**Kabbalah and Magic. The Sepher Yetzirah**

hryxyrps

**The Book of Formation:**

**instructions for creating worlds and making the Golem**

Curation, translation and commentary by Sebastiano Fusco

If a writing system, or an alphabet, has to make visible and pronounceable the Word of the Creator, the letters or figures that compose it must be open to a great quantity of meanings and interpretations, because in human languages there is no proposition that does not imply the whole universe; saying "the tiger" is saying the tigers that generated it, the deer that is devoured, the pasture that fed the deer, the land that was the mother of the pasture, the sky that gave light to the earth. In the language of a god, every word must enunciate thisinfinite concatenation of facts, and not in an implicit way but in an explicit one, not progressive but immediate. A god needs to say only one word, and that word contains fullness. No voice articulated by him can be less than the universe or less than the sum of the time.

J.L. Borges, *The Aleph*

**Presentation**

**A gateway to infinity**

Rabbi Rava, a wise rabbi among the most cited by the *Talmud*, is said to have said that "if the righteous want it, they can create a world". It is a phrase that raises many questions. About what world does the Rabbi speak? An inner world of the soul in which, as certain Eastern doctrines promise, one can live in serenity because there is no desire, which is the source of suffering? Alternatively, a figuration of the mind, a *mundus imaginalis* in which we can be all we want? Or a real, concrete world, a private space to be made our home and where things are not governed by chance, but rather how it should be, that is how we want it? Moreover, eventually, how big should this world be: just enough to accommodate us only, or even those around us, or our entire country, or our planet, or the entire universe? And where would it be compared to the "real" world: next, in interpenetration, in replacement? The Sepher Yetzirah answers such questions, and its answers seem even more astonishing than the questions themselves.

To get these answers, we must refer to Kabbalah, of which the *Sepher Yetzirah* is the founding text, in the sense that it was the first one, and all those who came later are nothing but a commentary on its synthetic expositions. Kabbalah is generally considered a bizarre and controversial aspect of Jewish mysticism (which is already quite bizarre of its own), but in reality, it is something very different: it is an experimental science. It shows that by performing specific actions, we get particular results, and it tries to explain why we get them. There is an excellent book called *Le Porte della Giustizia*, published by Adelphi and presented by Moshe Idel, in which a pupil of Abulafia (one of the masters of ecstatic Kabbalah, who lived in the thirteenth century) says that, following his meditation exercises, his body had begun to spread light, as if a lamp had lit up in his heart. He was not surprised or frightened by it. He had followed the instructions of his master, and it was a result he expected, just like a chemist who mixes an acid with a base knows that he will obtain a salt dissolved in water (the alchemists also knew that sulphur and mercury are fixed into salt, as spirit and soul into the body). He is not afraid even when he hears a divine voice that scolds him: it was precisely to hear it that he had begun to study Kabbalah with his teacher. He had done something, and he had achieved the result he expected.

This is exactly the attitude of the author *Sepher Yetzirah*: he teaches a method to obtain certain results, which he does not question at all. The method is simple, engaging the mind to manipulate certain symbols. It is the result that is disconcerting. The title of the work explains it, which means *Book of formation*. The undifferentiated matter of Creation is engraved and sculpted with the power of thought and given the desired shape, thus creating an entirely new world. Alternatively, a completely new "living" being, like the *Golem*. It is not created, because to create from nothing is the prerogative of God, but it is "shaped", like a potter (*yotzer*, same root of *yetzira*) makes a vase by shaping a mass of clay. How can the human mind achieve such a result is a notion that would surely upset a rationalist mind, who ignores or mocks these things. However, judging worthy of comprehension only what it can understand, and mock the rest is one of the limitations of rationalism. In reality, the formation of a world is something that we do without interruption in every moment of our life because it is a consequence of the perceptual process, that is the awareness of existing.

Like it or not, the real world does not exist on its own as it seems, but it is an effect of perception (did not one of the founders of rationalism say *Cogito, ergo sum*? Was he wrong?). Quantum physics states that the state of a particle, or the parameters that define it, is indeterminate until we measure it. It is the perceptual act that decides whether we are talking about a particle or a wave, and what its characteristics are. Before the measurement, the entity is in an indeterminate state and has only certain *probabilities* of being something defined. It is something "formless and empty", on which the Spirit of God hovers, waiting to give it a form (*Genesis*, I, 2).

By Stating this uncertainty between wave and particle, quantum physics has placed us ruthlessly in front of the problem of the ambiguity of reality, which is the labyrinth in which scientific and philosophical thought fumble around today, also deprived of the last certainties that survived Einstein's relativity. The description of reality as perceived by the senses and evoked by feelings does not complete the representation of a cosmos that suddenly appears infinitely larger than what our mind and our heart can conceive. Our logic is inadequate to squeeze into exact formulas phenomena, such as the quantum ones, which do not follow the Aristotelian categories, disregard the laws of causality and follow temporal sequences different from those of ordinary experience. If scientists had not told us about it, we would argue that it is the result of magic.

Physicists, with a process of reworking that is still slow and hesitant, are realizing that the so-called "standard model" of reality, which with so much difficulty has partially succeeded in unifying Bohr's atomic doctrine with Einstein's cosmology, is only a rough approximation of the truth. It is valid within limited parameters, as it was the clock-universe conceived by the mechanism of Descartes and Newton. In the real world, outside the limited scale offered by our senses and our rational and instinctive processes, there are no certainties, only probabilities. Time is not linear, but branches out, goes back on itself, it flows backwards. When space is considered as an entity in which we make measurements, it is valid for certain particles and for others not, which continue to be "magically" connected even if separated by an entire galaxy. Moreover, above all, perception is not a mere act of recording what exists, but it is what actually *determines* the plane of reality on which we are acting. Phenomena are defined and completed as we perceive them; otherwise, they remain in a state of probabilistic indeterminacy, non-living and undead like Schroedinger's cat.

It is difficult to express to what extent the latter consideration re-evaluates conscience and spirit towards pure materialism. Old-fashioned scientists, conceptually inadequate to deal with this state of affairs in an informed way, continue to elaborate everything in formulas based on the usual models, dismissing the variables they do not know how to consider. The result has been that for a century, that is since quantum physics has developed, there has been no new theory capable of giving us a more precise idea of Creation. The philosophers, ignorant of mathematics and steeped in nineteenth-century rationalism, however, perceive that something is wrong and, unable for lack of ingenuity to grasp the essence of things, they resort to "weak" configurations to mask their ineptitude to deal with the need a new way of thinking. The literati, ignorant of everything except their ego, have not understood anything of what is happening and have reduced the modern narrative to a political pamphlet, or an assembly line for evasion exercises, or a psycho-masturbatory practice.

Rabbi Rava, on the other hand, understood it almost two thousand years ago, stressing that to create a path that suits us we need to be "righteous". In Judaism, and in particular in Kabbalah, this term, tzadiq*,* does not have the generic meaning of "righteous one", but indicates the one whose soul serves as a vehicle (*merkavah*) to God, and for this reason, it is the foundation (yesod) of the world. It is not a *status* that is attained by righteousness but is granted by God to those He selects, often by incomprehensible choices. Yesod is the Sephirah of the Tree of Life which, in the middle pillar, is immediately above Malkuth, our world, and looks up at Tiphereth, the heart, that is awareness. The column then reaches up to Kether, which is the direct reflection of God. The path is clear: it is the awareness, inspired by God, that serves as the foundation of the world as we know it.

This concept emerges from the *Sepher Yetzirah* with absolute clarity: it is human awareness, in fact, the dimension that interprets the structure of the universe, giving it a meaning and therefore an essence, like measurement does in the case of subatomic particles. The book also describes how a world fit for "righteous" is "shaped" and characterized, and it does it by introducing another concept that again seems to be borrowed from quantum physics: that is "multiverse", which in the text is called *galgal*, that is "sphere". An eleven-dimensional sphere (as many as the most advanced cosmological theories foresee) whose infinite section planes each represents a possible alternative universe to ours. The *Sepher Yetzirah* shows how to define this universe based on a pattern of symbols linked to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and how to transfer our awareness to it by altering our perceptive system (which is also the key to objective reality) through a conceptually simple method, but in truth difficult to be implemented, thanks to which we increase our level of sensitivity. I do not want to anticipate the contents of the book and above all the explanations with which I have tried to clarify its concepts, which are expressed with synthetic efficacy but seems remote to us because of their symbolic dimension that in our materialist and rationalist culture is challenging to interpret. However, for what it says and even more for what he hints at, reading the *Sepher* Yetzirah is like taking a deep dive into ourselves to re-emerge into infinity.

**Some technical notes**

We do not know when the *Sepher Yetzirah* was written, let alone who wrote it. The work is mentioned in the *Talmud*, which would indicate that in the fourth/fifth century AD it had already been written and was widely distributed; however, it is not certain that it was really our book (Gersholm Scholem, however, considered it "not impossible"). The first comment that reached us is that of Isaac ben Solomon Israeli (830-932). It is written in Arabic and is found in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The next comment, by Saadya Gaon (who also wrote an Arabic version of the book), was written in 931 and reports that the Hebrew text had been circulating "for a long time" by oral transmission, and the tradition attributed it to the patriarch Abraham. The in-depth and extensive commentary entitled *Sepher Chakhmoni*, by Shabbatai Donnolo, is from 946, a few years later, it is a comprehensive work, fundamental for the history of the Jewish thought. The commentary in Arabic by Dunashibn Tamam, whose several translations in the biblical idiom have reached us, is from the same period. The most relevant comments written over the centuries are about ninety (In the bibliography the main ones are listed).

The opinions of the Hebraists on the date of composition of the text fluctuate within the range of a millennium. Lazarus Goldsmidt, the author of a German translation published in 1894, thought it was written a century before the birth of Christ, while for another German of the late nineteenth century, Philipp Bloch, it should be placed in the tenth century AD. There is a whole range of in-between hypotheses: Heinrich Graetz believes it is from the first century AD; in the opinion of Isidor Kalisch and David Castelli it was written in the second century; for Louis Ginzberg, on the other hand, between the third and fifth centuries; for Leo Baeck, between the fifth and the seventh; for Hermann Strack, between the seventh and the ninth; Leopold Zunz dates it in the ninth century. Finally, the evaluation of the greatest Kabbalah expert of the twentieth century, Gershom Scholem, who believes the text was written by a Palestinian Jew between the second and third centuries AD. For what it is worth my opinion as a modest expert in Grimoires, I share the latter evaluation, not only based on philological observations (such as the inclusion of *Resh* between the double letters) but because of the evident Gnostic influence shown in different concepts and terminologies. In my opinion, however, the discussion on the age of the writing is, as the Latins said, a *quaestio de lana caprina*, that is a dispute over a matter of little consequence. What matters is not so much knowing when and where the text was written, but to what age the *knowledge* contained in it dates back. In this regard, there is a substantial indication in the book, which leads to a surprising evaluation. I do not want to anticipate it: it will be found in my *Comment*ary at the end of the text.

The above reference to the grimoires leads me to emphasize that the nature of the *Sepher Yetzirah* is specifically that of a *grimoire* or a manual of practical magic aimed at evoking otherworldly entities with which to establish a relationship to one's advantage. What the book teaches is not different from the doctrines that became known as *theurgy*, and that date back to more remote antiquity (we have documentation of it from the Egyptians), that is rituals to communicate with the gods. The Jews replace the divine figures with abstract entities such as the Hebrew letters loaded with powers, not to undermine their monotheism. However, the parallels are obvious, and Gershom Scholem, among others, highlighted them. I will clarify this aspect in the appropriate passages of my explanations in support of the various paragraphs, but it seems to me that it clearly emerges through a non-preconceived reading. Scholem deals with it by discussing the procedures for forming the *Golem* in his book *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*. He also shares the opinion that the text should be considered written in the imperative mood, that is, as instructions aimed at achieving something, and not in the third person, as if reporting actions performed by God. On the other hand, the *Sepher Yetzirah*seems to have followed the whole typical process of text transmission. The fact that it is so meagre and synthetic has led us to think that what has come down to us is not the actual book but only its *table of content*. In fact, a similar structure is found in the older versions of many grimoires: see for example the Hebrew version of the famous *Key of Solomon* found by Hermann Gollancz and published in 1914 under the title *Sepher Maphteah Shelomoh.* These texts, in fact, were not written like a real *book*: they are notes that the operating magicians wrote for their convenience, in order to remember the procedures and doctrines to be implemented during the rituals. Passing from hand to hand, these notes, Passing from hand to hand, were modified and fleshed out by those who used them, thus showing the influence of other cultural environments as well. In the end, someone collated the various available manuscripts and merged them into a more organic version, which was then subjected to further changes over time.

This is probably what happened to the *Sepher Yetzirah*, in which Israel Weinstock, in its critical edition of the first chapter, found at least four layers of text gradually older: one, the initial, dating back to the first century BC; another dating back to the Talmudic period and around the fourth century AD; a further layer is from theGeonic period, after 609; and a last one from the beginning of the ninth century. Peter Hayman, the author of a meticulously critical edition of the Hebrew text, shares the same opinion. Hayman also makes an interesting consideration, citing the author of one of the oldest commentaries, DunashibnTamim, who attributed these additions to handovers between a "magus" and the other: each added notes in the margin with his observations to the manuscript, and these notes were then incorporated by those who wrote the following text. Identifying these layers is a problem that concerns anyone who undertakes to study ancient manuscripts, especially those ones that have not received particular philological attention.

This proliferation of versions means that some scholars periodically come up with the idea of drawing up a "final" edition of the text, comparing a series of texts that differ in different points and that should be composed in a coherent form. For the *Sepher Yetzirah*, this has happened several times and has led to three fundamental versions, whose basic content is identical, but which differ in the presence or absence of some paragraphs and their arrangement. The first is a version called "Long" because it contains about 2,500 words, and it is the one on which Shabbatai Donnolo based his comment. The other version is called "Short" (1,300 words). It was used by Kabbalist Abraham of Posquières (1120-1198) for his commentary in which he sees in the double combination of letters a reference to the primordial androgyne. Finally, the version called "Ari" (1,800 words) so called from the abbreviation of Rabbi Isaac Luria, the renovator of the Kabbalah, which around the middle of the sixteenth century perfected a text written by Moses Cordovero collating fifteen manuscripts. This version was then further refined two centuries later by the Gaon of Vilnius, Elia ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-1797) who used it to attempt the formation of the *Golem*. Its final version is known as "Gra-Ari", on which the Kabbalah schools ended up focusing. Currently, it is the most used by the Israeli kabbalists, and it is the one I translated and commented in this book. I added in an appendix, as it is tradition since the first printing of the *Sepher Yetzirah* (Mantova 1562), the texts of the other two versions, translating them, however, into the imperative mood instead of the third person, as it is allowed by the Hebrew grammar, in order to highlight their character of manuals for magical instructions.

There is also a fourth version that is often printed together with the others because of its antiquity and the depth of its comment. It is the one developed by Saadyaal-Fayyumin in the early tenth century. I did not include it because it was originally written in Arabic, and it is too different from the other three. Its inclusion would have involved a further addition of notes in a book in which notes already occupy more than ten times the space of the commented text.

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May 2019

**Chapter ONE**

**I, 1.**

**In thirty-two Mysterious Paths of Wisdom1has engraved2**

***Yah*3*, yhvh Tzabaoth*4*, God of Israel*5*, Living Elohim*6 *and King of the Universe*7*, God Almighty*8*,***

***Merciful and Compassionate9, Supreme and Exalted, Dwelling in Eternity, Acclaimed and Holy* 10**

**His Name. He has structured His universe on three registers11: with Number and Letter and Word12.**

Notes of the Curator

*"Who is obscuring My designs with words without knowledge?*

*Gird up now your loins like a man; for I will ask you. And you, answer me ".*

Job, xxxviii, 2-3

[In these notes I have tried as far as possible to clarify, above all to my own understanding, the sense of the most meaningful terms used by the author of the *Sepher Yetzirah*. By reading my inadequate analysis, it will be evident how frustrating is every attempt to turn the text into another language, an operation that due to the very structure of the Hebrew idiom will never be able to reproduce the depth and density of the original text fully. However, even reading the short treatise in the language in which it was written would not be enough: it is necessary to dig deep into the meaning contained in each word and every group of words to try to bring to light the values that are kept in it: not deliberately hidden, as one might believe, because Wisdom, on the contrary, is offered with great clarity of exposition, even in its admirable synthesis. It is only necessary to read it with the right disposition of mind (the text itself will explain what this means): and from every word, every letter, splendid lights will radiate to illuminate the darkness of ignorance. It is not a simple thing: for centuries, entire lives have been dedicated, and continue to be, to this task. It should also be borne in mind that the text of the *Sepher Yetzirah*does not merely consist of a doctrinal exposition, but also provides, for those who can read them, the *practical* instructions for the human spirit to return from its bare essence to the contemplation of the Infinite. Unfortunately, today we lost most of the notions that in the author's cultural environment were known by those who committed to this task: and their reconstruction, as well as extremely difficult, can only be mostly incomplete. However, through these, we tried to accomplish it. In a *Commentary*, at the end of the text, some arguments are explained that are too complex to be dealt with in a note. Finally, a piece of technical information. In order to respect the structure of Hebrew, the words, abbreviations and phrases in that language quoted in the text are written from right to left, while their transcriptions in Latin characters, given only to give an idea of the pronunciation, are written from left to right. - *S.F*.]

1 ***Thirty-two*.** The thirty-two Paths are the essential elements that summarize reality, both physically and spiritually and provide a way to approach the transcendent. The *Sepherkha*, later, will explain in detail their nature, expressed symbolically by the ten Sephiroth and the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Sephiroth and the letters are conceptually arranged in a table called the Tree of Life which also represents their connections. This table is a real map of the Whole, and by studying it, we can find the way to ascend from the human world to the threshold of the divine.

In Hebrew 32 it is written in figures using the letters *Lamed*I (which is 30) and *Bethb*b (which is 2), they are also the first (*Beth*) and the last (*Lamed*) letter of the Pentateuch, the first five ( 3 +2) books of the Bible, attributed to Moses. Consequently, the number 32, symbolically includes the whole content of the Torah, which the mystic will be able to bring to light by meditating on its hidden meanings. It should also be noted that the number 32 is obtained from a multiplication in which 2 appears 5 times (or two raised to the power of five, 25), thus: 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 x 2 = 32. Furthermore, 2 multiplied (Instead of being raised to power) by 5 gives 10, which as we shall see is the total number of Sephiroths, and reports to the One, that is God, seen as the unity extended into nothing (10 is indicated by the letter *Yod*, y, which is also the first letter of the Most Holy Name of God yhvhhwhy). 2 is the number of what is manifested: the Bible begins with the letter *Beth* of *bereshit* ("in the beginning"), which I 2, and also the first letter of the second word, barah ("created") is a *Beth*. Furthermore, creation itself is initially referred to as twofold: Elohim created "the heavens *and* the earth," that is, he began with two things together, not one. The number 2, or the letter *Beth*, is, therefore, the figure of our world, characterized by pairs of conflicting opposites: good/evil, positive/negative, pleasure/suffering, peace/war, but also male/female, hot/cold, light / dark and so on: the *Sepher Yetzirah*will dedicate Chapter six, in which it examines the double letters, to the analysis of contrasts. Number 1, instead, is the expression of the uniqueness and stability and permanence of God: in Hebrew *Elohim* is written \yhla, which begins with an *Alepha*a, indicating the number 1, and Elohim is the first of the names used for God in the Jewish Bible.

5, on the other hand, summarizes the structure of the universe seen as a union of Macrocosm and Microcosm. It is, in fact, the number of the fundamental dimensions of the Whole: the three spatial axes, the time axis and the axis of human awareness (3 +1 +1). The *Sepher* Yetzirahindicates the three concepts respectively with the names of Universe, Olam\lwu(the extension of space), Year, *Shanah*hnc(the measure of time) and Soul, *Nephesh*cpn (the psychophysical identity of man).

The word *levbl*, written with the same letters with which one writes the number 32, means "the heart of man", and in ancient times the term "heart" indicated the seat of the higher mental activities. Conversely, the two letters mean lb*Beth El*, or "the House of God". The sense is that to approach the divinity and assume, as Abraham did, the power of "formation", or the power to create "shapes" in the world of Yetzirah, the second of the four worlds in which the Whole is divided and immediately superior to the physical world, it is necessary to penetrate deeply (with the "heart") the archetypal value linked to the 32 Paths in which God sealed his imprint in the undifferentiated (the "formless and void" chaos of *Genesis*). Furthermore, it is revealed that this procedure involves a profound reversal of the human condition.

For the Kabbalists, the importance of the number 32 is underlined by the fact that in Genesis this is the number of the actions, expressed with verbs, attributed to God, with which all things were created [*here and in the rest of the book all biblical quotations are translated directly from the Masoretic text*]:

***1.*** In the beginning, Elohim *created* the heavens and the earth (*Genesis* i, 1);***2.*** The spirit of Elohim *was hovering* over the waters (I, 2);***3.*** And *Elohim said*: "Let there be Light!" (I, 3);***4.*** And Elohim *saw* that Light was good (I, 4);***5.*** And he *separated* the light from the darkness (I, 4);***6.*** And Elohim *called* the light day and the darkness night (I, 6);***7.*** And Elohim *said*: "Let there be an expanse..." (I, 6);***8.****And Elohim made* the expanse (I, 7);***9.*** Elohim *called* the expanse heaven (I, 8);***10.*** And Elohim *said*: "Let the waters under the sky be gathered in one place ..." (I, 9);***11.*** And Elohim *called* the dry ground land and the gathered waters seas (I, 10);***12.*** And Elohim *saw* that it was good (I, 10);***13.*** And Elohim *said*: "Let the land produce vegetation..." (I, 11);***14.*** And Elohim *saw* that it was good (I, 12);***15.*** And Elohim *said*: "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens" (I, 14);***16.*** And Elohim *made* the two great lights (I, 16);***17.*** Elohim *set them* in the expanse of the heavens (I, 17);***18.*** And Elohim *saw* that it was good (I, 18);***19.*** And Elohim *said*: "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth ..." (I, 20);***20.*** And Elohim *made* the great sea creatures... and every bird (I, 21); ***21.*** And Elohim *saw* that it was good (I, 21); ***22.*** And Elohim *blessed them*: "Be fruitful and multiply ..." (I, 22);***23.*** And Elohim *said*: "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds..." (I, 24); ***24.*** And Elohim *made* the livestock (I, 25);25. And *Elohim* saw that it was good (I, 25);***26.*** And Elohim *said*: "Let us make *Adam* in our image ..." (I, 26);***27.*** And Elohim *created* man (I, 27);***28.*** He *created him* in his own image, in the image of Elohim male and female (I, 27);***29.***  Elohim *blessed them* (I, 28);***30.*** And Elohim *told* them: "Be fruitful and multiply" (I, 28);***31.***  And Elohim *said*: "Behold, I *give you*..." (I, 29);***32.*** And Elohim *saw* what he had done, and behold, it was very good (I, 31).

Kabbalists link each of these divine acts to one of the "thirty-two Mirable Paths", to which the ten Sephiroth are also linked, which the text will mention in the next paragraph, and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Sephiroth correspond to the ten times in which the expression "And Elohim said" is presented, confirming that the creation took place through the Divine Word. Each of the other 22 is linked to one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

On the symbolism linked to the number 32 one could write entire libraries since it is one of the fundamental keys in the interpretation of the mystical universe. We will remember, for example, that the two columns of the Temple of Solomon - allegorical representation of the Whole - were built by the architect Hiram with a proportion between height and circumference of 3:2. Moreover, at the top of them was a capital five (3 +2) cubits high (*The Kings*, vii, 15). Kabbalists, moreover, point out that, in order to penetrate the mysteries of Creation, man has thirty-two tools at his disposal: the ten digits (ten, as much as the fingers) and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Both numbers and letters, which represent quantities and qualities, are bearers of archetypal meanings that allow us to go back to the origin of things. These synthetic considerations can only give a vague - very vague - idea of how complex are the reasoning that led to the precise terminology employed by the author of the *Sepher Yetzirah*. Besides, it is absolutely simplistic to say, as it is stated in many comments, that the "thirty-two paths" are in such number only because they are the sum of the ten Sephiroth and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

***Paths*.** The word is *nativoth*twbytn, feminine plural of *nativ*bytn, meaning path, a path travelled on foot. It is used in the same sense as the Christian expression "path of salvation". The majority of translations render *nativoth* as "sentieri" (*paths* in English, *sentiers* in French), but I preferred in my version to use the term "vie" - feminine too, and this has its importance - because it better conveys the idea of a direct path towards a well-defined goal, even though it is not in sight yet. The term *nativothtw* bytn however, depending on the vowels attributed with diacritical marks, conveys also other meanings: power, phase, form, effectiveness. This polysemism, present in all the texts of this genre, is intentional: Kabbalists combine the different meanings to derive doctrinal formulas (on the polysemism of traditional treatises, see my *Comment*ary at the end of the text). The term *nativoth* is rarely used in the Scriptures. More common is the term *derekh*krd, but the Zohar underlines an essential difference between the two words: *derekh* is a public road, used by everyone, *nativ* is instead a personal journey, a path that everyone chooses for himself. Nahmanides (1194-1270), in his commentary on the *Sepher Yetzirah*, writes that "the *nativoths* are such narrow streets that those who take them do not see where they end up. For this reason, the text does not use 'roads', since these are large and clear ... The Scriptures refer to this concept when they affirm: "Thus saith the Lord: Stop in the streets and look, inquire about the paths of the past, where the good way is and take it; thus you will find peace for your souls" (*Jeremiah*. vi, 16). In this verse, the souls are related to the vision, and the *nativoths* are associated with the enquiry ". The implication is that the formative process, although it concerns the Whole in its entirety, is always something that is expressed on an individual basis, as faith is individual: there are no "public roads" that lead to God.

***Amazing*.** The term used is *pelioth*twaylp, which derives from the root plhalpthat means "occult, separated from the world", and is akin to the Hebrew term for "miracle". The combination of the words *nativothpelioth*twaylptwbytn is the first of a series of "significant couples" that characterize the *Sepher Yetzirah*. Subsequently, we will meet the terms *Sephirothbelimah* and *autiothyesod*, and then others. These "significant pairs" must be analyzed carefully because they contain the deep meaning of the text. *Nativothpelioth* are both feminine plural, respectively of*nativ* bytn and*peliah*aylp. In Hebrew, "*Aleph*" is written [la (the sign [ is the final form of the *letter* Pehp), and "*Beth*" is written tyb. The choice of the lexically inconsistent term *peliah*aylp appears justified by the fact that, read in reverse, the word becomes [lya that is the name *Aleph* with a *Yod*y inserted after a,while*nativ*bytn (another uncommon term) in reverse becomes ntyb, that is the name *Beth* with a*Nun*nadded after*Tav*t. *Aleph* and *Tav* are also the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Borrowing an image used by the contemporary kabbalist Carlo Suarès, it is as if we saw the two letters *Aleph* and *Beth* projected towards us from a distant source, reflected on a transparent glass surface before our eyes. To become effective, this flow of energy expressed by the "Mysterious Paths" must have vitality, which is given by the addition of the letter n having the numerical value of 50, which expresses life, and must be imprinted in the existent, which is meant by the addition of the letter y, numerical value 10, which indicates existence (the insertion position of the added letters also has a precise meaning, but I do not think I should dwell on it). The fact that, to our observation that starts from the natural physical world, we observe them upside down, indicates that the infinite transcendent energy manifests itself in a specularly symmetrical sense in relation to its own essence.

It becomes clear at this point that the "thirty-two mysterious path of wisdom" are mirror images of the archetypal forces symbolized by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the ten radical figures, whose representations act as intermediaries to help us understand their formative and creative efficacy. They are forces that originate beyond spacetime, and that in passing through spacetime, they mirror and acquire vitality and existence. For this reason, Suarès translates the first part of the first paragraph of the *Sepher Yetzirah* as follows: "With thirty-two intermediaries yhvh projects *Shem*", that is "God expresses in the creation his Own Name". The Name (*Shem*) is represented in the *Sepher Yetzirah* as the Holy Name of 72 letters, composed of a series of shorter Names; in the text, I highlighted it by isolating it and writing it in italics. The first 42 letters compose a form of the "Name of 42 letters", one of the most venerated and powerful, which is said to have been used by Moses to hurl the plagues on Egypt. Adding the other 30 letters, we get the form used by the author of the text for the Name of 72. This is its complete structure in Hebrew, according to the *Sepher Yetzirah* version:

ydc la wu] lmw yyj yhlalarcyyhlatwabxhwhyhy

cwdqw wrmdu} kwcacnw} wnjw wjr

Divided into:

1. *Forty-two letters*

hy, *Yah*

twabxhwhy, yhvhTzabaoth *(* Master of Hosts)

larcyyhla, *AlhiIshral* (God of Israel)

\yyj yhla,*AlhimChiim* (living Elohim)

\lwu ]lmw, *VeMelekOlam* (King of the Universe)

ydc la, *El Shaddai* (God Almighty)

2. *Thirty letters*

}wnjw \wjr, *RahumVeAnnun* (Merciful and Compassionate)

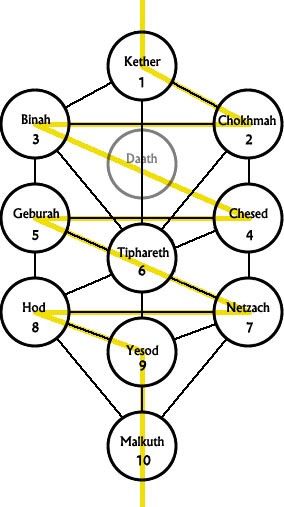
acnw \r, *RamVeNissa* (Supreme and Exalted)

du }kwc, *SokenAad* (Dweller in Eternity)

cwdqw \wrm, *MaromVeKadosh* (Most High and Holy).

Note that the Name is divided into 10 Simple Names (the double definitions, such as yhvh*Tzabaoth,* count for one), as many as the Sephiroth, which will be presented immediately after. Those reported are the Names as handed down by the *Sepher Yetzirah*, but in reality, there are many other forms, depending on the texts and traditions linked to the systems to obtain them. Furthermore, those given here are the Names as they appear in the so-called Gra-Ari version of the *Sepher Yetzirah*, which I mainly used for my translation. However, in the numerous existing manuscripts, there are different Names and in different numbers, from one only to the ten listed here, which are not always the same.

***Of Wisdom*.** The text reports the term *Chokmah* hmkj, the second Sephirah of the Tree of Life of Kabbalah. It is often translated as "saggezza" (I suppose following the English translations that generally use the term *wisdom*). But "sapienza" is closer to the sense of the original, especially bearing in mind that the third Sephirah*Binah*, hnyb, means "understanding" (this term too is generally translated, giving rise to misunderstanding, as "intelligence", from the Latin *intelligentia*: but in Latin *intelligere* means "to understand", not "to be intelligent"). Immediately below, in the middle of the Tree diagram, is the "Dark Sephirah" *Daath*tud, "knowledge", which is not a true autonomous Sephirah (It is not included in the list of Ten), but is the "absence" of a Sephirah, the invisible reflection of *Kether*rtk, "crown", the first of the Sephiroth. The path is therefore well defined: Knowledge → Understanding → Wisdom (we must first know in order to understand, and understanding is essential in order to know): in this way we reach the "crowning", or being close to the essence of God. In fact, Johannes Reuchlin in *De arte cabalistica* (1517) translates *Chokmah*hmkj as *Sapientia*. This terminology will be taken up later in the *Sepher Yetzirah*, in the appropriate places. However, the traditional names of the Sephiroth are not mentioned by the author of the book, who indicates them only by the numbers One to Ten. The names were fixed by Kabbalists only from the twelfth to the thirteenth century as they are reported in the *SepherBahir*, which paved the way for speculations on the *Zohar*.



**Insert attached image 1**

*The simplified diagram of the Tree of Life, including the "non-Sephirah" Daat.*

***2He engraved*.** The verb used is *chaqaq*qqj, which means digging a sign. Reuchlin translates it as *Incidit*, quoting this passage from the *SepherYetzirah*. The term will be found repeatedly in the text to indicate a specific action, performed on different levels throughout the elevation path. For the Kabbalahlurianica, the divine act of engraving, that is, of creating a space, is linked to the concept of tzimtzum\wxmx. This term, which means "contraction" or "restriction", indicates the God's need to "contract" his infinite essence to give rise to a "conceptual space" or "emptied space" (*chalal*llj) in which the idea of a finite world can exist. The *tzimtzum* contains in itself a paradox because it requires God to be at the same time transcendent and immanent. Around this paradox, long discussions developed among the Kabbalists, one of their schools concluded that *tzimtzum* had only a conceptual and not an ontological value. The idea was the basis of the sublime developments of the cosmological conception of Isaac Luria (1534-1572), who in the sixteenth century, three centuries after Abraham Abulafia (1240-1291), revive Kabbalah and probably started from the indications contained in the SepherYetzirah, where tzimtzum, although not explicit, is nevertheless implied. An important consequence of this concept is that being man conceived as *OlamKatan*}fq\lwu, that is a Microcosm, the process of *tzimtzum* can be replicated within each individual. On an inner level, creating an "emptied space" within oneself means freeing the mind of all spurious thoughts, so that it can accommodate what will be the object of meditation first and then contemplation (we will explain the meaning and the differences between these concepts later in the appropriate place). This object, at the highest levels of this process, is generally an image or symbol of a sacred nature, which will serve as a vessel to reach transcendence. In the following chapters, the *SepherYetzirah* meticulously explains how to do it.

3***Yah***. This Divine Name is found in *Psalm* lxviii, 4; in Greek, it is usually translated as*Kyrios*, in

Latin *Dominus*, the Lord. For many Kabbalists, the book is explaining that God created the universe by engraving His Name through the thirty-two Paths of Wisdom. Creation is, therefore, the very image of God. It should be emphasized, and later we will return to this concept, that the sentence, thanks to the very plastic structure of the Hebrew idiom, can also be read in the imperative, namely: ***"Engrave Yah ..."***, with all that follows. The ambiguity is intentional and will recur several times. Essentially, the book teaches how to reproduce *sub specie interioritatis* within us, the work of God. In this case, however, we cannot speak of "creation" in the proper sense, because only God can create from nothing. This is, instead, a "training", *yetzirah*hryxy, because the person acting is a created entity that operates based on concepts already created. The Kabbalist acts like the potter, who from a "formless and void" clay mass (*tohuvebohu*whbwwth, *Gen*. i, 2) makes a meaningful form. In Hebrew a "potter" is *called* yotzerrxwy, "the shaper", which has the same root of *Yetzirah.* However, let us not think that this action is only internal. According to many interpretations of Kabbalah, what is formed can also be an external entity, such as a *Golem*, or as Rabbi Rava wrote (*Sanhedrin* 65b), we can even "create a world". This last concept is of great vastness and interest: we will treat it separately in the *Commentary* at the end of the book.

4***yhvhTzabaoth***twabx. This name means "Lord of Hosts", as in *Psalm* xxiv, 10. *Tzabah*abx in Hebrew is "army" or "host". According to Nahmanide (Moshe ben NahmanGirondi, 1194-1269), in his text on *SepherYetzirah* discovered and published by Gershom Scholem (*KiryatSefer*, vol. 6, 1930), the phrase “yhvh*Tzabaoth*" shows how the splendour of the Sephiroth illuminates man. It is interesting to note how Dante Alighieri begins the Canto viii of *Paradise* with the following verses in Latin mixed with Hebrew: *"Osanna, Sanctus Deus Sabaòth, / superillustrans claritate tua /felices ignes horum malacòth"*, or "Hosanna, oh holy God of armies, / who illuminates from high with your light / the blessed splendors of these kingdoms ”. *Felices ignes*, blessed splendours, is a frequent attribute of the Sephiroth among the Christian Kabbalists (Reuchlin and Rittangel also used it, long after Dante), and *malacòth* is evidently Dante's transcription of the name of the first Sephira, Malkuth, Royalty, which Dante probably also read in the Prologue to the *Vulgate* of St. Jerome: *"Malacòth, idest regnorum"*. In Kabbalah, Malkuth refers to our world, that is, the "kingdom of man", which is the starting point of the Kabbalist's ascent to transcendence, following the light of the Sephiroth through the Paths. The influence that Kabbalistic doctrines had on Dante has not been studied enough, and it is not known how he learned them, but it emerges in different places of the *Comedy* and in other works. Umberto Eco noticed it, suggesting an influence of Abraham Abulafia, who was almost contemporary with Dante, on *De vulgari eloquentia*. However, we must keep in mind the differences between the mysticism of Neoplatonic origin, which influenced Dante as much as the Jewish mystics of the Middle Ages, and the esotericism of Kabbalah, which in many ways are antithetical. We must not confuse mystic and esoteric. Even Spinoza, who was Jewish, warned against such an error. In the first case, there is the constant growth and cultivation of the spiritual life, which becomes a condition of existence; in the second, there are occasional pseudo-mystical experiences induced by particular techniques, such as unusual movements, the use of visual and auditory stimulations that provoke para-hypnotic states, and in some situations also the use of drugs and sexual paroxysm. Therefore, for Kabbalists, who know this risk, their doctrine is not a search for transient phenomena, but the centre of existence, and identify themselves with it: the meditative state is no longer an exceptional moment or an artificially provoked state, but a permanent status, from which spiritual evolution originates. It is a difficult path to follow that requires total dedication: this is why the book designates it with the term *nativ*, a narrow and tiring path that the individual must follow alone, paying attention to where they turn their steps to avoid losing their way.

5***God of Israel***. Here the word for "God" is *Alhi*yhla, which in the Hebrew without diacritical signs can mean "God" or "Gods" or "My God". This Divine Name is the only point in the text where Israel is named. This is underlined by the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, which says that "the importance of the *SepherYetzirah* for mysticism lies in the fact that its reflection on God and man has lost all sectarian value. Thus Kabbalists were taught to reflect on "God", and not only on the "Lord of Israel" ».

6***Living Elohim***. The term *Alhim*\yhla, often transliterated in Latin characters like Elohim, or Aleim seems to be the plural masculine of the feminine form *Eloah*hla, of the masculine divine name *El*, la. It is generally translated as "God", and means "strong, powerful, supreme". *Chiim* \yyj is the plural of *Chi*yyj, "living". *Chiih*h yyj is a living animal, and so it is *Chiiva*, aw yyj; the root chiyyj also means "life". The correct adjective for "living" would be *Chiia*ayyi: ElohimChiim, therefore, apart from the Jewish and Christian preconceptions, it means "the living Gods", or "the Gods of lives, or of the living". Indeed, Rittangel translates it as *"Diiviventes"*, with the two words in the plural. Pistorio (or rather, "Magister Isaac") prudently omits both words to avoid accusations of polytheism. Postel uses the orthodox form *"Deus Vivus"*. The multiple *Elohim*, according to non-Jewish esotericists, are the Seven Forces, proceeding from the Divine One, which governs the *terra viventium* the world of life as it manifests itself. Magical traditions identify them with the archetypes linked to the seven planets that regulate the aspects of Becoming: a force that generates and one that extinguishes, one that governs growth and another that governs decline, one that determines stability and one which induces change, and finally a seventh one that governs recurrent mutations. Thus, mythologically, Venus is the depiction of the generating force, while Mars represents the destructive force; the Sun symbolizes energy and growth, Saturn heaviness and decline; Jupiter represents the orderly stability and harmony, Mercury mobility and change; the Moon periodic changes. However, this concept also filtered into unorthodox Jewish esotericism. The author of the  *Zohar*, in the first part of the *Sitrey Torah*, translates the first sentence of *Genesi*, *BereshitbarahElohim*, as "(He) began to create the Elohim [NT: plural]", or the magical and natural forces that govern the Manifested. Heinrich W. Guggenheimer says that this manifestly heterodox interpretation is already found in Talmudic texts dating back many centuries before the *Zohar* (*Prolegomenon to the study of the biblical text*).

7 ***Kings of the Universe.*** In some versions, it is rendered as "King of the Times" or "King of Eternity".

8***God Almighty*.** This is how the Hebrew *El Shaddai* is generally translated. From *Exodus* vi, 3, we learn that God told Moses: "And I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, by the name of *ElShaddai*."

9 ***Merciful and Compassionate.*** They are the second and third of the attributes of yhvh mentioned in *Exodus*, xxxiv, 6; the first is *Yah*, already used.

10***Supreme and Exalted, Dwelling in Eternity, Acclaimed and Holy.*** These names are taken from *Isaiah*, lvii, 15, and are written in the same order as the verse.

11***Registers*.** The term used is *Sepharim*\yrps, plural masculine of *Sephar*rps, which is generally translated as "text" or "letter", but also as "number": it depends on the diacritical marks, which are omitted. Here the meaning is evidently "a form of communication or expression".

12***Number, Letter and Word*.** The three Hebrew terms, without diacritical marks, are sprrps, sprrps andspurrwps. Some late editions, to avoid confusion, write sprrps, spurrwps, sipr, with diacritical marks that make them read as *Separ*, *Sipur*, *Seipar*. The general meaning of the text, as we shall see, indicates that the translation of the terms is Number Letter and Word. In fact, the Jewish source of Pistorio uses the terms *"Numeratis, scriptis, pronunciatis".* Postel renders *"Numerans, numerus, numeratus"*, an expression which however leads to ambiguous results; likewise, Rittangel, who gives *"Number, numbering, numbered"*. Kabbalists, in any case, considered them as three forms of expression as we can derive from the fact that the numerical value of the common trilateral root of the three words, sprrps, is 340, the same of *shem* \c,that is "name". In other words, creation is performed through the Name of God, and indeed, according to certain interpretations, it *is* the Name of God. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the six days of *Genesis*, Elohim is mentioned 32 times. Ten times, with the phrase "And Elohim said", corresponding therefore to the ten Sephiroth; three times with the phrase "And Elohim made", corresponding to the three Mother Letters; seven times with the phrase "And Elohim saw", corresponding to the seven double letters and to the same number of straight Paths on the Tree of the life; and twelve times with different expressions, corresponding to the 12 elementary letters and the 12 Inclined Paths.

**I,2.**

**Ten Sephiroth of non-being1and twenty-two basic letters2: three Mothers3, seven Double4, twelve Elementary5.**

1***Sephirot of non-being*.** The words are*Sephirothbelimah*hmylbtwryps. The term *Sephiroth*, feminine plural of Sephirah*,* seems to derive from the Hebrew verbal root sprrps, already seen, which in this case must be taken in the sense of "counting". It, therefore, means "numbering" (Reuchlin actually translates it as *"numerationes"*). In common language, however, the term *mispar*, rpsmis used for "number", and the fact that the author introduced a new word apparently indicates that he does not intend to deal with ordinary numbers, the ones used in arithmetic, but with numbers connected to the infinite, as archetypes or hierarchical designations, and categories of the creation. There is no association with the Greek term *sphaira*, that is "sphere", but the assonance already induced in ancient times to represent the Sephiroth as "spheres of creation".

The most literal translation would perhaps be "numerations of nothing" (but also "from nothing", "in nothing": the modal particle is omitted), since for kabbalists the starting point of the Whole is, with a paradox only apparent, Nothingness. The best expression of this pseudo-paradox is found in the mathematical concept, familiar to all students, whereby 0/0 = ∞, or "Zero on Zero is equal to Infinite", since dividing zero by zero results in not one but infinite possible results. In fact, dividing zero by zero means - based on the definition of the division operation - finding that number which, multiplied by zero, gives zero as a result. However, any of the infinite numbers, when multiplied by zero gives zero. Consequently, 0/0 is an expression that has infinite possible results. In other words, Nothing on Nothing generates the Whole.

This too is not a paradox: in Nothing on Nothing is enclosed the Whole because only in Nothingness deprived of everything there is the potential to give rise to the Infinite. Whatever entity was present in the initial Nothingness would impose limitations on it, and its final manifestation could no longer be the Infinite, but the Infinite minus what was present in the Nothingness. The reasoning develops in three successive phases:

*Ein*. The concept of "nothing on nothing" was expressed by kabbalists with the term *Ein*, } ya, which is a particle similar to the privative alpha in Greek and it indicates "Absence".

*If Kabbalah were a book, it would be like a page missing before the beginning.*

*Ein-sof.* To manifest itself, the Absence needs support. As it is Absence, this support cannot be a positive concept, but necessarily the absence of something. Therefore, the Absence will manifest itself in the infinite void, that is in limitless Nothingness. This concept is expressed with the terms *Ein-sof*[ws} ya, "Absence of limit".

*In the book of Kabbalah, it is like an entirely white front page.*

*Ein-sofAur.* The next step is called "Limitless Light", *Ein-sofAur*rwa[ws} ya: this is the non-place of all possible manifestations.

*In the book, it is another white page, on which, however, as on a school notebook, we can imagine the empty lines intended to house the text that will be imprinted on it.*

The three concepts *Ein*} ya, *Ein-sof*[ws} ya and *Ein-sofAur*rwa[ws} ya are the "three Veils of the Negative", which isolate the unknowability of God from the infinity of its manifestations.

The complicated premise to the explanation of the origin of the world in the kabbalistic system derives from the need to answer two of the fundamental questions for each theological system. If the divine principle is good in itself, how could evil penetrate the world? If it is unlimited in time and space, what can its relations be with an earthly world that is obviously endowed with evident spatial and temporal boundaries? To these two questions, another one of extreme individual importance is added: if the divine principle is infinite and unknowable, how can the single man recognize him and rejoin him?

In general, philosophical-religious systems give these questions a series of bizarre and complicated answers, and the system defined by kabbalists is no less so. Their first statement is that God is both the absence and the presence of all things. Every idea contains its contradiction and God, who is - as infinite - the sum of all ideas, is also the sum of all contradictions. God is both good and bad, limited and unlimited, unknowable and knowable. Its connection to the world is indirect. It is as if God were a mirror from which a dazzling light shines. This light is reflected in a second mirror, which directs it to a third, and then a fourth and so on. With each subsequent reflection, the light fades a little until it reaches, confused and weakened, the semi-opaque and corroded surface of our material world.

The ten Sephiroth are defined as the "ten primary emanations from the divine source", or the primal forces that in succession guide all the manifestations on the different planes of being. However, it is a concept that emerged in Kabbalah after the drafting of the *SepherYetzirah*, in which it is clearly stated that none of the Sephiroth, not even the first, is emanated directly from God (the concept of the Sephiroth as "emanations" probably dates back to Isaac the Blind, c. 1160-1236). The famous Hebrew Johannes Buxtorf, known as "the master of the Rabbis" (1564-1629), translates Sephiroth as *"Predicationes logicae"*. In a certain way, the term appears connected to the Latin *spiritus* (through the remote indo-aryan root sprt with the sense of "spirit" but also of "beginning"), which Quintilian also uses to indicate "sound". It would, therefore, be a superior refinement of *ruach*, jwr, "breath" or "spirit".

It is difficult to interpret the specific meaning of the term *belimah*hmylb, which in the text is always associated with Sephiroth to form another of the "significant pairs", and which we have rendered as "not being". Rittangel always writes the expression *"praeterillud ineffabile"*. Pistorio similarly renders *"ineffable praeter"*. Postel avoids the difficulty and limits himself to re-proposing the Hebrew term *Belimah*. In the *Hebrew, Latin and English Dictionary* (London 1815) by Joseph Samuel C.F. Frey, *belimah*hmylbis translated as "nothing", without further suggestions. Reuchlin proposes "without anything else". In the Scriptures it is found only once, in *Job*, xxvi, 7: "He stretches the north above the void, holds the earth suspended on nothingness (*belimah*)". The *Jewish Encyclopedia* renders it with "without reality". In fact, *beli*ylh is "without", and *mah*hm is "that, anything": hence my choice to translate it as "Sephiroth of non-being" (but one could also say "devoid of determination").

However, the term can also be traced back to the verbal root blm \lb, which has the sense of "harnessing", "forcing", "holding back", and "closing". It is found later in this same chapter (paragraph 8), where it says "hold (*balom*\wlb) your mouth and do not speak", also translating "close your mouth, so you do not talk". The Sephiroth can therefore also be defined as "closed", "inexpressible". The learned Phillip Bloch, who was the rabbi of Poznan, in his *Geschichte und EntwickelungderKabbala* (Trier 1894), translates the expression *SephirothBelimah* as "numbers closed in themselves" (*"Zahlen, insichgeschlossen"*), explaining: "with nothing and therefore abstract, purely and uniquely themselves ". A similar concept was expressed in the commentary of Saadia Gaon, dating back to the tenth century. Leo Baeck (*AusDreiJahrtausenden*, Tübingen, 1958) draws a parallel with the definition of the Enneads according to Proclus "έέ ά' ά ”(teleologically autonomous, non-composite, entirely in themselves and for themselves). In Kabbalistic writings the Sephiroth are often referred to also as "ineffable", that is, things that should not be talked about ("keep your mouth shut"), and which in any case cannot be described in common language. These hypotheses are not mutually exclusive: on the contrary, each term is full of multiple meanings that are layered one on top of the other and combine to give a complex idea of the indicated entity.

Peter Hayman, in his complicated and Teutonically meticulous critical edition of the *Sepher Yetzirah* (MohrSiebeck, Tübingen 2004), translates the expression *Sephirothbelimah* as "the Sephiroth are the base", but his arguments, derived from *Job*, xxvi, 7 (If God holds the Earth suspended over nothingness, the latter being the basis of it) seem forced and in contrast with what is asserted by practically all the commentators, both ancient and modern.

The use of the expression *Sephirothbelimah*, or "Sephiroth of not being", Christopher Benton points out, also suggests that the ultimate essence of creation is nothing but appearance. "Vanity of vanities, everything is vanity", *Ecclesiastes* reads( i, 2). The Hebrew word *hevell*l\h, which generally translates as "vanity", has the literal meaning of "steam", meaning intangible fog. If we attribute to the term *belimah*, associated continuously with Sephiroth, the meaning of "closed", "contract", "restricted", we are led back to the already mentioned concept of God's need to "restrict" his own infinite nature to make place for the finished creation, or the tzimtzumof the Lurianic Kabbalah. Taken together, the two concepts suggest that the world came into being through a contraction of divine power through the Sephiroth, but at the same time, they state that this contraction is purely illusory. It is an idea that brings us back to myths such as the Platonic cave, and which - translated into concepts of modern cosmology - recall the ideas of those scientists who imagine the cosmos as an immense hologram (see the *Commentary* at the end of the text).

The *SepherYetzirah* does not assign names to the Sephiroth but simply indicates them with the numbers from one to ten. The definitive names were taken from biblical verses and were formalized by Moses Cordovero, who in the sixteenth century strove to integrate into a single doctrine all the different schools of Kabbalah that had developed and had flourished in 1200-1300. Some of the verses considered are *Exodus*, xxxi, 4: "And I filled him with the Spirit of God, with Wisdom (*Chokmah*hmkj), Understanding (*Binah*hnyb) and Knowledge (*Daath*tud)"; and *1 Chronicles*, xxix, 11: "Yours,yhvh, are Greatness (*Gedulah*hldg), and Force (*Gevurah*hrwbg), and Beauty (*Tiphereth*trapt), and Splendor (*Hod*dwh) and Victory (*Netzach*jxn)", quoted verse from Isaac the Blind.

The most popular designations are:

1. ***Kèther***, rtk, "Crown"

2. ***Chokmàh***, hmkj, "Wisdom"

3. ***Binàh***, hnyb, "Understanding"

4. ***Chèsed***, dsj, "Mercy"

5. ***Gevuràh***, hrwbg, "Strenght"

6. ***Tiphèreth***, trapt, "Beauty"

7. ***Nètzach***, jxn, "Victory"

8. ***Hod***, dwh, "Splendor"

9. ***Yesòd***, dwsy, "Foundation"

10. ***Malkùth***, twklm, "Kingdom".

The names have undergone several variations over time. *Chesed*, for example, in some texts is called *Gedulah*hldg (“Greatness”), and *Gevurah* is also called *Din*}yd (“Judgement). Even the Hebrew terms are translated in different ways: *Chokmah* is sometimes rendered with "Wisdom", *Binah* with "Intelligence", *Chesed* with "Love", *Netzach* with "Eternity", *Hod* with "Gloria" or "Majesty", *Gevurah* with " Rigour "or" Discipline ", *Malkuth* with" Sovereignty ", and there are many other versions.