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JUDAISM

Sefer Yetzirah

(Book of Formation)

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Anonymous (ascribed to Abraham)

Sefaria Community Translation

Credits

Author	Anonymous (ascribed to Abraham)
Date	2nd to 6th centuries (date disputed)
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About:

The Sefer Yetzirah, Book of Formation (or of Creation), is the oldest treatise of Jewish mysticism and the starting point of Kabbalah. Tradition ascribes it to Abraham; scholars generally date it between the 2nd and 6th centuries, some of them later.

In a few pages it says that God formed the world by thirty-two paths of wisdom: the ten sefirot and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The letters are divided into three "mothers" (alef, mem and shin, linked to air, water and fire), seven "doubles" (linked to the planets and the days of the week) and twelve "simple" ones (linked to the months and the signs).

Each letter rules something in the world, in the year and in the human body.

The book circulated in short and long versions that differ considerably. This is the six-chapter text printed in Warsaw in 1884.

Source: https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer_Yetzirah

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Contents

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

CHAPTER 1

✦

1 YAH, ADONAI of Hosts, God of Israel, Living God and King of the World, EL SHADDAI, Merciful and Gracious, High and Exalted, Dwelling Ever Above, Holy Is His Name—He carved and created His World in Thirty-Two Wondrous Ways of Wisdom, with three linguistic tools: with Counting, with Writing, and with Speech.

2 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH and Twenty-Two Letters of Foundation: Three Mothers, Seven Pairs, and Twelve Simple Letters.

3 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH—The count of ten fingers, five against five, with the Covenant of the Unique One established in the center, like a word of the tongue and circumcision of the genitals.

4 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH—Ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand with Wisdom and become wise with Understanding; test with them and probe of them. Make a thing stand in assembly before its Creators; return the Maker to His Site.

5 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH—Their measure is ten; they have no edge. Depth of Beginning, Depth of End; Depth of Good, Depth of Evil; Depth of Above, Depth of Below; Depth of East, Depth of West; Depth of North, Depth of South. The Unique Lord EL, the faithful king, governs them all from His Holy Abode, forever and ever and ever.

6 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH—Their visage is as the look of lightning, and their limit has no edge. His Word is in them, running and returning. By His word they pursue like a whirlwind; before His throne they bow.

7 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH—Their end is attached to their start, like the flame-tongue is bound to the coal. For the Lord is unique, He has no second—before one, what can you count?

8 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH—Keep your mouth from speaking and your heart from conceiving. If your heart should run, return to the place of which is said, "running and returning". Upon this matter the covenant was cut.

9 Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH—One—The Wind of the Living GOD, Blessed and Happy is His Name, He Who Lives Forever. Voice and Wind and Speech—this is the Holy Wind.

10 Two—He carved Wind from Wind, and with it He hewed Twenty-Two Letters of Foundation: Three Mothers, Seven Pairs, and Twelve Simple Letters. And Wind is the first of them.

11 Three—He carved Water from Wind and with them He hewed tohu and bohu, mud and clay. He carved them like a garden bed, erected them like a wall, screened them like ceiling plaster.

12 Four—He carved Fire from Water, and with it He hewed the Throne of the Glory, and the Wheels, and the Fiery Serpents, and the Holy Creatures, and the Ministering Angels. And from the three of them He founded His Abode, as is said, "He makes the winds His angels and burning fire His ministers".

13 ([According to the 1562 Mantua print, the edition as written in the Otzer Hashem and in Rambam:] Five—Three of the Simple Letters—He sealed Wind by means of three and fixed them within His Great Name, Yod-Heh-Waw.) [The correct version:] He chose 3 of the simple letters with the secret of the 3 Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin, and He fixed them within His Great Name. With them He sealed 6 Edges. Five—He sealed Above and faced upwards and sealed it with Yod-Heh-Waw. Six—He sealed Below and faced downwards and sealed it with Yod-Waw-Heh. Seven—He sealed East and faced forwards and sealed it with Heh-Yod-Waw. Eight—He sealed West and faced backwards and sealed it with Heh-Waw-Yod. Nine—He sealed South and faced to His right and sealed it with Waw-Yod-Heh. Ten—He sealed North and faced to His left and sealed it with Waw-Heh-Yod.]

14 These are the Ten SEFIROT BELIMAH: One, the Wind of the Living God; and Wind from Wind, and Water from Air, and Fire from Water; and Up Above and Below, and East and West, and North and South.

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CHAPTER 2

✦

1 Twenty-Two Letters of Foundation—Three Mothers, Seven Pairs, and Twelve Simple Letters. Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin: Their foundation is the palm of innocence and the palm of guilt, and the tongue of edict decides between them.

2 Twenty-Two Letters—He carved them, and hewed them, and weighed them, and exchanged them, and combined them, and formed with them the soul of every formed being and the soul of every being He has yet to form.

3 Twenty-Two Letters of Foundation—Carved with voice, hewn with spirit, fixed in the mouth in five places: Alef-Heh-Chet-ʿAyin, Bet-Waw-Mem-Peh, Gimel-Yod-Kaf-Qof, Dalet-Tet-Lamed-Nun-Taw, Zayin-Samekh-Shin-Resh-Tzadi. ([In the Mantua printing, the following is added to the paragraph:] Bound to the tongue like a flame to coal—Alef-Chet-Heh-ʿAyin, serving behind the tongue in the house of swallowing. Bet-Waw-Mem-Peh, between the lips and in front of the tongue. Gimel-Yod-Kaf-Qof, being cut upon the third portion of the tongue. Dalet-Tet-Lamed-Nun-Taw, with the tip of the tongue, serving with voice. And Samekh-Tzadi-Resh-Shin, between the teeth and tongue, lain down and flattened. [On this stand the remarks of the Ramav.])

4 Twenty-Two Letters of Foundation—Fixed in a wheel with 231 gates. The wheel turns back and forth. This is a cypher for the matter: There is nothing in goodness higher than Delight, and nothing in evil lower than

Affliction.

5 How did He weigh and transform them? Alef with them all and all of them with Alef; Bet with them all and all of them with Bet. And so it turns, such that all matter is found and all speech emerges into one name.

6 He formed matter from chaos and made nothingness somethingness; He hewed great columns out of imperceptible Air. This is a cipher: observing, transforming, making all matter and all words one name. A cipher for the matter: twenty-two (numbers) [objects] in one body.

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CHAPTER 3

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1 Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin—Their foundation is the palm of guilt and the palm of innocence, and the tongue of edict decides between them.

2 Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin—A great secret, concealed and covered and sealed in Six Rings. From them emerge Fire and Water, being divided male and female. Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin is their foundation—from them are born Fathers from which all is created.

3 Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin—In the World are Air, Water, Fire. The heavens were created first from Fire, and the earth is created from Water, and the Air decides between the fire and the water.

4 Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin—In the Year are Fire, Water, and Wind. Heat was created from Fire, and cold from Water, and satiation from Wind deciding between them. Three mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin—In the Person are Fire, Water, and Wind; the head was created from Fire, the belly was created from Water, and the chest from Wind decides between them.

5 Three Mothers, Alef-Mem-Shin—He carved them, hewed them, combined them, and with them He sealed Three Mothers in the World, and Three Mothers in the Year, and Three Mothers in the Person, male and female.

6 He made the letter Alef reign over Wind, and He bound to it a crown. He combined them, this one with that one. With them He sealed the Wind in the world, and satiation in the Year, and the chest in the Person—

male with Alef-Mem-Shin and female with Alef-Shin-Mem.

7 He made the letter Mem reign over Water, and He bound to it a crown. He combined them, this one with that one; He sealed with them the earth in the World, and cold in the Year, and the belly in the Person, male and female—male with Mem-Alef-Shin and female with Mem-Shin-Alef.

8 He made the letter Shin reign over Fire, and He bound to it a crown. He combined them, this one with that one; He sealed with them the heavens in the World, and heat in the Year, and the head in the Person, male and female [male with Shin-Alef-Mem and female with Shin-Mem-Alef, written thus in the N.Y.].

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CHAPTER 4

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1 Seven Pairs, Begad-Kafrat (pronounced with two tongues)—their foundation is Life, Peace, Wisdom, Wealth, Beauty, Fertility, and Dominion, pronounced with two tongues: Vet-Bet, Ghimel-Gimel, Dhalet-Dalet, Khaf-Kaf, Feh-Peh, Resh-Rresh, Taw-Thaw. A soft and hard structure, a strong and weak structure. Pairs, for they are opposites—The opposite of Life is Death; the opposite of Peace is Evil; the opposite of Wisdom is Folly; the opposite of Wealth is Poverty; the opposite of Beauty is Ugliness; the opposite of Fertility is Barrenness; the opposite of Dominion is Servitude.

2 Seven Pairs, Begad-Kafrat—Seven and not six, seven and not eight. Test with them and probe of them (and form and think). Make a thing stand in assembly before its Creators; return the Maker to His Site.

3 Seven Pairs, Begad-Kafrat, against 7 Edges. 6 of the Edges are Above and Below, East and West, North and South, with the Holy Palace established in the center, bearing them all.

4 Seven Pairs, Begad-Kafrat. He carved them, hewed them, exchanged them, and formed with them the stars in the World and days in the Year and gates in the Person. He carved out of them the Seven Firmaments, and Seven Earths, and Seven Sabbaths; for this reason, He loved the Seventh Day more than anything under all the heavens.

5 How? He made the letter Bet reign over Life, and He bound to it a crown, and formed with it Saturn in the World, and Sunday in the Year, and the right eye in the Person.

6 He made the letter Gimel reign, and He bound to it a crown, and formed with it Jupiter in the World, and Monday in the Year, and the left eye in the Person.

7 He made the letter Dalet reign, and He bound to it a crown, and formed with it Mars in the World, and Tuesday in the Year, and the right ear in the Person.

8 He made the letter Kaf reign, and He bound to it a crown, and formed with it the Sun in the World, and Wednesday in the Year, and the left ear in the Person.

9 He made the letter Peh reign, and He bound to it a crown, and formed with it Venus in the World, and Thursday in the Year, and the right nostril in the Person.

10 He made the letter Resh reign, and He bound to it a crown, and formed with it Mercury in the World, and Friday in the Year, and the left nostril in the Person.

11 He made the letter Taw reign, and He bound to it a crown, and formed with it the Moon in the World, and Saturday in the Year, and the mouth in the Person.

12 Seven Pairs, Begad-Kafrat—How did He exchange them? Two stones build two houses; three build six houses; four build twenty-four houses; five build one hundred and twenty houses; six build seven hundred and

twenty houses; seven build five thousand and forty houses. From here on out, go and contemplate what the mouth cannot speak and the ear cannot hear. These are the Seven Stars in the world: the Sun, Venus, Mercury, the Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars. These are the 7 Days in the Year: the Days of Creation. And the Seven Gates in the person: two eyes, two ears, two punctures of the nose, and the mouth. With them He carved the Seven Firmaments and the Seven Earths and the Seven Hours; for this reason, He loved the Seventh Day more than any object under the heavens.

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CHAPTER 5

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1 Twelve Simple Letters, Heh-Waw Zayin-Chet Tet-Yod Lamed-Nun ʿAyin-Samekh Tzadi-Qof—Their foundation is Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Talking, Eating, Sex, Work, Movement, Excitement, Play, Contemplation, Sleep. Their measure is the Twelve Diagonal Borders: Northeastern border, Southeastern border, Upper-Eastern border, Lower-Western border, Upper-Northern border, Lower-Northern border, Southwestern border, Northwestern border, Upper-Western border, Lower-Western border, Upper-Southern border, Lower-Southern border. They extend outwards and go on forever and ever and ever—They are the Arms of the World.

2 Twelve Simple Letters, Heh-Waw Zayin-Chet Tet-Yod Lamed-Nun ʿAyin-Samekh Tzadi-Qof—He carved them, hewed them, weighed them, exchanged them, transformed them, and formed with them the Twelve Constellations in the World. A cipher: Teshat Seʾav Meʿaq Gedad. And these are the Twelve Months in the Year: Nisan, Iyyar, Siwan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishri, Marcheshwan, Kislew, Tevet, Shevat, Adar. And these are the Twelve Leaders in the Person: two hands, two legs, two kidneys, spleen, liver, gall, rumen, abomasum, craw. Like what did He make them? (A city) [strife]. And like what did He arrange them? War. God made them as this one compared with that one. How did He combine them? He made the letter Heh reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Aries in the World, and Nisan in the year, and the right hand in the Person, male and female. He made the letter Waw reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Taurus in the World, and Iyyar in the Year, and the left

hand in the Person. He made the letter Zayin reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Gemini in the World, and Siwan in the year, and the right leg in the Person. He made the letter Chet reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Cancer in the World, and Tammuz in the year, and the left leg in the Person. He made the letter Tet reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Leo in the World, and Av in the Year, and the the right kidney in the Person. He made the letter Yod reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Virgo in the World, and Elul in the Year, and the left kidney in the Person. He made the letter Lamed reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Libra in the World, and Tishri in the Year, and the liver in the Person. He made the letter Nun reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Scorpio in the World, and Marcheshwan in the Year, and the spleen in the Person. He made the Samekh reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Sagittarius in the World, and Kislew in the year, and the gall in the Person. He made the letter ʿAyin reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Capricorn in the World, and Tevet in the Year, and the rumen in the Person. He made the letter Tzadi reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Aquarius in the World, and Shevat in the Year, and the abomasum in the Person. He made the letter Qof reign, and bound to it a crown, and formed with it Pisces in the World, and Adar in the Year, and the craw in the Person.

3 Three Mothers, which are the Three Fathers from whom come Fire and Wind and Water; Three Mothers, and Seven Pairs, and Twelve Simple Letters.

4 The Holy One, Blessed Is He, YAH, ADONAI of Hosts, Living God, God of Israel, High and Exalted, Dwelling Ever Above, Holy Is His Name, Lofty and Holy Is He—These are the Twenty-Two Letters with which He founded.

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CHAPTER 6

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1 Three Fathers and their descendants, and Seven Stars [another version: Conquerors] and their hosts, and Twelve Diagonal Borders. A sight for faithful witnesses to speak—World, Year, Person. An edict—Twelve [another version: Ten] and Seven and Three He appointed them: the Dragon Teli, and the Wheel, and the Heart. Three—Fire, Water, and Wind; Fire above and Water below, with Wind the edict deciding between them. A cipher to speak: The Fire carries the Water; Mem being quiet and Shin whistling, with Alef the edict deciding between them.

2 Teli is in the World like a king on his throne; the Wheel is in the Year like a king in the city; the Heart is in the Person like a king in war. God made all things as this one compared to that one: good compared to evil, better and best and a worse and worst. Goodness distinguishes evil and evil distinguishes goodness; goodness is kept for the good and evil is kept for the evil.

3 Three, but each one stands alone. 7 divided: Three opposite Three, with an edict deciding between them. Twelve stand in war: Three Friends, Three Foes, Three Lifegivers, and Three Executioners. Three Friends: the heart and the ears and the mouth. Three foes: the liver and the gall and the tongue. And EL, the faithful king, rules over them all: One over Three, Three over Seven, Seven over Twelve, and all of them fastened this one to that one.

[4] And as soon as our father Abraham, peace be upon him, had viewed and witnessed and seen and searched and understood and carved and hewn and exchanged and formed, he raised up his hand. The Lord of All, Blessed Is He, revealed Himself to him. He returned him to his bosom and kissed him upon the head, and called him, "My beloved," and cut a covenant for him and his seed. And they believed in Hashem, and He reckoned righteousness to him. He cut for him a covenant between his ten toes, and this is the covenant of circumcision; and his ten fingers, [the covenant of] the tongue. He bound to him the Twenty-Two Letters with His tongue and revealed to him their foundation. He dragged them in Water and lit them in Fire and shook them in Wind, and burned them in the Seven [Stars] and drove them in the Twelve Constellations.

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