

ספר יצירה

SEFER YET'ZIYRAH

The Book of Formation

translated and annotated by
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PUBLISHED BY:

THE COLLEGE OF THELEMA

222 North Manhattan Place

Los Angeles, CA 90004-4018

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Version 1.0, January 29, 1996 E.V.
Version 2.0, April 11, 1996 E.V.
EDITION 3.0, July 2007 E.V.
Version 3.1, February 28, 2010 E.V.

Published by: THE COLLEGE OF THELEMA
A Not-for-Profit Religious Corporation
James A. Eshelman, M.A., Chancellor
www.thelema.org

*(Donations, legacies, and bequests made to the College of Thelema
are tax deductible in the United States.)*

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Founded 1973 E.V.
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FOREWORD

Sefer Yetziyah, “The Book of Formation,” is the oldest known Kabbalistic¹ text. It is the key to *The Zohar*, which it precedes by many centuries.

Sefer Yetziyah is also the key to the most important attributions of the Tarot, that pictorial codification of the initiated wisdom of the Hermetic Qabalistic tradition. A long-standing teaching within the Western mystery schools, supported by abundant internal evidence, is that the Greater Arcana of Tarot were designed intentionally to conform to the technical attributions of the 22 Hebrew letters as detailed in *Sefer Yetziyah*. The most important of these attributions and correspondences are summarized in an Appendix to the present monograph.

II

How old is *Sefer Yetziyah*? Nobody **exactly** knows. Compounding the question is the fact that this small book grew over the centuries, some parts of it existing long before some of its later appendages.

We know the following:

A work called *Sefer Yetziyah* is mentioned as early as the 1st century C.E., with a history that would have taken it back at least a century before. *Sefer Yetziyah* also is mentioned in the *Talmud*, which was written down between 3rd century and very early 5th century C.E. However, there is no certainty that this early work was the same document that we know today as *Sefer Yetziyah*.

As early as the 5th or 6th century C.E., the text itself was quoted in other works. What is then

quoted is recognizable as part of the present manuscript.

I have come to accept the earliest of these dates (1st century B.C.E. or, in any case, a pre-*Talmud* date) for the following reason: The Hebrew of *Sefer Yetziyah* is, almost without exception, Biblical Hebrew. It does not rely on the characteristic rabbinical vocabulary emerging in the first millennium C.E. such as was catalogued by Jastrow in his *Sefer Meliyim*.² This stands in sharp contrast (for example) to *The 32 Paths of Wisdom*, which relies heavily on the post-Diaspora rabbinical vocabulary.

The earliest surviving commentaries on *Sefer Yetziyah* date from the 10th century C.E. or a little earlier. Commentaries to three versions of *Sefer Yetziyah* (the Saadia, Long, and Short versions, respectively) appeared in 931, 946, and 956 C.E. The oldest surviving manuscripts of the work itself date from almost immediately thereafter. Of the four main variant versions of *Sefer Yetziyah*, the oldest manuscript of the Long Version (now in the Vatican Library) dates from the 10th or 11th century; that of the Saadia Version, from the 11th century; and that of the Short Version, from the 13th century. However, earlier copies than these existed, as proven by the 10th century commentaries.

The so-called Gra-Ari Version came much later. It was edited down from numerous variant manuscript versions in the mid-16th century by Rabbi Moshe Cordevero, and later refined further by Rabbi Yitzckhak Luria, called the Ari. The resultant “Ari Version” was edited further by Rabbi Eliahu (called the Gra) in the 18th century, and was thereafter known as the Gra-Ari (or simply the Gra) Version.

¹ It is my custom to transliterate קבלה as *Kabbalah* when speaking of the Hebraic-Rabbinical tradition, for the simple reason that its devotees thus spell it; and to render it *Qabalah* when writing of the Hermetic traditions, for similar reasons and to distinguish ק from כ by employing the English *Q*. (Sometimes a precise differentiation is not possible.)

² ספר מליים: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* compiled by Prof. Marcus Jastrow, Ph.D. Litt. D., Philadelphia, 1903.

III

The four main versions of *Sefer Yetziyah* have more similarities than differences, although the Saadia Version differs most from the others – enormously in places, especially with regard to the arrangement of text material. It also excludes altogether much of the attributive text that is of the greatest interest to us. The other three are fairly similar, with the Short Version and Long Version being the most similar (except that the latter is, well, *longer*), and the Gra Version strongly resembling the Long Version (but with numerous changes of attributions to the letters).

If popularity were the issue, the Short and Gra versions would clearly rise above the others. The Short Version is probably the most frequently published, whether in ancient or modern times. In comparison, the Gra Version was the synthetic creation of Hebrew Kabbalists from the 16th to 18th centuries, who were particularly careful to bring its technical details into conformity with certain particulars of *The Zohar*.

It was, thus, the Gra Version that the late Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan used in his superb *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation in Theory & Practice*. This popular work is one of the finest practical texts on the traditional **Hebraic** Kabbalah, and deserves every serious student's attention.

However, those teachings that evolved into the Hermetic Qabalistic tradition of Europe, the real foundation of the whole Western Mystery Tradition from Medieval times forward, broke away from the Hebrew Kabbalah centuries before the synthetic production of the Ari Version of *Sefer Yetziyah*. There is no reason to presume that the subsequent synthetic Hebraic tradition was any more true to the original teachings than were the non-Hebraic repositories of Wisdom Teachings. So far as there is significant practical difference between the Gra and Short versions of *Sefer Yetziyah*, it is in the attributions by which the 22 Hebrew letters are characterized; and **the Hermetic tradition, as far back as it can be traced, has employed the same attributions given in the original Short Version, not the later ones of the Ari or Gra.**

IV

I first began working on this present translation in the late 1980s and published a stable version in 1996. Originally, I had a far less grand vision of where my efforts would lead. Decades back, my primary exposure to *Sefer Yetziyah* involved the 1887 English translation by William Wynn Westcott (who went on, later that same year, to become one of the founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn). The brief article on *Sefer Yetziyah*, written by Westcott during this same period and included in H.P. Blavatsky's *Theosophical Glossary*, summarized the work as follows:

Sepher Yetzirah (*Heb.*). “The Book of Formation”. A very ancient Kabbalistic work ascribed to the patriarch Abraham. It illustrates the creation of the universe by analogy with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, distributed into a triad, a heptad, and a dodecad, corresponding with the three mother letters, A, M, S, the seven planets, and the twelve signs of the Zodiac. It is written in the Neo-Hebraic of the *Mishnah*.

Westcott's translation was based on several Hebrew codices cross-compared with three leading Latin manuscripts. The net effect most closely resembled a variation of the Short Version, with additional segments inserted from later editions and marked as supplemental. For many decades, Westcott's translation was the most generally available, and the most important to any who follow in the mystical and magical footsteps of the Golden Dawn.

My initial gripe concerning Westcott's translation was small yet pointed: When the text referred to “God,” Westcott did not always say **which** “God” the Hebrew texts intended. Being a budding student of Qabalah at the time, I wanted to know what the original Hebrew was for the various technical titles of Deity, including those that Westcott did not see fit to give.

Therefore, I was first and most excitedly attracted to Rabbi Kaplan's edition, when it first appeared in 1990, because he included the complete Hebrew text of one version of the work (the Gra Version). However, through many hours of frustration, I discovered many typographical errors

in his published Hebrew text (and some errors that were clearly no more than the publisher's incorrect paste-up of the Hebrew on the page). This is unfortunate, and required a certain amount of time to catch and correct.

I was quickly able to answer my original questions about the God-Names and, along the way, developed high regard for Rabbi Kaplan's work. To my students in the College of Thelema and Temple of Thelema I would have heartily recommended Kaplan's volume as **the** definitive translation were it not for one consideration: By his reliance on the Gra Version, favored by later Hebrew Kabbalists, Kaplan was seriously at odds with the Hermetic Qabalistic tradition with respect to basic attributions of the Hebrew letters.

There is no more **historical** evidence that the Hermetic attributions are correct than there is that the Hebraic ones are correct. There is, however, clear documentation that the modern Hermetic (non-Hebraic) attributions are centuries **older** than the rabbinical model, and antiquity is the usual basis for the Hebrew Kabbalah's claim to authenticity. The fact that a particular Kabbalistic teaching is Hebraic speaks *per se* neither for its authenticity nor even for its historic precedence. The Gra version of *Sefer Yetziyah* preferred by Kaplan and his rabbinical colleagues was **produced by a committee more than half a millennium after *Sefer Yetziyah* is KNOWN to have existed.** If we were to rely on the **available** historical record, and reasonable conclusions based thereon, we would have to conclude that the attributions of the 22 letters as listed in the Short Version are very likely the correct ones.

But we need not come to so final a conclusion. We need not even question the rabbinical approach within its own context. Ultimately, we need only assert that the initiated Hermetic Qabalistic tradition, of which Temple of Thelema is a recipient, employs a set of attributions which are those of the Short Version of *Sefer Yetziyah*, and which frame a self-contained system of tremendous efficacy. We need not apologize for employing what has been proven, on many interlocking levels, to work.

Therefore, for this present edition, I relied primarily on the Gra Hebrew version published by Kaplan – the best and most complete Hebrew text

of *Sefer Yetziyah* available to me³ – and altered the attributions in certain passages to conform to those given in the Short Version. When this was done, it is indicated in the footnotes. I retranslated the entire Hebrew text into English for the first edition in 1996. With the more mature perspective that time and further initiation have provided, I reviewed and revised it considerably in 2007 for this third revised edition.⁴

Chapter 4, verses 8 through 14 are among those that were added by unknown parties late in *Sefer Yetziyah's* history. They summarize attributions of the seven Double Letters, and differ widely from edition to edition. The same is true for verses 7 through 10 of Chapter 5, with respect to the twelve Simple Letters. Following a long-standing Kabbalistic tradition, I also have included these verses, substituting my own preferred attributions (those that have been handed down through the esoteric Hermetic tradition). The difference between my doing it and their doing it is – that I am telling my readers what I am doing!

V

With these few explanations, I offer and dedicate this annotated translation of *Sefer Yetziyah* to those who seek to know that they may serve.

James A. Eshelman
Los Angeles, California
July 29, 2007 E.V.

³ This was true in 1996. Since then, due to the kindness and generosity of my Brother in Light, Frater D.A., we have the Hebrew original of all main editions of *Sefer Yetziyah* and the primary rabbinical commentaries. A future edition of this monograph likely will rely on this wonderful new resource.

⁴ Chapter titles are not in the original and have been provided by the translator.

Chapter 1

THE SEFIYROTH & CREATION

1. In 32 mystical¹ Paths of Wisdom² inscribed³ Yah⁴, Y.H.V.H. Tzabaoth⁵, the God of Israel⁶, the Living God⁷ and King of the Universe⁸, El Shaddai⁹, the merciful and gracious, the high and exalted, dwelling in Eternity, whose Name is Holy –

exalted and holy is He¹⁰. He created His universe by three forms of expression¹¹ – by Letter, Number, and Sound.

2. Ten ineffable sefiyoth¹² and 22 Foundation Letters¹³ – three Mothers, seven Doubles, and twelve Simples.

3. Ten ineffable sefiyoth, in the number of the ten fingers, five matched against¹⁴ five, and a sin-

¹ פליוּרָה, *pelioth*, means “mysterious, mystical, wondrous, occult.”

² The 32 Paths are Paths of *Wisdom*, i.e., of Chakhmah. Thus, the first Name invoked is *Yah*, the Atziluthic aspect of Chakhmah. (Similarly, the legendary *Sefer Raziel* – “The Book of Raziel,” the Archangel, or Briatic aspect, of Chakhmah – is traditionally the source from which the greatest Kabbalists of history have derived their *Wisdom*.) Kabbalistic teachings are *Wisdom Teachings* in a very real sense, especially in the present Æon of Horus; for they are instructions in the operations of magick and of the True Will, or “Divine Word” (Greek *logos*), attributed to Chakhmah. Despite its antiquity, this present document contains a doctrine of the greatest import to the formula of Thelema today.

³ חֻקֵּק, *chaqaq*, more literally means “engraved,” but clearly refers to the earliest forms of writing. Alternate meaningful translations are “carved” and “wrote.” The interpretation “inscribed” was selected here and in 6:6 to connect its doctrine with the remainder of the book and verse, and to imply parallels between the Hebrew *Yah*, the Egyptian *Thoth* (who invented writing), and The Magus of the Tarot. Hereafter, we have translated it as “engraved.”

⁴ יָהּ, *Yah*, “Lord,” the Divine Name of Chakhmah.

⁵ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, *Y.H.V.H. Tzabaoth*, the Divine Name of Netzach.

⁶ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, *Elohi Yisrael*.

⁷ אֱלֹהֵי חַיִּים, *Elohiym Chayim*, “Living Elohiym,” “Elohiym of Life,” or “the Living God.” This Divine Name is attributable to Yesod.

⁸ מֶלֶךְ עוֹלָם, *Melekh Olam*. This Name corresponds to Malkhooth.

⁹ אֵל שַׁדַּי, *El Shaddai*, “Almighty God,” a Divine Name attributed to Yesod.

¹⁰ הוּא, *Hu*, which, by itself, sometimes is employed as a Divine Name attributed to Kether.

¹¹ סִפְרִים, *sefariym*, is literally “books.” “Letter” is סֵפֶר, *sefer*; “Number” is סֵפֶר, *sefar*; and “Sounds” is סִיפּוּר, *sippoor*, lit. “narration.”

¹² סְפִירוֹת בְּלִימָה, *sefiyoth beliyamah*, is translated “ineffable (i.e., inexpressible) sefiyoth” throughout this edition, in keeping with Westcott’s choice which is familiar, poetic, and accurate. A more literal translation, according to most scholars, would be “the sefiyoth of nothingness;” but Jastrow translates בְּלִימָה as either “nothing” or “air,” and renders it, in this context, as “heavenly.” *Sefiyrah* literally means “counting;” and the sefiyoth are, therefore, numbers; but, in Hebrew and English alike, its relationship to the identically spelled *sefeyrah*, “sphere,” has always seemed too close to discount.

¹³ This interesting phrase, אֹתוֹת וּסְדֵרוֹת, *otioth yesod*, should not be lightly overlooked. It equates the operation of the 22 letters, as discussed in the present work, with ideas related to Yesod. This *Sefer Yetziyrah* is itself a **foundation** work of Kabbalah that pertains specifically to the *Yetziratic* manifestations that correspond to, and are closely harmonized with, the domain of the sefiyrah Yesod and the creative act.

¹⁴ נֶגֶד, *nagad*, means, “in front of,” “in sight of,” etc. In modern Hebrew it has the additional sense of “opposite” or “against,” though this seems absent in ancient usage. Here, as כִּנְגַד, with the prepositional prefix כִּ-, it renders awkwardly in English, the most literal being “as over against” (Gesenius). In rabbinical writings, it often is used for things that are alike, corresponding, or a matched set. “Confrontation,” though literally correct, gives the wrong idea.

gle covenant in the midst, by word¹⁵ of the tongue, and by the circumcision¹⁶ of the genitals¹⁷.

4. Ten ineffable sefiyoth – ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand in Wisdom¹⁸, and be wise in Understanding¹⁹. Examine with them, and probe from them. Make each thing stand on its own essence²⁰. Restore the Former²¹ to His foundation²².

5. Ten ineffable sefiyoth: Theirs is a tenfold measure, without end. An abyss of beginning, an abyss of ending; an abyss of good, an abyss of evil; an abyss above, an abyss below; an abyss to the east, an abyss to the west; an abyss to the

north, an abyss to the south.²³ The only Lord, God the Faithful King,²⁴ rules all these from His holy dwelling throughout Eternity.

6. Ten ineffable sefiyoth: Their mystical image is like the lightning flash. Their fulfillment²⁵ is boundless. His Word is in them “running²⁶ and returning.”²⁷ They rush to His declaration like the

¹⁵ מילה, *milah*, means both “circumcision” and “word.” This last phrase is thus an intended pun, whereby the “single covenant” is expressed both by the word (or circumcision) of the tongue, and by the circumcision (or word) of the genitals.

¹⁶ One who has the power of speech is said to have “circumcised lips” – cf. *Exodus* 6:12. The same intent seems implied here. The covenant of the “word (circumcision) of the tongue” is the power of utterance, especially of words of power, or the use of the 22 letters of creation. The analogy to the second *milah* is obvious.

¹⁷ The Hebrew מעורר, *ma'or*, is modestly translated *pudenda* by Gesenius. Its root, עורר, means, “to be naked.” Although *pudenda* is most often used in English for the external aspect of the female genitals, it may mean the genitals of either sex. The present phrase, “circumcision of the genitals” (מילה המעורר) = 406 = תו, *Tav*) also may be read as, “the utterance of the (male or female) genitals.”

¹⁸ חכמה, *Chakhmah*.

¹⁹ בינה, *Biynah*.

²⁰ The central doctrine of Thelema.

²¹ יוצר, *yotzer*, “former,” from the same root as *Yetziyrah*, “formation.” Not the Creator (e.g., אלהים) as would appear in B'riyah, but the formative power on the Yetziratic plane in particular. This verse is a precise instruction in meditation and practical magick.

²² The word מכון, *makhon*, meaning, “place, foundation, basis,” is also used scripturally to refer to “that place where God sits.” מכון is related in meaning to *yesod*, “foundation.” This is also its usual translation in *Psalms* 89:14 and 9:12. We have employed the same translation here to preserve a relationship between these present ideas and those usually associated with the sefiyrah Yesod and the World of Yetziyrah. (Observe the juxtaposition of *stand* and *sit* in the last two sentences.)

²³ Within Freemasonry, the “lodge” of the mysteries is said to extend “from east to west, from north to south, and from the depths to the heights.” The origin of this traditional formula is here in *Sefer Yetziyrah*. However, this verse enumerates **five** dimensions: Two axes, depicting *time* and a *continuum of consciousness* (or L.V.X.), correspond to Chakhmah-Biynah and Kether-Malkhooth respectively, and are not constrained to three-dimensional space. These four sefiyoth are deemed the “roots” of the four Elements, and their Divine Names, employed together, are keys to awakening consciousness that also is not constrained to three dimensions. From the perspective of modern Qabalah we can equate Chesed-Geboorah to above-below, Tifereth-Yesod to east-west, and Hod-Netzach to north-south. (Earlier Kabbalists had other means of attributing these axes.)

²⁴ אדון יחיד אל מלך נאמן, *Adon Yechid El Melekh Naman*. The first two words, אדון יחיד, “the only Lord,” enumerate to 93. The notariqon of the last three words is אמן, *Amen*, a title of Kether, underscoring the absolute unity, or singularity, of deity intended by the word *Yechid*.

²⁵ תכלית, *taklit* (=860 = *Ruach Elohiym* [ם = 600]), means “completion” or “ultimate,” the fulfillment of a thing in its perfection. This is the consequence of a creature performing its True Will. The root of *taklit* is כלה, *kalah*, spelled identically with *Kallah*, a Kabbalistic term for the Bride, who is identical with מלכה, *Malkah*, the Queen of the Kingdom (*Malkhooth*). As a simple word, *kalah* means “complete” or “finished,” a worthy commentary on the completed creation in the sphere of Malkhooth.

²⁶ רצה, *ratza*. The root is רצה, which means both “to run” and “to will.” *Ratza*, translated here as “running” to retain a literary reference in *Ezekiel*, appears to have the meaning of the Fifth Power of the Sphinx, which is *Ire*, “To Go.”

²⁷ *Ezekiel* 1:14, “And the *Chayyoth* running and returning, like the appearance of lightning.” The *Chayyoth* are the Angels (or Yetziratic aspect) of Kether. Among other correspondences, they are representative of the four Elements, or four letters of the Name יהוה, going forth from a common Source.

whirlwind. They bow themselves before His Throne²⁸.

7. Ten ineffable sefiyoth, whose end is inherent in their beginning, and their beginning in their end, like a flame within a burning coal²⁹. For the Lord (אדון) is solitary (יחיד), He has no second; before One, what do you count?

8. Ten ineffable sefiyoth. Seal your mouth against speech, and your heart³⁰ against thought; and if your heart escapes from you, come back to the place. It is written, therefore, “The *Chayyoth* running and returning” (*Ezekiel* 1). Concerning this, a covenant was made.³¹

9. Ten ineffable sefiyoth. One: the Breath (or Spirit) of the Living God (רוח אלהים חיים), blessed and blessed be His Name, the Living God of the Æons (אל חי העולמים). Voice and Breath and Speech,³² this is the Holy Spirit (רוח הקדוש).

10. Two: Air from Spirit.³³ With it He engraved

and carved out³⁴ 22 Foundation Letters – three Mothers, seven Doubles, and twelve Simples. And the One Spirit (רוח אחה) is of them.

11. Three: Water from Air. With it He engraved and carved out 22 letters from the formless and void³⁵, the mire and clay. He engraved them like a type of garden; He carved them out like a type of wall; He covered them like a type of ceiling.³⁶

12. Four: Fire from Water.³⁷ With it He engraved and carved out a Throne of Glory, *Sera-*

here except that (a) it isn't literal and (b) it would interrupt the Air-Water-Fire emanation language, which seems important. Verses 9-12 resemble esoteric Eastern views of creation manifesting through successive emanations of the *tattwas*, which stream into being in the similar sequence *Akasha, Vayu, Tejas, Apas*, and *Prithivi* – Spirit, Air, Fire, Water, and Earth, the five lowest of the seven chakras.

²⁸ These images refer to the Vision of Ezekiel. “Throne” implies the World of B'riyah, the creative plane higher than the visionary or imaginative plane of Yetziyah with which this book is working. **All images are Yetziratic**; therefore, all images, even of these sublime realities, are only reflections, gathered about the base of the “throne,” or B'riyah. “His throne” in the present verse is כסא, from כסא, usually interpreted “throne,” but literally meaning, “that which is under a canopy,” referring here to the canopy of the heavens. Important clues to understanding this verse are found by gematria: כסא = 81, the square of 9, and a primary number of Yesod, the sphere of the Moon, corresponding uniquely to the plane of images; and כסאו = 87, the value of לבנה, *Lebanah*, the Moon itself.

²⁹ גחלה, *gecheleth* = 441, the value of that Great Arcanum אמת, *emeth*, “truth,” which is also 21 × 21.

³⁰ לב, *laib*, which means “heart, mind, soul,” etc.; *i.e.*, the inner life of a person. Ancient texts in many languages regularly speak of the heart as the seat of mind. This accords with the psychosophic attribution of *Ruach* (with its many facets of inner human consciousness) to Tifereth, the heart.

³¹ Some reputable scholarship holds that the original small text of *Sefer Yetziyah* ended at this point, and that all else was a later accretion.

³² קעל ורוח ודבור, *Qol ve-ruach ve-deboor*.

³³ רוח מרוח, lit., “breath from breath.” Traditional commentary has interpreted this as “reflected light (or breath),” Malkhoth reflecting Kether. The phrase would have been translated “reflected light”

³⁴ חקק, *chaqaq*, “engraved;” see v. 1:1. חצב, *chatzab*, “carved, quarried, mined.” The phrase וחצב חקק, which appears in several places in this work, refers to processes of consciousness that can be emulated through meditation, *e.g.*, the *tracing* of neural and associative pathways by *concentration* and *repetition*. Concentrating on a thing writes or (superficially) “engraves” that thing in the mind. Repetition deepens and makes permanent the channel and enables the “mining” of results.

שדי חקק וחצב enumerates to 314, the value of שדי, *Shaddai*, a Divine Name of Yesod and the Moon, the matrix of sub-consciousness; of שטה, *shittah*, “acacia,” the wood from which the Ark was made; and of הוא כהן לאל עליון, *hu kohen la-El Elion*, “He was priest of the Most High God.” (*Gen.* 14:18). Subject these elements to meditation; consider the meanings of ש, ד, and ך, especially as *Spiritual Fire, Love, and Will*; then take all this into your understanding of the phrase, “He engraved and carved out.”

³⁵ תהו ובהו, *tohu ve-bohu*. The same phrase is used in *Genesis* 1:2, where creation is made from the “formless and void.”

³⁶ Implicitly beneath, about, and above. Compare this, for example, to the doctrines surrounding *Nefesh, Ruach*, and *Neshamah*, respectively. The garden, wall, and ceiling have many characteristics in common with those three strata of consciousness.

³⁷ In this development, Water corresponds to Chakhmah and Fire to Biyah. This is opposite what most Hermetic Qabalists would suspect, and, in fact, a case can be made for reversing them. Chakhmah (corresponding to ך) is titled the *Root of Fire* and Bi-

fiym, Ofanniym, and Chayyoth ha-Qodesh,³⁸ and ministering angels. From these three He founded His dwelling, as it is written, “Who makes His angels spirits, and His ministers of flaming fire.”³⁹

13. He selected three letters from among the Simples⁴⁰ – in the mystery of the three Mothers, Alef, Meym, and Shiyn⁴¹ – and set them into His Great Name, and with them He sealed the six directions.

Five⁴²: He looked above, and sealed the Height with יהו.

Six: He looked below, and sealed the Depth with ירה.⁴³

Seven: He looked forward, and sealed the East with הרי.⁴⁴

Eight: He looked backward, and sealed the West with הרי.⁴⁵

Nine: He looked to the right, and sealed the South with ייה.⁴⁶

Ten: He looked to the left, and sealed the North with רהי.

14. These are the ten ineffable sefiyoth: the Spirit of the Living God, Air from Spirit, Water from Air, Fire from Water; and Above, Below, East, West, South, North.

ynah (corresponding to ה) is titled the *Root of Water*. These essential attributions persist. Yet, in *The Zohar*, Biynah is said to correspond to Fire and Chakhmah to Water; and in the ‘King,’ or Atziluthic, scale of color, Biynah is crimson and Chakhmah blue. A primary symbol of Biynah is the *pyramid*, from the root *pyr-* meaning “fire,” even as a *river* or *stream* is an important Chakhmah symbol. Additionally, there is a traditional counter-intuitive aphorism affirming that in Man is *peace* and in Woman *power*. These paradoxical and seemingly antipathetic attributions should not be abandoned too quickly when working with Supernal sefiyothic ideas.

³⁸ שרפים ואופנים וחיות הקדוש. Respectively, these are the angelic choirs attributed to Kether, Chakhmah, and Biynah in the World of B’riyah, the World of Thrones. (The *Chayyoth* are often interchanged, in older writings, with the *Kerubiym*.) These Briatic expressions are the “Throne of Glory” (כסא הכבוד). (This strengthens the attribution of Biynah to this principle, for the Throne is a primary title of Biynah, B’riyah, and the letter ה in general.)

³⁹ *Psalms* 104:4.

⁴⁰ These are Yod, Heh, and Vav, the Trigrammaton יהו, and the first three letters of the Tetragrammaton, יהוה. The full four-fold Name completes the manifestation of Creation into the fourth plane, *Assiyah* or Action; but the present work is only addressing the level of *Yetziyah*, Formation, and therefore only employs the Trigram for its emanation.

⁴¹ ך, ה, and ך are the root ideas of Fire, Water, and Air, as are the Three Mothers ש, ג, and א, respectively.

⁴² The attributions of the permutations of Trigrammaton to the six directions varies from manuscript to manuscript. Those given here are from the “Short Version” of *Sefer Yetziyah*, and have been employed by most commentators over the centuries. It accords perfectly with permutations as given in unpublished documents in the private archives of Temple of Thelema, written by a Qabalistic initiate and

scholar who spent his entire life in the exploration of *Sefer Yetziyah*.

For comparison: The Long Version of *Sefer Yetziyah* gives the sequence: יהו ירה ויה ויהי ויהי ויהי ויהי. The Gra Version gives: יהו יהו ויהו ויהו ויהו ויהו.

⁴³ Above-Below corresponds to Chesed-Geboorah.

⁴⁴ Lit., “to be.” East corresponds to Tifereth.

⁴⁵ Lit., “be thou”; imperative. It may also be read, *ve-Yah*, “and Yah.” West corresponds to Yesod.

⁴⁶ Lit., “be”; future tense. South-North corresponds to Netzach-Hod.

Chapter 2

THE TWENTY-TWO FOUNDATION LETTERS

1. Twenty-two Foundation Letters: three Mothers, seven Doubles, and twelve Simples. The three Mothers are Alef, Meym, and Shiyn: Their foundation is a scale pan¹ of merit, a scale pan of liability, and a tongue² of decree standing between these. Three Mothers, Alef, Meym, and Shiyn. Meym is silent, Shiyn hisses, and Alef is the breath of air (אֵייר רוּחַ)³ reconciling between them.

2. Twenty-two Foundation Letters: He engraved them, carved them out, refined⁴ them, weighed them, and transformed them.⁵ He formed

by them all that is formed and all that is ready to be formed.

3. Twenty-two Foundation Letters: He engraved them by voice and carved them out with breath. He placed them in the mouth in five places: Alef, Cheyth, Heh, A'ayin in the throat; Gimel, Kaf, Yod, Qof in the palate; Daleth, Teyth, Lamed, Noon, Tav in the tongue; Zayin, Samekh, Shiyn, Reysh, Tzaddiy in the teeth; and Vav, Meym, Peh in the lips.⁶

4. Twenty-two Foundation Letters: He placed them in a circle⁷ like a wall with 231 gates⁸. The

¹ כַּף, *kaf*, which also means “hand.”

² לָשׁוֹן, *lashon*, means the human tongue, or the “tongue” (pointer) of a balance.

³ רוּחַ, *ruach*, means “breath,” “air,” or “spirit.” Here it is particularly the breeze tipping the balance point of the scales (compare the symbolism of the feather in the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*). אֵייר is literally “air” in the simplest sense (cf. אַוִּירָה, “atmosphere”).

⁴ צָרַף, *tzaraf*, means “purify, refine, test, burn.” It is the process by which quarried materials are refined, and pure substances are extracted. This takes on a further significance when we recall that הֲצַב, “carved out,” also means “quarried.” (צָרַף with different pointings is *tzeraf*, and is sometimes translated “combine” or “permute.”)

⁵ These are five stages of meditation expressed in metaphors of mining. (1) Concentration superficially *engraves* or traces an object or idea upon the surface of the mind. (2) Repetition and persistence *carve out* (deepen and make permanent) these channels and *mine* raw material – associative streams of ideas. (3) The great heat of intensifying concentration *refines* true gold from the quarried raw matter. (4) By contemplation or *weighing* this, its value is discerned. (5) By renewed concentration, its emotional, intellectual, and sensual aspects become transparent, and it is understood in a broader, transcendent, context. By these means content is drawn forth from *Nefesh*, weighed in *Ruach*, and transformed in *Neshamah*.

⁶ Respectively, the guttural, palatal, lingual, dental, and labial classification of sounds. These groupings open to extraordinary insights when placed under the beacon lamp of meditation. Attention is also directed to words that express the entire course of sound, from guttural to labial, much like the Sanskrit *Pranava*, *aum*. Alef begins deep in the throat; Meym, like the other labials, plays off the lips as the outermost expression of speech. In between must lie a translation sound, generally of a palatal or lingual. One such word is אָדָם, *Adam*. Another is *atma*, where there is a final return to the deep, nearly silent guttural.

⁷ גַּלְגַּל, *galgal*. Literally, “turning.” Functionally this word may be translated as “circle,” “sphere,” “wheel,” or “cycle,” all of which have meaning in the present context. However, the phrase that follows, referring to a “wall,” determines the interpretation selected: the 22 letters are written in a circle. Compare this to the Rosicrucian *Rota* (“wheel”) or its anagram, *Taro*, which is also a circle of the 22 Hebrew letters.

⁸ *The 231 Gates of Wisdom* (Chakhmah) may be contrasted with *The 50 Gates of Understanding* (Biy-nah). Note that 231 is the sum of the first 21 numbers, therefore showing the number of possible combinations of 22 elements, two at a time. A.:A.: *Liber 231 (Liber Arcanorum)* is numbered partly in commemoration of this idea. The 231 Gates are,

circle rotates forward and back. A sign for this thing: There is nothing good higher than Delight (ענג)⁹, and nothing evil lower than Plague (נגע)^{10 11}.

5. How? He refined, weighed, and transformed¹² them each: Alef with all, and all with Alef; Beyth with all, and all with Beyth. They repeat cyclically and exist in 231 gates. Thus, all that is formed and all that is spoken emanates from the One Name.¹³

6. He formed substance¹⁴ from the formless¹⁵. He made Nothing (ןא) into Something (שא). He

hewed vast pillars¹⁶ out of intangible air. This is a sign, Alef with all, and all with Alef. He witnesses, transforms, and makes all that is formed and all that is spoken, One Name. A sign for this is: 22 things in a single body (ךך).

simply, the series of pairs of Hebrew letters, taken sequentially as described in the text.

⁹ ענג, *oneg*. The word is used in *Isaiah* 58:14 to refer to an intimate relationship with God.

¹⁰ נגע, *nega'a*. Derived from *oneg* by the rotation of its letters (*temurah*). Such a “plague” symbolizes alienation from the direct intimate relationship with God indicated by ענג, much in the way that the word “disaster” – literally *dis-aster* – means that one is “out of synch” with the stars.

¹¹ The hint here given is more sophisticated than first appears. ענג and נגע enumerate to 123, which is precisely the same sort of *temurah* of 231 as ענג is of נגע. The hint is more visible in Arabic numerals than Hebrew, but is sufficiently visible even in the latter by the technical method called *Ayiq Bekar*.

¹² Of the five stages of meditation itemized in verse 2:2, these are the three most associated with *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*, respectively.

¹³ אהר השם אחד, *ha-shem echad*, enumerates to 358 as does (for example) משׁיח, *meshiach* (“messiah”). It is also a mask for the seven-lettered Divine Name אהר יהרה, which is especially known as the final words of the *Shema'a* in *Deuteronomy* 6:4.

Verse 2:2 stated that “all that is formed and all that is ready to be formed” is produced from the 22 letters. This present verse 2:5 says much the same thing. How is it, then, that all things emanate from “the One Name”? It is because the letters from which all things are formed are media by which the Divine “created His universe” (*cf.* 1:1). In the present verse, “Thus” means “by these means.”

¹⁴ ממש, *mamas*, from משׁש, “to touch.” Therefore, this is not a description of mere abstraction formation, but of the creation of something that can be touched. However, an older manuscript of *Sefer Yetziyrah*, instead of משׁש, says אמש (Alef, Meym, Shin, the three Mothers) – which, if authentic, would shed a much different light on the remainder of the verse!

¹⁵ תהו, *tohu*; *cf.* 1:11.

¹⁶ *Cf. Proverbs* 9:1, “Wisdom has built its house; it has hewn out its seven pillars,” presumably referring to the pylons of the seven Double Letters, which are attributed to the seven planets (see Chapter 4). A circle of seven pylons thus attributed has a particular and esoteric significance for senior initiates of the Rosicrucian tradition.

Chapter 3

THE THREE MOTHER LETTERS

1. Three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn: Their foundation is a scale pan of merit, a scale pan of liability, and a tongue of decree standing between these.¹

2. Three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn: A secret great and mystical, veiled and sealed by six rings.² From them emanated Air, Water, and Fire; and from them are born the Fathers³; and from the Fathers, descendants.

3. Three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn: He engraved them, carved them out, refined them,

weighed them, and transformed them.⁴ He formed by them: three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn, in the universe; three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn, in the year; three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn, in the soul (נפש), male and female.⁵

4. Three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn, in the Universe are Air, Water, Fire. Heaven⁶ was created from Fire, and earth from Water; and the Air, from Breath (or Spirit)⁷, reconciles between them.⁸

5. Three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn, are the hot, the cold, and the temperate⁹ in the year. From

¹ Cf. 2:1. Because the word for “scale pan” is *kaf*, Westcott gave the interesting alternative translation, “on the one hand the guilty, on the other hand the purified.”

² Cf. *Esther* 8:8, חתמו בטבעת המלך, etc. חתום, *chitoom*, means, “sealed, signed, stamped,” as with a signet ring. As חתום, in 1:13, it described the *sealing* of the six directions by permutations of יהוה “in the mystery of the three Mothers, Alef, Meym, and Shin.” The “secret great and mystical” of the three Mothers is the mystery of the interior – the center – veiled by the six exterior surfaces. In Chapters 4 and 5, the Double and Simple letters are attributed to various directions, but no such attribution is given for the Mothers. Dr. Paul Foster Case, in an inspired move, attributed these to the three interior axes of above-below (א), east-west (ג), and north-south (ש) – modern correspondences which yield profound treasures in the working of Qabalistic rites of initiation. The root of these attributions lies in the present verse, where the three Mothers are portrayed as interior, outwardly “veiled and sealed” by six surfaces.

³ The “Three Fathers” comprise one of the more obscure doctrines of Qabalah. There are various interpretations. It seems most likely that they are the letters Yod, Heh, and Vav (cf. 1:13).

In brief: From ש, ג, and א we get the idea of the Elements. These in turn cause us to think of יהוה. From permutations of this Name, all diverse things are formed in the World of Yetziyah.

⁴ Cf. 2:2.

⁵ That is, through space (Nuit), time (Hadit), and experience (Ra-Hoor-Khuit) – beingness at each intersection of space and time. There is also analogy between these and *Neshamah, Ruach, Nefesh*.

⁶ שמים, *shamayim*. The word contains the letter ש, corresponding to fire, plus the word מים, *mayim*, “water.” It also begins with שם, *shem*, “name,” referring to THE Name, יהוה. The commentators have shown that this word is subject to even more extensive analysis.

⁷ רוח, *ruach*, which may mean “air,” “breath,” “spirit.” Each occurrence of the word “breath” in the remainder of this chapter is the word *ruach* in the Hebrew original.

⁸ Fire, “Heaven,” corresponds to *Neshamah* or super-consciousness. Water, “Earth,” corresponds to *Nefesh* (translated throughout this edition as “soul”) or sub-consciousness. Air corresponds to *Ruach* (the very word used here for air), or ego-consciousness.

This chapter is the origin of the formula on which the Temple of Thelema Equinox ceremony is based. It takes little effort to recognize which officer is heaven, and which earth; which is Fire, and which Water; and, in each case, which officer, attributed to Air the mediator, is the reconciler between them.

⁹ This translation of חום, קור, and רייה as “hot,” “cold,” and “temperate,” respectively, has long-standing rabbinical acceptance – notwithstanding the fact that the words mean something else. Students

Fire is created the hot; from Water is created the cold; and from Breath is created the temperate state, reconciling between them.

6. Three Mothers, Alef, Meym, Shiyn, in the soul¹⁰, male and female, are the head, the belly, and the chest. From Fire was created the head; from Water, the belly; and from the Breath, the chest, reconciling between them.¹¹

7. He made the letter Alef king over Breath, and He bound unto it a Crown¹²; and He combined one with the other. He formed with them Air in the universe, the temperate in the year, and the chest in the soul: the male by ש ג א and the female by א ש א¹³.

8. He made the letter Meym king over Water, and He bound unto it a Crown, and He combined one with the other. He formed with them the earth in the universe, cold in the year, and the belly in the soul: the male by ש א ג and the female by א ש ג.

9. He made the letter Shiyn king over Fire, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other. He formed with them heaven in the universe, heat in the year, and the head in the soul: the male by א א ש and the female by א ג ש.

both of the Eastern doctrine of the three Gunas, and of the European alchemical tradition, will find much in these words to describe the natures and interrelationships of Rajas-Sulphur, Tamas-Salt, and Sattva-Mercury, respectively. חרום means “black,” and refers to that which is scorched or burned. קור has reference to water, for it means “to dig,” as for a well, or “to cause to flow forth;” and, derivatively, to dig under or undermine a thing. (In Modern Hebrew, the same word means a spider’s web, or similar thread.) רייה is usually translated “abundance,” and is Biblically employed in reference to the more temperate and abundant seasons of spring and autumn, poised between the extremes of summer and winter. (The Second Point of Temple of Thelma’s Artisan Ritual is a striking dramatization of this passage.)

¹⁰ נפש, *nefesh*. The same word is used in verses 6-9.

¹¹ There is an important correlation here between “head, chest, and belly,” and the three Grades in *Liber Legis* of Hermit, Lover, and Man of Earth, with various cross-correspondences to the Tree of Life, etc. These should be worked out by the individual student.

¹² The title “king” (מלך, *melekh*) corresponds to Tifereth. “Crown,” of course, is כתר, *kether*. One must, so to speak, first find the *gold* of an idea, and then its pure and essential nature; and then combine one’s understanding of its essence (or Crown) with its actuality (or Kingdom).

¹³ “Man,” איש, *ish*, is created by אמש; while “woman,” אישה, *ishah*, is created by אשמ. Meym, which was said in v. 4 to correspond to earth (in contrast to heaven) and in v. 6 to the belly (and thus, psychospiritually, to the *Nefesh* within which operate the desires and procreative energies), is converted, in man, to a Yod, and, in woman, to a Heh. It is in the

lowest and most material expressions *only* that man and woman are thus differentiated.

Chapter 4

THE SEVEN DOUBLE LETTERS

1. Seven Double Letters: Beyth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaf, Peh, Reysh, Tav. They [each] give two expressions: ב, כ, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח. A form soft and hard, strong and weak.

2. Seven Double Letters: Beyth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaf, Peh, Reysh, Tav. Their foundation is Life (חיים), Peace (שלום), Wisdom (חכמה), Wealth (עושר), Grace (חן), Seed (זרע), and Dominion (ממשלה).

3. Seven Double Letters: Beyth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaf, Peh, Reysh, Tav, in speech and in permutation¹. The opposite² of Life (חיים) is Death (מורה). The opposite of Peace (שלום) is War (מלחמה). The opposite of Wisdom (חכמה) is Folly (אולה). The opposite of Wealth (עושר) is Poverty (עוני). The opposite of Grace (חן) is Ugliness (כיעור). The opposite of Seed (זרע) is Sterility (שממה)³. The opposite of Dominion (ממשלה) is Slavery (עבדות).⁴

4. Seven Double Letters: Beyth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaf, Peh, Reysh, Tav. Above and below, east and west, north and south, and the Palace of Holiness (היכל הקודש) in the center and supporting all things.⁵

5. Seven Double Letters: Beyth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaf, Peh, Reysh, Tav. Seven and not six, seven and not eight. Examine with them, and probe from them. Make each thing stand on its own essence. Restore the Former to His foundation.⁶

6. Seven Double Letters: Beyth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaf, Peh, Reysh, Tav, a foundation. He engraved them, carved them out, refined them, weighed them, and transformed them⁷. He formed by them seven planets⁸ in the universe, seven days in the week, [and] seven gates into the soul, male and female.

7. Seven planets in the universe: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun⁹, Venus, Mercury, Moon. Seven days in the year: the seven days of the week. Seven gates into the soul, male and female: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth.

[Verses 8-14 below do not exist in the earliest versions of Sefer Yetziyah. They are later additions, which more carefully specify the various attributions introduced in the prior verses. There is disagreement concerning these attributions from version to version. Most are transparently wrong. The attributions given below are conformed to the present text, and to the usages of Temple of Thelema.]

¹ תמורה, *temoorah*. Lit. “exchange, substitution.” from the root מור, *moor*, “to change or exchange.” In practice, it is a technical method of substitution cipher.

² תמורה, *temoorath*, a variant of תמורה, is here given a contextual translation.

³ זרע, *zera*, literally means not only “seed” or “semen,” but also “the growing season.” In contrast, שממה means “desolation, desert,” *i.e.*, the parched, infertile product of the Sun in its extreme. “Sterility” is a figurative and contextual translation of שממה.

⁴ The attributions received and employed by Temple of Thelema are: ב, Life & Death; ג, Peace & War; ד, Wisdom & Folly; כ, Wealth & Poverty; פ, Grace & Ugliness; ו, Fertility & Sterility; ח, Dominion & Slavery. This is the exact order of these attributions in most editions of *Sefer Yetziyah*, particularly the Short Version. The Long Version gives the same sequence except for the (perhaps inadvertent) transposition of “Seed” and “Grace.” (For comparison, the Gra version gives the order: Wisdom, Wealth, Seed, Life, Dominion, Peace, and Grace. The Saadia Version does not give these attributions at all.)

⁵ All major versions of *Sefer Yetziyah* giving these directional attributions give them in exactly the same sequence. This includes both the Short and Gra Versions.

⁶ Cf. 1:4. The final three sentences are identical.

⁷ Cf. 2:2 and 3:3, with which this is identical.

⁸ כוכבים, *kokhabiym*, lit. “stars.”

⁹ The word used is חמה, not שמש.

8. He made the letter Beyth king over Life, and He bound unto it a Crown¹⁰; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them Mercury in the universe, Wednesday in the year, and the mouth in the soul, male and female.

9. He made the letter Gimel king over Peace, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them the Moon in the universe, Monday in the year, and the left eye in the soul, male and female.

10. He made the letter Daleth king over Wisdom, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them Venus in the universe, Friday in the year, and the left nostril in the soul, male and female.

11. He made the letter Kaf king over Wealth, and He bound to it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them Jupiter in the universe, Thursday in the year, and the left ear in the soul, male and female.

12. He made the letter Peh king over Grace, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them Mars in the universe, Tuesday in the year, and the right nostril in the soul, male and female.

13. He made the letter Reysh king over Seed, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them the Sun in the universe, Sunday in the year, and the right eye in the soul, male and female.

14. He made the letter Tav king over Dominion, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them Saturn in the universe, the Sabbath in the year, and the right ear in the soul, male and female.

15. Seven Double Letters: Beyth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaf, Peh, Reysh, Tav. By them were engraved seven universes¹¹, seven heavens¹², seven

earths¹³, seven seas, seven rivers, seven desert wildernesses, seven days, seven weeks, seven years, seven sabbaticals, seven jubilees, and the Holy Temple. Therefore, He made sevens beloved under all the heavens.

16. Two stones build two houses; three stones build six houses; four stones build 24 houses; five stones build 120 houses; six stones build 720 houses; seven stones build 5,040 houses. And beyond this, go on and calculate what the mouth cannot speak and the ear cannot hear.¹⁴

¹² רַקִּיעַ, *raqiah*, can be translated “heaven” or “firmament.” It is a technical term, well-explained by Gesenius as follows: “*the firmament of heaven, spread out like a hemisphere above the earth... like a splendid and pellucid sapphire* (Ex. 24:10, compare Dan. 12:3), to which the stars were supposed to be fixed, and over which the Hebrews believed there was a heavenly ocean (Gen. 1:7; 7:11; Ps. 104:3; 148:4; compare, however, Gen. 2:6).” The Long Version openly identifies these with the traditional “7 Heavens (or Palaces) of Assiyah.”

¹³ These appear to be the traditional “10 Earths in 7 Palaces.” However, Ibn Ezra offered the intriguing suggestion that these are the seven continents.

¹⁴ $2! = 1 \times 2 = 2$
 $3! = 1 \times 2 \times 3 = 6$
 $4! = 1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 = 24$
 $5! = 1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 = 120$
 $6! = 1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 = 720$
 $7! = 1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 = 5,040$
 $8! = 1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8 = 40,320$

If each of 5,040 combinations of seven letters were pronounced, at an average of one combination every 5 seconds, all of the possible combinations would be uttered in seven hours. With sufficient mental and physical training, this at least is possible. However, if eight letters were used, the task, at the same rate, would require 56 nonstop hours – more than two days, uninterrupted. This is likely beyond any human capacity. It is, literally, “what the mouth cannot speak and the ear cannot hear.” Please note that the few seconds allowed in this example might well be sufficient time to recite the one-to-seven-letter combinations but, even then, would allow no realistic time for reflection on each of them!

¹⁰ Cf. 3:7 etc. The verses follow an identical pattern and have the same underlying meaning here, but with respect to the Double Letters.

¹¹ These are most likely the traditional “7 Palaces of B’riyah.” עולמים, *olamiym*, can be translated “worlds, universes, eternities.” Any of these might fit here. “Universes” was selected for consistency with the way עולם has been translated throughout. Gesenius emphasized that the root idea is something hidden, especially if vast or immeasurable.

Chapter 5

THE TWELVE SIMPLE LETTERS

1. Twelve Simple Letters: Heh, Vav, Zayin, Cheyth, Teyth, Yod, Lamed, Noon, Samekh, A'ayin, Tzaddiy, Qof.¹ Their foundation is Sight (רֵאִיָּה), Hearing (שְׁמִיעָה), Smell (רִיחַ), Speech (שִׁיחָה), Taste (לְעִיטָה)², Coitus (חֲשִׁמִישׁ)³, Work (מַעֲשֵׂה)⁴, Motion (הַלֹּךְ), Wrath (רִגְזִי), Laughter (שִׁחֻק), Thought or Meditation (הִרְהוּר), Sleep (שִׁנָּה).

2. Twelve Simple Letters: Heh, Vav, Zayin, Cheyth, Teyth, Yod, Lamed, Noon, Samekh, A'ayin, Tzaddiy, Qof. Their foundation is twelve diagonal boundaries: the boundary North-East, the boundary South-East, the boundary East-Above, the boundary East-Below, the boundary North-Above, the boundary North-Below, the boundary North-West, the boundary South-West, the boundary West-Above, the boundary West-Below, the boundary South-Above, the boundary South-Below.⁵ These extend infinitely, throughout Eternity. They are the boundaries of the universe.⁶

3. Twelve Simple Letters: Heh, Vav, Zayin, Cheyth, Teyth, Yod, Lamed, Noon, Samekh, A'ayin, Tzaddiy, Qof. Their foundation is He engraved them, carved them out, refined them, weighed them, and transformed them⁷. He formed by them twelve zodiacal constellations⁸ in the universe, twelve months in the year, and twelve drivers⁹ in the soul, male and female.

4. Twelve zodiacal constellations in the universe: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces.

interior diagonals of the cube, so that each exterior face (in relationship to the center, ה or Saturn) forms a regular right pyramid with height half the width of its base, and each diagonal edge equal to half $\sqrt{3}$ (~0.866) times the width of the base. Thus, the cube (regardless of its size, and even if infinite) is formed from six implicit right pyramids all "rising" to a common apex at the center.

¹ The following attributions, given differently in various editions of *Sefer Yetziyah*, are listed here in the sequence in which they appear in the Short Version.

² לְעִיטָה, *l'itah*, here attributed to Leo, literally means "digestion," but in this passage is uniformly rendered "taste." In the Hermetic alchemical application of Qabalah and the zodiac, the chemical process of Digestion is attributed to Leo.

³ Case softened this to "touch," which is useful in generalizing the doctrine, although it loses the exact emphasis of the attribution. Westcott rendered it as, "sexual love."

⁴ מַעֲשֵׂה, *ma'aseh*, which means "work" or "action," is synonymous with the Indian word *karma*.

⁵ These are listed in the same sequence as they appeared in the Short Version.

⁶ Each of these is a *direction*, rather than a position. Therefore, they are infinite in extension *and* define exact edges of a theoretical cube. The center point is connected to the four corners of any side by the four

⁷ Cf. 2:2, 3:3, and 4:6, with which this is identical.

⁸ מְזוּלוֹת, *mazzaloth*, is properly translated "zodiacal constellations," as here. However, it is worth noting that it originally meant "lodging places" or "inns," and only later developed the particular meaning given here. It would, therefore, also be appropriate to translate it as "houses," after the fashion of the early Greek and Latin astrologers' term for the 12 signs.

⁹ מְנַהִיג, *manhig*, in modern Hebrew, means "leader, director;" but the word comes from the simpler מְנַהֵג, "driving," as of a chariot. This translation is employed here both because it appears best to convey the real flavor of the original meaning, and because of its vivid expression of the meaning of Tarot Atu VII, The Chariot. The contemporary technical use of "driver" in computer science (meaning code that interfaces between hardware and the computer's operating system) is also appropriate here, and very fruitful for meditation if it is regarded in a way consistent with the foregoing remarks.

5. Twelve months in the year: Nisan (ניסן), Iyyar (אייר), Sivan (סיון), Tammuz (תמוז), Ab (אב), Elul (אלול), Tishri (תשרי), Cheshvan (חשוון), Kislev (כסלו), Tebet (טבת), Shebat (שבט), Adar (אדר).

6. Twelve drivers in the soul, male and female:¹⁰ two hands, two feet, two kidneys, the gall bladder¹¹, the intestines¹², the liver, the gizzard (קורקבן)¹³, the stomach (קבה)¹⁴, the spleen.

¹⁰ The following list varies from manuscript to manuscript of *Sefer Yetziyah*. These particular attributions have not been given any particular significance by most Hermetic Qabalists.

¹¹ מרה, *marah*, literally means “bitterness,” i.e., “gall.” It comes from the root מרר, “to flow, to drop,” which is also the origin of מר, *myrrh*. From these basic meanings it came to be the name of the gall bladder.

¹² דקין, *daqiyin*, is not the normal word for “intestines” (מע׳), but translators generally have agreed on the meaning here. The singular, דק, is an adjective meaning “thin, narrow, fine, slim.”

¹³ *Qorqeban* קורקבן (more commonly, קרקבן) usually means “gizzard (of a bird).” Kaplan remarked that, in the *Talmud* and *Midrash*, this word is “occasionally if rarely used to denote a human organ, usually identified with the ‘grinding of food.’” We have employed the literal meaning because the organs itemized in this verse are not of the human body, but rather of the “soul,” i.e., the *Nefesh*.

Certainly one reason physical organs are employed throughout this book to represent organs of the *Nefesh* is to express the close relationship of the autonomic nervous system (a dense aspect of the psyche) to the physical body (*goof*). The primary intent of these verses seems to be to communicate that physical organs are also organs employed by the soul and, moreover, the soul has its own analogous organs. The fact that two organs in the present list are distinctly nonhuman strongly implies that they do not really refer to any human *physical* organ, but rather to something subtler. If the twelve organs here listed are attributed to the zodiacal constellations in sequence (as is intended with most other attribution passages of this book), then the two nonhuman organs, *qorqeban* and *qebah*, would correspond to Capricorn and Aquarius, the two constellations ruled by Saturn. In this there may be a significance.

¹⁴ קבה, *qebah*, is best translated “stomach” if a part of the human body is meant. However, the word is rarely applied to humans. *Qebah* primarily means the stomach of a nonhuman animal, particular a part of the digestive mechanism of ruminants (see *Deut.*

[*The remainder of this chapter does not appear in the earliest versions of Sefer Yetziyah. Please consult the corresponding note to verse 4:8. The “drivers of the soul” have been attributed in this section purely according to the sequence in which they appear in verse 5:6. Otherwise, the attributions given below are conformed to the usages of Temple of Thelema. Most attributions of Tzaddiy and Heh have been swapped in response to the revelation in Liber Legis 1:51.*]

7. He made the letter Heh (ה) king over *sight*, and He bound unto it a Crown¹⁵; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Aquarius* in the universe, *Shebat* in the year, and the *qebah* in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Vav (ו) king over *hearing*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Taurus* in the universe, *Iyyar* in the year, and the left hand in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Zayin (ז) king over *smell*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Gemini* in the universe, *Sivan* in the year, and the right foot in the soul, male and female.

8. He made the letter Cheyth (ח) king over *speech*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Cancer* in the universe, *Tammuz* in the year, and the left foot in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Teyth (ט) king over *taste*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Leo* in the universe, *Ab* in the year, and the right kidney in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Yod (י) king over *coition*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Virgo* in the universe, *Elul* in the year, and the left kidney in the soul, male and female.

18:3 where the conventional translation is “maw”). As explained in the preceding note, *qebah* or *qobah* may imply something entirely different, something that bears no more than an analogous relationship to any human physical organ.

¹⁵ Cf. 3:7 ff. and 4:8 ff. The verses follow an identical pattern and have the same underlying meaning here, but with respect to the Simple Letters.

9. He made the letter Lamed (ל) king over *work (karma)*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Libra* in the universe, *Tishri* in the year, and the gall bladder in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Noon (נ) king over *motion*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Scorpio* in the universe, *Cheshvan* in the year, and the intestines in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Samekh (ס) king over *wrath*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Sagittarius* in the universe, *Kislev* in the year, and the liver in the soul, male and female.

10. He made the letter A'ayin (ע) king over *laughter*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Capricorn* in the universe, *Tebet* in the year, and the *gorqeban* in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Tzaddiy (צ) king over *thought or meditation*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Aries* in the universe, *Nisan* in the year, and the right hand in the soul, male and female.

He made the letter Qof (ק) king over *sleep*, and He bound unto it a Crown; and He combined one with the other, and formed with them *Pisces* in the universe, *Adar* in the year, and the spleen in the soul, male and female.

He made them like a desert¹⁶. He arranged them like a wall. He organized them as for war.¹⁷

¹⁶ עריבה (or, more commonly, ערבה), *eribah*. It is used in *Job*, *Isaiah*, and *Jeremiah* to mean “an arid, sterile region; a desert,” according to Gesenius. Based on comparisons of scriptural usage, “desert” appears to be the simplest and best translation in the present place. (In the Hebrew of the *Talmud* and *Midrash*, ערבה meant “trough,” “tub,” or even “boat;” but this later, post-Diaspora vocabulary does not appear to be the Hebrew of *Sefer Yetziyah*.)

¹⁷ These three sentences may refer, respectively, to the zodiacal constellations, the months (or cycle of New Moons), and the drivers of the soul; or they may refer, collectively and sequentially, to the Simple Letters (and the corresponding zodiacal constellations) *per se*.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

1. These are three Mothers: Alef, Meym, Shiyn. And from them emanated three Fathers, and they are Air, Water, and Fire; and from the Fathers, generations.¹ Three Fathers and their generations, and seven planets and their hosts, and twelve diagonal boundaries. Evidence of this statement: faithful witnesses in the universe, the year, and the soul; and the Law of the Twelve, the Seven, and the Three governs² in the Celestial Dragon (תל"י)³, in cyclicity⁴, and in the heart.

2. Three Mothers: Alef, Meym, Shiyn: Air, Water, Fire. Fire is above, and Water below, and the breath of air⁵ reconciles between them. A mark of this is that the Fire is the bearer of the Water. Meym is silent, Shiyn hisses, and Alef is the breath of air reconciling between them.

3. The Celestial Dragon (תל"י) in the universe is like a king upon his throne. The cyclicity in the year is like a king out in the provinces⁶. The heart in the soul is like a king in warfare.

4. "Also, Elohiym made the one opposite the other."⁷ Good (טוב) opposite evil (רע); evil opposite good. Good from good; evil from evil. The good defines⁸ the evil, and the evil defines the good. Good is the preserve of those who are good, and evil is the preserve of those who are evil.

5. The Three: Each stands alone; one defending, one accusing⁹, and one deciding between them. The Seven: Three against¹⁰ three, and one law deciding between them. The Twelve stand in war: Three are friends, three are enemies, three are

¹ Cf. 3:2 which *appears* to represent this emanation slightly differently. However, the two verses likely have the same basic meaning.

² פקדון more commonly means "commands, marshals, sets in order." The word "governs" was selected for its expressiveness in this context, especially in juxtaposition to the word חק (translated "law") earlier in the same sentence.

³ *Theli*, תל"י, is the name of a great dragon in the Kabbalah. It is with fair certainty identified as the constellation Draco which circumambulates the ecliptical north pole. It may be taken generally as a symbol of the entire turning of the heavens, and thus of the Sphere of the Zodiac. The name is mentioned in *Liber LXV* 3:4 and 17-18, where it is related (on a lower octave) to "the Infinite Circle of Emerald that encloseth the Universe" that "hast no time Past, no time To Come. Verily Thou art not."

⁴ גלגל, *galgal*, "wheel" or *gilgal*, "circle." Sometimes it means "whirlwind" or other spiraling or circling things. Occasionally it is used for the circle of the zodiac. Overall, "cyclicity" seems the best translation here, including a wide range of astronomical and other "wheels" or "turnings" (rhythms) in the year.

⁵ אויר רוח. Cf. the end of this verse to 2:1.

⁶ מדינה, *mediynah*, means "province," "state," or other territory. The meaning here is, "a king out and about in his kingdom." The root of מדינה is דין, the title of Geboorah meaning "justice," from an identical root meaning, "to rule, regulate, or judge."

⁷ *Ecclesiastes* 7:14. In the King James Version it is translated, "God also hath set the one over against the other."

⁸ מבחין, *mibchiyn*. All of the more primitive forms of מבחין, or בחין, deal with tests, trials, proof, etc. We have adopted Kaplan's translation, "defines" – a derived meaning – as the most expressive of the Kabbalistic teachings in this verse.

⁹ חייב, *chiyeb*, may mean either "convicting" or merely "accusing." The contrast between זכה and חייב could be either the polarity between acquittal and conviction, or between defending and accusing; but the final one, the "deciding" one (Alef), "tips the scales" in favor of the latter translation since it implies that, in זכה and חייב alone, the decision has not been rendered.

¹⁰ מול, *mool*, is translated "against" to retain the ambiguity of the word, as meaning both "opposed to" and "over against."

of life, and three are of death.¹¹ The three friends are the heart and the ears; the three enemies are the liver, the gall bladder, and the tongue; the three that are of life are the two nostrils and the spleen; the three that are of death are the two [lower] openings and the mouth;¹² and God the Faithful King (אל מלך נאמן) rules all these from His holy dwelling throughout Eternity.¹³ The One atop the Three, the Three atop the Seven, the Seven atop the Twelve¹⁴, and all united,¹⁵ one in the other.¹⁶

¹¹ Possibly these four sets refer to the four seasons of the year, composed of three months each; but see also the sentence following.

¹² There is an important doctrine hidden in this phrase, which is far different than its surface meaning might suggest.

¹³ This sentence is an exact replica of the end of verse 1:5, *q.v.*

¹⁴ Even as Creation occurred by the five-letter name אלהים, the sequence 1-3-5-7 establishes the root elements of Formation from the numbers 1 through 5. Start with 1. Add 2 to get 3. Add 4 to get 7. Add 5 to get 12. Or, in the simplest form of the Pythagorean right triangle (with sides of 3, 4, and 5 units in length), the *one* triangle has *one* side equal to 3, *two* sides equal to 7, and *three* sides (adding the hypotenuse) equal to 12.

¹⁵ אדוקים, *adooqiyim*, literally means “the pious, the zealous, the orthodox” yet translators have rendered it “bound” or “connected.” The root appears to be דקק, which represents several variations of the idea “to separate.” The *adoqiyim* (the orthodox or pious) are, therefore, those who are not separated out, *i.e.*, the pure rootstock from which all others have departed. The meaning in the present passage, then, is not only that the One, the Three, the Seven, and the Twelve are united, but that **they have never been separated** from that One Thing which they all are.

¹⁶ Westcott’s translation, “One above Three, Three above Seven, and Seven above Twelve; and all are connected the one with the other,” is a phrase well engrained within the Hermetic Qabalistic and magical tradition in this century. It is so familiar and valuable, sealed by long-term sacramental usage, that we very much would have preferred to have employed it directly as our translation. Unfortunately, while the word על may mean either “on” or “above,” the longer phrase employed here, על גבי, definitely means “on,” in the sense of “up on top the back of.”

6. These are the 22 letters with which inscribed¹⁷ Eheyeh (אהיה), Yah (יה), Y.H.V.H. Elohiym (יהוה אלהים), Y.H.V.H. (יהוה), Y.H.V.H. Tzabaoth (צבאות), Elohiym Tzabaoth (אלהים צבאות), El Shaddai (אל שדי), Y.H.V.H. Adonai (יהוה אדני).¹⁸ He produced from them three forms¹⁹ of expression. He created from them His whole universe. He formed by them all that is formed and all that is ready to be formed.²⁰

7. When Abraham our father had looked, seen, understood, and inquired, and had engraved and carved out, he was successful in his power of creation²¹, as it is written: “and the souls that they created in Haran.”²² At once was revealed²³ [to him] the Most High Lord of All (עלין ארון הכל), blessed be His Name forever; and He placed him within His bosom and He kissed him upon his head and He called him “Abraham my beloved”²⁴ and made a covenant²⁵ with him and his seed forever, as it is written, “And he believed in God

¹⁷ חקק, *chaqqaq*. Cf. 1.1.

¹⁸ If יהוה, the traditional Divine Name attributed to Tiphereth, is here taken as subsuming the whole middle triad of the Tree of Life, then this is exactly the list of the Atziluthic powers ruling the ten sefiroth.

¹⁹ ספרים, *sefariym*. See verse 1:1. These three *sefariym* are thus Letter, Number, and Sound.

²⁰ Cf. verse 2:2.

²¹ בריאה, *b'riyah*, the name of the World of Creation; the second of the four Kabbalistic Worlds, immediately above or behind Yetziyah. This passage takes on a further meaning if this phrase is understood as meaning, “he was successful in his Briatic Power” as the direct result of perfectly completing his Yetziratic operation. Furthermore, the word here translated “power” is יד, *yad*.

²² וראה נפש אשר עשו בחרן, from *Genesis* 12:5. “They” that created were Abram and Sarai.

²³ The word is נגלה, which means “apparent, clear, revealed.” It has, however, a technical meaning, as referring to the revelation of the Written and Oral Law.

²⁴ From *Isaiah* 41:8, where Jacob is referred to as “the seed (זרע) of Abraham my beloved.”

²⁵ כרת ברית. The first word merely means “a cutting,” etc.; but when joined with the second word, *brith* (the Ashkenazi *bris*), it is clear which covenant is intended. One may rightly wonder if this is the origin of the modern phrase, “to cut a deal;” and, as it is said, *such* a deal it is, too!

(יְהוָה), and He counted it unto him for righteousness.²⁶ And he made unto him a covenant between the ten fingers of his hands (and this is the covenant of the tongue) and between the ten toes of his feet (and this is the covenant of the genitals).²⁷ And He bound the 22 letters of the Law²⁸ unto his tongue and revealed unto him His Mystery²⁹. He attracted³⁰ them in Water, he enflamed them in Fire, he vibrated³¹ them in Air, he ignited them³² within the Seven³³, he drove them in the twelve zodiacal constellations.

²⁶ וְהָאֱמֵן בִּיהוָה וַיַּחֲשֹׁבָה לּוֹ צְדָקָה, from *Genesis* 15:6.

²⁷ בְּרִיתַת הַמִּילָה. Cf. 1:3 and the notes thereto.

²⁸ תּוֹרָה, *torah*. The 22 letters are the formative elements of the whole of the written *Torah*.

²⁹ סוֹד, *sod*, which represents *The Mystery of Kabbalah*.

³⁰ מִשָּׁךְ, *mashakh*, means, “to pull, draw, attract,” etc. This phrase is, therefore, usually rendered, “He drew them in water,” perhaps a little ambiguous in English. We have selected the present translation to emphasize the attractive, magnetic quality generally attributed to the element of Water.

³¹ רָעַשׁ, *ra’ash*, means “to tremble, quake, make noise.”

³² בָּעַר, *ba’ar*, means “to blaze, burn, kindle, ignite.” The word choice here was necessarily different from the translation, earlier in the sentence, of דָּלַק, which we translated “enflamed” with respect to fire.

³³ The reference, on the surface, is to the seven planets; but initiates will immediately recognize this as an allusion to an interior Heptad of the chakras.

APPENDIX

ATTRIBUTIONS OF THE HEBREW LETTERS According to *Sefer Yetziyah* & the Initiated Tradition

MOTHER LETTERS (Elements)

א Alef	Air	Air	Temperate	Chest (Ruach)	0. Fool
ב Meym	Water	Earth	Cold	Belly (Nefesh)	12. Hanged Man
ש Shiyh	Fire	Heaven	Hot	Head (Neshamah)	20. Æon

DOUBLE LETTERS (Planets)

כ Beyth	Mercury	Life & Death		Above Mouth	1. Magus
ג Gimel	The Moon	Peace & War		Below Left eye	2. Priestess
ד Daleth	Venus	Wisdom & Folly		East Left nostril	3. Empress
ה Kaf	Jupiter	Wealth & Poverty		West Left ear	10. Fortune
ו Peh	Mars	Grace & Ugliness		North Right nostril	16. Tower
ז Reysh	The Sun	Seed & Sterility		South Right eye	19. Sun
ח Tav	Saturn	Dominion & Slavery		Center Right ear	21. Universe

SIMPLE LETTERS (Zodiacal Constellations)

ה Heh	Aquarius	Sight		South-Above	17. Star
ו Vav	Taurus	Hearing		South-East	5. Hierophant
ז Zayin	Gemini	Smell		East-Above	6. Lovers
ח Cheyth	Cancer	Speech		East-Below	7. Chariot
ט Teyth	Leo	Taste		North-Above	11. Lust
י Yod	Virgo	Coitus		North-Below	9. Hermit
כ Lamed	Libra	Work		North-West	8. Adjustment
ל Noon	Scorpio	Motion		South-West	13. Death
מ Samekh	Sagittarius	Wrath		West-Above	14. Art
נ A'ayin	Capricorn	Laughter		West-Below	15. Devil
ס Tzaddiy	Aries	Thought <i>or</i> Meditation		North-East	4. Emperor
פ Qof	Pisces	Sleep		South-Below	18. Moon

ספר יצירה

SEFER YET'ZIYRAH

The Book of Formation

translated and annotated by
James A. Eshelman

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