Thoughts on the Kaballah

The Kabbalah is a body of Jewish thought based on mystical insight into the nature of God and an imaginative interpretation of the Torah. The word itself means “received.” According to legend this special knowledge was imparted by God either to Adam in Eden or to Moses on Sinai, and handed down thereafter from generation to generation to an enlightened few, who preserved the received wisdom and taught it to their students. This post presents some thoughts about the Kabbalah from someone who, though neither Jewish nor fluent in Hebrew, is fascinated by the intricacy of its ideas.

Early Origins of the Kabbalah

Since at the beginning the Kabbalah was largely unwritten, we have no clear ideas about its origins. However, in the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, various books on the Kabbalah were written down using the Aramaic language in the region of Syria-Palestine (Dan & Kiener, 1986; Dan, 2007; Hoffman, 2010; Matt, 1996a, Ogden, 2016).

One of these foundational texts of the Kabbalah is the *Sefir Yetzirah* – the “Book of the Creation,” or “Book of Formation.” The universe was created by God engraving in light upon the darkness the 32 letters and numbers of the Hebrew language (*Sefir Yetzirah* I:1, Kaplan translation, 1990):

> With 32 mystical paths of Wisdom
> engraved Yah
> the Lord of Hosts
> the God of Israel
> the living God
> King of the universe
> El Shaddai
> Merciful and Gracious

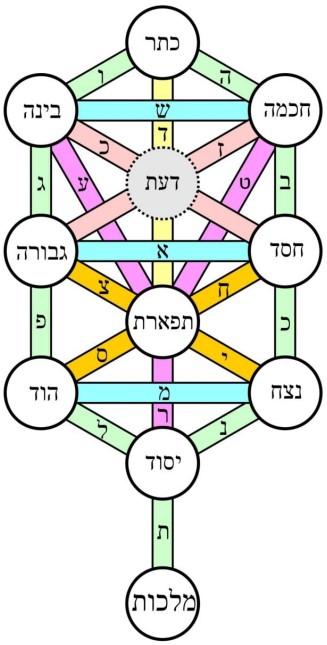
High and Exalted
Dwelling in eternity
Whose name is Holy –
He is lofty and holy –
And He created His universe
with three books (Sepharim),
with text (Sepher)
with number (Sephar)
and with communication (Sippur).

Text and number define the nature of the universe. Its qualities are described by language, and the quantities of its components are described by number. Communication allows the universe to exist – as divine speech. Note that the Hebrew root S-F-R using the letters *samech* (s), *pay* (p/f) and *resh* (r) is the basis of many words denoting writing and books, counting and numbers.

Another text probably written in that period, the *Sefer HaBahir* – the "Book of Illumination" –associated the ten numbers with ten different ways that God was manifest in the universe that He created: the *Sefirot* (Verses 124-193, Kaplan translation, 1979). These divine emanations became a way to understand all things.

The following illustration shows the 10 *Sefirot* (singular *Sefirah*) together with 22 linkages, each denoted by one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. As well as the 10 *Sefirot*, the idea of *Da'at* or "knowledge" is represented in the upper half of the diagram. Originally this was not directly connected to any of the *Sefirot*. Rather it appeared to be entangled in the network: knowledge develops through the study of the *Sefirot* and their interactions. Kaplan (1990, p 25) suggests that it is "the point of confluence between Wisdom and Understanding." Other interpretations consider *Da'at* to be one of the 10 *Sefirot*, and consider *Keter* as the Divine Will that infuses the whole underlying structure of the universe.

כתר	Keter	Crown
חכמה	Chochmah	Wisdom
בינה	Binah	Understanding
דעת	Da'at	Knowledge
חסד	Chesed	Love
גבורה	Gevurah	Power
תפארת	Tif'eret	Beauty
נצח	Netzach	Endurance
הוד	Hod	Splendor
יסוד	Yesod	Foundation
מלכות	Malkhut	Kingdom



א	Alef (a)	1	Ox
ב	Bet (b/v)	2	House
ג	Gimel (g)	3	Camel
ד	Dalet (d)	4	Door
ה	He (h)	5	Window
ו	Vav (v)	6	Nail
ז	Zayin (z)	7	Sword
ח	Chet (ch)	8	Fence
ט	Tet (t)	9	Serpent
י	Yod (y)	10	Hand
כ	Kaf (k)	20	Palm (hand)
ל	Lamed (l)	30	Goad
מ	Mem (m)	40	Water
נ	Nun (n)	50	Fish
ס	Samech (s)	60	Support
ע	Ayin (o)	70	Eye
פ	Pe (p/f)	80	Mouth
צ	Tsadi (ts)	90	Hook
ק	Qof (q)	100	Back of Head
ר	Resh (r)	200	Head
ש	Shin (sh/s)	300	Tooth
ת	Tav (t)	400	Cross

The Sefirot are arranged in three linked columns. The middle column represents the main flow of energy from the Creator to the Creation. The left column tends toward the female aspect of the Divine, and the right column toward its male aspect (Kaplan, 1990, p 34). However, in some formulations, *Malkhut* is also considered as the female aspect (*Shekhinah*) of *Keter.* We shall return to this idea when we examine the *Zohar*.

The numbers and letters in this representation of creation could be used in various ways – to explain the nature of things, to predict the future, to ward off disease and to exert magical control. The practice of *Gematria* (a Hebrew word likely deriving from the Greek *grammateia*, knowledge of writing) represents words by the sum of their letters according to the alphanumeric cipher given in the preceding figure. Thus, the word for father *av* can be considered as 3 – the sum of *alef* (1) and *bet* (2): Similarly, mother *em* can be considered as 41 – the sum of *alef* (1) and *mem* (40). Adding father and mother together leads to the word for child *yeled* which has a value of 44 – the sum of *yod* (10), *lamed* (30) and *dalet* (4). (I am indebted to Tokarczuk, 2022, p 579 for this example).

The use of Creation's numbers and letters in magic was the basis of *Kaballah Ma'asit* (practical), as compared to *Kaballah Iyunit* (contemplative). Amulets containing magical words were used to treat or prevent disease. The legendary Prague Golem (illustrated on the right by Philippe Semeria) was formed out of clay and brought to life by writing the Hebrew letters *alef*, *met* and *tav* upon his forehead – these make the word *emet*, "life." Once the Golem became dangerous, he was returned to clay by erasing the first of these letters so that the word became *met*, "death" (Scholem, 1965/1996, pp 158-204)

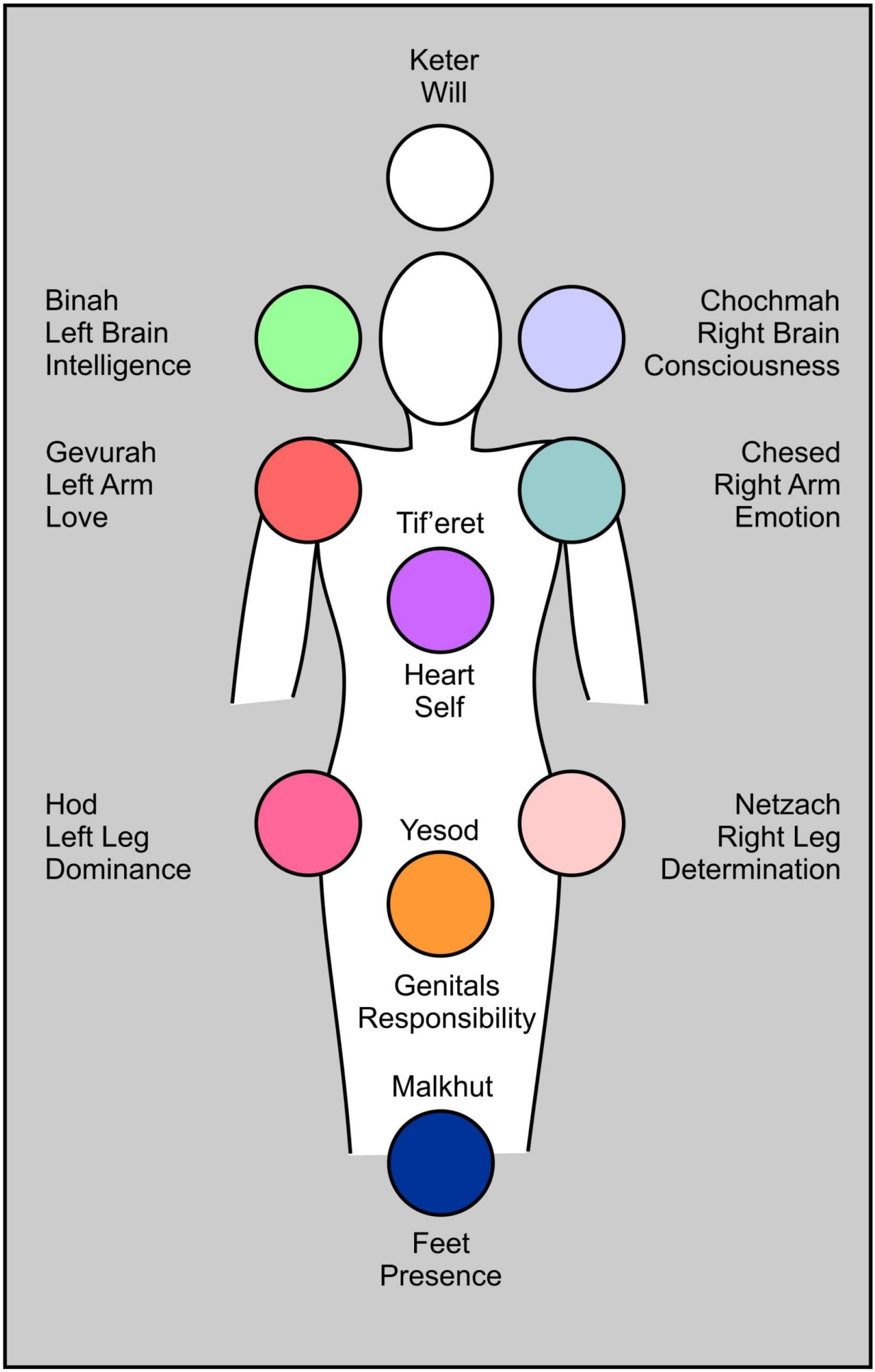
Many are the ways in which the world and its history can be mapped onto the *Sephirot*. One analysis relates these different emanations to the sayings of God as reported in the first chapter of *Genesis* (Kaplan, 1990, pp 6-7). God spoke and the universe came into being. The following are the words introduced by "And God said…" as they flow from Keter into the other nine emanations

> 3 Let there be light (*Chochmah*, Wisdom)
> 6 Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters (*Binah*, Understanding)
> 9 Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear (*Chesed,* Love)

> 11 Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind (*Gevurah*, Power)
> 14 Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night (*Tif'eret*, Beauty)
> 20 Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. (*Netzach*, Endurance)
> 24 Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind (*Hod*, Splendor)
> 26 Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (*Yesod*, Foundation)
> 28 Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (*Malkhut,* Kingdom)

Likewise, each of the ten commandments as given in Exodus 20 may relate to a particular *Sefirah* (Bar-Asher, 2022). However, exactly which commandment goes with which *Sefirah* varies from one commentary to the next. Most accept that the first commandment ("I am the Lord thy God …. Thou shalt have no other gods before me") relates to *Keter*.

The ten *Sefirot* can be mapped to the primordial human body in many ways. The following illustration shows an amalgam of several (Kaplan, 1990, p. 151; Berenson-Perkins, 2000; Atzmon, 2003). These relations are in keeping with the idea that "God created man in his own image" (*Genesis* 1:27).


Keter
Will
Binah
Left Brain
Intelligence
Chochmah
Right Brain
Consciousness
Gevurah
Left Arm
Love
Chesed
Right Arm
Emotion
Tif'eret
Heart
Self
Hod
Left Leg
Dominance
Netzach
Right Leg
Determination
Yesod
Genitals
Responsibility
Malkhut
Feet
Presence

Little definite is known about the history of Kabbalah scholarship between these early origins in Palestine and the 13th Century in Provence, France, where Rabbi Isaac the Blind (about 1160-1235 CE) wrote a commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Scholem, 1987, Dan & Kiener, 1986; Dan, 2007). He and his colleagues were the first to organize the 10 *Sefirot* in the way (see preceding figure) in which they are now most commonly considered (Dan & Kiener, 1986, pp 32, 73-86). He described the *Sefirot* as the emanations of a boundless God – *Ein Sof,* words meaning "no limit" and denoting that which is both infinite in space and eternal in time (Valabregue-Parry, 2012). *Ein Sof* is everything but is also nothing because it is not anything in particular. The concept of *Ein Sof* is therefore related to the idea of *Ayin* or "nothingness" (Matt, 1990). The words *Ein* and *Ayin* use the same Hebrew letters. *Ayin* and *Ein Sof* work through he first *Sephirah – Keter* – to create the other *Sefirot*.

The study of the Kaballah then spread from Southern France to the Jewish communities in Spain. In Gerona, Rabbi Azriel (about 1160-1238 CE), who had studied with Rabbi Isaac the Blind, wrote

> Anything visible, and anything that can be grasped by thought, is bounded. Anything bounded is finite. Anything finite is not undifferentiated. Conversely, the boundless is called *Ein Sof*, Infinite. It is absolute undifferentiation in perfect, changeless oneness. Since it is boundless, there is nothing outside of it. Since it transcends and conceals itself, it is the essence of everything hidden and revealed. Since it is concealed, it is the root of faith and the root of rebellion. As it is written, "One who is righteous lives by his faith." The philosophers acknowledge that we comprehend it only by way of no.
> Emanating from *Ein Sof* are the ten sefirot. They constitute the process by which all things come into being and pass away. They energize every existent thing that can be

> quantified. Since all things come into being by means of the sefirot, they differ from one another; yet they all derive from one root. Everything is from *Ein Sof*; there is nothing outside of it. (quotation from Matt, 1996a, p. 29)

The Spanish Rabbi Josef Gikatilla (about 1248-1305), whose name comes from the Spanish *Chiquitilla* (little one) wrote in his *Sha'are Orah* ("The Gates of Light," translated by Weinstein, 1994):

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

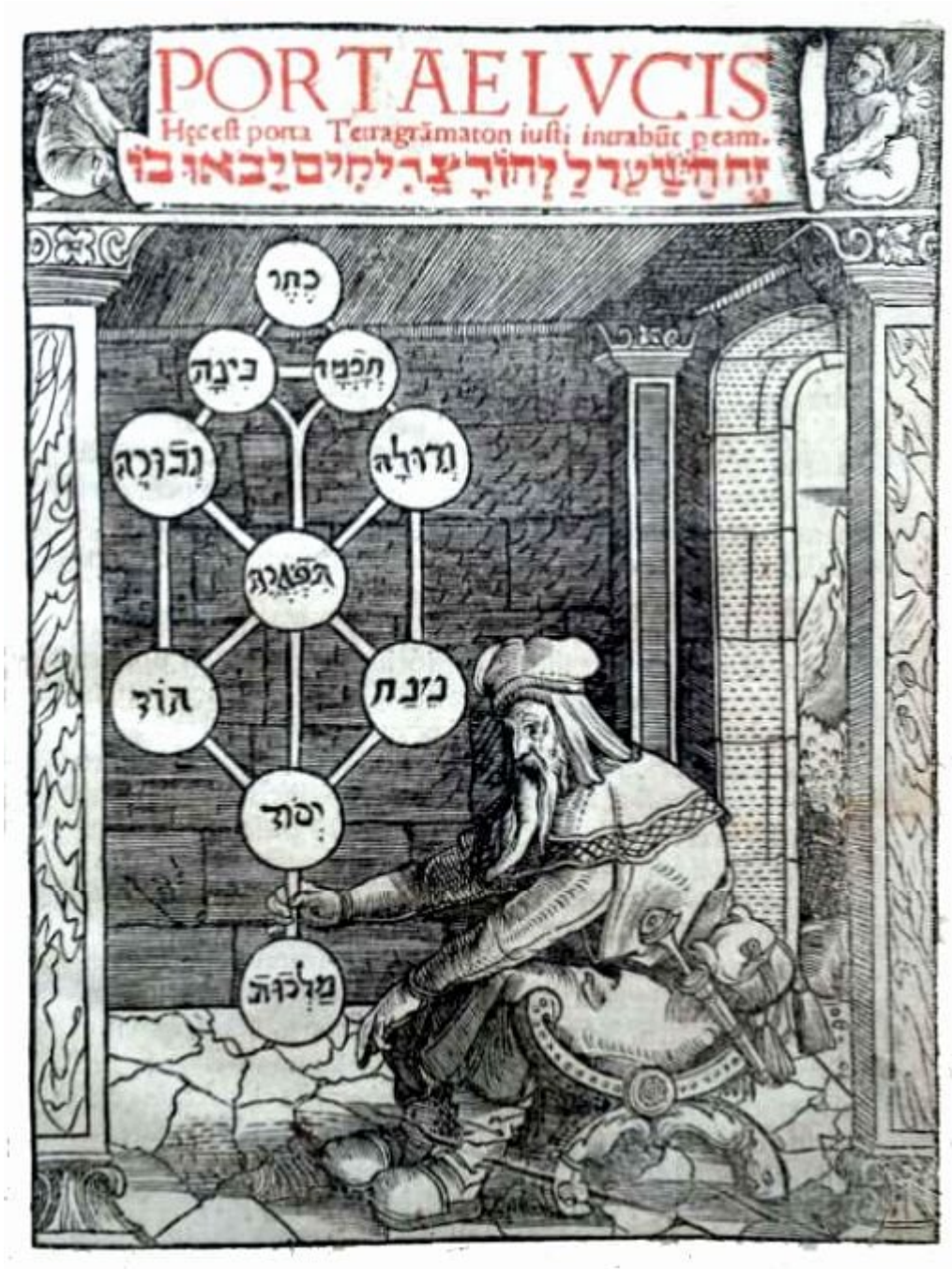
The final comment refers to the name "I am that I am" – *Eheyeh asher eheyeh* – of God in the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. Since Hebrew does not clearly indicate the tense of the verb, this can also be translated as "I am who I shall be" or "I shall be who I am."

In the *Sha'are Orah*, Gikatilla related the ten Sefirot to the various names of God in the Torah (this table derives from the Wikipedia article on Gikatilla):

SEPHIROT AND THE NAMES OF GOD

Sephirah	Holy Name
כתר, *Keter*, "Crown"	אהי"ה, *Eheye*, "I AM"
חכמה, *Chokhmah*, "Wisdom"	יה, *Yah*, "LORD"
בינה, *Binah*, "Understanding"	יהו"ה, *Havaya*h, "LORD"
חסד, *Chesed*, "Kindness"	אל, *El,* "God"
גבורה, *Gevurah*, "Severity"	אלהים, *Elohim*, "God"
תפארת, *Tiferet*, "Beauty"	יהו"ה, *Havayah*, "LORD"
נצח, *Netzach*, "Eternity"	יהו"ה צבאות, *Havayah Tsevaot*, "LORD of hosts"
הוד, *Hod*, "Splendor"	אלהים צבאות, *Elohim Tsevaot*, "God of hosts"
יסוד, *Yesod*, "Foundation"	אל חי, *El Chai*, "the living God"
מלכות, *Malkuth*, "Kingship"	אדני, *Adonai*, "my Lord"

The illustration below shows the frontispiece of a Latin translation of the *Sha'are Orah* (*Portae Lucis*) by Paulus Ricius, published in Augsburg in 1516, from the collection of the British Museum. The engraving shows a Kabbalist meditating on the *Sefirot.*



Mystic meditation on the ten Sefirot allows one to gain access to the nothingness of *Ein Sof*. Matt (1996a, p 119) quotes an anonymous Kabbalist from 13th Century Gerona:

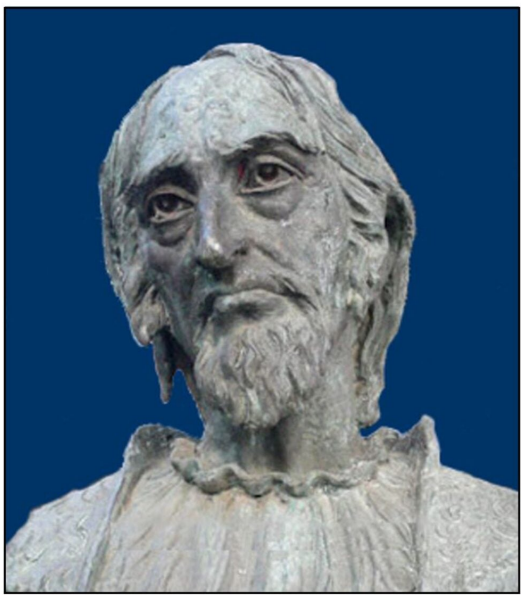
> When the soul comes into the One, entering into pure loss of self, it finds God as in nothingness. It seemed to a man that he had a dream, a waking dream, that he became pregnant with nothingness as a woman with child. In this nothingness God was born. He was the fruit of nothingness; God was born in nothingness. (quoted in McGinn, 1981).

The Zohar

Toward the end of the 13th Century, Moses de León (1240-1305), a Kabbalah scholar in Guadalajara, began to publish a set of Aramaic writings that he claimed had been written by the great Hebrew sage Shimon bar Yochai (also known as Rashbi) in the 2nd Century C.E. Rabbi Shimon is buried in Meron, Galilee, the sight of an annual ecstatic gathering of his adherents. The collection of these texts came to be known as the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Radiance), or more simply the *Zohar.* The legend has that Rashbi withdrew to a cave for 13 years and there, under the inspiration of the prophet Elijah, wrote the *Zohar*. Various lines of evidence suggest, however, that these texts were actually written by Moses de León, and that the Zohar is an example of religious *pseudoepigrapha*, works falsely attributed to a past author:

> The quest for truth knows of adventures that are all its own, and in a vast number of cases has arrayed itself in pseudoepigraphic garb. the further a man progresses along his own road in this quest for truth, the more he might become convinced that his own road must have been trodden by others, ages before him. to the streak of adventurousness which was in moses de leon, no less than to his genius, we owe one of the most remarkable works of jewish literature. (Scholem, 1945/1995, p 204)

We have no contemporary portrait of Moses de León. The following illustration shows two modern representations: on the left a print by Arnold Belkin and on the right a bust by Luis Sanguino:



The following is the Zohar's commentary on the first verse of *Genesis*. I have used Matt's 2004 translation but I have in some places used the explanatory annotations in Matt (2002, 2004) instead of the literal translation:

> On the authority of the King (i.e., *Ein Sof*), He engraved engravings in luster on high. A spark of impenetrable darkness flashed within the concealed of the concealed (i.e., the first and most hidden *Sefirah*, *Keter*) from the head of *Ein Sof* – a cluster of vapor forming in formlessness, thrust in a ring, not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all. As a measuring line, yielding radiant colors. Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below, concealed within the concealed of the mystery of *Ein Sof*. It split and did not split its aura, was not known at all, until under the impact of splitting, a single, concealed, supernal point shone. Beyond that point, nothing is known, so it is called *Reshit* (Beginning), first command of all.
>
> *The enlightened will shine like the Zohar (radiance, brilliance, splendor) of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever* (Daniel 12: 3)

> Zohar! Concealed of concealed struck its aura, which touched and did not touch this point. Then this beginning expanded, building itself a palace worthy of glorious praise. There it sowed seed to give birth, availing worlds. The secret is: Her stock is seed of holiness (*Hokhmah*) (Isaiah 6:13). Zohar! Sowing seed for its glory, like the seed of fine purple silk wrapping itself within, weaving itself a palace, constituting its praise, availing all.
>
> With this beginning, the unknown concealed one created the palace. this palace is called *elohim*, god. the secret is: *Be-reshit bara Elohim*, With beginning, ___ created God.

The final lines in this section propose a complete re-interpretation of Creation. Rather than the usual translation ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"), the new interpretation proposes that God is created (together with the heaven and the earth) by the unknowable and unnameable force of *Ein Sof*. The Zohar proposes that since *Elohim* follows the verb *bara*, it is the object rather than the subject of the act of creation. This would fit with modern colloquial Hebrew, although there are many examples in the Hebrew of the Torah where the subject follows the verb, e.g. Genesis 1:4, *Wayyar Elohim et-ha'owr*, God saw the light.

Some scholars have remarked about how the expansion of the universe from a "single concealed supernal point" at the beginning of Creation might represent the Big Bang (Friedman, 1995; Matt, 1996b). we should be very cautious in relating science to scripture. Early Kabbalah ideas related the ten *sefirot* to the now obsolete idea that the earth is the centre of a universe surrounded by the sky and eight crystalline spheres carrying the moon, sun, the five known planets, the fixed stars, and the empyrean heaven (Chajes, 2020).

The *Zohar* (Matt, 2004, sections i: 53ab) makes some intriguing comments on the sin of Adam and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The tenth *Sefirah* is called *Malkhut*

(kingdom) and represents the actual world which contains both good and evil. However, the Sefirah also represents *Shekhinah*. This word means “dwelling,” or “presence,” and as such it has come to mean the presence of God within the real world. At another level of interpretation, *Shekhinah* is the female counterpart of *Keter* or the bride of *Tif’eret*. Adam’s eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil brought evil and death into the world and distanced *Shekhinah* from the other *Sefirot*. It was not that God drove Adam out of Eden, but that Adam drove *Shekhinah* out of God. The goal of Judaism is then to repair this cleavage between the Creator and his Creation, to join male and female back together. These concepts were to be expanded in the teachings of Isaac Luria, which will be considered later.

Christian Kabbalah

In the 15th and early 16th centuries, Renaissance scholars began once again to study scientific, philosophical and religious works written by the Ancients but long unread by teachers only concerned with Christian Scripture. Early Kabbalah writings such as the *Sefir Yetzirah* were some of the sources of knowledge that were thus “reborn” during the Renaissance. Placing these ancient Hebrew writings in the context of Christian philosophy led to the formulation of a Christian Kaballah (Forshaw, 2016).

Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522) in Germany published *De Arte Cabbalistica* in 1517. He tried to reconcile some of the ideas of the Kabbalah with Christian theology, and mapped the Christian Trinity to the upper levels of the *Sefirot*. The early 16th Century saw the beginning of a campaign to facilitate the conversion of the Jews in the Holy Roman Empire by burning all their books. Reuchlin successfully argued against this (Price, 2011).

The other famous Renaissance scholar of the Kabbalah was

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) (Copenhaver, 2019, 2020; Howlett, 2021; Hanegraaff, 2012, pp 53-68). This young nobleman studied at the universities of Ferrara, Padua and Paris, becoming proficient in French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. He then became a member of the Medici court of Lorenzo the Magnificent in Florence. His beautiful face and long chestnut hair was widely depicted in renaissance art. The illustration below shows him represented (posthumously) in Raphael's *School of Athens* (1511) in the Vatican (upper left), in Cosimo Rosselli's fresco *Niracle of the Sacrament* (1486) (lower left), and holding a medallion of Cosimo de' Medici in an anonymous engraving (right).

In 1486 Pico published a set of 900 *Conclusiones philosophicae, cabalasticae et theologicae* in Rome, and offered to defend these propositions in debate with any scholar who wished to challenge them. He also published a general defense of his conclusions in his *oration on the dignity of man*, which became the foundational text of the new humanism, wherein man became the measure of all things:

> For, raised to the most eminent height of theology, whence we shall be able to measure with the rod of indivisible eternity all things that are and that have been. (Caponigri translation, p 27).

Many of Pico's *Conclusions* derived from his readings in the Kabbalah. The following are three examples (from Copenhaver, 2019, Appendix C):

> *Ein Sof* is not to be numbered along with other Numerations (*Sefira*) because it is the unity of those Numerations, removed and uncommunicated, not a coordinated unity.
>
> Someone with a deep knowledge of Kabbalah can understand that the three great fourfold names of God contained in the secrets of Kabbalists ought to be assigned to the three persons of the Trinity by a wondrous allocation so that the name □□□□ (*Ehyeh*, I am) belongs to the Father, the name □□□□ (the tetragrammaton, *Yahweh*) to the Son, the name □□□□ (*Adonai*) to the Holy Spirit.
>
> One who has thought deeply about the novenary number of beatitudes that Matthew writes about in the Gospel *(Matthew* 5: 3:12) will see that they fit wonderfully with the novenary of nine Numerations (*Sefirot*) that come beneath the first, which is the unapproachable abyss of the Deity.

Pope Innocent VII considered many of Pico's proposals, particularly those related to the Kabbalah, as heretical. He forbad the proposed debate and banned any subsequent publication of the *Conclusions*.

Pico treated all his different sources – Greek philosophers, Christian theologians, Egyptian magicians and Hebrew sages – as equal. His was a philosophy of "syncretism" (from the Greek *syn* together and *krasis* mix). The Christian Kabbalah thenceforth became part of a tradition of secret knowledge, a strange amalgam of Gnosticism, Hermetism, Alchemy, Astrology, Freemasonry, and Kabbalah. The word "cabal" entered the lexicon to denote a secret society conspiring to bring about political change by means of intrigue.

Hanegraaff (2012) characterized those systems of knowledge that are rejected by the majority yet followed by a secret few as "esotericism" – the "academy's dustbin of rejected knowledge" (Hanegraaff, 2013, p 13). The popularity of such esoteric systems waxes and wanes. In the late 19th and early 20th Century various aspects of the occult – spiritualism, Tarot, theosophy – became popular. Later in the 20th Century various "New Age" religions made their impact.

Safed

In 1492 the Jews were expelled from Spain and the great flowering of Spanish Kabbalah ceased. Kabbalah scholars moved to other regions of Europe and the Middle East. The city of Safed in in Galilee, then part of Ottoman Syria, soon became an important center of Kabbalah learning. Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (1522-1570), also known as Remak, was one of the most important scholars in Safed. His name indicates that his family originally came from Cordoba in Spain. The following is from Cordovero's *Pardes Rimonim*, "Orchard of Pomegranates" (1548):

> In the beginning *Ein Sof* emanated ten *sefirot*, which are of its essence, united with it. It and they are entirely one. There is no change or division in the emanator that would

> justify saying it is divided into parts in these various sefirot. … Imagine a ray of sunlight shining through a stained-glass window of ten different colors. The sunlight possesses no color at all but appears to change hue as it passes through the different colors of glass. Colored light radiates through the window. The light has not essentially changed, though so it seems to the viewer. Just so with the *sefirot*. The light that clothes itself in the vessels of the sefirot is the essence, like the ray of sunlight. That essence does not change color at all, neither judgment nor compassion, neither right nor left. Yet by emanating through the *sefirot*—the variegated stained glass—judgment or compassion prevails. (quoted in Matt, 1996a, p 38).

Cordovero was followed by Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1532-1572), also known as *HaARI*, "the lion." He did not leave any writings of his own, but his teachings were later recorded by his disciples. He proposed that during Creation *Ein Sof* initially contracted (*tsimtsum*) so as to make space for the universe, and that when light was emanated into the *Sefirot* there was some unavoidable fragmentation (*shevirah*). The task of the faithful is to repair (*tikkun*) what was broken by means of good works, charity, social justice and prayer (Drob, 2000, pp 384-433). Matt (1996a, p 15) summarized these concepts:

> Luria taught that the first divine act was not emanation, but withdrawal. *Ein Sof* withdrew its presence "from itself to itself," withdrawing in all directions away from one point at the center" of its infinity, as it were, thereby creating a vacuum. This vacuum served as the site of creation. . . . Into the vacuum *Ein Sof* emanated a ray of light, channeled through vessels. At first, everything went smoothly; but as the emanation proceeded, some of the vessels could not withstand the power of the light, and they shattered. Most of the light returned to its infinite source, but the rest fell as sparks, along with the shards of the vessels. Eventually, these sparks became trapped in

material existence. The human task is to liberate, or raise, these sparks, to restore them to divinity. This process of *tikkun* (repair or mending) is accomplished through living a life of holiness. All human actions either promote or impede *tikkun*, thus hastening or delaying the arrival of the Messiah.

Final Thoughts

There is much that is foolish in the teachings of the Kaballah. The use of the Kaballah in magic makes for wonderful stories but in reality is nonsense. The use of the Kaballah to predict the future is foolish. Sabattai Zevi (1626-1676) used the Kabbalah to claim that he was the Messiah. After gathering together thousands of followers, he was imprisoned by Sultan Mehmed IV and ultimately converted to Islam. He augmented rather than decreased the sum of human suffering.

The great Kaballah texts are magnificent works of the imagination. They present a view of a universe infused with number and language. In the general sense that we cannot understand or control anything without number and language, these teachings are true. The writings of the Kaballah also provide meditative tools to facilitate individual mystical encounters with the infinite.

Over the past century we have come to consider particular things as dependent on universal principles. Noam Chomsky has shown that different human languages are all related to a universal grammar; Claude Lévi-Strauss has proposed that different human societies all follow some basic rules for how human beings interact with each other. Perhaps the ideas of the Kaballah can provide us with a general structure with which to understand things – a template for the infinite. These issues are well discussed (though ultimately not resolved) in Levi's 2009 paper "Structuralism and Kabbalah:

Sciences of mysticism or mystifications of science?”

> Structural anthropology and Kabbalah, although on cursory appraisal having nothing in common—insofar as they stem from entirely different intellectual domains, the one being a modern social science and the other an ancient form of jewish mysticism—on deeper examination actually share a number of epistemological and ontological postulates. These include, but are not limited to, the idea that surface diversity conceals an underlying unity, specifically truth is discoverable within a layered model of reality, and that space, time, and matter are characterized by entropy and fragmentation.

Perhaps we might end this post with the concept of *tikkun olam* (“repair of the world”) as proposed in the Kabbalah teachings of Isaac Luria. this is one of the most powerful justifications of human ethics: we should be good not to benefit ourselves but to make the world a better place.

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