian art derive either from this tradition or from the Greco-Roman Erotes, "loves." Here Rabbi Shim'on relates the golden cherubim to the golden wreaths of the Song of Songs, concluding that both images allude to children.

26. *Opening of the eyes* פתח עינים (Petaḥ einayim). The phrase originates in Genesis 38:14, where it means "the entrance to Einayim," a village where Tamar seduced her father-in-law, Judah. The midrash on Genesis (*Bereshit Rabbah* 85:7) discovers a deeper meaning: "Rabbi [Yehudah the Prince] said, 'We have searched through the entire Bible and have not found a place called Petaḥ Einayim. What is Petaḥ Einayim? This indicates that she [Tamar] gazed at the opening toward which all eyes gaze and said, 'May it be the divine will that I not leave this house empty.'" In the *Zohar*, this opening is identified with *Shekhinah*, gateway to the divine. See 3:71b–72a.

27. *Who* מי (Mi). *Binah*, the Divine Mother, is called *Who*. A spiritual seeker may inquire about Her, but such questions do not yield ordinary answers. The identity of the divine is discovered only in a realm beyond words. The mystical name *Who* becomes a focus of meditation, as question

turns into quest. See Shim'on Lavi, *KP*, 1:91a: "Concerning everything that cannot be grasped, its question constitutes its answer."

See *Zohar* 1:29b–30a, 45b, 85b–86a, 237b; 2:126b–127a, 138a, 139b, 226a, 231b.

28. *End of Heaven above* See Deuteronomy 4:32: *For ask now of primal days, which were before you: from the day that God created humankind on earth, and from one end of heaven to the other.* In BT *Ḥagigah* 11b, this verse is interpreted as imposing a limit on cosmological speculation: "You may inquire concerning *from one end of heaven to the other*, but you may not inquire concerning what is above, what is below, what came before, what will come after." See M *Ḥagigah* 2:1; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:10.

These restrictions on cosmological speculation recall the Gnostic striving after "the knowledge of who we were, what we have become, where we were, where we have been thrown, where we hasten, from what we are redeemed, what birth is and what rebirth" (Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpts from Theodotus* 78:2). See *Zohar* 1:30a; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 31; idem, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 20, 375; idem, *Sod Eser Sefirot Belimah*, 371.

29. *Beyond...* The realms beyond *Binah*, namely, *Ḥokhmah*, *Keter*, and *Ein Sof*, are so unknowable that no question concerning them can even be formulated.

“This end of heaven is called *Who*. There is another below, called *What*.³⁰ What distinguishes the two? The first, concealed one—called *Who*—can be questioned. Once a human being questions and searches,³¹ contemplating and knowing rung after rung to the very last rung—once one reaches there: *What?* What do you know? What have you contemplated? For what have you searched? All is concealed, as before.

“Concerning this mystery it is written: *What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?* (Lamentations 2:13). When the holy Temple was destroyed, a voice cried out: ‘*What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?*’ I take *What* as a witness to you. Every single day I have called witnesses against you, since days of old, as is written: *I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day* (Deuteronomy 30:19).³² I compare you to *What*, precisely!³³ I crowned you with holy crowns, gave you dominion over the world, as is written: *Is this the city that was called perfect crown of beauty, joy of all the earth?* (Lamentations 2:15). I called you *Jerusalem built up, a city bound together* (Psalms 122:3). Now, *What can I liken to you, to console you?* (Lamentations, *ibid.*, 13).³⁴ Just as you sit desolate, so it is above, as it were. Just as now, the holy people do not enter you in holy array, so I swear to you that I Myself will not enter above until your inhabitants enter you below.³⁵ This is your consolation: I compare this rung to you completely.³⁶ But now that you are here, *your ruin is vast as the ocean* (*ibid.*).³⁷ Yet if you say you cannot endure or be healed, then *Who will heal you* (*ibid.*), really! That concealed, high rung in which all exists will heal you and raise you up.

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30. *What* מה (*Mah*), a name for *Shekhinah*, last of the ten *sefirot*, daughter of *Binah*. See *Zohar* 2:127a. *Binah* and *Shekhinah* comprise the two ends of heaven, above and below *Tif'eret*, who is called Heaven.

31. and searches ומפּשֵׁשׁ, *Umpashpesh*. Cr reads here: ומתפּשֵׁשׁ, *u-mitpashshet*, “and expands.” See *Bahir* 134 (194); and Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 39: “Thought expands מתפּשֵׁשׁת, *mitpashshetet*) and ascends to its source. When it reaches there, it is stopped and can ascend no further.”

32. *I call heaven and earth...* Earth symbolizes *Shekhinah*.

33. *I compare you to What, precisely!* Israel resembles *Shekhinah* perfectly.

34. *What can I liken...* Again, Israel and *Shekhinah* (*What*) are compared.

35. *I Myself will not enter...* The blessed Holy One promises not to enter the heavenly Jerusalem, *Shekhinah*, until the earthly Jerusalem is restored. See *Tanhuma, Pequdei* 1: “There is a Jerusalem above aligned with Jerusalem below. Out of His love for the one below, He fashioned another above... He has sworn that His presence will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until the earthly Jerusalem is rebuilt.”

See Revelation 21:2; *Targum Yonatan*, Psalms 122:3; BT *Ta’anit* 5a; *Zohar* 1:80b (*ST*), 128b, 183b, 231a; 3:15b, 68b, 147b.

36. *this rung* *Shekhinah*.

37. *But now that you are here, your ruin is vast...* Now that Israel has fallen to the low state of exile, her *ruin is vast as the ocean*, another name for *Shekhinah*, who shares Israel’s exile.

“Who is End of Heaven above; What is End of Heaven below. Jacob inherited this, *running from end to end* (Exodus 26:28),³⁸ from first end, *Who*, to last end, *What*, for he stands in the middle. So, *Who created these*.”

Rabbi Shim'on said, “El'azar, my son, cease your words,³⁹ so that the concealed mystery on high, unknown to any human, may be revealed.”

Rabbi El'azar was silent.

Rabbi Shim'on wept and paused for a moment. Then he said, “El'azar, what is *these*?⁴⁰ If you answer, ‘Stars and constellations,’ they are always visible there⁴¹ and were created by *What*, as is said: *By the word of YHVH the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6).⁴² As for things concealed, such would not be referred to as *these*, for that word indicates something revealed. This mystery was only revealed one day when I was at the seashore. Elijah⁴³ came and asked me, ‘Rabbi, do you know the meaning of *Who created these*?’ I answered, ‘These are the heavens and their array, the work of the blessed Holy One. Human beings should contemplate them and bless Him, as is written: *When I behold Your heavens, the work of [2a] Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, . . . YHVH our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!* (Psalms 8:4, 10).

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38. *running from end to end* A description of the central wooden beam of the Tabernacle in the desert. The *Zohar* applies this description to *Tiferet*, the central *sefirah*, symbolized by Jacob, who spans the *sefirot* from *Binah* (*Who*) to *Shekhinah* (*What*). See *Zohar* 1:148b (ST).

39. **cease your words** פסוק מליך, *Pesoq millekha*. The phrase could also be translated: “utter your words.” See BT *Ḥagigah* 15a–b: פסוק לי פסוקך, *pesoq li pesuqekha*, “Recite for me your verse”; cf. *Zohar* 1:238b. “Cease” fits the context of our passage, but the ambiguity may be intentional, in which case a better rendering would be: “Complete your words,” or “Cut your words.”

40. **these** In the verse from Isaiah 40:26: *Lift up your eyes and see: Who created these?* Now that the mystical meaning of *Who* has been established, Rabbi Shim'on explores the meaning of *these*.

41. **they are always visible there** So why would the verse say, *Lift up your eyes and see*, implying that there is something new to see?

42. *By the word of YHVH . . .* The word of *YHVH* symbolizes *Shekhinah*, who conveys the divine essence. Thus the heavens were made by Her (also known as *What*), not by *Binah* (*Who*).

See *Zohar* 1:119b; 3:191a, 193b.

43. **Elijah** According to the Bible (2 Kings 11:12), the prophet Elijah did not die a normal death but was carried off to heaven in a chariot of fire. He became associated with the Messianic age (Malachi 3:23–24) and in rabbinic tradition is described as “still existing” (BT *Bava Batra* 121b) and revealing divine secrets to righteous humans (BT *Bava Metsi'a* 59b).

In Kabbalah mystical experiences are known as revelations of Elijah. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 19–21; *Zohar* 1:151a; 3:221a, 231a; *ZḤ* 59d. In *Zohar* 3:241b Elijah turns to Rabbi Shim'on for instruction! Elsewhere (*ZḤ* 63d, 70d, 73c [*ShS*]) Elijah encourages him to reveal the secrets and says (62c), “My words will be written by you.”

“Elijah said to me, ‘Rabbi, the word was concealed with the blessed Holy One and revealed in the Academy on High.’⁴⁴ Here it is:

‘When Concealed of all Concealed⁴⁵ verged on being revealed, it produced at first a single point,⁴⁶ which ascended to become thought. Within, it drew all drawings, graved all engravings,⁴⁷ carving within the concealed holy lamp⁴⁸ a graving of one hidden design, holy of holies, a deep structure emerging from thought, called מי (*Mi*), *Who*, origin of structure.⁴⁹ Existent and non-existent, deep and hidden, called by no name but *Who*.

‘Seeking to be revealed, to be named, it garbed itself in a splendid, radiant garment and created אלה (*elleh*), *these*.⁵⁰ אלה (*Elleh*) attained the name: these letters joined with those, culminating in the name אלהים (*Elohim*).⁵¹ Until it created אלה (*elleh*), it did not attain the name אלהים (*Elohim*).⁵² Based on this mystery, those who sinned with the Golden Calf said “אלה (*Elleh*), *These, are your gods, O Israel!*” (Exodus 32:8).⁵³ Just as מי (*mi*) is combined with אלה (*elleh*), so the name אלהים (*Elohim*) is constantly polysemous.⁵⁴ Through this mystery, the universe exists.’

“Then Elijah flew off; I did not see him. From him I discovered the word, whose mysterious secret I have demonstrated.”

Rabbi El’azar and all the Companions came and bowed down in front of him. Weeping, they said, “If we have come into the world only to hear this, it is enough.”⁵⁵

44. **Academy on High** The Heavenly Academy, where souls of the righteous study Torah with God.

45. **Concealed of all Concealed** *Ein Sof* or *Keter*, the most hidden recesses of divinity.

46. **single point** The primordial point of *Hokhmah* (“Wisdom”), the first emanation.

47. **It drew all drawings...** The *sefirot* were prefigured within divine thought before they emerged in the process of emanation.

48. **concealed holy lamp** *Hokhmah*.

49. **graving of one hidden design...** *Binah*, the origin of the structure of the seven lower *sefirot*.

50. **created אלה (*elleh*), *these*...** *Binah* emanated the seven lower *sefirot*, which are less hidden than *Binah* and therefore referred to as *these*.

51. **these letters joined...** אלהים (*Elohim*) The letters אלה (*elleh*) (*these*) joined with the letters מי (*mi*) (*who*) to form the divine name אלהים (*Elohim*). See *Zohar* 2:105a.

52. **Until it created...** *Binah* was not called אלהים (*Elohim*) until She emanated the seven lower *sefirot*.

53. **“אלה (*Elleh*), *These are your gods*...”** Their sin was that they separated the lower, more concrete *sefirot* (אלה [*elleh*], *these*) from their mysterious source, *Binah* (מי [*Mi*], *Who*), and worshiped *these* alone.

54. **constantly polysemous** The name *Elohim* refers not only to *Binah*, but also to *Cevurah* and *Shekhinah*, as well as to angels and human judges. See Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 42–43.

55. **“If we have come...”** Similar exclamations appear in rabbinic literature and often in the *Zohar*. See *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 1:3; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 3:11; *Qohelet Rabbah* on 6:2; *Qohelet Zuta* 5:17; BT *Berakhot* 16a, 24b; *Shabbat* 41a; *Zohar* 1:148b, 164b, 240a; 2:99a, 121b, 122a, 193b; 3:26a; KP 1:20d.

Rabbi Shim'on said, "So the heavens and their array were created by **מה** (Mah), *What*,⁵⁶ as is written: *When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, . . . מה* (mah), *how, majestic is Your name throughout the earth! Your splendor is celebrated above heaven.* (Psalms 8:4, 1). *Above heaven*,⁵⁷ to attain the name. For it created a light for its light, one en clothed in the other, and it attained a high name. So, *In the beginning* **אלהים** (Elohim) *created* (Genesis 1:1), **אלהים** (Elohim) *above*.⁵⁸ For **מה** (Mah) was not so, is not composed until these letters—**אלה** (elleh)—are drawn from above to below and Mother lends Daughter Her garments, though not adorning Her with Her adornments.⁵⁹ When does She adorn Her fittingly? When all males appear before Her, as is written: [*All your males shall appear*] *before the Sovereign, YHVH* (Exodus 23:17).⁶⁰ This one is called Sovereign, as is said: *Behold, the ark of the covenant, Sovereign of all the earth* (Joshua 3:11).⁶¹ Then the letter **ה** (he) departs and **י** (yod) enters, and She adorns Herself in masculine clothing in the presence of every male in Israel.⁶² Other letters Israel draws from above to this site: **אלה** (Elleh), *These, I remember* (Psalms 42:5).⁶³ "With my mouth I mentioned them, in my yearning I poured out my tears, drawing forth these letters. Then *I conduct them* from above to the house of Elohim, to be Elohim, like Him."⁶⁴ With what? *With joyous shouts of praise, the festive throng.*"

56. **מה** (Mah), *What* Shekhinah.

57. *Above heaven* . . . Heaven refers to Tif'eret, above which lies Binah.

58. *In the beginning* **אלהים** (Elohim) *created* . . . By emanating the lower *sefirot*, "a light for its light," Binah attained the name Elohim.

59. **מה** (Mah) was not so . . . Shekhinah does not emerge until Binah emanates the seven lower *sefirot*. Only then can Binah, the Divine Mother, lend Her garments, the lower *sefirot*, to Her daughter, Shekhinah.

60. *All your males* . . . All Israelite males are commanded to appear in God's Temple in Jerusalem three times a year on the pilgrimage festivals: *Pesah* ("Passover"), *Shavu'ot* (Festival of "Weeks"), and *Sukkot* (Festival of "Booths"). Here the command implies that the masculine power of the *sefirot* must be drawn down to Shekhinah, the Sovereign. Through the ritual of pilgrimage, Shekhinah is adorned.

61. *Behold, the ark* . . . Shekhinah is the ark housing the *sefirah* of Yesod, the covenant.

See Zohar 1:33b, 59b, 228b; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 75 (95).

62. **letter ה** (he) . . . The letter **ה** (he) signifies the feminine; the letter **י** (yod), the masculine. When the masculine powers of the *sefirot* reach Shekhinah, She is transformed from feminine to masculine, from **מה** (Mah) to **מי** (Mi). Then She rules the world.

63. **אלה** (Elleh), *These I remember* The verse continues: *and pour out my soul: how I walked with the crowd, conducting them to the house of Elohim with joyous shouts of praise, the festive throng.* With the arrival of these letters, Shekhinah also attains the name of **אלהים** (Elohim): **מי** (mi) plus **אלה** (elleh). Here the verse describes both the earthly pilgrimage to the Temple and the divine procession of emanation to Shekhinah. The two meanings are linked since the human ritual below stimulates the *sefirot* above.

64. **to be Elohim, like Him** So Shekhinah will be Elohim, like Binah. On the masculine nature of Binah, see Zohar 1:5b, 17b, 96a; 2:127b; ZH 72b (ShS).

Rabbi El'azar said, "My silence assembled a temple above, a temple below.⁶⁵ Indeed, 'a word is worth one coin; silence, two.'⁶⁶ 'A word is worth one coin': what I said, the meaning I aroused. 'Silence, two': by holding my silence, two worlds were created, erected as one."

Rabbi Shim'on said, "From here on, the completion of the verse, as is written: *The one who brings forth their array by number* (Isaiah 40:26).⁶⁷ These are two rungs, each of which should be inscribed. One is *What*; the other, *Who*. This is above, that is below. The one above is inscribed by the words: *The one who brings forth their array by number*, the one who is known, beyond compare.⁶⁸ Similarly, "The one who brings forth bread from the earth,"⁶⁹ the one who is known, the lower rung,⁷⁰ and all is one. *By number*: 600,000, standing together, generating forces according to their kind, beyond number.⁷¹ *And calls them each by name*, both the 600,000 and their forces. What does this mean: *by name*? If you say they were called individually by name—not so, for then the verse should read *each by its name*. Rather, as long as this rung had not ascended and was still called מי (*Mi*), *Who*, it did not give birth nor bring forth what was hidden, each according to its kind, though all of them were hidden within. Once it *created* אלה (*elleh*), *these*, and attained its name, אלהים (*Elohim*), then by the power of this name, it yielded them perfectly. This is the meaning of *calls them each by name*: by its very name, it called forth each and every kind to exist perfectly. Similarly, *See, I have called by name Bezalel* (Exodus 31:2):⁷² 'I mentioned My name so that Bezalel would attain perfect

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65. **temple above...below** The temple above is *Binah*; the one below, *Shekhinah*. See BT *Sanhedrin* 99b: "Rav said, '[Whoever engages in Torah for its own sake,] it is as if he built the heavenly and earthly palaces.'"

On the heavenly and earthly temples, see *Mekhilta*, *Shirata* 10; JT *Berakhot* 4:5, 8c; *Tanḥuma*, *Vayaqhel* 7; *Pequdei* 1–3; *Shemot Rabbah* 33:4; *Midrash Tehillim* 30:1.

Rabbi El'azar's silence stimulated his father, Rabbi Shim'on, to reveal mysteries of two realms.

66. **a word is worth...** A proverb cited by Rav Dimi in BT *Megillah* 18a.

67. **completion of the verse...** The verse that Rabbi Shim'on and his son have been expounding continues: *Who brings forth their array by number and calls them each by name: because of His great might and vast power, not one is missing*.

68. **the one who is known, beyond compare** *Binah*. Rabbi Shim'on interprets the opening letter ה (*he*) of המוציא (*hamotsi*), *who brings forth*, as a definite article ("the one who") rather than simply a relative pronoun ("who").

69. **'The one who brings forth bread...'** The traditional blessing over bread, derived from Psalms 104:14. Again, the ה (*he*) is interpreted as a definite article.

70. **the one who is known, the lower rung, and all is one** *Shekhinah* is modeled on *Binah*, shares Her name (*Elohim*), and is also known as *Earth*.

71. **600,000...beyond number** The number represents the six *sefirot* between *Binah* and *Shekhinah*, which generate innumerable offspring. See *Zohar* 1:21b–22a.

72. **See, I have called by name Bezalel** Referring to the chief artisan of the Tabernacle in the Sinai Desert.

existence.’ *His great might* (Isaiah 40:26).⁷³ What is this? First of rungs, to which all desires ascend, ascending there [2b] secretly.⁷⁴ *And vast power*—mystery of the upper world,⁷⁵ which attained the name *Elohim*, as we have said. *Not one is missing*—not one of those 600,000 generated by the power of the name. Because *not one is missing*, whenever any of the Children of Israel died as punishment for their sins, the people were counted, and not even one of the 600,000 was lacking,⁷⁶ so that everything accorded with the paradigm: just as *not one is missing* above, so *not one is missing* below.”

Rav Hamnuna Sava said, “We find the letters backward:⁷⁷ ב (Bet) first, followed by ב (bet): בראשית (Be-reshit), *In the beginning*, followed by ברא (bara), *created*. Then א (alef) first, followed by א (alef): אלהים (Elohim), followed by את (et).

“The reason is: When the blessed Holy One wished to fashion the world, all the letters were hidden away.⁷⁸ For two thousand years before creating the world,⁷⁹ the blessed Holy One contemplated them and played with them. As He verged on creating the world, all the letters presented themselves before Him, from last to first.⁸⁰

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73. *His great might* This is the continuation of the verse from Isaiah: *Because of His great might and vast power, not one is missing*; cited above, note 67.

74. **First of rungs**... Either *Keter*, also known as *Ratson* (“Will, Desire”), or *Hokhmah*, the first *sefirah* that can be identified. See *Zohar* 2:231b.

75. **the upper world** *Binah*.

76. **Children of Israel... 600,000...** The total number of male Israelites above the age of twenty who left Egypt was approximately 600,000. See Exodus 12:37; Numbers 11:21. The precise total of the first census taken in the Sinai Desert was 603,550 (Exodus 38:26; Numbers 1:46; cf. Numbers 26:51; *Leqah Tov*, Numbers 1:46). The 600,000 Israelites parallel the 600,000 divine forces.

See *Mekhilta, Bahodesh* 3: “If even one of them had been missing [at Mount Sinai], they would not have been worthy of receiving [the Torah].” Cf. *Mekhilta de-Rasbhi*, on Exodus 19:11; *Devarim Rabbah* 7:8.

77. **We find the letters backward...** The first two words of the Torah begin with the second letter of the alphabet, ב (bet); the next two words of the Torah begin with the first letter, א (alef).

78. **hidden away** Before Creation, the letters were concealed within the divine mind and arranged in reverse order.

79. **For two thousand years...** See *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:2: “Rabbi Shim’on son of Lakish said, ‘The Torah preceded the creation of the world by two thousand years.’”

80. **all the letters presented themselves before Him...** A similar story appears in *Alfa Beita de-Rabbi Aqiva*, Version 2 (*Battei Midrashot*, 2:396–404); *Midrash Aseret ha-Dibberot* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 1:62–63); *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim* (ed. L. Greenhut) 5:11; *Zohar* 1:205b; *ZH* 88c–d (*MhN, Rut*); *TZ, Haqdamah*, 16a. The *Zohar* draws primarily on *Alfa Beita de-Rabbi Aqiva*. See Michal Oron, in *Mehqerei Yerushalayim be-Mahashevet Yisra’el* 3 (1984): 97–109.

“The letter ת (*tav*) entered first of all. She said, ‘Master of the worlds, may it please You to create the world by me, for I complete Your seal: אמת (*emet*), truth⁸¹—and You are called Truth.⁸² It is fitting for the King of Truth to begin with a letter of truth and to create the world by me.’

“The blessed Holy One replied, ‘You are seemly and worthy, but not deserving to initiate Creation, since you are destined to be marked on the foreheads of the faithful who fulfilled the Torah from א (*alef*) to ת (*tav*), and by your mark they will die.⁸³ Furthermore you are the seal of מות (*mavet*), death.⁸⁴ So you do not deserve to serve as the instrument of Creation.’ She immediately departed.

“The letter ש (*shin*) came before Him. She said, ‘Master of the worlds, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are named שדי (*Shaddai*), and it is fitting to create the world by a holy name.’

“He replied, ‘You are seemly, you are good, and you are true, but since letters of deceit take you as their accomplice, I do not wish to create the world by you. For a lie cannot exist unless ק”ר (*qof-resh*) take you.⁸⁵ So whoever wants to tell a lie will first lay a foundation of truth and then construct the lie.⁸⁶ For ש (*shin*) is a letter of truth, a true letter of the Patriarchs, who were united in it;⁸⁷ ק”ר (*qof-resh*) are letters that appear on the evil side.⁸⁸ In order to survive, they entangle the letter ש (*shin*), forming קשר (*qesher*), conspiracy. Seeing this, she left His presence.

81. **Your seal:** אמת (*emet*), “truth” According to Rabbi Ḥanina (BT *Shabbat* 55a), God’s seal is אמת (*emet*), “truth,” the final letter of which is ת (*tav*).

82. **You are called Truth** See Jeremiah 10:10: יהוה (*YHVH*) is the God of truth.

83. **destined to be marked...** See Ezekiel 9:3–4: *He* [יהוה (*YHVH*)] called to the man dressed in linen with the scribe’s kit at his waist, and יהוה (*YHVH*) said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark [תו] (*tav*) on the foreheads of those who moan and groan over all the abominations being committed in it.” See Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 177. In the old Hebrew script, the ת (*tav*) was shaped like an X, the simplest mark. Its purpose in Ezekiel was to distinguish the righteous from the rest of the population, but according to Rabbi Aḥa son of Rabbi Ḥanina (BT *Shabbat* 55a), even those marked were killed, since their silence in the face of the wicked implicated them.

84. **seal of מות (*mavet*), “death”** The word מות (*mavet*) ends with the letter ת (*tav*).

85. **letters of deceit... ק”ר (*qof-resh*)...** The word שקר (*sheqer*), “lie,” begins with ש (*shin*) and continues: קר (*qof, resh*). See BT *Shabbat* 104a; Judah ben Barzillai, *Peirush Sefer Yetsirah*, 146.

86. **whoever wants to tell a lie...** See Rashi on Numbers 13:27, who paraphrases BT *Sotah* 35a; *Zohar* 2:215b, 264a; 3:161a.

87. **ש (*shin*) is a letter of truth...** The three prongs of the ש (*shin*) stand for the three Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who symbolize the triad of *sefirot*: *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*. See *Zohar* 1:25b (TZ); 2:204a.

88. **appear on the evil side** Perhaps because they stand for קליפה (*qelippah*), “husk,” and רע (*ra*), “evil.” See *Zohar* 2:180b; ZḤ 8c (SO).

“The letter \aleph (*tsadi*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for צדיקים (*tsaddiqim*), the righteous, are sealed by me, and You, who are called צדיק (*Tsaddiq*), Righteous, are signified by me, as is written: *For יהוה (YHVH) is צדיק (tsaddiq)—loving righteousness* (Psalms 11:7). It is fitting to create the world by me!’

“He replied, ‘ \aleph (*Tsadi*), you are צדיק (*tsaddiq*), but you should remain hidden—not so revealed—so as not to provide the world a pretext.’ How so? She is נ (*nun*). י (*Yod*) from the name of the holy covenant comes and rides on her, is united with her.⁸⁹ This is the mystery: When the blessed Holy One created Adam, He created him with two faces.⁹⁰ So the י (*yod*) faces backward, like this: \aleph .⁹¹ They were not turned face-to-face, like this: \aleph .⁹² It looked upward like this: \aleph . It looked downward like this: \aleph .⁹³ The blessed Holy One said to her, ‘Turn back, for I intend to split you and transfigure you face-to-face, but you will arise elsewhere.’⁹⁴ She left His presence and departed.

89. She is נ (*nun*)... The letter \aleph (*tsadi*) consists of a נ (*nun*) and a י (*yod*). See *Bahir* 42 (61); *Sefer ha-Temunah*, 2, 21a. The נ (*nun*) symbolizes *Shekhinah*, the feminine (נקבה [*neqevah*]). The י (*yod*) symbolizes *Yesod*, the divine phallus, who is called “covenant.” The mark of the covenant of circumcision is pictured as the smallest of the Hebrew letters. In *Tanḥuma*, *Tsav* 14, *Shemini* 8, this mark is identified with the י (*yod*) of the divine name שדי (*Shaddai*). A German Hasidic tradition identifies the mark with the *yod* of יהוה (*YHVH*).

See *Zohar* 1:13a, 56a, 95a–b; 2:36a, 216b; 3:142a (*IR*), 215b, 220a, 256a (*RM*); Wolfson, in *JQR* 78 (1987): 77–112; idem, *Circle in the Square*, 29–48. Liebes (*Studies*, 154–58) suggests that the \aleph (*tsadi*) alludes to Jesus.

90. two faces דו פרצופין (*Du partsufin*). See *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:1: “Rabbi Yirmeyah son of El’azar said, ‘When the blessed Holy One created Adam, He created him androgynous, as is said: *Male and female He created them* (Genesis 1:27).’ Rabbi Shemu’el son of Naḥamani said, ‘When the blessed Holy One created Adam, He created him with two faces. Then He sawed him and gave him two backs, one on this side and one on that.’”

See BT *Berakhot* 61a; *Eruvin* 18a; Plato, *Symposium* 189d–191d; *Zohar* 1:13b, 47a; 2:55a; 3:5a, 44b; Matt, *Zohar*, 217.

91. י (*yod*) faces backward... This reflects the Sephardic practice of writing the \aleph (*tsadi*). See Scholem; Friedman, *Tsidqat ha-Tsaddiq*, 41–55; Meshi-Zahav, *Qovets Sifrei Setam*, intro, 36; 8, 149–52, 239–40; Havlin, in *Alei Sefer* 12 (1986): 13–19; Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigleh she-ba-Nistar*, 65, 139, nn. 163–66.

92. not turned face-to-face... Initially the union between the masculine and feminine aspects of God was back-to-back and thus incomplete. See *Zohar* 2:176b (*SdTs*); 3:292b (*IZ*); BT *Bava Batra* 99a. This incomplete union is symbolized by the configuration of the \aleph (*tsadi*). The \aleph (*tsadi*) must remain hidden so that this secret will not become widely known and “provide the world a pretext” to impugn the divine union.

93. It looked upward... downward... Trying to face its partner. See Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2:564.

94. you will arise elsewhere The י (*yod*) and the נ (*nun*) will face one another not here but in another letter: ט (*tet*). See *KP*.

“The letter פ (*pe*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the worlds, may it please You to create the world by me, for I signify פורקנא (*purqena*), the redemption, that You will someday bring to the world, also called פדות (*pedut*), deliverance. It is fitting to create the world by me!’

“He replied, ‘You are seemly, but you signify hidden transgression, like a serpent striking, then tucking its head into its body:⁹⁵ so one who sins bows his head, stretching out his hands.’

“Similarly ע (*ayin*) stands for עון (*avon*), iniquity. Although she said, ‘I imply ענוה (*anavah*), humility,’ the blessed Holy One replied, ‘I will not create the world by you.’ She left His presence.

“The letter ס (*samekh*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of [3a] the worlds, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me סמיכא (*semikha*), support, exists for those who fall, as is written: סומך יהוה (*Somekh YHVH*), YHVH supports all who fall (Psalms 145:14).’

“He replied, ‘So you are needed where you are; do not move! If you leave, what would happen to the fallen, who depend on you?’ She immediately left His presence.

“The letter נ (*nun*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are called נורא (*Nora*), *Awesome, in praises* (Exodus 15:11). By me, the praise of the righteous is called נאודה (*na’vah*), *comely* (Psalms 33:1).’

“He replied, ‘נ (*Nun*), return to your place, for because of you ס (*samekh*) returned to her place.⁹⁶ Depend on her.’ She returned immediately, leaving His presence.

“The letter מ (*mem*) entered. She said to him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are called מלך (*Melekh*), King.’

“He replied, ‘Certainly so, but I will not create the world by you, since the world needs a king. Return to your place, you along with ל (*lamed*) and ך (*khaf*),⁹⁷ for the world should not be without a king.’

“At that moment the letter כ (*kaf*) descended from His throne of glory.⁹⁸ Trembling, she said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for I am Your כבוד (*Kavod*), “Glory.”’

95. **hidden transgression...** The form of the letter פ (*pe*) resembles someone trying to hide his head. See *Zohar* 3:119b.

96. **because of you...** נ (*Nun*) stands for נופלים (*nofelim*), the “fallen.”

97. **ל (*lamed*) and ך (*khaf*)** The other two letters in the word מלך (*melekh*), “king,”

which precede the letter מ (*mem*) in the alphabet.

98. **letter כ (*kaf*) descended...** The final ך (*khaf*) in the word מלך (*melekh*) was eliminated, but now the regular כ (*kaf*) approaches God.

“When כ (kaf) descended from the throne of glory, 200,000 worlds trembled, the throne trembled, and all the worlds verged on collapse. The blessed Holy One said to her, ‘כ, כ (Kaf, kaf), what are you doing here? I will not create the world by you. Return to your place, for you imply בליה (kelayah), destruction—a decree of destruction (Isaiah 10:23). Return to your throne and stay there.’ She thereupon left His presence and returned to her place.

“The letter י (yod) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for I am the beginning of the holy Name.’⁹⁹ It is fitting for You to create the world by me!’

“He replied, ‘It is enough for you to be engraved in Me, inscribed in Me. I desire you entirely. Ascend! You should not be uprooted from My name.’

“The letter ט (tet) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are called טוב וישר (tov ve-yashar), good and upright (Psalms 25:8).’

“He replied, ‘I will not create the world by you, for your goodness is concealed and hidden within you,¹⁰⁰ as is written: *How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those in awe of You* (Psalms 31:20). Since it is hidden within you, it plays no part in this world that I am about to create, but rather in the world to come.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, because your goodness is hidden within you, the gates of the Temple will sink, as is written: *Her gates טבעו (tave’u), have sunk, into the earth* (Lamentations 2:9). Further, facing you is ח (het),¹⁰² and when you join together you spell חטא (het), sin.’¹⁰³ So these two letters are not inscribed in the holy tribes.¹⁰⁴ She immediately left His presence.

“The letter ז (zayin) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me Your children observe the Sabbath, as is written: זכור (Zakhor), *Remember, the Sabbath day, to hallow it* (Exodus 20:8).’

99. beginning... The first letter of יהוה (YHVH).

100. hidden within you The point at the upper right of the ט (tet) is turned inward. See *Zohar* 1:30b.

101. rather in the world to come See BT *Ḥagigah* 12a (cited above, note 10); *Bereshit Rabbah* 3:6; 41:3; *Shemot Rabbah* 35:1; *Tanḥuma, Shemini* 9; *Bahir* 97–98 (147); *Zohar* 1:31b–32a, 45b–46a, 47a; 2:127a, 148b–149a, 220a–b; 3:88a, 173b.

102. facing you is ח (het) The letter preceding ט (tet) in the alphabet.

103. חטא (het), “sin” Which ends with a quiescent א (alef). See *Zohar* 1:204a.

104. these letters are not inscribed... The letters ח (het) and ט (tet) do not appear in the names of the twelve tribes, which were engraved on the jewels of the breastplate worn by the high priest. See BT *Yoma* 73b; JT *Yoma* 7:7, 44c; *Zohar* 2:152a, 230a; 3:188b.

“He replied, ‘I will not create the world by you, for you imply war—a sharp sword and a spear for battle, like a ך (nun).¹⁰⁵ She immediately left His presence.

“The letter ם (vav) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for I am a letter of Your name.’¹⁰⁶

“He replied, ‘ ם (Vav), it is enough for you and ה (he) to be letters of My name, included in the mystery of My name, engraved and carved in My name. I will not create the world by either of you.’

“The letters ד (dalet) and ג (gimel) entered and made the same request. He replied to them as well, ‘It is enough for you to be with each other, since the poor will never cease from the world¹⁰⁷ and need to be treated kindly. ד (Dalet) is poor; ג (gimel) גומל (gomel), renders, goodness to her.¹⁰⁸ Do not separate from one another! It is enough for one of you to sustain the other.’

“The letter ב (bet) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are blessed above and below.’¹⁰⁹

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“The blessed Holy One replied, ‘Indeed, by you I will create the world. You will be the beginning of Creation.’

“The letter א (alef) stood and did not enter. The blessed Holy One said to her, ‘א, א (Alef, alef), why do you not enter My presence like all the other letters?’

“She replied, ‘Master of the world! Because I saw all the letters leaving Your presence fruitlessly. What could I do there? Furthermore, look, [3b] You have given this enormous gift to the letter ב (bet), and it is not fitting for the exalted King to take back a gift He has given to his servant and give it to another!’

“The blessed Holy One said, ‘א, א (Alef, alef)! Although I will create the world with the letter ב (bet), you will be the first of all the letters. Only through you do I become one.¹¹⁰ With you all counting begins and every deed in the world. No union is actualized except by א (alef).’

“The blessed Holy One fashioned high, large letters and low, small letters.¹¹¹ So, ב, ב (Bet, bet): בראשית ברא (Be-reshit bara); א, א (Alef, alef): אלהים את

105. like a ך (nun) Like the straight line of a ך (final nun). The word זין (zayin) means “weapon.”

106. letter of Your name The third letter of the name יהוה (YHVH).

107. poor will never cease... See Deuteronomy 15:11.

108. ד (Dalet) is poor... The letter ד (dalet) signifies דל (dal), “poor.” See BT *Shabbat* 104a: “גמול דלים — גימיל דלית — גמול דלים” (Gimel dalet: gemol dallim), Render kindness to the poor.”

109. By me, You are blessed... ב (Bet) stands for ברכה (berakhah), “blessing.” See JT *Hagigah* 2:1, 77c; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:10; *Midrash ha-Gadol*, Genesis 1:1, 10.

110. Only through you do I become one... The א (alef) stands for the number one and also for Keter, the first *sefirah*. The word אחד (ehad), “one,” begins with א (alef).

111. high, large letters and low, small letters The initial letters of the first four words of the Torah are ב, ב (bet, bet), then

(Elohim et). Letters above and letters below. They were all as one, from the upper world and the lower world.

Rabbi Yudai said, “What is בראשית (Be-reshit), *In the beginning*. (Be-reshit)? With Wisdom.¹¹² This is the Wisdom on which the world stands—through which one enters hidden, high mysteries. Here were engraved six vast, supernal dimensions, from which everything emerges, from which issued six springs and streams, flowing into the immense ocean.¹¹³ This is ברא שית (bara shit), created six,¹¹⁴ created from here. Who created them? The unmentioned, the hidden unknown.”¹¹⁵

Rabbi Ḥiyya and Rabbi Yose were walking on the way. As they reached the site of a certain field, Rabbi Ḥiyya said to Rabbi Yose, “What you have said—ברא שית (bara shit)—is certainly true, for there are six supernal days in the Torah, not more; the others are concealed.¹¹⁶ But in the Secrets of Creation we have discovered this:

“The holy hidden one¹¹⁷ engraved an engraving in the innards of a recess, punctuated by a thrust point.¹¹⁸ He engraved that engraving, hiding it away, like one who locks up everything under a single key, which locks everything

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א, א (alef, alef). Although the first word, בראשית (be-reshit), does open with a large ב (bet), the emphasis here is not on the size of the letters but rather their origin. The first of each pair derives from *Binah*, the higher world; the second of each from *Shekhinah*, the lower world.

See *Zohar* 1:159b; 2:132a, 174a, 180b; 3:2a, 220a; *ZḤ* 66c (*ShS*), 74c (*ShS*).

112. **בראשית (Be-reshit)? With Wisdom** See *Targum Yerushalmi* (frag.), Genesis 1:1: “With wisdom God created.” Wisdom (*Hokhmah*) is the second *sefirah*, the primordial point of emanation.

The identification of ראשית (*reshit*), *beginning*, with Wisdom appears widely. See Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:242–45, 266–69; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1; Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 8; Naḥmanides on Genesis 1:1; *Zohar* 1:2a, 15a, 16b, 20a, 145a; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 21–22 (25–26); Scholem, *Major Trends*, 391, n. 80.

113. **six vast, supernal dimensions...** Within *Hokhmah*, the six *sefirot* from *Ḥesed* to *Yesod* are etched, subsequently emerging

and flowing to the ocean of *Shekhinah*. See *Sefer Yetsirah* 1:13.

114. **ברא שית (bara shit)...** The word בראשית (*Be-reshit*) is divided in two and read as ברא שית (*bara shit*), “created six.” See *Midrash ha-Gadol*, Genesis 1:1, 11–12; *Seder Rabbah di-Vreshit*, 1 (*Battei Midrashot*, 1:19), where it is said that the world was created by six letters (the divine names יה [YH] and יהוה [YHVH]); BT *Sukkah* 49a; *Zohar* 1:15b, 39b.

115. **The unmentioned, the hidden unknown** The hidden source of emanation, *Ein Sof* or *Keter*; the unnamed subject of the verb ברא (*bara*), “created.”

116. **six supernal days...the others...** The mystical Torah, *Tif'eret*, includes the six *sefirot* from *Ḥesed* to *Yesod*, the six primordial days of Creation, whereas the higher *sefirot* are concealed.

117. **holy hidden one** Apparently *Keter*. See *Zohar* 1:10a; 3:66b.

118. **recess...thrust point** *Binah* is the recess, or womb, penetrated by the primordial point of *Hokhmah*.

within a single palace.¹¹⁹ Although everything is hidden away within that palace, the essence of everything lies in that key, which closes and opens. Within that palace lie hidden treasures, one greater than the other. Within that palace stand gates built cryptically, fifty of them. Carved into four sides, they were forty-nine. One gate has no side. No one knows whether it is above or below; it is shut.¹²⁰ In those gates is one lock and one precise place for inserting the key,¹²¹ marked only by the impress of the key, known only to the key. Concerning this mystery it is written: בראשית ברא אלהים (*Be-reshit bara Elohim*), *In the beginning God created*. בראשית (*Be-reshit*) is the key enclosing all, closing and opening. Six gates are contained in that key that closes and opens.¹²² When it closes those gates, enclosing them within itself, then indeed: בראשית (*Be-reshit*)—a revealed word combined with a concealed word. ברא (*Bara*), *created*, is always concealed, closing, not opening.”¹²³

Rabbi Yose said, “Certainly so! I heard the Holy Lamp¹²⁴ say so, that ברא (*bara*) is a concealed word, closing, not opening. As long as the world¹²⁵ was locked within the word ברא (*bara*), it was not, did not exist. Enveloping

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119. **a single key... a single palace** The key of *Hokhmah* opens and closes the palace of *Binah*.

120. **Carved into four sides... forty-nine...** Forty-nine gates of *Binah* are revealed in four lower *sefirot*, corresponding to the four directions: *Hesed* (south), *Gevurah* (north), *Tiferet* (east), and *Shekhinah* (west). The fiftieth gate remains hidden; it “has no side” and “is shut.”

See BT *Rosh ha-Shanah* 21b: “Rav and Shemu’el both said, ‘Fifty gates of בינה (*binah*), understanding, were created in the world, all of which were given to Moses except for one, as is said: *You made him little less than God* (Psalms 8:6).”

Instead of “forty-nine” (preferred by OL), several witnesses (C12, Ms3, M, Cr) read “forty.” *KP* suggests that the original reading was מי (*Mi*), “Who,” indicating *Binah* and Her fifty (the *gimatriyya* of מי) gates, and that this word was misread as מ (*mem*), “forty.”

121. **one lock...** The opening within *Binah*. The “precise place” is the subtle link between the primordial point of *Hokhmah* and the womb of the Divine Mother, *Binah*. Elsewhere in the *Zohar* this site is identified

as *a path unknown to any vulture* (Job 28:7). See 1:29a–b; 2:122b–123a; 3:61b.

122. **Six gates...** The six *sefirot* hidden within *Hokhmah*. See *Zohar* 2:177a (*SdT*s).

123. **revealed word...concealed word...** The word בראשית (*Be-reshit*) contains two words: ברא (*bara*), “created”, referring to the hidden mystery of creation, and שית (*shit*), “six”, referring to the revelation of the six *sefirot*.

Yehuda Liebes argues that the insistence on the concealed nature of ברא (*bara*) alludes to a different pronunciation and meaning: ברא (*bera*), “son,” the Divine Son. See *Zohar* 2:178b (*SdT*s); and Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 146–52.

124. **Holy Lamp** בוצינא קדישא (*Botsina Qaddisha*), the Zoharic title of Rabbi Shim’on son of Yoḥai. See *Zohar* 1:4a, 156a, 197b; 3:171a; *ZḤ* 85d (*MhN*, *Rut*).

See 2 Samuel 21:17; *Bereshit Rabbah* 85:4; BT *Ketubbot* 17a, where Rabbi Abbahu is called: בוצינא דנהורא (*Botsina di-Nhora*), “Lamp of Light”; and *Berakhot* 28b, where Rabban Yoḥanan son of Zakkai is called נר ישראל (*Ner Yisra’el*), “Lamp of Israel.”

125. **world** The lower *sefirot*, which constitute the pattern of all the worlds.

everything was תהו (*tohu*), *chaos*,¹²⁶ and as long as תהו (*tohu*) reigned, the world was not, did not exist. When did that key open gates? When was it fit to be fruitful, to generate offspring? When Abraham arrived,¹²⁷ as is written: *These are the generations of heaven and earth* בהבראם (*be-hibbare'am*), *when they were created* (Genesis 2:4), and we have learned: באברהם (*be-Avraham*), through Abraham.¹²⁸ Whereas everything was concealed in the word ברא (*bara*), now the letters were transposed and rendered fruitful. A pillar emerged, generating offspring: אבר (*ever*), organ—Holy Foundation on which the world stands.¹²⁹

“When אבר (*ever*) was inscribed in the word ברא (*bara*), the supernal concealed one inscribed another inscription for its glorious name. This is מי ברא אלה (*Mi vara elleh*), *Who created these* (Isaiah 40:26).¹³⁰ The holy blessed name מה (*Mah*), *What*, was also inscribed.¹³¹ Out of ברא (*bara*) it generated אבר (*ever*), inscribing אלה (*elleh*) at one end and אבר (*ever*) at the other.¹³² Holy concealed one! אלה (*Elleh*) exists, אבר (*ever*) exists. As one was completed, so was the other. In אבר (*ever*) it engraved ה (*he*); in אלה (*elleh*), י (*yod*). Letters were aroused to complete one side and the other. It produced מ”ם (two *mems*), moving one to this side, one to that. The holy name was completed—becoming אלהים (*Elohim*)—and the name אברהם (*Avraham*) as well. [4a] As one was completed, so was the other.¹³³ Then life was generated and the complete

126. תהו (*tohu*), *chaos* *Hokhmah*, the primordial divine substance representing pure potential, corresponding to the Greek philosophical concept of *hyle*, primordial matter.

127. **When Abraham arrived** Abraham symbolizes the *sefirah* of *Hesed*, first of the lower *sefirot* emanating from *Binah*.

128. באברהם (*be-Avraham*)... According to Rabbi Yehoshu'a son of Korhah (*Bereshit Rabbah* 12:9), בהבראם (*be-hibbare'am*), *when they were created*, is an anagram of באברהם (*be-Avraham*), “through Abraham,” indicating that the world was created for his sake.

See *Zohar* 1:86b, 91b, 93a, 105b, 128b, 154b, 230b; 3:117a.

129. **Whereas everything was concealed** ... אבר (*ever*)... The letters of the word ברא (*bara*) were rearranged into אבר (*ever*), which not only forms the beginning of אברהם (*Avraham*) but also signifies the male “organ,” *Yesod* (“Foundation”), the divine phallus and cosmic pillar.

130. מי ברא אלה (*Mi vara elleh*)... *Binah*, known as מי (*Mi*), *Who* (see above, pages XX27–XX62), emanated *elleh* (*these*), the lower *sefirot*. The transition from מי (*mi*) to אלה (*elleh*) corresponds to the transposition of ברא (*bara*) into אבר (*ever*).

131. מה (*Mah*), *What*... *Shekhinah* is known as מה (*mah*), *What* (see above, pages XX30–XX62). When מה (*mah*) was added to אבר (*ever*), the name אברהם (*Avraham*) was formed.

132. אלה (*elleh*) at one end and אבר (*ever*) at the other The verse *These are the generations of heaven and earth, when they were created* contains אלה (*elleh*), *These*, at one end and אבר (*ever*) (included in the word בהבראם [*be-hibbare'am*], *when they were created*, at the other.

133. **As one was completed**... The letters ה (*he*) and מ (*mem*) were added to אבר (*ever*) to complete the name אברהם (*Avraham*); the letters י (*yod*) and מ (*mem*) were added to אלה (*elleh*) to complete the name אלהים (*Elohim*).

Name emerged, unlike before, as is written: *These are the generations of heaven and earth* בהבראם (*be-hibbare'am*), when they were created. All remained suspended until the name of Abraham was created.¹³⁴ Once that name was completed, the holy name was completed, as the verse concludes: *on the day that יהוה אלהים (YHVH Elohim) made earth and heaven* (Genesis 2:4).¹³⁵

Rabbi Ḥiyya prostrated himself on the ground, kissing the dust and weeping. He cried out, “Dust, dust, how stubborn you are, how impudent! All delights of the eye decay in you. All pillars of light in the world you consume and pulverize. How insolent you are! The Holy Lamp¹³⁶ who has illumined the world, majestic ruler, prince whose merit sustains the world, decays in you. O Rabbi Shim'on, radiance of the lamp, radiance of the worlds, you decompose in the dust, yet you subsist and guide the world!”¹³⁷

For a moment he was shocked, and then exclaimed, “Dust, dust, do not boast! The pillars of the world will not be surrendered to you. Rabbi Shim'on has not decayed in you!”¹³⁸

Still weeping, Rabbi Ḥiyya rose and walked on together with Rabbi Yose. From that day on, he fasted forty days to envision Rabbi Shim'on.¹³⁹ He was

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134. **until the name of Abraham . . .** See the remark by Rabbi Yehoshu'a son of Korḥah (*Bereshit Rabbah* 12:9) referred to above: בהבראם (*be-hibbare'am*) is an anagram of באברהם (*be-Avraham*).

135. **on the day . . .** יהוה אלהים (*YHVH Elohim*). In rabbinic literature these two names represent, respectively, the divine qualities of compassion and justice.

See *Sifrei*, Deuteronomy 26; *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:15; 33:3; and 13:3, where *YHVH Elohim* is called “a complete name.” Cf. *Zohar* 1:20a, 48b; 2:161a, 229a; 3:138b (*IR*); *ZḤ* 70d (*ShS*).

136. **Holy Lamp** Rabbi Shim'on, who had recently died; see above, note 124. On the following passage see Wineman, *Mystic Tales from the Zohar*, 19–32.

137. **yet you subsist . . .** The soul of Rabbi Shim'on endures in the Garden of Eden, and his spiritual power still guides the world.

138. **has not decayed . . .** The bodies of the righteous do not decay. See BT *Bava Metsi'a* 84b, concerning Rabbi El'azar son of Rabbi Shim'on.

139. **he fasted forty days to envision Rabbi Shim'on** See *Qohelet Rabbah* on 9:10:

“Resh Lakish (according to another version: Rabbi Yehoshu'a son of Levi) was longing to see Rabbi Ḥiyya Rabbah [in a dream]. He was told, ‘You are not worthy.’ ‘Why?’ he asked. ‘Didn’t I study Torah as he did?’ They replied, ‘You did not teach Torah as he did; and not only that, he exiled himself [wandering for the sake of Torah].’ He said to them, ‘Didn’t I exile myself?’ They replied, ‘You exiled yourself to learn; he exiled himself to teach.’ He sat for 300 fasts, and then he [Rabbi Ḥiyya] appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘If someone is a nobody but speaks of himself as though he were somebody—better for him if he had never been created.’ Rabbi Assi fasted for thirty days to envision Rabbi Ḥiyya Rabbah but did not see him. He was told, ‘You are not worthy.’ He said to them, ‘Show him to me, and let happen what happens!’ He saw his steps [the steps of Rabbi Ḥiyya’s throne in heaven], and his eyes grew dim.” See JT *Kil'ayim* 9:4, 32b; Lerner, in *Sinai* 59 (1966): 20–21.

In the *Zohar* Rabbi Ḥiyya is no longer the saint whose appearance is sought by fasting, but rather the devotee who seeks. Rabbi

told, “You are not entitled to see him.” He wept and fasted another forty days. In a vision he was shown Rabbi Shim’on and his son Rabbi El’azar, studying the word that Rabbi Yose had spoken,¹⁴⁰ with thousands listening. Meanwhile he noticed many huge celestial wings,¹⁴¹ which Rabbi Shim’on and his son Rabbi El’azar mounted, and they soared to the Academy of Heaven. All those wings waited for them. He saw them returning, their splendor renewed, and they shone more brilliantly than the dazzle of the sun.

Rabbi Shim’on opened, saying, “Let Rabbi Ḥiyya enter and see how the blessed Holy One intends to rejuvenate the faces of the righteous in the time to come.¹⁴² Happy is one who enters here without shame. Happy is one who stands in that world¹⁴³ as a sturdy pillar.”

Rabbi Ḥiyya saw himself entering. Rabbi El’azar rose together with the other pillars sitting there. Embarrassed, he drew back, then entered and sat at the feet of Rabbi Shim’on. A voice issued: “Lower your eyes, do not raise your head, do not gaze!” Lowering his eyes, he saw a light shining in the distance. The voice returned: “O high, hidden, concealed ones, open-eyed, roaming the

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Shim’on, who has replaced him as the spiritual hero, welcomes him to heaven.

On Mount Sinai Moses fasted for forty days (Exodus 34:28). According to Rabbi Tanḥum son of Ḥanilai (*Midrash Mishlei* 1:1), Solomon did the same “so that God would give him a spirit of wisdom and understanding.” See BT *Bava Metsi’a* 85a, where Rabbi Yosef is said to have fasted forty fasts, then forty more, then forty more, in order to ensure that Torah not depart from him. On the following page (85b) we read of Rabbi Ḥiyya’s glorious state in heaven, a passage which influences the *Zohar*’s description here of Rabbi Shim’on and Rabbi El’azar: “Rabbi Ḥaviva said, ‘Rabbi Ḥaviva son of Surmaki told me: “I saw one of the rabbis whom Elijah used to frequent. In the morning his eyes were lovely, but in the evening they looked as if they had been burnt by fire. I asked him, ‘What is this?’ He told me that he had asked Elijah, ‘Show me the [departed] rabbis as they ascend to the Heavenly Academy.’ He [Elijah] replied: ‘You can gaze at all of them except for the carriage of Rabbi Ḥiyya, at which you cannot gaze.’ ‘What is their sign? [How can I distinguish between them?] ‘All are accompanied by angels as they as-

pend and descend, except for Rabbi Ḥiyya’s carriage, which ascends and descends on its own.’ ‘Unable to restrain myself, I gazed at it. Two sparks of fire shot forth and struck that man [i.e., me], blinding him. The next day I went and prostrated myself upon his [Rabbi Ḥiyya’s] grave, crying out, “Your mishnah is my mishnah,” and I was healed.””

On the special relationship between Rabbi Ḥiyya and Rabbi Shim’on, see *Zohar* 2:14a (*MhN*). On weeping as a technique for attaining a vision, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 75–88.

140. **the word that Rabbi Yose had spoken** Rabbi Yose had transmitted a teaching of Rabbi Shim’on’s concerning בראשית ברא (*Be-reshit bara*). See above, pages XX124–XX135.

141. **wings** Of angels, or “winged beings.”

142. **rejuvenate the faces...** See *Qohelet Rabbah* on 1:7: “Rabbi Yirmeyah son of Rabbi El’azar said, ‘In the time to come, the blessed Holy One will rejuvenate the light of the faces of the righteous, as is said: *But may those that love him be as the sun going forth in its might* (Judges 5:31).”

143. **in that world** On earth.

entire world, gaze and see!¹⁴⁴ O low, sleeping ones, close-eyed, awake!¹⁴⁵ Who among you turns darkness into light, bitter into sweet before arriving here?¹⁴⁶ Who among you awaits each day the light that shines when the King visits the doe¹⁴⁷ and is glorified—declared King of all kings of the world? Whoever does not await this each day in that world has no portion here.”¹⁴⁸

Meanwhile he noticed many of the Companions surrounding all those erect pillars, and he saw them being raised to the Academy of Heaven—some ascending, some descending.¹⁴⁹ Above them all, he saw the Master of Wings¹⁵⁰ approaching. When he arrived, he solemnly swore that he had heard from behind the curtain¹⁵¹ that the King remembers the doe who lies in the dust and visits Her every day. At that moment He kicks the 390 firmaments,¹⁵² which all

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144. **O high, hidden, concealed ones...** Referring to the angels or perhaps the souls of the righteous. See *ZH* 76d (*MhN, Rut*); and Zechariah 4:10: *the eyes of YHWH roaming the whole earth*.

145. **O low, sleeping ones...** Human beings.

146. **darkness into light, bitter into sweet** By acting righteously on earth.

147. **visits the doe** Joins *Shekhinah* and redeems Her from exile. The *Zohar* identifies *Shekhinah* with the *doe of love* (Proverbs 5:19) and *the doe of dawn* (Psalms 22:1). See *Zohar* 2:7b; 3:21b, 25b; *JT Berakhot* 1:1, 2c.

148. **Whoever does not await...** See *BT Shabbat* 31a: “Rava said, ‘When a human is led in for judgment, he is asked, “Were you honest in your business dealings, did you set aside time for Torah, did you generate new life, did you await salvation, did you engage in the dialectics of wisdom, did you understand one thing from another?”’”

149. **saw them being raised to the Academy...** See the passage from *BT Bava Metsi’a* 85b, cited above, note 139. Again, what is said in rabbinic literature about Rabbi Ḥiyya is transferred here to Rabbi Shim’on.

150. **Master of Wings** מארי דגרפי (*Marei de-gadpei*). Apparently Metatron, the chief angel. Cf. Proverbs 1:17; Ecclesiastes 10:20 (in both of which the corresponding Hebrew expression means simply “a winged

creature,” “a bird”); *BT Shabbat* 49a (where the title is applied to Elisha, who wore *tefillin* despite a Roman prohibition). Elsewhere in the *Zohar*, the expression means simply “angel.” See 1:44a, 92a, 152a; 2:13a, 122b; 3:80b. At times (e.g., above; 2:171a), גרפין (*gadpin*), “wings,” itself means “angels”; so “the Master of wings” would be the chief angel.

Metatron is often associated with the Heavenly Academy. See *BT Avodah Zarah* 3b; *Bereshit Rabbati* 5:24; *Sefer Ḥanokh* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:115–16); *Seder Gan Eden* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 3:134–35); *Zohar* 2:169b; *ZH* 36b (*ST*).

In *Targum Qohelet* 10:20 and *Ma’yan Ḥokhmah* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 1:60), Elijah is identified as “Master of Wings.” See *BT Bava Metsi’a* 85b, a passage which influences the *Zohar* here (cited above, note 139): “He [Rabbi Ḥaviva] had asked Elijah, ‘Show me the [departed] rabbis as they ascend to the Heavenly Academy.’”

151. **behind the curtain** The curtain concealing God from the world. See *BT Ḥagigah* 15a; *Ma’yan Ḥokhmah* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 1:60).

152. **He kicks the 390 firmaments** See *Derekh Erets Rabbah*, 2, 56a: “He is one and dwells in 390 firmaments.” The *gimatriyya* of שמיים (*shamayim*), “heaven,” is 390.

On kicking the firmament, see *BT Berakhot* 59a; *Zohar* 1:231a; 2:195b–196a; *ZH* 53b.

tremble and quake [4b] before Him. He sheds tears over this,¹⁵³ and those tears of bubbling fire fall into the vast ocean. From those tears the Prince of the Ocean¹⁵⁴ emerges—by them he is sustained. And he hallows the name of the Holy King, agreeing to swallow up all the waters of Creation and absorb them when all the nations gather against the holy people,¹⁵⁵ so that the waters will dry up and they will pass through on dry land.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile he¹⁵⁷ heard a voice proclaiming, “Make way, make way—for King Messiah is coming to the Academy of Rabbi Shim’on!” For all the righteous present there are heads of academies, and those academies are designated there; and all members of each academy ascend from the Academy here¹⁵⁸ to the Academy of Heaven. The Messiah visits all those academies, setting his seal on the Torah issuing from the mouths of the rabbis.¹⁵⁹ At that moment the Messiah arrived, adorned by the heads of the academies with celestial crowns. At that moment all the Companions rose and Rabbi Shim’on rose, his light radiating to the vault of heaven.

He said to him,¹⁶⁰ “Happy are you, Rabbi, for your Torah ascends in 370 lights,¹⁶¹ each and every light refracting into 613 senses,¹⁶² ascending and bathing in rivers of pure balsam.¹⁶³ The blessed Holy One sets His seal on the

153. **sheds tears over this** Over the exile of *Shekhinah*. See BT *Berakhot* 59a: “When the blessed Holy One remembers His children, who are plunged in suffering among the nations of the world, He sheds two tears into the Great Sea, and His voice resounds from one end of the world to the other.”

See *Zohar* 2:9a, 19a–b (*MhN*), 195b; 3:172a–b; *Seder Gan Eden* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 3:133).

154. **Prince of the Ocean** Apparently Leviathan, mentioned below, page XX168.

155. **to swallow up all the waters...** See *Tanḥuma*, *Ḥuqqat* 1, and BT *Bava Batra* 74b (in the name of Rav), where God commands the Prince of the Ocean to swallow the chaotic waters of creation. When he refuses, God kicks and slays him. Here, the prince obeys the divine command.

On the parallel between the waters and the nations, see *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* A, 35, where both gatherings (of the water and of the nations) are peaceful. Cf. *Zohar* 1:119a; Wineman, *Mystic Tales from the Zohar*, 30–31.

156. **pass through on dry land** Recalling the crossing of the Red Sea. See Micah 7:15:

As in the days when You went forth from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders. Cf. Exodus 14:21–22; Isaiah 11:15–16; *Vayiqra Rabbah* 27:4.

157. **he** Rabbi Ḥiyya.

158. **the Academy here** In the Garden of Eden.

159. **setting his seal...** Endorsing their teachings. See *Zohar* 3:173a; *ZḤ* 80b (*MhN*, *Rut*); BT *Ḥagigah* 15b. The image of sealing Torah originates in Isaiah 8:16: *Bind up the testimony, seal Torah among my disciples.*

160. **He said to him** The Messiah said to Rabbi Shim’on.

161. **370 lights** Apparently the number 300 signifies the three highest *sefirot*, while the number 70 represents the seven lower *sefirot* emanating from them. See *OY*; *Zohar* 2:14a–b (*MhN*); 3:128b (*IR*). *KP* reads: 390, corresponding to the 390 firmaments.

162. **613 senses** Corresponding to the 613 *mitsvot* of the Torah. See *Zohar* 3:128a (*IR*).

163. **pure balsam** Thirteen rivers of balsam await the righteous in the world that is coming. See BT *Ta’anit* 25a; *Bereshit Rabbah*

Torah of your academy, and of the academy of Hezekiah, king of Judah,¹⁶⁴ and of the academy of Ahiyah of Shiloh.¹⁶⁵ I have not come to set my seal on what issues from your academy. Rather, the Master of Wings has come here, for I know he enters no academy but yours.”¹⁶⁶

Then Rabbi Shim'on told him¹⁶⁷ the oath that the Master of Wings had sworn. The Messiah began trembling and cried aloud. The heavens trembled, the vast ocean trembled, Leviathan trembled, and the world verged on overturning. At that moment, he noticed Rabbi Ḥiyya sitting at the feet of Rabbi Shim'on. He said, “Who placed a human here, clothed in the garb of that world?”¹⁶⁸

Rabbi Shim'on answered, “This is Rabbi Ḥiyya, radiance of the lamp of Torah!”

The Messiah said, “Let him be gathered in,¹⁶⁹ together with his sons,¹⁷⁰ so that they become members of your academy.”

Rabbi Shim'on said, “Let him be granted time.”¹⁷¹

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62:2. In the *Zohar* (2:127a; 3:181a), the rivers of balsam are the fragrant flow of emanation from *Binah* to *Shekhinah*.

164. **Hezekiah** . . . King of Judah toward the end of the eighth century B.C.E. According to rabbinic tradition, Hezekiah was extremely devoted to the study and teaching of Torah. See *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 4:8; BT *Sanhedrin* 94b. According to Rabbi Ḥizkiyah (*Bereshit Rabbah* 35:2), there was no need of the covenantal sign of the rainbow in the generations of Hezekiah and of Rabbi Shim'on because of the righteousness of those two figures.

165. **Ahiyah of Shiloh** Ahiyah was the prophet who revealed to King Jeroboam that Solomon's kingdom would be divided (1 Kings 11:29–39). According to rabbinic tradition, he was a master of the secrets of Torah (BT *Sanhedrin* 102a; *Midrash Tehillim* 5:8) and the teacher of Elijah (JT *Eruvin* 5:1, 22b).

Rabbi Shim'on associates himself with Ahiyah in *Bereshit Rabbah* 35:2; *Zohar* 3:287b (*IZ*); *ZḤ* 19a (*MhN*). Hasidic legend portrays Ahiyah as the mentor of Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism.

166. **I have not come** . . . Your teachings do not need my confirmation, as your

teachings have been confirmed by God. Rather, I have come to hear the words of Metatron.

167. **told him** Told the Messiah.

168. **clothed in the garb of that world** In a physical body. See the reaction of the angels when Moses ascends to receive the Torah (BT *Shabbat* 88b): “Rabbi Yehoshu'a son of Levi said, ‘When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels said before the blessed Holy One, ‘Master of the Universe! What is one born of woman doing here among us?’”

169. **“Let him be gathered in”** Let his life on earth come to an end. Cf. the biblical idiom “to be gathered to one's people” (Genesis 25:8; 35:29; 49:29).

170. **together with his sons** The *amoraim* Rabbi Ḥizkiyah and Rabbi Yehudah. In BT *Bava Metsi'a* 85b (which, as already noted, influences the *Zohar* here), Elijah compares Rabbi Ḥiyya and his sons with the Patriarchs. See *Qohelet Rabbah* on 9:10 (which also influences this *Zohar* passage).

171. **“Let him be granted time”** Let Rabbi Ḥiyya remain alive on earth a while longer. See *ZḤ* 80c (*MhN, Rut*); and *Zohar* 1:217b–218b, where Rabbi Shim'on intercedes with God to spare the life of Rabbi

Time was granted to him. He emerged trembling, his eyes streaming with tears. Quivering, he cried, “Happy is the share of the righteous in that world! Happy is the share of the son of Yoḥai who has attained this! Of him is written: *So that I may endow those who love Me with substance and fill their treasuries* (Proverbs 8:21).”¹⁷²

Rabbi Shim’on opened, “*I have put בראשית (Be-reshit), In the beginning. My words in your mouth* (Isaiah 51:16). How vital it is for a human being to engage in Torah day and night! For the blessed Holy One listens to the voice of those who occupy themselves with Torah, and with every word innovated in Torah by one engaged in Torah, He fashions one heaven.

We have learned: The moment a new word of Torah originates from the mouth of a human being, that word ascends and presents herself before the blessed Holy One,¹⁷³ who lifts that word, kisses her, and adorns her with seventy crowns—engraved and inscribed.¹⁷⁴ But an innovated word of wisdom¹⁷⁵ ascends and settles on the head of צדיק (*Tsaddiq*), Righteous One—Vitality of the Worlds.¹⁷⁶ From there, it flies and soars through 70,000 worlds,¹⁷⁷ ascending to the Ancient of Days.¹⁷⁸ All the words of the Ancient

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Yitṣḥak when it was decreed that he was to die.

The theme of a holy person remaining on earth appears in a contemporary thirteenth-century Spanish hagiography, *Vida de Santa Oria*, composed by Gonzola de Berceo. There St. Orea ascends to heaven and sees her reward as a throne but is told that for now she must return to earth and continue her spiritual practice. See Wineman, *Mystic Tales from the Zohar*, 28–29.

172. *So that I may endow those who love Me with substance...* According to rabbinic tradition, this verse describes the reward of the righteous in the afterlife. See *M Avot* 5:19; *Uqtsin* 3:12; *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana, nispaḥim, Vezot Haberakhah*, 451; *BT Sanhedrin* 100a; *Zohar* 1:158a, 206a, 242b; 2:166b.

173. **the blessed Holy One** *Tif’eret*.

174. **seventy crowns** The number seventy appears in the context of revelation in *BT Shabbat* 88b: “Rabbi Yoḥanan said, ‘... Every utterance emerging from the mouth of Power branched into seventy languages.’” See *Bemidbar Rabbah* 13:16, where

Torah is compared to wine: “Just as יין (*yayin*), wine, is numerically equivalent to seventy, so Torah assumes seventy faces.”

See *Sefer Ḥanokh (Beit ha-Midrash, 2:116)*; Ibn Ezra, introduction to Commentary on the Torah; *Zohar* 1:26a (TZ), 47b, 54a.

175. **innovated word of wisdom** A new mystical insight, which rises higher than other new interpretations. Cf. *OY*: “One is able to innovate in Torah matters that Moses himself was not permitted to reveal.”

176. **צדיק (Tsaddiq), Righteous One—Vitality of the Worlds** *Yesod*, who channels the flow of emanation to *Shekhinah* and the worlds below.

On various senses of the title “Vitality of the Worlds,” see Daniel 12:7; *Mekhilta, Pisha* 16; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:5; Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 275; *Zohar* 1:132a, 135b, 167b.

177. **70,000 worlds** Corresponding to the seven lower *sefirot*.

178. **Ancient of Days** עתיק יומין (*Attiq yomin*). See Daniel 7:9: *The Ancient of Days sits, the hair on His head like clean fleece, His*

of Days are words of wisdom, conveying supernal, concealed mysteries.¹⁷⁹ When that secret word of wisdom, innovated here, ascends, it joins those words of the Ancient of Days. Along with them, it ascends and descends, entering eighteen hidden worlds, which *no eye has seen, O God, but You* (Isaiah 64:3).¹⁸⁰ Emerging from there, they roam until they arrive, full and complete, presenting themselves before the Ancient of Days. At that moment, the Ancient of Days inhales the aroma of that word and it pleases Him more than anything. Lifting that word, He adorns her with 370,000 crowns.¹⁸¹ The word flies, ascending and descending, and is transformed into a heaven. So each and every word of wisdom is transformed into a heaven, existing enduringly in the presence of the Ancient of Days. He calls them *new heavens*, newly created heavens, hidden mysteries of supernal wisdom. As for all other innovated words of Torah,¹⁸² they stand before [5a] the blessed Holy One, then ascend and are transformed into *earths of the living* (Psalms 116:9). Then they descend, crowning themselves upon one earth,¹⁸³ which is renewed and transformed into a *new earth* through that renewed word of Torah. Concerning this is written: *As the new heavens and the new earth that I am making endure before Me...* (Isaiah 66:22). The verse does not read *I have made*,¹⁸⁴ but rather *I am making*, for He makes them continually out of those innovations and mysteries

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throne—flames of fire. In the *Zohar* this name designates the primordial *sefirah* of *Keter*.

179. **words of the Ancient of Days...** In BT *Pesaḥim* 119a, secrets of Torah are referred to as “things hidden by the Ancient of Days.” See the rabbinic blessing in BT *Berakhot* 17a: “May your steps run to hear words of the Ancient of Days.”

See BT *Bava Batra* 91b; *Zohar* 1:9a; 2:168a; 3:105b, 138b (*IR*), 232b; and 3:20a: “Rabbi Yose said to Rabbi Ḥiyya, ‘Let us engage in words of Torah, in words of the Ancient of Days.’”

180. **eighteen hidden worlds...** Recalling the phrase above, חַי עֲלְמִין (*hei almin*), “vitality of the worlds,” describing *Yesod*; the word חַי (*hei*) has a numerical value of eighteen. See BT *Avodah Zarah* 3b: “Rabbi Abba said to Rabbi Naḥman son of Yitṣḥak, ‘...What does [God] do at night?... He rides his light cherub and sails through 18,000 worlds.’”

See BT *Berakhot* 34b: “Rabbi Ḥiyya son of Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan,

‘All the prophets prophesied only concerning the days of the Messiah, but as for the world that is coming, *No eye has seen, O God, but You, [what You will do for one who awaits You]...* All the prophets prophesied only concerning masters of return [those who succeed in turning back to God], but as for the completely righteous, *No eye has seen, O God, but You.*”

181. **370,000** An allusion to the three higher *sefirot* (3 × 100,000) and seven lower *sefirot* (7 × 10,000). See *Zohar* 1:4b; 2:14a–b (*MhN*); 3:128b (*IR*).

182. **all other innovated words of Torah** Nonmystical insights.

183. **earths of the living...one earth** *Shekhinah* is the singular “earth of the living,” who is adorned and renewed by human insights of Torah, which have been transformed into planetoids, miniature *earths of the living* orbiting Her.

184. **The verse does not read *I have made*** In the past tense, referring to the original creation of heaven and earth.

of Torah. Of this is written: *I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth* (Isaiah 51:16). The verse does not read *the heavens*, but rather *heavens*.¹⁸⁵

Rabbi El'azar asked, "What is the meaning of: *I have covered you with the shadow of My hand?*"

He replied, "When Torah was transmitted to Moses, myriads of celestial angels came to scorch him with flames from their mouths, but the blessed Holy One sheltered him.¹⁸⁶ Now when this word ascends, is crowned, and stands before the blessed Holy One, He shelters that word and covers that person so that he will not be discovered by them—arousing their jealousy—before that word is transformed into new heavens and a new earth, as is written: *I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth*. From this we learn that every word concealed from the eyes attains supernal value,¹⁸⁷ as is written: *I have covered you with the shadow of My hand*. Why was it covered and hidden from view? For the sake of supernal value, as is written: *to plant heavens and establish earth*, as already explained.

"To say to Zion: 'You are עמי (ammi), My people!' (ibid.). To say to those gates, those distinguished words,¹⁸⁸ these above those: 'You are עמי (ammi).'

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185. The verse does not read *the heavens*... The reference is not to the existing heavens, but to new heavens. See BT *Sanhedrin* 99b: "Rav said, '[Concerning one who studies Torah for her own sake,] it is as though he built heavenly and earthly palaces, as is written: *I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth*.'" Rabbi Shim'on amplifies this teaching and radicalizes it; note how the phrase "it is as though" has disappeared.

186. angels came to scorch him... Jealous that a mere mortal dared to enter the celestial realm. See *Pesiqta Rabbati* 20: "When Moses ascended on high... a band of angels of destruction... sought to scorch him with the breath of their mouths. What did the blessed Holy One do? He spread over him some of His splendor."

See *Ma'yan Hokhmah (Beit ha-Midrash, 1:58–60)*; and BT *Shabbat* 88b: "Rabbi Yehoshu'a son of Levi said, 'When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels said before the blessed Holy One, "Master of the Universe! What is one born of woman doing

here among us?" He answered, "He has come to receive Torah." They said, "That precious treasure hidden by You for 974 generations before the world was created, You desire to give to flesh and blood! *What is a human that You are mindful of him, a human being that You take note of him?*" (Psalms 8:5). "Answer them," said the blessed Holy One to Moses. "Master of the Universe," he replied, "I fear they could scorch me with the breath of their mouths." He said, "Grasp My throne of Glory, and answer them. . . ." Rabbi Nahman observed, "This teaches that the Almighty spread some of the luster of His *Shekhinah* and His cloud over him." See *Zohar* 2:58a, 156b.

187. every word concealed... See BT *Ta'anit* 8b: "Blessing is not found in anything weighed, measured, or counted, but only in that which is hidden from the eye." Cf. *Zohar* 1:64b, 202a.

188. Zion... gates... distinguished words In BT *Berakhot* 8a, the phrase *gates of ציין (tsiyyon), Zion* (Psalms 87:2) is interpreted in the name of Rav H̄isda as "gates מצויינים (metsuyyanim), distinguished by *halakhah*." Based on this passage, Rabbi Shim'on iden-

Do not read ‘You are עמי (*ammi*), My people,’ but rather ‘You are עמי (*immi*), with Me, becoming My partner! Just as I made heaven and earth by speaking, as is said: *By the word of YHVH, the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6), so do you.’ Happy are those engaged with Torah!

“Now if you say that the word of any ignorant person has the same effect, come and see: One who is unaccustomed to the mysteries of Torah and innovates words he does not fully understand—when that word ascends, *a man of perversity, tongue of falsehood* (Proverbs 16:28; 6:17),¹⁸⁹ bursts forth from the chasm of the immense abyss,¹⁹⁰ leaping 500 parasangs¹⁹¹ to obtain that word. Grabbing her, he takes that word back to his chasm and transmogrifies her into a distorted heaven called ‘chaos.’ The *man of perversity* flies through that heaven—6,000 parasangs in one glide.¹⁹² As soon as the distorted heaven is established, *a woman of whoredom* (Hosea 1:2)¹⁹³ emerges, clinging to it, joining with it. From there she sets out, killing thousands, myriads. For as long as she endures in that heaven, she is empowered to swoop through the entire world in a single moment.¹⁹⁴ Concerning this is written: *Woe unto them who haul iniquity with cords of falsehood, and sin as with a cart rope* (Isaiah 5:18).¹⁹⁵ *Iniquity* is the male. Who is *sin*? The female. He¹⁹⁶ hauls the one called *iniquity* with those *cords of falsehood*, and then *sin as with a cart rope*, that female called *sin*, who is empowered there to fly and kill human beings. So, *Many are those she has struck dead* (Proverbs 7:26). Who has struck them dead? This *sin* who slays human beings. Who causes this? A disciple unqualified to teach who teaches.¹⁹⁷ May the Compassionate One save us!”

tifies original interpretations of Torah as Zion.

189. *man of perversity*... Samael, the male demon who schemes and accuses falsely.

190. *chasm of the immense abyss* The abode of demons.

191. *parasangs* The Greek parasang equals about 3.5 miles.

192. *in one glide* The distorted heaven empowers Samael, providing him a fast celestial highway.

193. *woman of whoredom* Lilith, the female demon, wife of Samael. Together they comprise *Sitra Aħra*, “the Other Side.” See *Zohar* 1:148a (*ST*); 2:245a; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 356–61.

194. *in a single moment* See *BT Bera-khot* 4b: “A *tanna* taught: ‘Michael [reaches his destination] in one [glide], Gabriel in

two, Elijah in four, and the Angel of Death in eight—in time of plague, however, in one.”

195. *Woe unto them*... See *BT Sukkah* 52a: “Rabbi Assi said, ‘The evil impulse at first resembles the thread of a spider but ultimately it resembles cart ropes, as is said: *Woe unto them who haul iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as with a cart rope*.’” Cf. *Zohar* 1:57a.

196. *He* The distorted heaven.

197. *A disciple unqualified*... See *BT Sotah* 22a: “Rav said, ‘What is the meaning of the verse *Many are those she has struck dead, numerous are her slain? Many are those she has struck dead*—this refers to a disciple unqualified to teach [to decide questions of law] who teaches. *Numerous are her slain*—this refers to a disciple qualified to teach who does not.’”

Rabbi Shim'on said to the Companions, "I beg of you not to utter a word of Torah that you do not know and have not heard properly from a lofty tree,¹⁹⁸ lest you enable *sin* to slay multitudes without cause."¹⁹⁹

They all opened, saying, "May the Compassionate One save us! May the Compassionate One save us!"

"Come and see: With Torah the blessed Holy One created the world. This has been established, as is written: *I was with Him as a nursling, I was a daily delight* (Proverbs 8:30).²⁰⁰ He gazed upon her once, twice, three and four times, then spoke, creating through her.²⁰¹ To teach human beings not to err in her,²⁰² as is written: *Then He saw and declared her, arranged her and probed her. He told humanity* (Job 28:27).²⁰³ The blessed Holy One created what He created corresponding to those four times: *He saw and declared her, arranged her and probed her.*²⁰⁴ Before generating His work, He introduced four words: את בראשית ברא אלהים את (*Be-reshit bara Elohim et*), *In the beginning God created*. First, these four; then, השמים (*ha-shamayim*), *the heavens*. These correspond to the four times that the blessed Holy One contemplated Torah before actualizing His work of art."

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198. **from a lofty tree** From a recognized authority. See the similar expression: "from high tamarisks" (BT *Beitsah* 27a). One of the five things that the imprisoned Rabbi Akiva taught Rabbi Shim'on (BT *Pe-sahim* 112a) was: "If you want to be strangled, then be hanged on a large tree," which according to Rashi (ad loc.) means: If you must depend on an authority, see that it is a great one.

See *Kallah Rabbati*, 2; *Zohar* 2:87a; 3:76a-b; and BT *Berakhot* 27b: "Rabbi Eli'ezer says, '... One who says something that he has not heard from his teacher causes *Shekhinah* to depart from Israel."

The conservative attitude here contrasts with the preceding encouragement to innovate. See *OY* and *KP*.

199. **slay multitudes without cause** Righteous and sinners die together in the plagues and disease brought by Lilith.

200. **With Torah... This has been established...** According to M *Avot* 3:14, Torah is the "precious instrument by which the world was created." See *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1: "Rabbi Oshaya opened, 'I was with Him as אמן (*amon*), a *nursling*... אמן (*amon*)—אמן

(*umman*), an *artisan*. Torah says, "I was the artistic tool of the blessed Holy One."... The blessed Holy One gazed into Torah and created the world."

See *Zohar* 1:47a, 134a-b; 2:161a-b; 3:35b; Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:243-45.

201. **then spoke...** Only after perusing Torah did God proclaim her words, thereby creating the world.

202. **not to err...** But rather to imitate God and study Torah thoroughly. Cf. BT *Eruvin* 54b: "Rabbi Eli'ezer said, 'One must teach his student four times.'"

203. **Then He saw... declared... arranged... probed...** See *Bereshit Rabbah* 24:5. The four verbs correspond to the four times that God gazed into Torah, perhaps also to the four methods of interpretation: literal, allegorical, midrashic, and mystical. After creating the world, God *told humanity* to imitate Him by studying Torah intensively.

204. **corresponding to those four times...** Perhaps a reference to the four worlds, containing respectively the *sefirot*, the Chariot, the angels, and the physical world.

Rabbi El'azar was going to see Rabbi Yose son of Rabbi Shim'on son of Lekonya, his father-in-law.²⁰⁵ [5b] Rabbi Abba accompanied him, and a man was goading the donkeys behind them.

Rabbi Abba said, "Let us open openings of Torah, for the time is ripe to adorn ourselves on our way."

Rabbi El'azar opened, saying, "My Sabbaths you are to observe (Leviticus 19:30). Come and see: In six days the blessed Holy One created the world. Every single day revealed its work, transmitting its power through that day.²⁰⁶ When did it reveal its work and transmit its power? On the fourth day,²⁰⁷ for those first three days were all concealed, not revealed. When the fourth day arrived, it generated the work and power of them all, since fire, water, and air—although they are three ethereal elements²⁰⁸—were all suspended, their work unrevealed until earth revealed them. Then the skill of each one of them was made known.

"Now you might say this happened on the third day, concerning which is written: *Let the earth sprout vegetation*, and *The earth brought forth vegetation* (Genesis 1:11–12). But although written of the third day, it was really the fourth,

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205. Rabbi Yose son of Rabbi Shim'on son of Lekonya, his father-in-law See the similar setting in *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 11:20: "Rabbi El'azar son of Rabbi Shim'on was going to Rabbi Shim'on son of Rabbi Yose son of Lekonya, his father-in-law..." According to this rabbinic tradition, El'azar's father-in-law was named Shim'on son of Yose.

See JT *Ma'aserot* 3:8, 50d; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 4:11; *Devarim Rabbah* 7:11; *Seder ha-Dorot*, s.v. Shim'on ben Yose ben Lekonya. (In BT *Bava Metsi'a* 85a the name of Rabbi El'azar's brother-in-law is given as Rabbi Shim'on son of Issi [Yose] son of Lekonya, which would make Yose his father-in-law, as here in the *Zohar*, but nowhere in rabbinic literature is he named Yose son of Shim'on.)

The author of the *Zohar* consistently switches father and son, transforming Shim'on son of Yose into Yose son of Shim'on. See 1:61b, 143b; 3:84b, 188a, 193a; *ZH* 10d, 14a (*MhN*), 22c (*MhN*). El'azar's own father, of course, is Rabbi Shim'on son of Yoḥai. Note who accompanies Rabbi El'azar: Rabbi

Abba ("father"). Soon another father and son appear.

206. In six days... The six days of Creation correspond to six primordial days, the *sefirot* from *Ḥesed* through *Yesod*, through which God fashioned the world. Each sefirotic day displayed its creative power on the corresponding day of the week.

207. On the fourth day Corresponding to *Shekhinah*. Although usually pictured as seventh of the lower *sefirot*, She can also be characterized as the fourth primordial day (the middle of the cosmic week), completing the triad of *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*. *Shekhinah* actualizes the potential of the other *sefirot*.

208. three ethereal elements According to Empedocles and later Greek and medieval thought, the four elements—water, fire, air, and earth—are the ultimate root of all things. By their combination and separation, everything in nature comes into being and passes away.

See *Sefer Yetsirah* 3:3; *Bemidbar Rabbah* 14:12; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 4:1. In the *Zohar*, the four

included in the third to be one without division.²⁰⁹ From the fourth day on, its work was revealed, yielding an artisan for each and every skill,²¹⁰ for the fourth day constitutes the fourth leg of the celestial throne.²¹¹ All the work of all of them, both earlier and later days, was dependent on the Sabbath day,²¹² as is written: *God included in²¹³ the seventh day His work that He had made* (Genesis 2:2). This is *Sabbath*, fourth leg of the throne.

“Now you might ask, ‘If so, why *My Sabbaths you are to observe*, two?’ The answer is: the Sabbath of Sabbath eve and the Sabbath of the day itself, which are indivisible.”²¹⁴

That Arab donkey-driver²¹⁵ goading behind them said, “And what is *My sanctuary you are to hold in awe* (Leviticus 19:30)?”²¹⁶

He replied, “This is the holiness of the Sabbath.”

He said, “What is the holiness of the Sabbath?”

He replied, “This is the holiness drawn down from above.”

elements symbolize the quartet of *sefirot*: *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tif’eret*, and *Shekhinah*.

209. **included in the third...** The third primordial day is *Tif’eret*, the male *sefirah*. The activity of the female, *Shekhinah*, symbolized by earth, took place on the fourth day but is included in His day to ensure and demonstrate their union.

210. **From the fourth day on... an artisan...** Beginning on the fourth day, the lower triad of *sefirot* emerged: *Netsah*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*. These three artisans completed the work of the preceding skilled trio: *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif’eret*. See *OY*.

211. **fourth leg...** The four *sefirot* (*Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tif’eret*, and *Shekhinah*), the four elements, also constitute the four legs of the divine throne upon which sits *Binah*. See *Zohar* 1:20a.

212. **earlier and later days... Sabbath Shekhinah** completes the triad of *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif’eret*, as well as the next triad: *Netsah*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*. She is the Sabbath, culmination of the primordial week of Creation.

213. **included** ויכל (*Vaykhal*), “And He completed,” from the root כלה (*klh*). Rabbi El’azar understands this word in light of the related root כלל (*kl*), “include, comprise, gather.”

214. **Sabbath of Sabbath eve...** There are two aspects of the Sabbath: the feminine Sabbath eve, symbolized by *Shekhinah*, and the masculine Sabbath day, symbolized by *Tif’eret* or *Yesod*. Cf. Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 1–10.

215. **Arab donkey-driver** טייעא (*Tayya’a*), “Arab, Arab merchant, traveler,” apparently derived from the name of the Arabian tribe *taiy*. The prophet Elijah returns to earth to appear as a *tayya’a* in *BT Berakhot* 6b, and as an ערבי (*aravi*), “Arab” in *Rut Zuta* 1:20; 4:11. See *Rosh ha-Shanah* 26b; *Yevamot* 120b; *Bava Batra* 73b; *Sanhedrin* 110a; *Ḥullin* 7a.

In the *Zohar*, *tayya’a* indicates one of several wandering donkey-drivers who annoy, perplex, and enlighten the Companions on the road. See 2:45b, 94b–114a, 145b, 155b–157a; 3:21a–23a, 186b; *ZḤ* 83a–d (*MhN*, *Rut*); *TZ* 23, 69a. Cf. *Tosefta*, *Ḥagigah* 2:1 (*BT Ḥagigah* 14b; *JT Ḥagigah* 2:1, 77a); *BT Mo’ed Qatan* 25a–b; *Bereshit Rabbah* 32:10; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 4:3; Steinschneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur*, 248–54; Pushinski, in *Yavneh* 2 (1940): 140–47; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 165, 388, n. 46; idem, *Kabbalah*, 227.

216. **My sanctuary...** The continuation of the verse with which Rabbi El’azar opened: *My Sabbaths you are to observe...* (Leviticus 19:30).

He said, “If so, you have turned the Sabbath into something not holy except for the holiness that rests upon it from above!”

Rabbi Abba said, “So it is: *Call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of YHVH honored* (Isaiah 58:13). *Sabbath* and *holy of YHVH* are each mentioned separately.”

He said, “If so, who is *holy of YHVH*?”

He replied, “Holiness that descends from above, resting upon it.”

He said, “If holiness drawn down from above is called *honored*, then it appears that the Sabbath is not *honored*. Yet it is written: *And honor it* (ibid.)!”

Rabbi El’azar said to Rabbi Abba, “Let this man be! Within him lies a new word we do not know.”

They said to him, “Speak!”

He opened, saying, “את שבתותי” (*Et Shabbetotai*), *My Sabbaths*. את (*Et*)²¹⁷ amplifies the meaning to include²¹⁸ the range of Sabbath, which is 2000 cubits in every direction.²¹⁹ So the meaning is expanded: את שבתותי (*Et Shabbetotai*), *My Sabbaths*—one is the higher Sabbath; the other, the lower Sabbath,²²⁰ both included as one, concealed as one.

“Another Sabbath²²¹ was left unmentioned and felt ashamed. She said before Him, ‘Master of the universe, since the day You created me, I have been called Sabbath—and there can be no day without night.’²²² He replied, ‘My daughter, you are Sabbath—I call you Sabbath—but I am about to crown you with a higher crown.’ He issued a proclamation: *My sanctuary you are to hold in awe*. This is the Sabbath of Sabbath eve, who is awe and in whom awe dwells.²²³

217. את (*Et*) Grammatically, the accusative particle את (*et*) has no ascertainable independent sense, but Naḥum of Gimzo and his disciple Rabbi Akiva taught that when *et* appears in a biblical verse, it amplifies the original meaning.

See BT *Pesahim* 22b; *Ḥagigah* 12a–b; *Zohar* 1:79b, 247a; 2:90a, 135b.

218. amplifies the meaning to include לאטגאה (*Le-asga’ah*), “To increase,” a Zoharic rendering of the rabbinic Hebrew לרבות (*le-rabbot*), “to increase”—that is, to include, amplify, or widen the scope of meaning.

219. 2000 cubits The traditional limitation on how far one may walk beyond the city limits on the Sabbath. See *Mekhilta*, *Vayassa* 6; cf. *Zohar* 2:207a. Here it refers to the range of holiness beyond the realm of the *sefirot*; according to *KP*, the feet of the divine chariot.

220. the higher Sabbath... the lower Sabbath The higher Sabbath is *Binah*, the seventh *sefirah* counting up from *Yesod*. The lower Sabbath is *Yesod*, the seventh *sefirah* counting down from *Binah*.

221. Another Sabbath Sabbath eve, symbolizing *Shekhinah*.

222. there can be no day... The sefirotic day of *Yesod* needs the night of *Shekhinah*. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 11:8, where according to Rabbi Shim’on son of Yoḥai, the Sabbath complains to God that she has no partner among the days of the week, and she is told: “The Assembly of Israel is your partner.” See BT *Ḥullin* 60b.

223. who is awe... The “Sabbath of Sabbath eve” (Friday night) is *Shekhinah*, who conveys the attribute of Judgment, inspiring awe and fear. The *sefirah* of *Ḥokhmah*, the father of *Shekhinah*, is also called

Who is that? The one included by the blessed Holy One when He said *I am YHVH*.²²⁴

“I heard my father say so precisely: אַת (Et) includes the range of Sabbath. *My Sabbaths* are a circle with a square inscribed within.²²⁵ They are two, corresponding to which are two hallowings we should recite. One is ויכלו (Vaykhullu), *And they [heaven and earth] were completed...* (Genesis 2:1–3);²²⁶ the other, קידוש (Qiddush), *Hallowing*.²²⁷ Vaykhullu contains thirty-five words, and in the *qiddush* that we recite there are thirty-five words,²²⁸ altogether amounting to seventy names of the blessed Holy One,²²⁹ with which Assembly of Israel is adorned.²³⁰ Since this circle and square are *My Sabbaths*, they are both included in שמור (Shamor), *Observe* (Deuteronomy 5:12), as is written: תשמורו (Tishmoru), *You are to observe* (Leviticus 19:30),²³¹ whereas the higher

“awe” and is reflected in His daughter, who is lower *Hokhmah*.

224. *I am YHVH* The full verse reads: *My Sabbaths you are to observe, My sanctuary you are to hold in awe, I am YHVH* (Leviticus 19:30). Through *Shekhinah*, God reveals the full spectrum of divine personality and is thus called *I*. In this phrase, *I* is joined with *YHVH* (*Tiferet*). *Shekhinah* manifests in both sacred time (*Sabbath*) and sacred space (*sanctuary*).

225. **circle with a square inscribed within** The phrase derives from BT *Eruvin* 76b; cf. *Bahir* 83 (114–16). Here the reference is to the higher *sefirot* (beginning with *Binah* and culminating in *Yesod*) and *Shekhinah*.

See *KP*; Scholem. Cf. *Zohar* 2:127a, where the circle of the letter ס (*samekh*) symbolizes *Binah*, while the square of the letter ם (final *mem*) symbolizes *Shekhinah*.

226. ויכלו (*Vaykhullu*)... The opening lines of the *qiddush* (“hallowing, sanctification”), the prayer recited over wine Friday evening to hallow the Sabbath.

227. קידוש (*Qiddush*)... The rest of the prayer, which includes the blessing over wine and the blessing of hallowing the Sabbath.

228. **in the qiddush that we recite... thirty-five words** This total requires the omission of the following ten words from the *qiddush*: כי הוא יום (ki hu yom), “for it is the day,” and בני בחרת ואותנו קדשת מכל כי

העמים (ki vanu vaharta ve-otanu qiddashta mikol ha-ammim), “for You have chosen us and hallowed us from among all nations.”

See Scholem, 493 (unnumbered); Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigleh she-ba-Nistar*, 63, 138–39, n. 159. The *Zohar*’s phrase “that we recite” indicates a particular custom, which differs from the standard *qiddush*.

229. **seventy names...** See *Bemidbar Rabbah* 14:12; Nahmanides, *Kitvei Ramban*, 1:135; cf. *Zohar* 2:207b. For various lists of these names, see *Alfa Beita de-Rabbi Aqiva* (*Battei Midrashot*, 2:350–51); *Shir ha-Shirim Zuta* 1:1; *Midrash ha-Gadol*, Genesis 46:8; and *Ba’al ha-Turim*, Numbers 11:16.

230. **Assembly of Israel** כנסת ישראל (*Keneset Yisra’el*). In rabbinic Hebrew this phrase denotes the people of Israel. The midrash on the Song of Songs describes the love affair between the maiden (the earthly community of Israel) and her lover (the Holy One, blessed be He). See *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 2:1. In the *Zohar*, *Keneset Yisra’el* can refer to the earthly community but also (often primarily) to *Shekhinah*, the divine feminine counterpart of the people, the aspect of God most intimately connected with them. The lovers in the Song of Songs are pictured as the divine couple: *Tiferet* and *Shekhinah*.

231. **they are both included...** Both aspects of the Sabbath, the masculine *Yesod* and the feminine *Shekhinah*, are included in

Sabbath is not included here in שמור (*Shamor*), *Observe*, but rather in זכור (*Zakhor*), *Remember* (Exodus 20:8), for the supreme King is completed by זכור (*zakhor*).²³² So He is called ‘the King who possesses peace,’ and His peace is זכור (*zakhor*).²³³ That is why there is no strife above, because of the two peaces below: one, Jacob; the other, Joseph.²³⁴ So it is written twice: *Peace, peace to the far and the near* (Isaiah 57:19). *To the far* refers to Jacob, [6a] *and the near* refers to Joseph. *To the far*, as is said: *From afar, YHVH appeared to me* (Jeremiah 31:2),²³⁵ *His sister stood far off* (Exodus 2:4).²³⁶ *And the near*, as is said: *New [gods] who came from nearby* (Deuteronomy 32:17).²³⁷ *From afar* is the highest point, standing in its palace.²³⁸ So it is written: תשמור (*Tishmoru*), *You are to observe*, included in שמור (*Shamor*), *Observe*.²³⁹ *My sanctuary you are to hold in*

the feminine, which is signified by the opening word of the fourth of the Ten Commandments: שמור (*Shamor*), *Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy*. This word signifies the feminine because the other version of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8) reads: זכור (*Zakhor*), *Remember, the Sabbath day*, and זכור (*zakhor*) suggests זכר (*zakhar*), “male.” In the verse in Leviticus 19, the plural verb תשמור (*tishmoru*), *You are to observe*, indicates the union of male and female.

See BT *Berakhot* 20b; *Bahir* 124 (182); Ezra of Gerona, *Peirush Shir ha-Shirim*, 496–97; Nahmanides on Exodus 20:8; *Zohar* 1:47b, 48b, 164b; Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 118.

232. **completed by זכור (*zakhor*)** *Binah*, the supreme King and higher Sabbath, finds its completion in the masculine *sefirah* of *Yesod*, signified by זכור (*zakhor*), which implies זכר (*zakhar*), “male.” Although often depicted as the Divine Mother, *Binah* is also described as “World of the Male,” encompassing the entire configuration of *sefirot* from *Hesed* through *Yesod*. Together they constitute a masculine entity ready to join *Shekhinah*.

See *Zohar* 1:96a, 147a, 149a, 160b, 246a, 248b; 2:127b; *ZH* 72b (*ShS*). Cf. 1:17b, 46b, 163a; 2:4a.

233. ‘the King who possesses peace’... In midrashic literature this phrase is applied to God. See *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 1:2; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 1:2. Here it designates

Binah, who contains *Yesod*, who is called “peace” either because He mediates between the right and left poles of the *sefirot*, or because He unites *Tif’eret* with *Shekhinah*. See BT *Shabbat* 152a, where Rabbi Shim’on son of Ḥalafta refers to the phallus as “peacemaker of the home.”

234. **two peaces below...** Jacob symbolizes *Tif’eret*; Joseph symbolizes *Yesod*, the divine phallus, since he withstood the test of sexual temptation in Egypt (Genesis 39). See TZ 21, 43b, 45b. Both of these mediate between right and left, and unite with *Shekhinah*, insuring peace in the sefirotic realm.

235. **From afar, YHVH appeared...** *Tif’eret*, who is called YHVH, appeared from afar. See Rashi, ad loc.; *Zohar* 1:120a.

236. **His sister stood far off** Miriam, the subject of the sentence, symbolizes *Shekhinah*, who faces *Tif’eret*. See BT *Sotah* 11a.

237. **from nearby** Idiomatic for “recently.” Joseph, *Yesod*, represents a more recent emanation than Jacob, *Tif’eret*. This citation is striking, since the verse in Deuteronomy refers to false gods.

238. **From afar is the highest point...** *Hokhmah*, the primordial point of emanation, is situated in the palace of *Binah*. *Tif’eret* issues from them, from afar.

239. **So it is written... שמור (*Shamor*), Observe** Referring back to the two Sabbaths, *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*, who are indicated together by the plural verb תשמור (*tishmoru*), *You are to observe*.

awe is the point standing in the center,²⁴⁰ which one should fear more than anything, for its punishment is death, as is written: מחלליה (Mehaleleha), *Those who profane it, shall surely be put to death* (Exodus 31:14). Who are מחלליה (mehaleleha), *those who profane it?* Whoever enters the חלל (halal), hollow, of the circle and the square—the site where that point rests—and damages it²⁴¹ *shall surely be put to death*. So it is written: *You are to hold in awe*. That point is called *I*,²⁴² and on it rests that high concealed one, unrevealed.²⁴³ This is YHVH, and all is one.”²⁴⁴

Rabbi El’azar and Rabbi Abba dismounted²⁴⁵ and kissed him. They said, “All this wisdom in your hand, and you are goading our donkeys behind us? Who are you?”

He replied, “Do not ask who I am! Rather, let us go together, engaging in Torah. Let each one speak words of wisdom to illumine the way.”

They said to him, “Who appointed you to go here, goading donkeys?”

He replied, “יוד (Yod) waged war with two letters, כף (kaf) and סמך (samekh), to be bound together with me.²⁴⁶ כף (Kaf) did not want to depart and be bound, since it cannot survive for a moment anywhere else.²⁴⁷ סמך (Samekh) did not want to depart, so it could support those who fall, for without סמך (samekh) they cannot survive.²⁴⁸ Alone, יוד (yod) came to me, kissing and

240. **point standing in the center** The central point of *Shekhinah* inside the square inscribed within the circle.

See *Zohar* 2:204a–b; 3:250a; Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 110; Joseph Gikatilla, cited in Elijah de Vidas, *Reshit Hokhmah, Sha’ar ha-Qedushah*, 2. On the Sabbath as sacred center, see Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*, 85–92.

241. **Whoever enters... damages it** Profaning the Sabbath damages the core of *Shekhinah*. See Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Rimon*, 332–35; idem, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 111.

242. **called I** *Shekhinah*, who fully expresses the personality of God, is called *I*.

243. **that high concealed one...** *Tif’eret*, more concealed than *Shekhinah*.

244. **all is one** The conclusion of the verse, *I am YHVH*, indicates that *Tif’eret* and *Shekhinah* are united.

245. **dismounted** Out of respect for the sanctity of Torah. See *Tosefta, Hagigah* 2:1, where Yoḥanan son of Zakkai dismounts from his donkey to hear an exposition of

ma’aseh merkavah, “the account of the chariot,” from El’azar son of Arakh, who had been driving the donkey from behind.

See BT *Hagigah* 14b; JT *Hagigah* 2:1, 77a; *Zohar* 1:160a.

246. **to be bound together...** These three letters spell the word כִּיס (*kis*), “pocket.” If all three had joined together, then the wandering donkey-driver would have been wealthy, but such was not the case.

247. **כף (Kaf) did not want...** כף (*Kaf*) wanted to remain at the head of the word כִּסֵּה (*kisse*), the divine “throne.” See above, page X98 (transmitted in the name of Rav Hamnuna Sava), where the throne begins to tremble when כף (*kaf*) descends from it.

248. **סמך (Samekh) did not want...** The letter סמך (*samekh*) stands for the word סוּמַך (*somekh*), “supporting.” See above, page X95, where God tells her: “You are needed where you are; do not move! If you leave, what would happen to the fallen, who depend on you?”

embracing me. She wept with me, saying, ‘My son, what can I do for you? But look, I will ascend and fill myself with goodness—with hidden, celestial, splendid letters! Then I will come to you, serving as your support. I will endow you with two letters, higher than those that departed, namely, **שׁי** (*yesh*), substance—celestial **יוד** (*yod*) and **שׁין** (*shin*)—as your treasuries filled with everything. So, my son, go and goad donkeys.’ That is why I go like this.”²⁴⁹

Rabbi El’azar and Rabbi Abba rejoiced and wept. They said, “Go ride! We will goad the donkeys behind you.”

He said to them, “Didn’t I tell you it is the command of the King, until the one driving donkeys arrives?”²⁵⁰

They said to him, “But you haven’t told us your name. The site you inhabit—what is it?”

He replied, “The site I inhabit is fine and lofty for me: a certain tower soaring in the air,²⁵¹ grand and splendid. Those dwelling in this tower are the blessed Holy One and a certain poor person.²⁵² This is where I reside, but I have gone into exile, goading donkeys.”

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249. **שׁי** (*yesh*), “substance”... Composed of the two letters **יוד** (*yod*) and **שׁין** (*shin*). **שׁי** (*Yesh*) designates the flow of emanation from *Hokhmah* (“Wisdom”) and *Binah* (“Understanding”), which is the ultimate substance, more valuable than wealth.

The *gimatriyya* of **שׁי** (*yesh*) is 310, and according to Rabbi Yehoshu’a son of Levi (*M Uqtsin* 3:12), “In the world to come, the blessed Holy One will endow every righteous person with 310 worlds, as is written: *So that I may endow those who love Me with שׁי* (*yesh*), substance, and fill their treasuries (Proverbs 8:21).” See Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Orah*, 93a–b.

250. **until the one driving**... Until the Messiah arrives riding on a donkey. See Zechariah 9:9: *Behold, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and triumphant, humble [or: poor] and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of an ass.*

251. **tower soaring in the air**... The expression originates in the Talmud (BT *Ḥagigah* 15b; *Sanhedrin* 106b), where the phrase *counter of the towers* (Isaiah 33:18) is interpreted as: “one who counted 300 fixed laws concerning a tower soaring in the air.” The laws are apparently laws of defilement (see *M Oholot* 4:1). Rashi (on both Talmudic

passages) offers several interpretations, including one from his teacher that the tower refers to the letter **ל** (*lamed*), highest letter of the alphabet. Todros Abulafia, in *Otsar ha-Kavod*, discusses this interpretation of the *Ḥagigah* passage (ad loc.); cf. *Shoshan Sodot*, 108. In several Qumran texts the **ל** [*lamed*] is written above the normal line of letters. See Birnbaum, *The Hebrew Scripts*, 1:127, 143.

In the *Zohar*, the tower is *Binah*, towering over the lower *sefirot*. See 2:91a, 102a; *ZḤ* 58a, 70a (*ShS*), and 66a–b (*ShS*), where the connection between **ל** (*lamed*) and the tower is cited from the Book of Rav Hamnuna Sava. Cf. Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 89–90 (112–14); *Zohar* 1:9a, 37b, 96b; 3:164a–b.

252. **the blessed Holy One and a certain poor person** *Tif’eret* and *Shekhinah*, who is poor in the sense that She has no emanation of Her own but receives emanation from the other *sefirot*. These two *sefirot* are joined in the tower of *Binah*, the **ל** (*lamed*). According to Todros Abulafia, *Otsar ha-Kavod*, *Ḥagigah* 15b, the **ל** (*lamed*) is composed of the two letters **ד** (*dalet*) and **ו** (*vav*). In Kabbalah **ד** (*dalet*) symbolizes *Shekhinah*, who is **דלה** (*dallah*), “poor,” while **ו** (*vav*),

Rabbi Abba and Rabbi El'azar gazed at him. He had flavored his words for them as sweet as manna and honey.

They said to him, "If you tell us the name of your father, we will kiss the dust of your feet."

He said, "Why? It is not my habit to boast of Torah.²⁵³ But my father's dwelling was in the great ocean. He was a fish,²⁵⁴ circumnavigating the vast ocean from one end to the other. So grand and splendid, ancient of days, he would swallow all the other fish in the ocean, then spew them out alive, thriving, filled with all goodness of the world. So strong, he could swim the ocean in one moment. He shot me out like an arrow from the hand of a mighty warrior,²⁵⁵ secreting me in that site I described. Then he returned to his site, disappearing into the ocean."

Rabbi El'azar contemplated his words. He said, "You are the son of the Holy Lamp!²⁵⁶ You are the son of Rav Hamnuna Sava,²⁵⁷ son of the radiance of Torah, and you are goading donkeys behind us?"

whose numerical value is six, symbolizes *Tiferet*, who joins with the five *sefirot* around Him (*Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, *Netsah*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*) to form the sixfold sefirotic torso. The three letters joined together spell לוד (*Lod*), the city of Lydda (cf. *KP*), and the donkey-driver is apparently hinting that on the material plane he resides there. On the messianic implication of "poor," see Zechariah 9:9, cited above, note 250.

253. **It is not my habit to boast...** See *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Wistinetzki, par. 1945 (ed. Margalioṭ, par. 522): "A person whose father is called 'Rabbi,' e.g., 'Rabbi Ya'akov,' and his son [i.e., he himself] is called 'Reu'ven,' should not sign his name 'Reu'ven son of Rabbi Ya'akov,' but rather simply 'Reu'ven.'"

254. **fish** נוגא (*Nuna*), swimming in the ocean of Torah. Sefirotically, the fish is *Yesod*, swimming the ocean of divinity.

255. **like an arrow...** See Psalms 127:4: *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth*. Cf. BT *Ḥagigah* 15a: "Shemu'el said, 'Any emission of semen that does not shoot forth like an arrow does not fruitify.'"

256. **Holy Lamp** ברצינא קדישא (*Botsina Qaddisha*), the title usually reserved by the

Zohar for Rabbi Shim'on son of Yoḥai. See above, note 124.

257. **Rav Hamnuna Sava** Rav Hamnuna the Elder, a Babylonian teacher who lived in the third century, though the *Zohar* assumes that he died in the lifetime of Rabbi Shim'on, before the story related here. The donkey-driver had hinted at the name Hamnuna by saying that his father was a נוגא (*nuna*), "fish."

See *Zohar* 3:187a; *Tosafot*, *Qiddushin* 25a, s.v. *hamnuna karnuna*; *Bereshit Rabbah* 97:3. The fish carries messianic overtones in both Judaism and Christianity; see Stroumsa, "The Early Christian Fish Symbol Reconsidered."

In the Talmud Rav Hamnuna occasionally transmits teachings of Rabbi Shim'on (e.g., BT *Hullin* 21a; *Temurah* 15a), and several prayers are attributed to him (BT *Berakhot* 11b, 17a, 58a). Cf. BT *Gittin* 39b. In the *Zohar*, roles are reversed and Rabbi Shim'on cites Rav Hamnuna (e.g., 1:8a–b). Throughout the *Zohar*, Hamnuna is greatly revered, and several original ritual acts are attributed to him.

See 1:240a, 250a; 2:88a, 124a, 136b; 3:87b, 103b, 145b (*IR*), 188a; Scholem, *Das Buch Bahir*, 68; idem, *Major Trends*, 368, n. 134;

They both wept together, kissed him, and went on.

They said to him, “If it pleases our master, let him reveal his name to us.”

He opened, saying, “*Benayahu son of Yehoyada* (2 Samuel 23:20).²⁵⁸ This verse has been established²⁵⁹—which is fine—but this verse alludes to supernal mysteries of Torah. *Benayahu son of Yehoyada* appears on behalf of a mystery of wisdom—a concealed word, and the name prevails. *Son of a living man* (ibid.)—צדיק (*Tsaddiq*), Righteous One—Vitality of the Worlds.²⁶⁰ *Master of deeds* (ibid.)²⁶¹—Master of all action, of all celestial powers, for all emerge from Him. He is יהוה צבאות (*YHVH Tseva’ot*), Lord of Hosts, insignia of all His hosts.²⁶² Distinguished and supreme, He is called *Master of deeds*.

“*From Qavtse’el* (ibid.)—this grand and dignified tree, supreme above all,²⁶³ from which site did it emerge? From which rung did it come? The verse goes on to say: *From Qavtse’el*²⁶⁴—a high, concealed rung that [6b] *no eye has seen*... (Isaiah 64:3),²⁶⁵ a rung containing all, gathered in from upper light, and from which all emerges. It is the holy, hidden palace, in which all rungs are

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Liebes, in *Eshel Be’er Sheva* 4 (1996): 198–201; Goldreich, in *Masu’ot*, 486–91.

258. *Benayahu son of Yehoyada* The verse continues: *son of a living man, abounding in deeds, from Qavtse’el. He smote the two Ariel of Moab. He went down and slew the lion within the pit on a snowy day.* The donkey-driver begins to answer the question of his identity with a verse about Benayahu, a loyal follower of King David, one of the heroes mentioned in 2 Samuel 23.

259. **This verse has been established** See BT *Berakhot* 18a–b: “Rabbi Ḥiyya said..., ‘*Son of a living man.* Are all other people then sons of dead men? Rather, *son of a living man*, for even in his death he was called *living*...”

Cf. Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Tsedeq*, 7a; *Zohar* 1:132a, 136a.

260. **the name prevails... צדיק (*Tsaddiq*), Righteous One...** The name בניהו (*Benayahu*) indicates *Yesod*, who is בן (*ben*), “son of,” יוד (*yod*, *he*, *vav*), three letters symbolizing *Ḥokhmah*, *Binah*, and *Tif’eret*. See *Zohar* 1:136a, 164a.

Yesod, “Vitality of the Worlds,” animates all of existence. On various senses of this title see above, note 176. On the notion that “the

name prevails,” see BT *Berakhot* 7b; *Zohar* 1:58b; 2:179b.

261. **Master of deeds** The donkey-driver interprets the biblical word רב (*rav*), *abounding*, according to its alternate meaning: “master.”

262. **insignia of all His hosts** See BT *Ḥagigah* 16a, in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan: “He is the insignia among His myriad.” Cf. *Zohar* 2:232a.

263. **this grand and dignified tree...** *Yesod*, often identified with the Tree of Life.

264. **Qavtse’el** The root קבץ (*qvts*) means “to gather,” and *Qavtse’el* refers to *Binah*, who gathers in the upper light of *Ḥokhmah*.

265. **no eye has seen** The verse continues: *O God, but You, what You will do for one who awaits You.* See BT *Berakhot* 34b: “Rabbi Ḥiyya son of Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan, ‘All the prophets prophesied only concerning the days of the Messiah, but as for the world that is coming, *No eye has seen, O God, but You, [what You will do for one who awaits You]*... All the prophets prophesied only concerning masters of return [those who succeed in turning back

gathered and concealed.²⁶⁶ In the trunk of this tree all worlds exist; from it, all holy powers are nourished and deployed.

“*He smote the two Ariel of Moab* (2 Samuel, *ibid.*). Two sanctuaries existed because of Him, were nourished by Him: First Temple and Second Temple.²⁶⁷ As soon as He departed, the flow flowing from above ceased. *He*, as it were, *smote* them, destroying and obliterating them, and the Holy Throne fell,²⁶⁸ as is written: *And I was in the midst of the exile* (Ezekiel 1:1)—that rung called *I*²⁶⁹ was *in the midst of the exile*. Why? *By the River Kever* (*ibid.*), River of Already,²⁷⁰ on account of the river gushing and flowing, whose waters and springs ceased, so that it did not flow as before, as is written: *A river dries up and is parched* (Job 14:11).²⁷¹ *Dries up*—in the First Temple; *is parched*—in the Second. So *He smote the two Ariel of Moab*. מואב (*Mo'av*), *Moab*—for they originated מאב (*me-av*), from Father, in heaven and were destroyed and obliterated because of Him.²⁷² All the lights illumining Israel darkened.

“Further, *He went down and slew the lion* (2 Samuel, *ibid.*).²⁷³ In former times, when this river gushed its waters below, [the people of] Israel were fulfilled, offering offerings and sacrifices to atone for their souls. Then from above would descend the image of a lion, whom they could see on the altar,

to God], but as for the completely righteous, *No eye has seen, O God, but You.*”

In the *Zohar*, this verse often refers to *Binah*, who is identified with “the world that is coming.” See 1:4b; 2:97b, 163a; above, note 19.

266. **holy, hidden palace...** *Binah*, the Divine Mother, contains within Herself—and then gives birth to—all the lower *sefirot*.

267. **two Ariel... Two sanctuaries...** The meaning of the word *Ariel* in the verse in Samuel is unclear. In Ezekiel 43:15–16 it apparently means “hearth” of an altar; in Isaiah 29:1 the name is applied to Jerusalem. In rabbinic sources *Ariel of Moab* refers to the Temple, since King David was descended from Ruth the Moabitess. See *M Middot* 4:7; and *BT Berakhot* 18a–b: “Rabbi Ḥiyya said..., ‘*He smote the two Ariel of Moab*, for he did not leave his like in either the First Temple or the Second.’”

268. **Holy Throne fell** *Shekhinah* fell into exile.

269. **that rung called I** *Shekhinah*, who reveals the full spectrum of divine personality.

270. **River Kever, ... River of Already** The prophet Ezekiel experienced his vision by the River Kever, a stream near Nippur in Babylon. In Hebrew, though, the word כְּבֵר (*kevar*) means “already,” “long ago.” The point here is that the river of *Yesod* was of the past and had ceased to flow, causing the destruction of the Temple and the exile of *Shekhinah*.

See *Re'uyyot Yehezqel*, ed. Gruenwald, in *Temirin* 1 (1972): 111–14; Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*, 126, 205; *Zohar* 1:85a, 149a–b.

271. **A river dries up and is parched** See *Zohar* 1:26a (*TZ*), 67a; 2:166b; 3:150b.

272. **they originated... were destroyed** The two Temples came into being through the flow of divine emanation, and when that flow ceased they were destroyed.

273. **He went down and slew the lion** The verse continues: *within the pit on a snowy day*.

crouching over its prey,²⁷⁴ consuming sacrifices like a fierce warrior, while all dogs²⁷⁵ hid themselves away, not venturing out.

“When sins prevailed, He descended to the rungs below,²⁷⁶ and He killed that lion, no longer willing to provide its prey. He, as it were, killed it. *He slew the lion*, really! *Within the pit* (ibid.)—in plain sight of the evil Other Side.²⁷⁷ Seeing this, that Other Side was emboldened to send a dog to eat the offerings. What is the name of that lion? אוריאל (*Uri’el*), for his face is the face of אריה (*aryeh*), a lion.²⁷⁸ What is the name of that dog? בלאדן (*Bal’adan*) is its name, for it is excluded from the category of אדם (*adam*), human, but is rather a dog—its face a dog.²⁷⁹ *On a snowy day*—a day when sins prevailed, and

274. image of a lion... See BT *Yoma* 21b: “Five things were reported about the fire of the pile of wood on the Temple altar: it crouched like a lion, it was as clear as sunlight, its flame was of substance, it devoured wet wood like dry wood, and it caused no smoke to rise.” Cf. *Zohar* 3:32b, 211a, 241a; Todros Abulafia, *Sha’ar ha-Razim*, 90.

275. dogs The demonic powers.

276. He descended... Sin severed the connection between *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*, and the flow of emanation became available to “the rungs below,” the demonic forces. The holy lion no longer received its prey and was thus killed, as it were, by *Yesod*.

277. evil Other Side סטרא אחרא בישא (*Sitra aḥra bisha*), the demonic realm, which represents the shadow of the divine.

278. אוריאל (*Uri’el*)... Literally, “God is my light,” though here connected by the *Zohar* with the similar-sounding אריה (*aryeh*), “lion” and with אריאל (*Ariel*), symbol of the Temple. Uriel is one of the four angels of the Presence (along with Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael), who surround the divine throne. In Kabbalah these angels of the Presence are identified with the four holy creatures seen by Ezekiel. Uriel appears sometimes as the figure of the eagle, sometimes as the lion.

See 1 Enoch 9:1; 2 Esdras 4:1; *Pesiqta Rabbati* 46; *Bemidbar Rabbah* 2:10; *Midrash Konen* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:39); cf. *Zohar* 3:32b, 211a.

279. name of that dog? בלאדן (*Bal’adan*)... The name derives from Merodach Baladan, king of Babylon (722–710 B.C.E.), with whom King Hezekiah of Judea had contact. See 2 Kings 20:12–13; Isaiah 39:1–2, where he is named Merodach Baladan son of Baladan. On this the Talmud (BT *Sanhedrin* 96a) comments: “Why was he called [Merodach-]Baladan the son of Baladan? It has been told: Baladan was a king whose face turned into that of a dog, so his son sat upon his throne instead. In his documents he wrote his own name and the name of his father, King Baladan.” Baladan’s dog-face is probably a rabbinic explanation of the dogs seen on Assyrian-Babylonian monuments (Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:368, n. 82).

Here בלאדן (*Bal’adan*) is a demonic figure whose name is taken to mean: בל אדם (*bal adam*), “not human.” *KP* refers to non-Jewish magical traditions concerning בילאד (*Bil’ad*), prince of the demons. See *OY*; *Shoshan Sodot*, 104; Scholem, in *Madda’ei ha-Yahadut* 1 (1926): 112–27. In the continuation of the passage cited above (note 274), BT *Yoma* 21b observes that in the First Temple the fire on the altar appeared crouching like a lion, while in the Second Temple it crouched like a dog. See *Zohar* 3:32b, 211a.

Here the donkey-driver blends several of these traditions to describe a demonic figure with the face of a dog who is empowered to devour the sacrifices.

judgment was decreed above by the celestial court.²⁸⁰ Of this is written: *She is not afraid of snow for her household* (Proverbs 31:21)—Judgment on high.²⁸¹ Why? Because *her whole household is clothed in crimson*²⁸² (ibid.) and can endure the fierce fire.

“Until here, mystery of the verse. What is written next? *He slew an Egyptian, a man of good appearance* (2 Samuel, ibid., 21). Here the mystery of the verse discloses that whenever Israel sinned He²⁸³ departed, withholding from them all the goodness, all the light illumining them. *He slew an Egyptian man*—the light of that light illumining Israel. Who is it? Moses,²⁸⁴ as is written: *They said, ‘An Egyptian man rescued us’* (Exodus 2:19).²⁸⁵ There he was born, there he was raised, there he rose to the highest light.²⁸⁶ A *man of מראה (mar’eh), good appearance*, as is said: *ומראה (u-mar’eh), In appearance, not in riddles* (Numbers 12:8).²⁸⁷ *Man*, as is said: *Man of Elohim* (Deuteronomy 33:1)—husband, as it were, of that *מראה (mar’eh), appearance, of the Presence of YHVH*,²⁸⁸ for he was worthy of conducting this rung on earth in any way he wished—something no other human attained.

280. *On a snowy day...sins...judgment...* Water symbolizes *Hesed*, but snow symbolizes *Gevurah* and *Din* (“Judgment”), the congealing and hardening of water. See *Zohar* 1:16a; and *Aggadot Olam Qatan (Beit ha-Midrash, 5:58)*: “Snow is human sin.” According to rabbinic literature, the yearlong punishment of the wicked in Hell is equally divided between fire and snow. See *JT Sanhedrin* 10:3, 29b; *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 10:4; *Zohar* 1:62b, 68b, 107b, 238b.

In *Zohar* 2:97b, 104a, 109a, the donkey-driver who confounds the rabbis refers cryptically to a snowy day on which he and Rabbi Shim’on son of Yoḥai “sowed beans in fifty-two colors,” alluding to the fifty-two-letter name of God and to the word *בן (ben)*, “son,” whose *gimatriyya* is fifty-two. See Liebes, in *Eshel Be’er Sheva* 4 (1996): 200.

281. *She is not afraid...* The *She* of Proverbs 31 is understood as *Shekhinah*, who does not fear the power of *Din* (“Judgment”).

282. *clothed in crimson...* *Shekhinah* has an affinity with *Gevurah* and *Din*, symbolized by the color red, and She executes the decrees of Judgment, so She does not

fear Judgment’s fire or snow. See *Zohar* 1:238b.

283. *He* *Yesod*.

284. *the light of that light...Moses* Moses attained the *sefirah* of *Tif’eret* and transmitted some of its light.

285. *‘An Egyptian man...’* A description of Moses given by Jethro’s daughters to their father after Moses rescued them from aggressive shepherds.

286. *There...there...there...* In Egypt. See *Zohar* 2:34a.

287. *ומראה (u-mar’eh), In appearance...* In plain sight. God appears to Moses directly, unlike the experience of other prophets.

288. *Man of Elohim—husband, as it were, of that מראה (mar’eh)...* *Shekhinah* is the *מראה (mar’eh), appearance of the Presence of YHVH*, the site of divine manifestation. She is also known as *Elohim*. Moses is on such intimate terms with *Shekhinah* that he is called Her husband, as indicated by his title: *Man of Elohim* (Deuteronomy 33:1; Psalms 90:1).

See *Midrash Tehillim* 90:5; *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana, nispaḥim, Vezot Haberakhah*, 443–44, 448 (variants); *Tanḥuma, Vezot Haber-*

“*The Egyptian had a spear in his hand* (2 Samuel, *ibid.*). This is the staff of God, handed down to him,²⁸⁹ as is said: *With the staff of God in my hand* (Exodus 17:9). This is the staff created on the eve of Sabbath at twilight,²⁹⁰ engraved with the holy name,²⁹¹ a holy graving. With this he sinned at the rock, as is said: *He struck the rock with his staff twice* (Numbers 20:11). The blessed Holy One said to him, ‘Moses, I did not give you My staff for this. By your life! From now on, it will no longer be in your hand.’ Immediately *He went down to him with a club* (2 Samuel, *ibid.*)²⁹²—with severe judgment. *And wrenched the spear out of the Egyptian’s hand*, for from that moment it was withheld from him and was never again in his hand. *And killed him with his own spear*. Because of the sin of striking with that staff,²⁹³ he died and did not enter the Holy Land, and this light was withheld from Israel.

“*From the thirty, he was most honored* (2 Samuel, *ibid.*, 23).²⁹⁴ These are the thirty celestial years,²⁹⁵ on which He drew, conveying them below. Drawing on

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akhah 2 (*Ets Yosef*, ad loc.); *Devarim Rabbah* (Lieberman), on 33:1; *Zohar* 1:21b–22a, 148a, 152a–b, 236b; 239a; 2:22b, 235b, 238b, 244b (*Heikh*).

According to rabbinic tradition, after encountering God on Mount Sinai, Moses abstained from sexual contact with his wife and maintained union with *Shekhinah*.

See *Sifrei*, Numbers 99; BT *Shabbat* 87a; *Tanḥuma*, *Tsav* 13; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 7:6; *Zohar* 1:22a, 152b, 234b; 2:222a; 3:148a, 180a.

289. **staff of God, handed down to him** The staff with which Moses performed miracles before Pharaoh, split the Red Sea, and struck the rock to produce water. According to *Pirḳei de-Rabbi Eli’ezer* 40, the rod had previously been in the possession of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Jethro. See *Targum Yerushalmi*, Exodus 2:21; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:106, n. 600.

290. **staff created on the eve of Sabbath...** One of the ten things created in the last moments of the week of Creation, just before the first Sabbath began. See *M Avot* 5:6.

291. **engraved with the holy name** The Ineffable Name, *YHVH*. See *Targum Yerushalmi*, Exodus 2:21; *Devarim Rabbah* 3:8;

Midrash Tehillim 114:9; *Sefer ha-Yashar*, *Shemot*, 307; *Zohar* 2:28a, 48a.

292. **He went down to him with a club** The verse continues: *and wrenched the spear out of the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear*. As the donkey-driver interprets the verse, the subject, Benayahu, is really Yesod, who confronts Moses the Egyptian. See *Zohar* 2:114b (*RM*).

293. **And killed him with his own spear ...that staff** Benayahu killed Moses the Egyptian with Moses’ own staff, i.e., because of Moses’ own misuse of the staff. The notion that Moses was an Egyptian who was killed by an Israelite foreshadows Freud’s thesis. See Amado Lévy-Valensi, *Le Moïse de Freud*; Goldreich, in *Masu’ot*, 486–87.

294. **From the thirty, he was most honored** The verse continues: *but the three he did not attain. David set him over his guard*. The actual biblical verse does not include the word *most* (הכי [ha-khi]). Apparently the *Zohar*’s author or a later scribe replaced this phrase with a different one, several verses earlier, describing another of King David’s warriors, Avishai: *Of the three, he was most honored* (2 Samuel 23:19). See *Zohar* 1:105b.

295. **thirty celestial years** The three sefirot, *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*, each reflect

them, He drew near. *But the three he did not attain.* They approached Him, giving to Him wholeheartedly, but He did not approach Them.²⁹⁶ Still, although He was not counted as one of Them, *David set him over his bodyguard*, for He never faded from the tablet of His heart.²⁹⁷ [7a] They are never separated. David set His heart on Him, not He on David for with the praises, songs and love that the moon offers to the sun,²⁹⁸ She draws Him toward Her, so that He dwell with Her. This is: *David set him over his bodyguard.*”

Rabbi El'azar and Rabbi Abba fell before him. Meanwhile they did not see him. They rose, looking in every direction, but could not see him. They sat down and wept, and could not speak to one another. After a while Rabbi Abba said, “This is precisely what we learned: On whatever path the righteous walk, with words of Torah between them, virtuous ones of that world come to them.²⁹⁹ This was indeed Rav Hamnuna Sava,³⁰⁰ coming to us from that world to reveal these words to us. Before we could recognize him, he vanished!”

the full decade of the *sefirot*; so together They form a total of thirty, which flow into and through *Yesod*. See Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Orah*, 48a.

296. **They approached Him...** The highest triad of *sefirot*, *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, and *Binah*, emanate to *Yesod*, but He has no direct contact with Them.

297. **David set him... bodyguard...** King David, who symbolizes *Shekhinah*, yearns to unite with *Yesod*. *Bodyguard* renders the Hebrew *משמעתו* (*mishma'ato*), “his obedient band,” from the root *שמע* (*shama*), “to hear.”

Liebes (oral communication) suggests that the use of the word in this passage is influenced by the Arabic Sufi term *sama*, “hearing,” the ecstatic song and dance of the Dervishes. Note the reference to “songs and love” in the following lines. One Sufi defense of *sama* invokes the Koranic tradition (34:10) that David sang praises to God (*ER* 13:30–31). See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 178–86.

298. **moon... sun** *Shekhinah* and Her partner, *Yesod*.

299. **On whatever path... with words of Torah...** See *M Avot* 3:2: “Rabbi Hananya son of Teradyon said, ‘...If two are sitting

engaged in words of Torah, *Shekhinah* dwells between them.” Here the seekers are walking, not sitting, and they are visited not by *Shekhinah*, but by a righteous soul who has reincarnated and comes to puzzle and enlighten them.

On the importance of engaging in Torah while on a journey, see Deuteronomy 6:7; *BT Eruvin* 54a; *Ta'anit* 10b; *Zohar* 1:58b, 69b–70a, 76a, 87a, 115b.

300. **Rav Hamnuna Sava** Earlier, the donkey-driver had hinted at the name Hamnuna when he said that his father was a *נונה* (*nuna*), “fish” (above, page XX254). The rabbis concluded that he was the son of the late Hamnuna, but now they realize that he was really Hamnuna himself, reincarnated as a lowly donkey-driver. Father and son are one and the same. Hamnuna’s reincarnation is referred to (by his son) in *Zohar* 3:186a–88a; cf. *Zohar* 2:94b–95a; *ZH* 97b–c (*Tiq*).

According to *BT Berakhot* 18a–b, the phrase *son of a living man* (2 Samuel 23:20) describing Benayahu refers to the fact that Benayahu (or the righteous in general) are called *living* even in death. In the *Zohar*, Rav Hamnuna, the donkey-driver, embodies Benayahu anew.

They rose and tried to goad the donkeys, but they would not move. They tried to goad them, but they would not move. Frightened, they left the donkeys behind. Still today that spot is called Donkeys' Site.

Rabbi El'azar opened, saying, "How immense is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those in awe of You!... (Psalms 31:20). How great is the precious, supernal goodness the blessed Holy One intends to lavish upon humanity—for the supremely righteous, dreading sin, engaging in Torah—when they enter that world! The verse does not read *Your goodness*, but rather *Your immense goodness*. Who is that? *The memory of Your immense goodness they express*³⁰¹ (Psalms 145:7)—joy of life flowing from the world that is coming³⁰² to Vitality of the Worlds,³⁰³ who is *the memory of Your immense goodness—immense goodness for the house of Israel*... (Isaiah 63:7).³⁰⁴

"Further, *How immense is Your goodness*. Here is engraved a mystery of wisdom, all mysteries intimated here. מה (Mah), *How*, as has been explained.³⁰⁵ *Immense*—the *immense* and mighty tree,³⁰⁶ for there is another, smaller tree,³⁰⁷ but this one is *immense*, penetrating the vault of heaven. *Your*

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301. *memory*... זכר (Zekher), connected by Rabbi El'azar with זכר (zakhar), "male," denoting *Yesod*, the divine male who transmits the flow of emanation from the upper *sefirot* to *Shekhinah*. The cited verse is fitting because *Yesod* is also known as "good."

302. **world that is coming** עלמא דאתי (Alma de-atei), the Aramaic equivalent of the rabbinic Hebrew העולם הבא (ha-olam ha-ba), "the world that is coming." This concept is often understood as referring to the hereafter and is usually translated as "the world to come." From another point of view, however, "the world that is coming" already exists, occupying another dimension. See *Tanḥuma*, *Vayiqra* 8: "The wise call it *ha-olam ha-ba* not because it does not exist now, but for us today in this world it is still to come." Cf. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:8; and Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 37: "The world to come' does not succeed 'this world' in time, but exists from eternity as a reality outside and above time, to which the soul ascends."

In Kabbalah "the world that is coming" often refers to *Binah*, the continuous source of emanation. See *Zohar* 3:290b (IZ): "the world that is coming, constantly coming, never ceasing."

Cf. *Bahir* 106 (160); Asher ben David, *Peirush Shelosh Esreh Middot*, in *Kabbalah* 2 (1997): 293; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 26 (30); idem, *Sod Eser Sefirot*, 375; *Zohar* 1:83a, 92a.

303. **Vitality of the Worlds** *Yesod*, who channels the flow of emanation to *Shekhinah* and the worlds below. On this title, see above, note 176.

304. **house of Israel** *Shekhinah*, also known as Assembly of Israel. See above, note 230.

305. **מה (Mah), How**, as has been explained Earlier (above, page XX30) Rabbi El'azar had explained that מה (mah), "what" or "how," is a name for *Shekhinah*.

306. **immense and mighty tree** *Tifer'et*, trunk of the cosmic tree. See Daniel 4:8.

307. **another, smaller tree** *Shekhinah*. See *Zohar* 2:99b; 3:170a; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2:696.

goodness—the light created on the first day.³⁰⁸ *That you have hidden away for those in awe of You*, for He concealed it for the righteous in that world.³⁰⁹

“*That You made* (Psalms 31:20)³¹⁰—the upper Garden of Eden,³¹¹ as is written: *The place You have made to dwell in, O YHVH* (Exodus 15:17). This is *that You made for those who take refuge in You. In the presence of human beings*—the lower Garden of Eden, where all the righteous abide in spirit clothed in a splendid garment resembling the image of this world.³¹² This is נגד (*neged*), *in the presence of, human beings*—in the image of *human beings* of this world.³¹³ There they stand, then fly through the air, ascending to the Academy of Heaven in that upper Garden of Eden.³¹⁴ They soar and bathe in the dew of rivers of pure balsam,³¹⁵ then descend and dwell below. Sometimes

308. **light created on the first day** *Hesed*, the first of the lower seven *sefirot*, the seven primordial days. In the Torah, the word “good” appears for the first time in the verse describing this light: *God saw that the light was good* (Genesis 1:4).

309. **He concealed it...** See BT *Ḥagigah* 12a: “Rabbi El’azar said, ‘With the light created by the blessed Holy One on the first day, one could gaze and see from one end of the universe to the other. When the blessed Holy One foresaw the corrupt deeds of the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion [the generation of the Tower of Babel], He immediately hid it from them, as is written: *The light of the wicked is withheld* (Job 38:15). For whom did He hide it? For the righteous in the time to come.’”

See *Bereshit Rabbah* 3:6; 41:3; *Shemot Rabbah* 35:1; *Tanḥuma*, *Shemini* 9; *Bahir* 97–98 (147); *Zohar* 1:31b–32a, 45b–46a, 47a; 2:127a, 148b–149a, 220a–b; 3:88a, 173b.

310. **That you made** The verse continues: *for those who take refuge in You, in the presence of human beings*. Rabbi El’azar now concludes the verse that he began.

311. **upper Garden of Eden** *Shekhinah*, the divine presence and dwelling, the culmination of the emanation that was *made*. *Shekhinah* actualizes the various divine qualities.

312. **all the righteous abide...** Righteous souls who have departed this world

abide in the Garden of Eden clothed in an ethereal body resembling their previous human form. The soul is clothed in this garment before descending to earth, retains it while in the physical body until shortly before death, and then regains it upon ascending.

See *Zohar* 1:38b (*Heikh*), 81a (*ST*), 90b–91a, 131a, 219a, 220a, 227b; 2:96b, 150a, 161b; 3:43a–b, 104a–b; Scholem, in *Tarbiz* 24 (1955): 293–95; idem, *Kabbalah*, 158–59; idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 251–73; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2:770–73. Cf. Rashi on BT *Ḥagigah* 12b, s.v. *ve-ruhot unshamot*.

313. נגד (*neged*), *in the presence of... in the image of...* The Hebrew word means both “in the presence of” and “corresponding to.”

314. **Academy of Heaven...** Where the souls of the righteous study Torah with God.

315. **dew of rivers of pure balsam** Thirteen rivers of pure balsam await the righteous in the world that is coming. See BT *Ta’anit* 25a; *Bereshit Rabbah* 62:2.

In the *Zohar*, the rivers of balsam are the fragrant flow of emanation from *Binah*, who is known as “the world that is coming, constantly coming, never ceasing” (*Zohar* 3:290b [*IZ*]; see 2:127a; 3:181a).

The reference to dew recalls the rabbinic notion that God will resurrect the dead with dew. See BT *Shabbat* 88b; JT *Berakhot* 5:2, 9b.

they appear *in the presence of human beings*, enacting miracles for them like celestial angels³¹⁶—as we just saw the radiance of the High Lamp,³¹⁷ though we were not privileged to contemplate and discover further mysteries of wisdom.”

Rabbi Abba opened, saying, “*Manoah said to his wife, ‘We will surely die, for we have seen God!’* (Judges 13:22). Even though Manoah did not know its nature,³¹⁸ he said, ‘Since it is written: *No human shall see Me and live* (Exodus 33:20), and we certainly have seen, so *we will surely die.*’ As for us, we have seen and attained this light moving with us,³¹⁹ yet we are still alive, for the blessed Holy One sent him to us to reveal mysteries of wisdom. Happy is our share!”

They went on. They reached a certain mountain, as the sun was inclining. The branches of the tree on the mountain began lashing one another, emitting a song. As they were walking, they heard a resounding voice proclaim: “Holy sons of God,³²⁰ dispersed among the living of this world! Luminous lamps, initiates of the Academy! Assemble at your places to delight with your Lord in Torah!”

They were frightened, stood in place, then sat down. Meanwhile a voice called out as before, proclaiming: “Mighty boulders, towering hammers,³²¹ behold the Master of Colors,³²² embroidered in figures, standing on a dais.³²³ Enter and assemble!” That moment, they heard the branches of the trees resounding intensely, proclaiming: *The voice of YHVH breaks cedars* (Psalms 29:5).³²⁴ Rabbi El’azar and Rabbi Abba fell on their faces, immense fear falling upon them. They rose hastily, went on, and heard nothing. Leaving the mountain, they walked on.

316. **Sometimes they appear...** See Nahmanides on Genesis 49:33.

317. **High Lamp** Rav Hamnuna Sava.

318. **its nature** The divine nature of the angel, as indicated in Judges 13:16: *Manoah did not know that he was an angel of YHVH*. See BT *Berakhot* 61a; Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Orah*, 36b.

319. **this light...** Rav Hamnuna Sava.

320. **Holy sons of God...** Souls of the righteous, such as Rav Hamnuna, who circulate among humanity, spreading wisdom.

321. **towering hammers** See BT *Berakhot* 28b, where Yoḥanan son of Zakkai is addressed by his students as “Mighty Hammer.” Cf. *Zohar* 3:206a, and 187a: “Rabbi Yehudah wept and said, ‘Rabbi Shim’on, happy is your share! Happy is the genera-

tion! On account of you, even schoolchildren are towering, mighty hammers!”

322. **Master of Colors** Apparently Metatron (see *KP*). According to *TZ*, intro, 7a; 70, 119b, Metatron has *the appearance of the rainbow* (Ezekiel 1:28). He is often associated with the Heavenly Academy.

See BT *Avodah Zarah* 3b; *Bereshit Rabbati* 5:24; *Sefer Ḥanokh* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:115–16); *Seder Gan Eden* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 3:134–35); *Zohar* 2:169b; *ZḤ* 36b (*ST*).

323. **a dais** אַצטווא (*Itstevana*). See Targum to 2 Kings 11:14; Radak, ad loc.

324. **branches of the trees...** In *Pereq Shirah* (2:80), an early mystical text according to which every created thing sings a biblical verse to God, the trees of the field sing differently: *Then all the trees of the forest*

Upon reaching the house of Rabbi Yose son of Rabbi Shim'on son of Lekonya,³²⁵ they saw Rabbi Shim'on son of Yoḥai and rejoiced. [7b] Rabbi Shim'on rejoiced, saying to them, "Indeed you have traversed a path of heavenly miracles and signs. For I was just now sleeping, and I saw you and Benayahu son of Yehoyada, who was sending you two crowns³²⁶ by the hand of a certain old man to crown you. The blessed Holy One was certainly on this path! Further, I see your faces transfigured."

Rabbi Yose said, "Well have you said, 'A sage is preferable to a prophet.'"³²⁷

Rabbi El'azar approached, placed his head between the knees of his father³²⁸ and told him what happened. Rabbi Shim'on was frightened and wept. He said, "YHVH, I heard what You made heard; I am awed (Habakkuk 3:2). This verse was spoken by Habakkuk when he saw his death and was restored to life by Elisha.³²⁹ Why was he named חִבְקִיק (Havaqquq), Habakkuk? Because it is written: *At this time next year, you will be חֹבֶקֶת (ḥoveqet), embracing, a son* (2 Kings 4:16). He³³⁰ was the son of the Shunammite! Furthermore there were two embracings³³¹—one by his mother, one by Elisha—as is written: *He placed his mouth on his mouth* (ibid., 34).

will sing before YHVH because He is coming to judge the earth (Psalms 96:12–13; 1 Chronicles 16:33).

Elsewhere too the trees exult in song at the revelation of secrets of Torah. See JT *Ḥagigah* 2:1, 77a; BT *Ḥagigah* 14b; *Zohar* 1:77a; *Seder Gan Eden (Beit ha-Midrash, 3:138)*.

325. Rabbi Yose son of Rabbi Shim'on son of Lekonya See the beginning of this story, above, page XX205. As noted there, the *Zohar* changes Shim'on son of Yose into Yose son of Shim'on, transposing father and son. Similarly, the apparent son of Hamnuna turned out to be Hamnuna himself.

326. two crowns Two new words of Torah, each of which becomes a crown. The donkey-driver presented the rabbis with new interpretations of two biblical passages, one concerning the Sabbath, the other concerning Benayahu son of Yehoyada. See BT *Shabbat* 88a; *Zohar* 1:4b; 3:291a (IZ).

327. A sage is preferable to a prophet See BT *Bava Batra* 12a, in the name of Amemar; *Zohar* 1:183b; 2:6b; 3:35a. Rabbi Shim'on's visionary power is unrivaled.

328. placed his head... Placing one's head between one's own knees was a meditative posture in early rabbinic mysticism. See 1 Kings 18:42; *Zohar* 3:166b. Here Rabbi El'azar places his head between his father's knees before relating what has happened to them on the road.

329. spoken by Habakkuk when he saw his death... The son of the Shunammite, who was born miraculously, died suddenly, and was restored to life by the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 4), is identified by the *Zohar* with the prophet Habakkuk. See 2:44b–45a; 3:195a; and El'azar of Worms, *Rimzei Haf-tarot* for *Shavu'ot* (Scholem).

Habakkuk's desire to know secrets and his special intimacy with God are noted in *Midrash Tehillim* 7:17; 77:1; cf. BT *Ta'anit* 23a. He appears as a paradigmatic mystic in *Bahir* 46–47 (68–69). This particular verse, which opens Habakkuk's theophany, appears again in *Zohar* 2:45a; 3:128a, 138b (IR). See Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 34–35.

330. He Habakkuk.

331. two embracings חִבְקִין [(*Hibbu-qin*)], which explains the doubling in the name חִבְקִיק (Havaqquq).

“I have discovered in *The Book of King Solomon*:³³² He inscribed on him³³³ in words the engraved name of seventy-two names.³³⁴ For the letters of the alphabet that his father had originally inscribed on him³³⁵ flew away from him when he died. Now that Elisha embraced him, he inscribed on him all those letters of the seventy-two names. The letters of these seventy-two engraved names are 216 letters,³³⁶ all of which Elisha inscribed with his breath to restore him to life through the letters of the seventy-two names. He called him חבִּקוּק (*Havaqquq*), a name fulfilling all sides: fulfilling embracings, as explained, and fulfilling the mystery of the 216 letters of the holy name.³³⁷ He was revived with words,³³⁸ restoring his spirit, and with letters,³³⁹ reviving his entire body

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332. *The Book of King Solomon* One of the many volumes housed in the real or imaginary library of the author of the *Zohar*. See 1:13b, 33b, 225b; Matt, *Zohar*, 25; and the comment on this passage by Shim'on Lavi, *KP*: “All such books mentioned in the *Zohar*... have been lost in the wanderings of exile... Nothing is left of them except what is mentioned in the *Zohar*.”

333. **He inscribed on him** Elisha inscribed on Habakkuk, the son of the Shunammite woman.

334. **engraved name of seventy-two names** The divine name derived from the description of the splitting of the Red Sea: Exodus 14:19–21. Each of these three verses contains seventy-two letters. The name is composed of seventy-two triads (or “words”), according to the following pattern: the first letter of the first verse, the last letter of the second verse, the first letter of the third verse (forming the first triad); the second letter of the first verse, the penultimate letter of the second verse, the second letter of the third verse (the second triad); etc.

Revival by means of a divine name recalls the legend of the Golem, according to which dust could be animated by the recitation of magical names, and in fact Abraham Abulafia notes that the seventy-two-letter name animates the Golem. See Idel, *Golem*, 98–101; Liebes, in *Kiryat Sefer* 63 (1990–91): 1318–21. According to a magical text (British Museum 752:17, 107a), Elisha used the forty-two-letter name of God to revive the son of the

Shunamite (see Scholem). *Sefer Ḥasidim* (ed. Wistinetzki, par. 219) states that Elisha was punished with illness for using the forty-two-letter name of God to curse a group of children who had insulted him by calling him “Baldhead” (2 Kings 2:23–24). As a result of his curse, forty-two of the children were killed by two she-bears.

On the seventy-two-letter name, see *Leqah Tov*, Exodus 14:21; *Bereshit Rabbah* 44:19; *Vayiqra Rabbah* 23:2; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 2:2; Hai Gaon, *Otsar ha-Ge'onim*, *Ḥagigah*, 23; Rashi on BT *Sukkah* 45a, s.v. *ani*; Ibn Ezra on Exodus 14:19; *Bahir* 79 (110); *Zohar* 1:17a; 2:51b, 132b, 270a; 3:150b–151a; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 95–97; Kasher, *Torah Shelema*, 14:67, 284–86.

335. **letters... that his father...** Habakkuk, the son of the Shunammite, was born through the power of the letters of the alphabet, but not the particular combination of seventy-two triads of letters that Elisha employed.

336. **216 letters** The total number of letters in the seventy-two triads derived from the three verses (Exodus 14:19–21).

337. **חבִּקוּק (*Havaqquq*)... 216 letters...** The name חבִּקוּק has a numerical value of 216.

338. **with words** The seventy-two triads, whose greater spiritual potency is required for the restoration of the spirit.

339. **with letters** The 216 individual letters, whose potency suffices to restore the body.

enduringly. So he was called Habakkuk; it was he who said, ‘YHVH, I heard what You made heard; I am awed. I heard what happened to me, my tasting of that world,³⁴⁰ and I am frightened.’ He began begging for compassion for his soul, exclaiming, ‘YHVH, Your action that You did for me, *in the midst of years* חיייהו (*hayyehū*), may its life be’ (Habakkuk, *ibid.*). חיייהו (*Hayyehū*), like חיייו (*hayyav*): its life.³⁴¹ Whoever is bound to those primordial years,³⁴² life is bound to him. *Convey it in the midst of years* (*ibid.*)—*Convey it* to that level that has no life at all.”³⁴³

Rabbi Shim’on wept and said, “From what I have heard, I, too, am afraid of the blessed Holy One.”

Raising his hands above his head, he exclaimed: “What a privilege that you saw Rav Hamnuna Sava, radiance of Torah, face-to-face! I was not so privileged.”

He fell on his face and saw him³⁴⁴ uprooting mountains,³⁴⁵ kindling lights in the palace of King Messiah.³⁴⁶ He said to him,³⁴⁷ “Rabbi, in that world you will be neighbors, empowered masters in the presence of the blessed Holy One.”

From that day on, he called Rabbi El’azar, his son, and Rabbi Abba פניאל (*Peni’el*), *Face of God*, as is said: *For I have seen God face-to-face* (Genesis 32:31).³⁴⁸

Rabbi Ḥiyya opened, “*The beginning of wisdom is awe of YHVH; all who actualize it gain good insight. His praise endures forever* (Psalms 111:10). *The beginning of wisdom*—this verse should read *The end of wisdom is awe of YHVH*, because *awe of YHVH* is really

340. **my tasting of that world** My brief experience of death.

341. **Your action . . . in the midst of years . . .** The verse concludes: חיייהו (*hayyehū*), *revive it*. Rabbi Shim’on reads this last word not as a verb but as a noun: *its life*.

342. **those primordial years** See Malachi 3:4. Here the phrase refers to the *sefirot* from *Ḥesed* through *Yesod*, flowing into *Shekhinah*. See *Zohar* 1:238b; 2:105b; 3:134b, 138b (*IR*). They are also the six primordial days of the week culminating in the Sabbath of *Shekhinah*.

343. **that level that has no life at all** *Shekhinah*, who has nothing of Her own and is dependent on the flow from above.

344. **him** Rav Hamnuna Sava.

345. **uprooting mountains** In BT *Bera-khot* 64a, Rabbah son of Naḥamani is called “Uprooter of Mountains,” based on his sharp mind.

346. **palace of King Messiah** Also known in the *Zohar* as “the bird’s nest” (2:7b–8b). Cf. 3:164b; *Seder Gan Eden* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 3:132).

347. **He said to him** Rav Hamnuna said to Rabbi Shim’on.

348. **For I have seen God face-to-face** The verse continues: *and my life has been saved*. After surviving his wrestling match with the angel, Jacob names the site *Peni’el*. Perhaps here the name is understood in the plural: *Penei El*, *Faces of God*, referring to both rabbis.

the end of Wisdom.³⁴⁹ However, it is the beginning of entering the level of supernal Wisdom, as is written: *Open for me gates of righteousness. This is the gate to YHVH* (Psalms 118:19–20).³⁵⁰ Truly! For unless one enters this gate, one will never enter.

“This can be compared to an exalted king—high, concealed and hidden away—who built gates for himself, one above the other. At the end of all the gates, he fashioned one gate with many locks, openings, palaces—one above the other. He said, ‘Whoever wishes to enter my presence, this gate will be first. Whoever enters, will enter through this gate.’

“Similarly, the first gate to supernal Wisdom is *awe of YHVH*.³⁵¹ This is ראשית (*reshit*), *beginning*; ב (*bet*)—two joined together as one.³⁵² These are two points: one hidden and concealed, one existing overtly.³⁵³ Since they are inseparable, they are called ראשית (*reshit*), *beginning*—one, not two. Whoever attains one attains the other.³⁵⁴ All is one, for He and His name are one,³⁵⁵ as is written: *They will know that You, YHVH, alone are Your name* (Psalms 83:19).

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“Why is it called *awe of YHVH*? Because it is the Tree of Good and Evil.³⁵⁶ If a person is deserving, it is good; if not, evil. [8a] So awe abides at this site, gateway to all goodness of the world.

349. *awe of YHVH is really the end of Wisdom* Shekhinah is called *awe of YHVH* because She is characterized by the power of Judgment and inspires awe. See above, page XX230. She is also lower Wisdom, culmination of the process of emanation that begins at upper Wisdom.

350. *gates of righteousness. This is the gate...* Shekhinah is called Righteousness. Through Her one enters the realm of *sefirot* and can eventually ascend to Wisdom. See *Zohar* 1:11b, 36b–37a, 141b; Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Orah*, 4b.

351. *Similarly...* The king in the parable symbolizes supernal Wisdom, who has fashioned the various gates (*sefirot*). The last gate, first to be encountered, is *Shekhinah*, but even before reaching Her, one must pass through several levels of camps of angels, chariots, and palaces. See BT *Shabbat* 31a–b.

352. *This is ראשית (reshit), beginning; ב (bet)—two...* The opening word of the

Torah, בראשית (*Be-reshit*), *In the beginning*, alludes to both Wisdom (*Hokhmah*) and *Shekhinah*. The letter ב (*bet*), the second letter of the alphabet, signifies “two,” and both of these *sefirot* are called ראשית (*reshit*), *beginning*: Wisdom is the beginning of emanation, while *Shekhinah* is the first gate on the spiritual path.

353. *two points* *Hokhmah* and *Shekhinah*. See above, page XX240.

354. *Whoever attains one...* Upon entering *Shekhinah*, lower Wisdom, one encounters higher Wisdom, reflected in Her.

355. *He and His name are one* *Shekhinah* reveals the *sefirot*, the various divine qualities, and is therefore called the name of God. See *Zohar* 1:18a; 2:134a, 161b.

356. *Tree of Good and Evil* The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, whose fruit was eaten by Adam and Eve. In Kabbalah this Tree symbolizes *Shekhinah*, who transmits either reward or punishment, depending on human behavior.