

Sepher Yetzirah: The Book of Formation

Translated by Frater Sapere Aude¹

Revised by Nathan B Jorge²

(Version 1.0)

Chapter One:

1. By thirty-two mysterious Paths of Wisdom did Yah, Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh Tzabaoth, God (Eloheh) of Israel, the Living Elohim, King unto the ages, the merciful and gracious AL, the Exalted One, the Dweller in eternity, most high and holy, etch his name in the three aspects of language: cipher, symbol, and story.

2. Ten are the spheres (Sephiroth) of no-thing (B'li-mah). Twenty-two are the signs, the Foundation (Yesod) of all things. There are three Mother, seven Double, and twelve Single letters.

3. The spheres of no-thing are ten, as are the digits, and as there are in humanity five fingers over against five, so between them is established a covenant of strength, by the mouth's speech and by circumcision.

4. Ten is the number of the spheres of no-thing, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand Wisdom and become wise in Understanding. Search and contemplate concerning them, make each thing to stand upon its own essence, and replace the creator upon his throne.

5. The ten spheres of no-thing have ten vast regions bound unto them, boundless in origin and having no end: an abyss of good and of evil, an abyss of height and of depth, an abyss to the east and to the west, an abyss to the north and to the south. Adonai Yechidah AL, the Faithful King rules all these from his Holy Throne, for ever and ever.

6. The ten spheres of no-thing have the appearance of the lightning flash. Their source is unseen, and their ending is invisible. The Word is in them as they rush forth and return. They speak as from the whirlwind, and, returning, fall prostrate in adoration before the Throne.³

¹ From the version of the Hebrew text published in Amsterdam by Joannes Stephanus Rittangelius in 1642.

² The translations of Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan and James Eshelman were consulted for this revision. James Eshelman, *Sepher Yetzirah: The Book of Formation* (Los Angeles, CA: College of Thelema, 1996). Aryeh Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1997).

³ Compare with *Ezekiel* 1: 14.

7. The ten spheres of no-thing, whose ending is as their origin, are like a flame arising from a burning coal. For YHVH is superlative in his oneness. There is none equal to him. What number can you place before one?

8. Ten are the spheres of no-thing. Guard the mouth and the heart when contemplating them, and if the mind escapes bring it back under control, even as it is written: “the living creatures ran and returned.”⁴ Thus, is the covenant sealed.

9. Ten are the spheres of no-thing. First is the Spirit (Ruach) of the living Elohim, blessed and blessed is the living AL unto the ages. The Voice, the Spirit, and the Word are the Holy Spirit (Ruach Hakodesh).

10. Second, from Spirit he produced Air, and from it formed twenty-two signs. Three are Mothers, seven are Double, and twelve are Single, and together they are from the Spirit.

11. Third, from the Air he formed the Waters, etching and hewing the twenty-two signs from the “formless and void” (Tohu Bohu)⁵ and the mire and clay. He etched them into the likeness of a garden, hewed recesses in them like a wall, and covered them as if for a roof. He poured out snow over them and it became dirt, as it is written: “to the snow He says, ‘fall on the earth.’”⁶

12. Fourth, from the Water he formed Fire and made for himself a Throne of Glory with Ophanim, Seraphim, the Holy Living Creatures, and ministering angels. With these three he completed his dwelling, as it is written: “who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flaming fire.”⁷

13. He selected three signs from among the Simples, sealing and forming them into the Great Name Yod-Heh-Vav, in the mystery of the three Mothers Aleph, Mem, and Shin, and with it sealed the six directions of the universe.⁸

⁴ *Ezekiel* 1: 14.

⁵ *Genesis* 1: 1.

⁶ *Job* 37: 6. The passage is read as if the snow, made of water, is being transmuted into earth, in accord with the doctrine developed in 3: 4, where the terrestrial earth is conceived as having been formed from the primordial waters of creation.

⁷ *Psalms* 104: 4.

⁸ These are the first three letters of the Tetragrammaton, whose elemental attributions reveal their correspondences to the three Mother letters, as follows:

Yod = Fire = Shin,

Heh = Water = Mem,

Fifth—He looked above and sealed the height with Yod-Heh-Vav (יהו).

Sixth—He looked below and sealed the depth with Yod-Vav-Heh (יוה).

Seventh—He looked ahead and sealed the east with Heh-Yod-Vav (היו).

Eighth—He looked back and sealed the west with Heh-Vav-Yod (הוי).

Ninth—He looked right and sealed the south with Vav-Yod-Heh (ויה).

Tenth—He looked left and sealed the north with Vav-Heh-Yod (והי).

14. From the ten spheres of no-thing proceed the Spirit of the Living Elohim, from Spirit Air, from Air Water, from Water Fire, and from these height, depth, east, west, south, and north.

Chapter Two:

1. The twenty-two signs are the Foundation (Yesod) of all things: three Mothers, seven Doubles, and twelve Singles. The three Mothers are Aleph, Mem, and Shin, which are Air, Water, and Fire. They are like the scales of a balance, with a pan measuring profit, a pan measuring debt, and the tongue of the balance judging between them. Mem hums, Shin hisses, and Aleph is the silent breath that mediates between them.

2. He etched, hewed, permutated, weighed, and transmuted with these twenty-two signs every created thing, and the form of everything which shall hereafter be.

3. These twenty-two signs are etched by the voice, hewed into the air, and audibly modified in five places: in the throat, in the mouth, by the tongue, through the teeth, and by the lips.⁹

4. These twenty-two signs, which are the Foundation (Yesod) of all things, He arranged in a circle with two-hundred-thirty-one gates, and the circle may be turned forward or backwards, whether for good or for evil. For there is nothing good greater than delight (Oneg, ענג), and nothing evil lower than the plague (Nega, נגע).

5. For He permutated, weighed and transmuted them, each with the others: Aleph with all of them, and all of them with Aleph, and Beth with all of them, and all of them with Beth, and

Vav = Air = Aleph.

⁹ Respectively, these are the gutturals, palatals, linguals, dentals, and labials.

so on. By thus permutating all the signs in pairs the two-hundred-thirty-one gates of knowledge are produced. For all that is formed and spoken comes from this One Name.

6. He formed the touchable from the formless (Tohu), making the nonexistent have existence. He hewed vast columns from the intangible air, and by the One Name he makes all that is formed and spoken, for the twenty-two letters are one body.

Chapter Three:

1. The foundation of all the other signs are the three Mothers Aleph, Mem, and Shin. They resemble the scales of a balance, with a pan of profit, a pan of debt, and the tongue of discernment judging between them.

2. The three Mothers Aleph, Mem, and Shin, are a great and recondite mystery, veiled and sealed with six rings. From them proceed air, water, and fire, and from them spring three Fathers, and from these proceed everything that is in the universe.¹⁰

3. With the three Mothers Aleph, Mem, and Shin, He etched, hewed, permutated, weighed, and transmuted them, sealing them as the three Mothers in the universe, in the cycle of the year, and in the form of humanity, both male and female.

4. Three Mothers: Aleph, Mem, and Shin. In the universe the heavens are formed from fire, the earth is formed from water, while the aerial breath of the Spirit mediates between them.

5. Three Mothers: Aleph, Mem, and Shin. In the cycle of the year the hot season comes from fire, the cold season derives from water, while the temperate season formed from breath mediates between them.

6. Three Mothers: Aleph, Mem, and Shin. In the form of the human being the head is formed from fire, the belly from water, and the chest from breath, mediating between them.

7. He made Aleph ruler over air and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as the air in the universe, the temperate climate of the year, and as the breath of the chest in the human form. The male with אַמֶּשׁ, and the female with אֶשֶׁמ.

¹⁰ The "six rings" are the three Mother letters together with the three Father letters Yod, Heh, and Vav. See 1: 13. Alternatively, this is a reference to the six possible permutations of the three Mothers divide between the male and the female in 3: 7-9.

8. He made Mem ruler over water and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as the matrix of the earth in the universe, the cold in the year, and the belly of the human form. The male with מאש, and the female with משא.

9. He made Shin ruler over fire and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as the heavens of the universe, the hot in the year, and the head of the human form. The male with שאם, and the female with אשא.

Chapter Four:

1. The seven Double signs Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tav may each be pronounced with two sounds, soft or hard, and strong or weak.

2. The seven Double signs Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tav have their foundation in life, peace, wisdom, wealth, graciousness, fertility, and leadership.

3. The seven Double signs Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tav, may be transmuted through speech from life into death, peace into war, wisdom into folly, wealth into poverty, graciousness into ugliness, fertility into sterility, and leadership into slavery.

4. The seven Double signs Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tav correspond to the directions above, below, east, west, north, south, and the Palace of Holiness in the center sustaining all things.

5. The seven Double signs Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tav are seven and not six, seven and not eight. Search and contemplate concerning them, make each thing to stand upon its own essence, and replace the creator upon his throne.

6. With the seven Double signs Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tav He etched, hewed, permutated, weighed, and transmuted them, sealing them as the seven planets in the universe, the seven days in the year, and the seven gates of the human form, both male and female.

7. The seven planets in the universe are Mercury, the Moon, Venus, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, and Saturn. The seven days in the year are the seven days of the week. The seven gates of the human form, both male and female, are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth.

8. He made Beth ruler over life and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Mercury in the universe, Wednesday in the year, and as the mouth of the human form, both male and female.

9. He made Gimel ruler over peace and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as the Moon in the universe, Monday in the year, and the left eye of the human form, both male and female.

10. He made Daleth ruler over wisdom and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Venus in the universe, Friday in the year, and the left nostril of the human form, both male and female.

11. He made Kaph ruler over wealth and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Jupiter in the universe, Thursday in the year, and the left ear of the human form, both male and female.

12. He made Peh ruler over graciousness and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Mars in the universe, Tuesday in the year, and the right nostril of the human form, both male and female.

13. He made Resh ruler over fertility and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as the Sun in the universe, Sunday in the year, and the right eye of the human form, both male and female.

14. He made Tav ruler over leadership and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Saturn in the universe, Saturday the sabbath in the year, and the right ear of the the human form, both male and female.

15. With the seven Double signs Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, and Tav He etched seven worlds,¹¹ seven heavens, seven continents, seven oceans, seven rivers,¹² seven deserts,¹³

¹¹ The “seven worlds” can be interpreted as the seven Sephiroth from Binah to Yesod (3-9) which correspond to the seven planets.

¹² These are the seven rivers in the Holy Land, namely the Jordan, Yarmoch, Kirmyon, Poga, Pishon, Gichon, and Chidekel rivers. (Kaplan, pg. 188.)

¹³ These are the deserts of Eitan, Shur, Sin, Sinai, Paran, Tzin, and Kadmut, through which the Israelites passed during the exodus. (Ibid.)

seven days of the week, seven weeks,¹⁴ seven years,¹⁵ seven sabbaticals,¹⁶ seven jubilees,¹⁷ and the Palace of Holiness. Therefore, He made the number seven preferred beneath all the heavens.

16. Two stones forms two houses, three forms six, four forms twenty-four, five forms one-hundred-twenty, six forms seven-hundred-twenty, seven forms five-thousand-forty.¹⁸ Beyond this the numbers increase so that the mouth can hardly utter them, nor the ear hear the number of them.¹⁹

Chapter Five:

1. The twelve Single signs Heh, Vav, Zayin, Cheth, Teth, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samekh, Ayin, Tzaddi, and Qoph are the foundation of sight, hearing, smell, speech, taste, sex, labor, movement, wrath, mirth, imagination, and sleep.

2. The twelve Single signs Heh, Vav, Zayin, Cheth, Teth, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samekh, Ayin, Tzaddi, and Qoph correspond to the boundaries between north and east, south and east, east and above, east and below, north and above, north and below, north and west, south and west, west and above, west and below, south and above, and south and below. These diverge to infinity eternally, to the ends of the universe.

3. With the twelve Single signs Heh, Vav, Zayin, Cheth, Teth, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samekh, Ayin, Tzaddi, and Qoph He etched, hewed, permutated, weighed, and transmuted them, sealing them as the zodiacal constellations in the universe, the twelve months in the year, and the organs of the human form, both male and female.

4. The twelve zodiacal constellations in the universe are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces.

¹⁴ The "seven weeks" are the weeks between Passover and the festival of Shavuot. See *Leviticus* 23: 15. (Ibid.)

¹⁵ *Leviticus* 25: 3-4 commands that after six years of cultivation, a field is to remain fallow for the seventh year. This is called the Sabbatical cycle. (Kaplan, pg. 189.)

¹⁶ *Leviticus* 25: 8, 10, specifies that after seven Sabbatical cycles there shall be a Jubilee year during which a landholder's slaves are to be freed. (Ibid.)

¹⁷ A cycle of seven Sabbatical cycles, or 343 years. (Ibid.)

¹⁸ These are the possible permutations of the given number of "stones" or letters.

¹⁹ For example, the total number of possible permutations of all twenty-two letters is approximately ten to the twenty-first power combinations, or 1,124,000,727,777,607,680,000. (Kaplan, pg. 193)

5. The twelve months in the year are Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tamuz, Av, Elul, Tishri, Cheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, and Adar.

6. The twelve organs of the human form, both male and female, are the two hands, two feet, two kidneys, gall bladder, intestines, liver, stomach, esophagus, and the spleen.

7. He made Heh ruler over sight and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Aquarius in the universe, Shevat in the year, and as the esophagus of the human form, both male and female.

8. He made Vav ruler over hearing and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Taurus in the universe, Iyar in the year, and as the left hand of the human form, both male and female.

9. He made Zayin ruler over smell and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Gemini in the universe, Sivan in the year, and as the right foot of the human form, both male and female.

10. He made Cheth ruler over speech and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Cancer in the universe, Tamuz in the year, and as the left foot of the human form, both male and female.

11. He made Teth ruler over taste and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Leo in the universe, Av in the year, and as the right kidney of the human form, both male and female.

12. He made Yod ruler over sex and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Virgo in the universe, Elul in the year, and as the left kidney of the human form, both male and female.

13. He made Lamed ruler over labor and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Libra in the universe, Tishri in the year, and as the gall bladder of the human form, both male and female.

14. He made Nun ruler over movement and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Scorpio in the universe, Cheshvan in the year, and as the intestines of the human form, both male and female.

15. He made Samekh ruler over wrath and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Sagittarius in the universe, Kislev in the year, and as the liver of the human form, both male and female.

16. He made Ayin ruler over mirth and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Capricorn in the universe, Tevet in the year, and as the stomach of the human form, both male and female.

17. He mad Tzaddi ruler over imagination and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Aries in the universe, Nisan in the year, and as the right hand of the human form, both male and female.

18. He made Qoph ruler over sleep and crowned it, and permutating it with the other signs He sealed it as Pisces in the universe, Adar in the year, and as the spleen of the human form, both male and female.

19. He made the zodiac in the likeness of a channel. He placed the months like a wall. He arrayed the organs as if for battle.

Chapter Six:

1. From three Mothers proceeded three Fathers. The Mothers are air, water, and fire, and the three Fathers are descended from these. From the Fathers are descended the seven and their hosts, and the twelve boundaries of space. Faithful witnesses are in the universe, the year, and the human form, through the reign of the Three, the Seven, and the Twelve, which are also set over the Heavenly Dragon (Theli, תלי),²⁰ the circle (Galgal, גלגל),²¹ and the heart (Lev, לב).²²

2. The three Mother signs Aleph, Mem, and Shin are air, water, and fire. Fire is above, and water below, while air discriminates, mediating between them, as a sign of which fire supports

²⁰ The Theli refers to the constellation Draco, which surrounds the celestial north pole. MacGregor Mathers authored a highly advanced paper interpreting the concept of the Theli entitled "The Law of the Convolved Revolution of the Forces Symbolised by the Four Aces Round the Northern Pole" which was issued to members of the Inner Order of the Golden Dawn.

Israel Regardie (ed.), *The Golden Dawn* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1989), pg. 603-621.

²¹ The circle or "Galgal" is also referred to in 2: 4, above, where it designates the circular wall of the 231 gates. According to Aryeh Kaplan, the Talmud uses the word "Galgal" to refer to the zodiac, as well as to the cycles of history. (Kaplan, pg. 239)

²² Lev = לב = 32, the number of paths of wisdom described in the *Sepher Yetzirah*.

water.²³ Mem hums, Shin hisses, while Aleph is the breath of the spirit that discriminates between them.

3. The Heavenly Dragon is placed over the universe like a king upon their throne. The revolution of the year is as the reign of a king over his dominion. The heart of the human form like a king in warfare.

4. "God has made the one as well as the other."²⁴ Good as well as evil, and evil as well as good, and good from good, and evil from evil. Good tests evil, and evil tests good. Good is for the good, and evil is for the evil.

5. Among the Three each one stands apart. One is the advocate, and one is the prosecutor, while one is the judge between them. Of the Seven three are opposite three, while one discriminates between them. The Twelve are arrayed for battle. Three are friends, three are enemies, three spare life, and three slay. The three friends are of the heart and ears, the three enemies are of the liver, gallbladder, and the tongue, the three who spare life are of the nostrils and the spleen, and the three who slay are of the two excreting openings and the mouth. While AL the faithful king reigns over everything from His Holy House unto the eternal ages. One above Three, Three above Seven, Seven above Twelve, with all in One and in each other.

6. With these twenty-two signs Eheieh, Yah, YHVH Elohim, AL, Elohim Givor, YHVH Eloah Va-Daath, YHVH Tzabaoth, Elohim Tzabaoth, Shaddai AL Chai, Adonai Ha-Aretz etched, making three books,²⁵ with which He made His universe, forming with them everything that was ever formed, and everything that ever can be formed.

7. When our father Abraham, may his memory be for a blessing, looked, saw, understood, contemplated, etched, and hewed, he succeeded in creating, as it is written: "and the people they had made in Haran."²⁶ The master of all was revealed to him, may his name be blessed unto the ages, and He placed him in His bosom, kissing him on his head, and called him "Abraham my

²³ According to 3: 4, the heavens are condensed from fire and the earth from the primordial waters of creation, while the air of the atmosphere safely separates the two otherwise antagonistic domains. Because of this aerial mediation "fire supports water." The heavens of fire surround and bear up the earth without vaporizing it.

²⁴ *Ecclesiastes* 7: 14.

²⁵ See 1: 1. The three "books" are the three components of language, namely cipher, symbol, and story.

²⁶ *Genesis* 12: 5. The text's description of Abraham's acquisition of servants in Haran is read as if he had created life by magic.

beloved,”²⁷ making a covenant with him and with his seed forever, as it is written, “and he believed Adonai, and Adonai reckoned it unto him for righteousness.”²⁸ He made a covenant with him between the ten fingers of the hand—this is the covenant of the tongue—and between the ten toes of the feet—this is the covenant of circumcision, and he bound the twenty-two signs of the Law (Torah) to his tongue, revealing unto him His mysteries. He drew them in water, kindled them in fire, vibrated them in the air, burning them with the Seven and projecting with the Twelve constellations.

²⁷ *Isaiah* 41: 8.

²⁸ *Genesis* 15: 6.