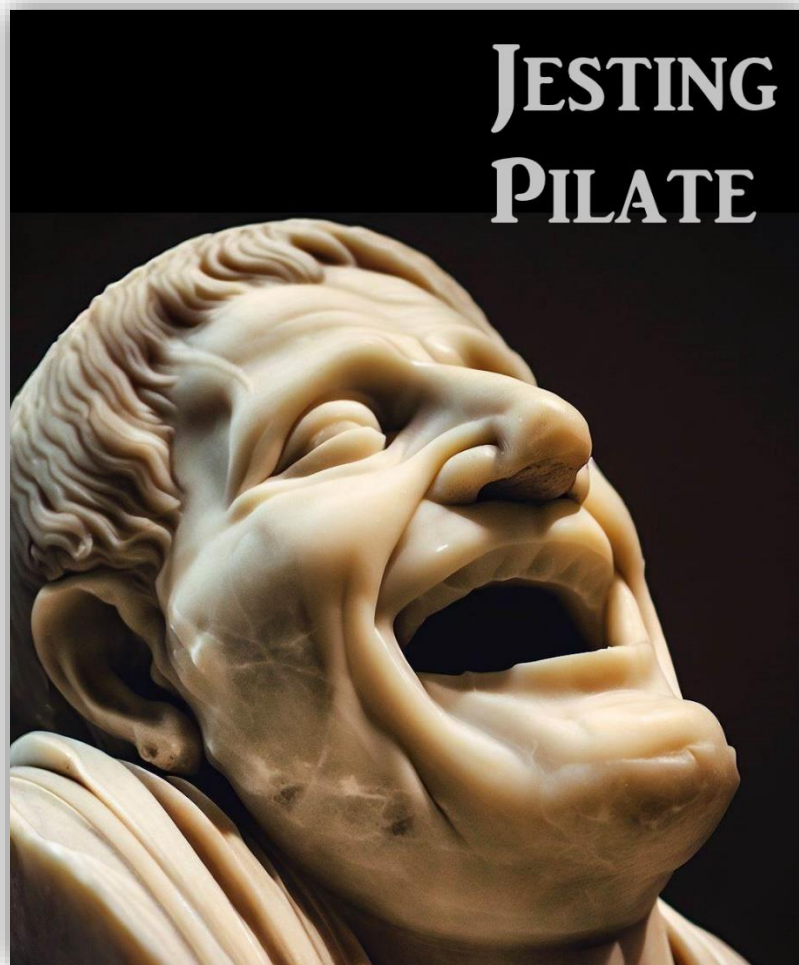


– Bibliotheca Sapientiae Hermeticae –

The Annotated
Sefer
Yetzirah



(The Book of Creation)



*WHAT is truth? said jesting Pilate,
and would not stay for an answer:
(Francis Bacon – ‘Of Truth’, 1625).*

Jesting Pilate is an emanation **From the Quarries**

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Acknowledgements

Translation taken from Saadia ben Joseph (al-Fayyumi), *Commentaire sur le Séfer Yesira ou Livre de la Création* par Le Saadya de Fayyoun, trans. & ed., M. Lambert, Paris, Emile Bouillon, Editeur, 1891; translated into English from the French & Hebrew by Scott Thompson and Dominique Marson, San Francisco, 1985.

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INTRODUCTION

The Sefer Yetzirah, (ספר יצירה) or "Book of Creation," is an early Jewish mystical text that explores the creation of the universe and the principles of existence through the manipulation of language and divine wisdom. It is considered one of the foundational texts of Kabbalah, a



tradition of Jewish mysticism. The exact authorship and date of composition are uncertain, but it is generally believed to have originated between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE.

The Sefer Yetzirah delves into the concept of the ten Sefirot, which are emanations or attributes through which the Infinite, or God, interacts with the finite world. Additionally, it explores the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are believed to serve as the building blocks of creation. According to the text, these letters and the ten Sefirot were used by God to create the universe and its underlying structures.

The book is highly cryptic and has been interpreted in various ways throughout history, leading to different versions and commentaries. Despite its brevity, the Sefer Yetzirah has had a significant influence on Jewish mysticism, philosophy, and the development of Kabbalah.

PREFACE

In this commentary on the Sefer Yetzirah, we aim to provide an in-depth exploration of the foundational Jewish mystical text that has played a crucial role in the development of Kabbalah and Jewish philosophy. The Sefer Yetzirah, or "Book of Formation," delves into the mysteries of creation and the principles of existence through the manipulation of language and divine wisdom. Although its exact authorship and date of composition remain uncertain, the text is generally believed to have originated between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE [1].

The primary focus of the Sefer Yetzirah is the introduction of the ten Sefirot, which are considered to be emanations or attributes through which the Infinite (Ein Sof), or God, interacts with the finite world [2]. These Sefirot are often arranged in three columns and represent a hierarchy of divine attributes, functioning as channels for divine energy to flow into the world.

Another significant aspect of the text is its exploration of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are believed to serve as the building blocks of creation. The Sefer Yetzirah posits that God used these letters in conjunction with the ten Sefirot to create the universe and its underlying structures [3]. The 22 letters are divided into three categories: the three "Mother" letters, the seven "Double" letters, and the twelve "Simple" letters, each with their own unique symbolic representations.

Throughout the centuries, the Sefer Yetzirah has inspired numerous commentaries, interpretations, and debates among scholars and mystics alike. In this edition, we draw upon historical and contemporary sources to provide an extensive analysis and fresh insights into this enigmatic work. Our commentary includes quotations from various translations and interpretations, as well as scholarly Notes, to facilitate a deeper understanding of the text.



The Sefer Yetzirah's cryptic nature has led to diverse interpretations, and it is our hope that this new edition of the commentary will serve as a valuable resource for those seeking to further explore the rich and complex world of Jewish mysticism and the Kabbalistic tradition.

Notes:

[1] Scholem, Gershom. Kabbalah. Keter Publishing House, 1974.

[2] Kaplan, Aryeh. Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation. Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1997.

[3] Dan, Joseph. The Early Kabbalah. Paulist Press, 1986.



Contents

Page 7 - Introduction

Page 8 - Chapter I

Page 14 - Chapter II

Page 22 - Chapter III

Page 30 - Chapter IV

Page 40 - Chapter V

Page 55 - Chapter VI

Page 73 - Chapter VII

Page 76 - Chapter VIII

Page 84 - Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

The Sefer Yetzirah, or "Book of Formation," is an early Jewish mystical text that has been a significant influence on Jewish mysticism, philosophy, and the development of Kabbalah. It explores the creation of the universe and the principles of existence through the manipulation of language and divine wisdom. The book's authorship and date of composition are uncertain, but it is generally believed to have originated between the 3rd and 6th centuries CE.

The Ten Sefirot

The Sefer Yetzirah introduces the concept of the ten Sefirot, which are emanations or attributes through which the Infinite (Ein Sof), or God, interacts with the finite world. The ten Sefirot are often arranged in three columns and are as follows:

1. **Keter** (Crown) – Divine Will
2. **Chokhmah** (Wisdom) – Divine Intellect
3. **Binah** (Understanding) – Divine Comprehension
4. **Chesed** (Kindness) – Divine Love
5. **Gevurah** (Severity) – Divine Judgment
6. **Tiferet** (Beauty) – Divine Harmony
7. **Netzach** (Eternity) – Divine Victory
8. **Hod** (Glory) – Divine Splendor
9. **Yesod** (Foundation) – Divine Connection
10. **Malkhut** (Kingdom) – Divine Presence

The Sefirot represent a hierarchy of divine attributes and are seen as channels through which divine energy flows into the world.

The 22 Letters of the Hebrew Alphabet

The text also explores the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are believed to serve as the building blocks of creation. According to the Sefer Yetzirah, these letters and the ten Sefirot were used by God to create the universe and its underlying structures.

The 22 letters are divided into three categories:

1. Three "Mother" letters (א, מ, ש): representing the three elements of air, water, and fire.
2. Seven "Double" letters (ב, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח): representing the seven planets and the seven days of the week.
3. Twelve "Simple" letters (ט, י, כ, ל, נ, ס, ע, פ, ק, ר, ש, צ): representing the twelve zodiac signs and the twelve months of the year.

The Sefer Yetzirah suggests that through various combinations and permutations of these letters, God created the universe.

CHAPTER I



Thirty-two Mysterious Paths of Wisdom

1. In thirty-two mysterious paths of Wisdom, Yah, Eternal of Hosts [Yod-Vav-Yod], God of Israel, Living Elohim, Almighty God, High and Extolled, Dwelling in Eternity, Holy Be His Name, engraved and created His world in three Sefarim: in writing, number and word. Ten Sefirot out of nothing, twenty-two foundation letters, three mothers, seven doubles and twelve simples.

This passage presents the fundamental concepts of the Kabbalistic system, including the thirty-two mysterious paths of wisdom, the three Sefarim, the ten Sefirot, and the twenty-two Hebrew letters.

The "thirty-two mysterious paths of wisdom" can be understood as the combination of the ten Sefirot and the twenty-two foundation letters. These paths represent the channels through which divine energy flows and interacts with the world [1]. The ten Sefirot are divine attributes or emanations, while the twenty-two foundation letters are considered the building blocks of creation [2].



The three Sefarim mentioned in the text – writing, number, and word – are the ways in which God created the universe. Writing refers to the act of engraving or inscribing the Hebrew letters, number denotes the numerological aspect of the Kabbalistic system, and word indicates the divine speech through which creation was actualized [3].

The ten Sefirot "out of nothing" emphasize the idea that these divine emanations emerged from the Infinite (Ein Sof) and not from any pre-existing substance. The Sefirot function as channels for divine energy and play a vital role in the Kabbalistic understanding of creation [4].

The passage also refers to the three categories of Hebrew letters: three mothers, seven doubles, and twelve simples. The three "Mother" letters (א, מ, ש) represent the three elements of air, water, and fire⁵. The seven "Double" letters (ב, ג, ד, ה, ו, ז, ח) symbolize the seven planets and the seven days of the week. Finally, the twelve "Simple" letters (ט, י, כ, ל, מ, נ, ס, ע, פ, ק, ר, צ) correspond to the twelve zodiac signs and the twelve months of the year [6].

This section presents a foundational understanding of the Kabbalistic system, emphasizing the relationship between the ten Sefirot and the twenty-two Hebrew letters. It highlights the

significance of these concepts in the process of creation and provides insight into the divine attributes and creative potential of language.

Notes:

[1] Kaplan, Aryeh. *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*. Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1997.

[2] Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah*. Keter Publishing House, 1974.

[3] Matt, Daniel C. *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*. HarperCollins, 2009.

[4] Dan, Joseph. *The Early Kabbalah*. Paulist Press, 1986.

[5] *Sefer Yetzirah* 3:1-3, translated by Aryeh Kaplan. [6] *Sefer Yetzirah* 4:1-2, translated by Aryeh Kaplan.



Ten Sefirot Out of Nothing

2. Ten Sefirot out of nothing according to the number of the ten digits [fingers and toes], which are five against five and a single covenant to be determined in the centre. In word and tongue and mouth, they are ten extending beyond limit: depth of beginning, depth of end, depth of good, depth of evil, depth above and depth below, depth of east and depth of west, depth of north and depth of south, and the sole Master and lofty King faithfully governs them all from his Holy dwelling in Eternity forever.

The reference to the "ten Sefirot out of nothing according to the number of the ten digits" creates a parallel between the Sefirot and the human body, specifically the fingers and toes. This parallel underscores the concept that the Sefirot are the divine attributes through which God interacts with the world, and that humans, being created in the image of God, reflect these divine attributes [1]. This idea of "five against five" with "a single covenant to be determined in the centre" can be interpreted as the symmetrical and balanced nature of the Sefirot and their interdependence [2].

The phrase "In word and tongue and mouth" further highlights the importance of language and speech in the Kabbalistic understanding of creation. As discussed in the previous commentary, the *Sefer Yetzirah* posits that the twenty-two Hebrew letters, in conjunction with the ten Sefirot, were used by God to create the universe and its underlying structures [3].

The passage then proceeds to enumerate the "ten extending beyond limit," which can be understood as the ten dimensions or aspects of creation, each corresponding to one of the Sefirot. These dimensions emphasize the omnipresence of the divine influence in all aspects of existence and creation [4]. The "depth of beginning" and "depth of end" signify the Sefirot of Keter (Crown) and Malkhut (Kingdom), respectively, representing the beginning and end of the divine hierarchy.

The other dimensions mentioned – "depth of good," "depth of evil," "depth above," "depth below," "depth of east," "depth of west," "depth of north," and "depth of south" – further illustrate the all-encompassing nature of the divine influence and the interconnectedness of the Sefirot in the creation and governance of the world.

The text concludes by emphasizing that the "sole Master and lofty King," referring to God, governs all of these dimensions and Sefirot from His Holy dwelling in Eternity, underlining the central role of divine unity in the Kabbalistic system [5].

Notes:

- [1] Matt, Daniel C. *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*. HarperCollins, 2009.
- [2] Kaplan, Aryeh. *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*. Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1997.
- [3] Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah*. Keter Publishing House, 1974.
- [4] Dan, Joseph. *The Early Kabbalah*. Paulist Press, 1986.
- [5] Tishby, Isaiah. *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*. Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1991.

