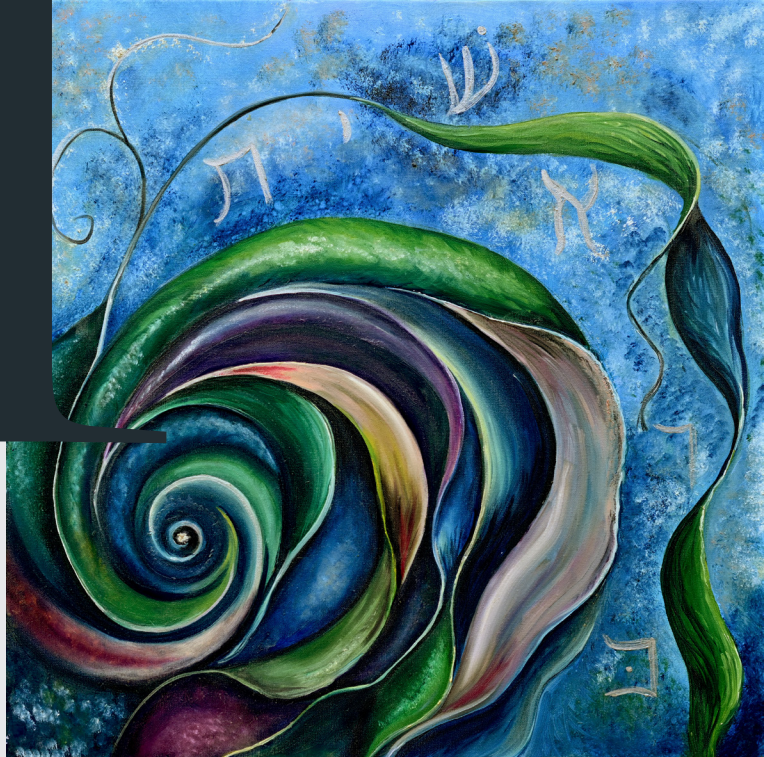


LESSON



THE EVOLUTION OF EGO

Our mystical journey is initiated by an overview of three unique spiritual worlds that precede the physical cosmic system within which we exist. These three realms correspond to three strata within the individual human experience—namely, thought, speech, and action. The insights from this awareness will become practical empowerment for personal growth.

IN THE BEGINNING
Jane Kamentser, oil on
canvas, 2015, Los Angeles

I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *The World of Kabbalah: Revealing How Its Mystical Secrets Relate to You*. This course provides a journey into the fascinating yet mysterious realm of kabbalah, genuine Jewish mysticism.

The intellectual bridge that facilitates this journey is an analysis of a fascinating hierarchy present within the human soul. That hierarchy is a reflection of a far higher cosmic order referred to as *seder hishtalshelut*, the magnificent sequence of spiritual evolution that stretches from G-d's* infinite desire to create the world all the way down the Divine pipeline until the final, finite product. This order gave rise to the curious-looking charts that appear in kabbalistic works, and it is key to the present study.

* Throughout this book, "G-d" and "L-rd" are written with a hyphen instead of an "o" (both in our own translations and when quoting others). This is one way we accord reverence to the sacred Divine name. This also reminds us that, even as we seek G-d, He transcends any human effort to describe His reality.



FIGURE 1.1

Driving Questions

1. What is kabbalah?
2. What are its central teachings?
3. What is the significance of some of its key terms, like *sefirot*?
4. How are these teachings relevant to my everyday life?



KABBALAH
Bracha Lavee, felt on
canvas, Israel, 2021



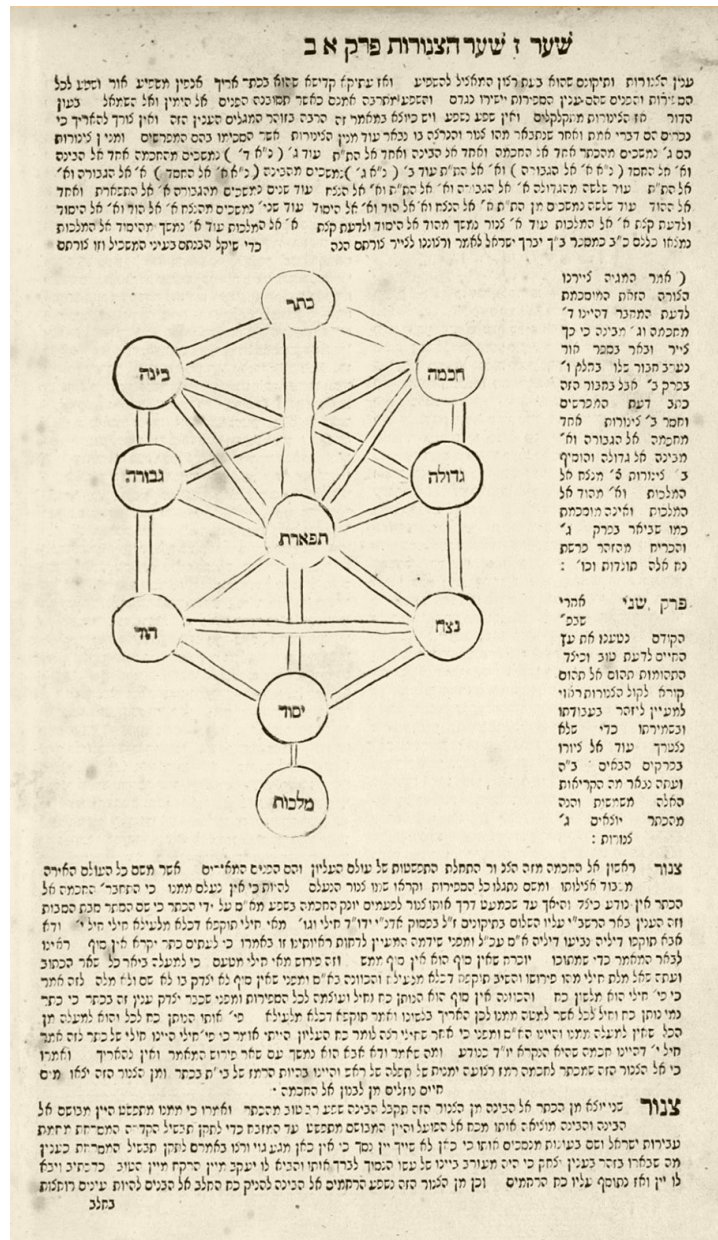
FIGURE 1.2

Kabbalah Diagram

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim* (Koretz, 1786), p. 32b

**RABBI MOSHE
CORDOVERO
(RAMAK)
1522-1570**

Prominent kabbalist. Ramak belonged to the circle of Jewish mystical thinkers who flourished in 16th-century Safed. The name Cordovero indicates that his family originated in Córdoba, Spain. His most famous kabbalistic work is *Pardes Rimonim*.



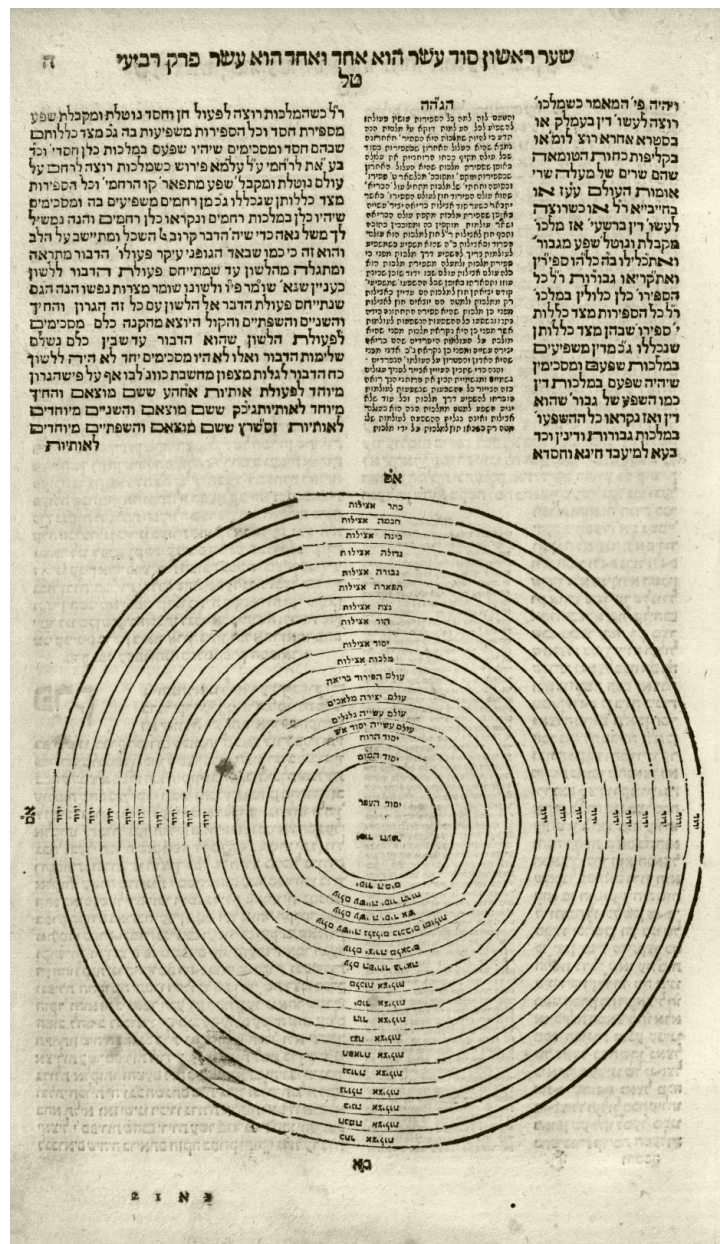
**FIGURE 1.3**

Kabbalah Diagram

Rabbi Shabtai Sheftel Halevi Horowitz,
Shefa Tal (Hanau, 1612), p. 5a

**RABBI SHABTAI SHEFTEL
HALEVI HOROWITZ
1566-1619**

Kabbalist. A resident of Prague, Rabbi Shabtai Horowitz was a nephew of the renowned kabbalist Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz, the Shalah. Rabbi Shabtai is best known for his kabbalistic work *Shefa Tal* and for his emphasis of the Divine nature of the human soul.





TEXT 1

The Mortal Mirror

Rabbi Meir ibn Gabai, *Tolaat Yaakov*, *Sod Hamilah*

כִּי הָאָדָם דְּגִמָּא עֲלִיּוֹנָה. וְכָל מָה שֶּׁבְּעֲלִיּוֹנִים
וְתַחְתּוֹנִים כָּלוּל בּוֹ. וְהוּא סוּד "צֶלֶם אֱלֹקִים"
(בְּרֵאשִׁית א, כז), בְּהִיוּתוֹ בְּדִגְמַת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֱלֹקִים,
בְּסוּד "וּמִבְּשָׂרִי אֶחְזֶה אֱלֹקָה" (אִיּוֹב יט, כו).

A mortal is a mirror for the supernal reality. All that exists in both higher and lower realms is present in microcosmic form within the human. This is the deeper significance of the Torah's statement that the human was created "in the Divine image" (GENESIS 1:27). And this is why we say, "From my flesh, I envision G-d" (JOB 19:26).

RABBI MEIR IBN GABAI 1480-AFTER 1540

Kabbalist and author. Ibn Gabai was born in Spain, from which he emigrated during the 1492 expulsion. Eventually he settled in Egypt. He authored three books in which he elucidates many basic mystical concepts, which have become kabbalistic classics: *Tolaat Yaakov* (which he authored at the age of 26), *Derech Emunah*, and *Avodat Hakodesh*.



JACOB'S LADDER

Lesley Friedmann, acrylic on board, on permanent display, Chabad of Vancouver Island synagogue foyer, Victoria, BC, Canada, 2017



TEXT 2

Divine Ladder

Rabbi Moshe Alshich, Genesis 1:26

מה עשה הוא יתברך? עשה "סלם מצב ארצה
וראשו מגיע השמימה" (בראשית כח, יב), למען
על ידי מדרגות הסלם ישתלשל שפע עליון, קו לקו
יורד ומתעבה, עד יוכן להתקבל עד מטה מטה.

G-d fashioned "a ladder planted on the earth, whose top reaches into the heavens" (GENESIS 28:12). This ladder's rungs serve as channels through which the flow of Divine energy can devolve degree after degree, in a constant pattern of progressive coarsening, until the flow can be received at the lowest extreme of existence.

RABBI MOSHE ALSHICH
1508-1593

Biblical exegete. Rabbi Alshich was born in Turkey and moved to Safed, Israel, where he became a student of Rabbi Yosef Caro, the preeminent codifier of Jewish law. Alshich's commentary to the Torah, titled *Torat Moshe*, remains popular to this day. His students included Rabbi Chaim Vital and Rabbi Yom Tov Tzahalon. He is buried in Safed.



KEY TERM 1.1

HEBREW TERM	סדר השתלשלות
TRANSLITERATION	<i>seder hishtalshehut</i>
LITERAL MEANING	system of devolution
DEFINITION	the many degrees of systematic descent that stretch between G-d's desire to create the universe and the tangible result of that goal



TEXT 3

Word of Caution

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Torah*, Vayikra 51c

אָמַר קְדוֹשׁ ה' הָרַב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעַל שֵׁם טוֹב
נִשְׁמָתוֹ עֵדוֹן: אֲשֶׁר בְּלִמּוּד סִפְרֵי הַקְּבָלָה יֵשׁ
לְהַזְהִיר שְׁלֹא יִדְמָה הַדְּבָרִים כְּפִשּׁוּטָתָן.

The saintly Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov taught that when studying works of kabbalah, we must be careful not to perceive the kabbalistic ideas as literal, physical concepts.



THE WAGON OF THE BESHT
Shoshannah Brombacher,
oil pastel on paper,
Brooklyn, 1995

**RABBI SHNEUR
ZALMAN OF LIADI
(ALTER REBBE)**
1745–1812

Chasidic rebbe, Halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus, and was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chabad Chasidism; and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, an expanded and reworked code of Jewish law.

**RABBI YISRAEL
BAAL SHEM TOV
(BESHT)**
1698–1760

Founder of the Chasidic movement. Born in Slutsk, Belarus, the Baal Shem Tov was orphaned as a child. He served as a teacher's assistant and clay digger before founding the Chasidic movement and revolutionizing the Jewish world with his emphasis on prayer, joy, and love for every Jew, regardless of his or her level of Torah knowledge.

II. THE THREE WORLDS

The *Zohar* discusses the existence of three spiritual worlds that precede our physical universe. Their titles in Jewish mysticism reflect the varying degrees to which they are endowed with a sense of partial independence from G-d. The greater the sense of self, the greater the loss of an empowering surrender to G-d.



TEXT 4

Beriah, Yetzirah, Asiyah

Zohar 2, 155a

דְּאִית בֵּיה אוֹף הָכִי בְּרִיאָה, וְעַל דָּא בְּרִיאָתוֹ.

בְּהֵוָה כְּבוֹד עֲלָאָה אֵית בֵּיה יְצִירָה, וְעַל דָּא יְצִירָתוֹ. . .

בְּהֵוָה כְּבוֹד עֲלָאָה אֵית בֵּיה עֲשִׂיָּה, וְעַל

דָּא אוֹף הָכִי בְּבִר נֶשׁ כְּתִיב עֲשִׂיתוֹ.

לְמַהֲוֵי אִיהוּ כְּגֻנָּא דְּהֵוָה כְּבוֹד עֲלָאָה.

G-d's glory includes *Beriah*, and G-d bestowed this unto the human.

G-d's glory includes *Yetzirah*, and G-d bestowed this unto the human. . .

G-d's glory includes *Asiyah*, and G-d bestowed this unto the human.

Thus, the human is rendered in the image of the supernal glory.

ZOHAR

The seminal work of kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. The *Zohar* is a mystical commentary on the Torah, written in Aramaic and Hebrew. According to the Arizal, the *Zohar* contains the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yocha'i, who lived in the Land of Israel during the 2nd century. The *Zohar* has become one of the indispensable texts of traditional Judaism, alongside and nearly equal in stature to the Mishnah and Talmud.



KEY TERM 1.2

HEBREW TERM	בִּי"ע
TRANSLITERATION	<i>BiYA</i>
LITERAL MEANING	created, shaped, made
DEFINITION	acronym for the grouping of the three spiritual words, <i>Beriah</i> , <i>Yetzirah</i> , and <i>Asiyah</i>



KEY TERM 1.3

HEBREW TERM	יְשׁוּת
TRANSLITERATION	<i>yeshut</i>
LITERAL MEANING	existence
DEFINITION	existence with a sense of self-awareness and independence



ILAN SEFIROT
(SEFIROT TREE)
Yehoshua Wiseman,
acrylic on canvas, Israel



FIGURE 1.4

Names of *BiYa*

NAME OF WORLD	TRANSLATION	IMPLICATION	DEGREE OF SELF-AWARENESS
BERIAH	Created	The initial appearance of a novel entity	Minimal
YETZIRAH	Shaped	Supplying form to a preexisting entity	Intermediate
ASIAH	Made	Completion of an entity's production	Maximal

An introductory page of the *Zohar* from the first printed edition, Mantua (in modern-day Italy), 1558. Numerous handwritten notes of an unknown author fill the margins of this particular copy. (JTS Library, New York)





TEXT 5

Decisive Factor: Closeness

Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn,
Sefer Hamaamarim 5662, pp. 357–358

וְהֵן ג' מַדְרָגוֹת: בְּרִיָּאָה, יִצְרִיָּה, עֲשִׂיָּה.

דְּבָרִיָּאָה הוּא רֵאשִׁית הַתְּחִלָּה הַשְּׁלִישִׁת . . . אֵלָּא
 שְׂאֵפֶן הַתְּהוּוּתוֹ עַד שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה בְּבַחֲנֵינֵי יֵשׁ מִמֶּשׁ, דְּהֵינּוּ
 הַתְּגִלּוֹת יְשׁוּתוֹ בְּפֶעַל מִמֶּשׁ, הוּא בִּג' מַדְרָגוֹת . . .

וְהֵטַעַם מָה שֶׁהַתְּהוּוּת הַיֵּשׁ הוּא בְּאֵפֶן כָּזֶה שֶׁאֵינּוּ
 נַעֲשֶׂה בְּבַחֲנֵינֵי יֵשׁ מִמֶּשׁ בְּתַחֲלֵת הַתְּהוּוּתוֹ . . . לְפִי
 שֶׁבְּתַחֲלֵת וִירָאשִׁית הַתְּהוּוּת הַיֵּשׁ הָרִי הוּא קְרוֹב עֲדִין
 אֶל הָאֵין הָאֱלֹקִי וּמֵאִיר בּוֹ בְּחִינַת הָאֵין . . . וְלִכֵּן אֵי
 אֶפְשָׁר שִׁיְהִי בְּבַחֲנֵינֵי מִצִּיאוֹת יֵשׁ מִמֶּשׁ.

כִּי אִם כְּאֲשֶׁר יֵרֵד מִמְדְּרָגָה לְמְדְּרָגָה, וְהֵינּוּ
 שְׂמִתְעֵלִם הָאוֹר וְאֵינּוּ מֵאִיר בּוֹ בְּגִלּוּי.

עַד בְּחִינַת עֲשִׂיָּה, שֶׁהָאוֹר מְסֻתָּר לְגִמְרִי,
 אֲזִי דוֹקָא נַעֲשֶׂה בְּבַחֲנֵינֵי יֵשׁ מִמֶּשׁ.

There are three rungs: *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*.

Beriah is the first introduction of *yeshut*, an independent self-concept. . . . However, existence only develops into a complete *yesb* when it reaches the third stage. . . .

**RABBI SHALOM DOVBER
 SCHNEERSOHN
 (RASHAB)
 1860–1920**

Chasidic rebbe. Rabbi Shalom Dovber became the 5th leader of the Chabad movement upon the passing of his father, Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn. He established the Lubavitch network of *yeshivot* called Tomchei Temimim. He authored many volumes of Chasidic discourses and is renowned for his lucid and thorough explanations of kabbalistic concepts.

The reason *yeshut* develops gradually . . . is because the initial stage of existence remains close to G-d, and His presence is very much sensed at this level.

Then *Beriah* devolves into *Yetzirah*, where the presence of G-d is somewhat concealed.

Finally, *Yetzirah* devolves into *Asiyah*, where G-d is *completely* concealed. At this point, existence becomes a true *yesh* and gains a complete sense of selfhood.



KEY TERM 1.4

HEBREW TERM	בטול
TRANSLITERATION	<i>bitul</i>
LITERAL MEANING	surrender, suspension, nullification
DEFINITION	a subdued sense of self due to being absorbed by something overwhelmingly impressive, and the desire to become one with it



Does *bitul* (surrender) harm one's self self-esteem? **Rabbi Shais Taub** responds: myjli.com/kabbalah

III. THE HUMAN EXAMPLE

An analysis of mortal thought, speech, and action that identifies the distinctions unique to each of these functions provides an analogy through which to understand the nature of *BiYA* and the distinctions between these worlds.



KEY TERM 1.5

HEBREW TERM	לבושי הנפש
TRANSLITERATION	<i>levushei hanefesh</i>
LITERAL MEANING	the soul's garments
DEFINITION	Thought, speech, and action—the soul's behaviors, which are external to the soul itself



Title page of *Sefer Yetzirah*, an early kabbalistic work, from the first printed edition, Mantua, 1562. (Scholem Collection, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem)



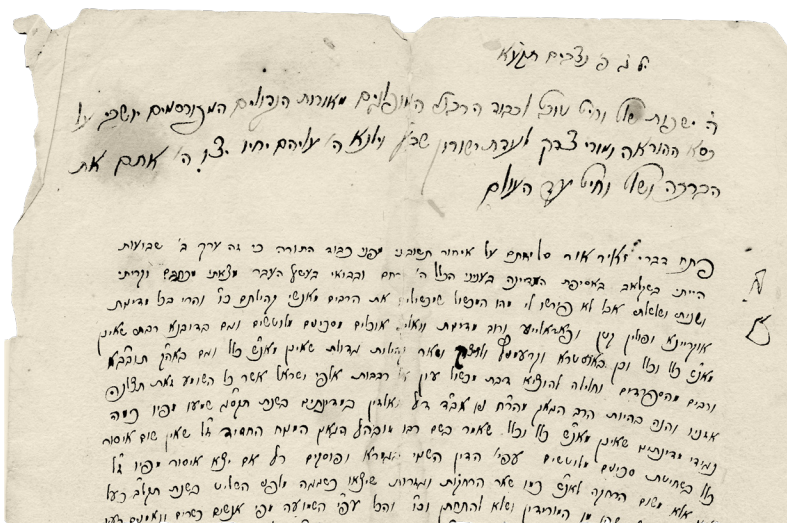
TEXT 6A

Removable

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi,
Maamarei Admur Hazaken 5567, p. 414

שְׂבָחִינֵת בְּרִיאָה יְצִירָה עֲשִׂיָּה הֵם עַל דֶּרֶךְ מִשָּׁל כָּמוֹ
 לְבוּשׁ גִּשְׁמִי, שִׁכּוֹל לִפְשֵׁט אוֹתוֹ וְלִלְבֹּשׁ לְבוּשׁ אֲחֵר,
 לְפִי שֶׁהַלְבוּשׁ אֵינוֹ נוֹגֵעַ לַעֲצָמוֹתוֹ . . . כָּמוֹ מַחְשָׁבָה
 דְּבוּר וּמַעֲשֶׂה לַעֲצָמוֹת הַנֶּפֶשׁ, הֵם רַק בְּחִינַת לְבוּשִׁים.

Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah are comparable to physical garments. We can always remove our garments and dress in alternative garments because garments are not part of our essential selves. . . . In the soul's experience, this correlates to thought, speech, and action, which are not relevant to the core of the soul, but serve only as its garments.



Handwritten correspondence
 by Rabbi Shneur Zalman
 of Liadi, dated 1811.
 (Library of Agudas Chasidei
 Chabad, Brooklyn, N.Y.)



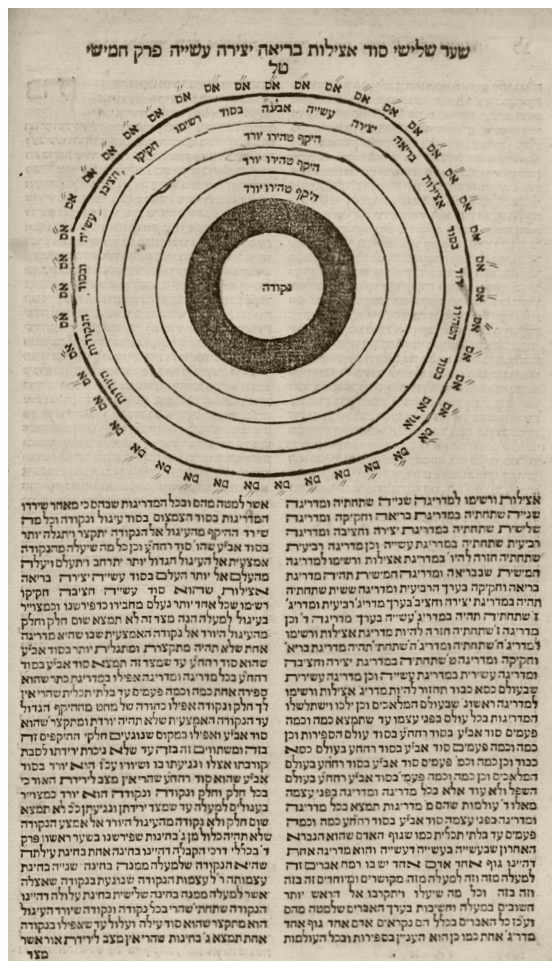
TEXT 6B

Triple Correspondence

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *ibid.*

בְּרִיאָה הוּא בְּחִינַת מַחְשָׁבָה, וְיִצְרָה הוּא בְּחִינַת
דְּבוּר, וְעִשְׂיָה הוּא בְּחִינַת מַעֲשֶׂה בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת.

Beriah corresponds to thinking; *Yetzirah*, to speaking; and *Asiyah*, to physical action.



Kabbalistic diagram in the first printed edition of *Shefa Tal* by Rabbi Shabtai Sheftel Halevi Horowitz, Hanau (in modern-day Germany), 1612. (National Library of Israel, Jerusalem)

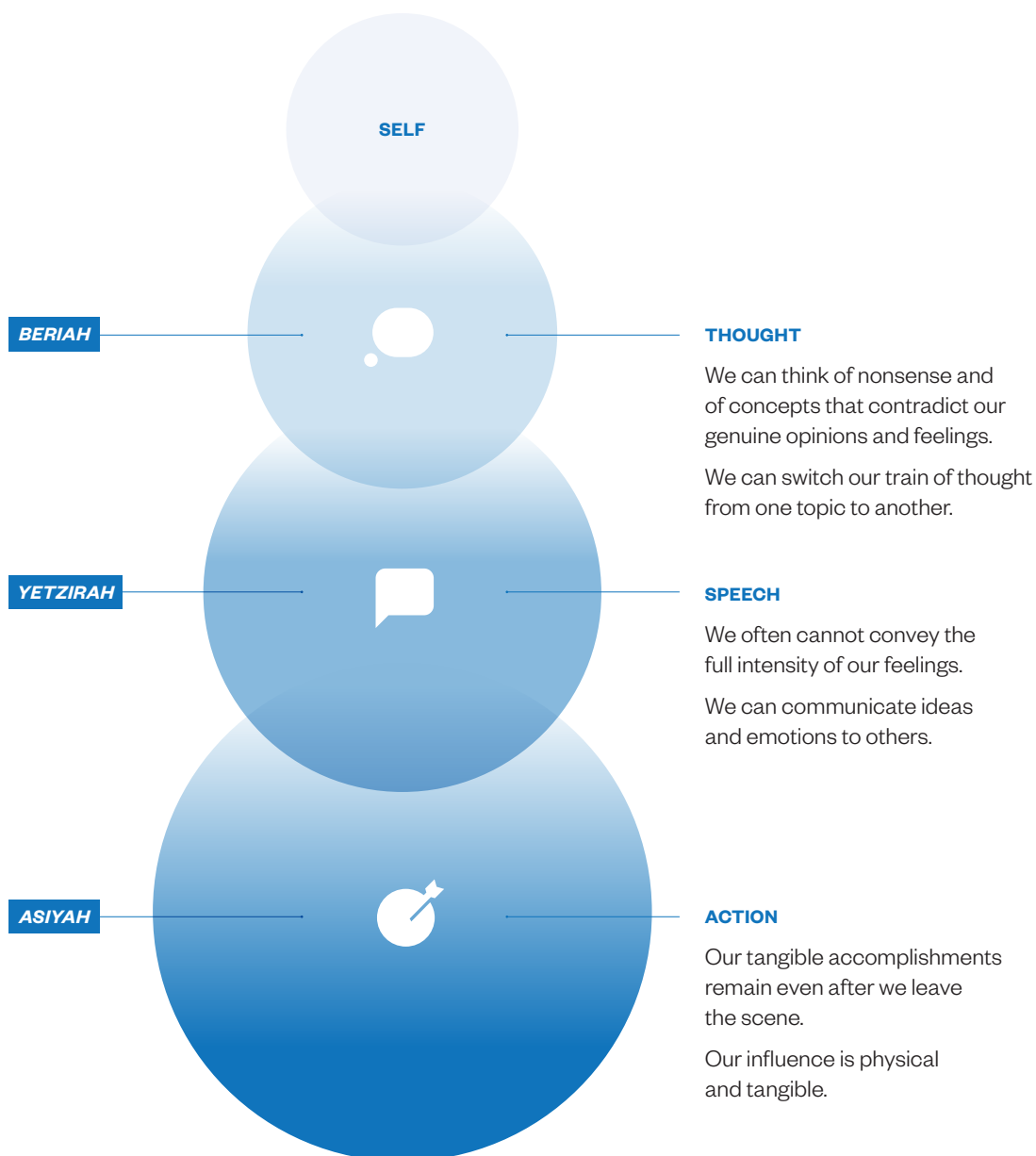


Watch "Do Your Thoughts Matter?" by **Mrs. Sara Esther Crispe**:
myjii.com/kabbalah



FIGURE 1.5

Degrees of Separation



Souls in the Spiritual Worlds

The spiritual worlds of *Beriah* and *Yetzirah* are home to souls due to descend to, or that have already returned from, our physical world—*Asiyah*. Even while a soul is installed in a human body in *Asiyah*, it nevertheless retains a connection with its source in the higher, spiritual worlds.

The following collection of texts chart the soul's journey from the spiritual worlds to our physical world and back.

SPIRITUAL ORIGINS

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim* 1:7

The world of *Beriah* is referred to as the Divine Throne. It is the World of Souls, as per the *Zohar*'s (3:29b) teaching: "Souls are hewn from beneath the Divine Throne." The original source of souls is actually far higher than *Beriah*, but *Beriah* is the realm within which souls emerge as distinct entities.

Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson, *Likutei Torah: Torat Shmuel* 5635:2, p. 3017

In our Morning Blessings, we turn to G-d and exclaim, "My G-d! The soul You placed into me is pure. *Atah Beratab*—You created it! *Atah Yetzartab*—You formed it! And You breathed it into me."

The significance of this prayer is that it depicts the path through which a soul descends into a human body. The soul's earliest origin is described as "pure," indicating that it is within pristine Divinity. In order to descend into our world, the soul must travel through the realms referred to as *Beratab*, "You created it"—the world of *Beriah*, and then *Yetzartab*, "You formed it"—the world of *Yetzirah*, and finally, "You have breathed it into me"—the soul's installation within a human body, here in the world of *Asiyah*.

RESIDUAL SPIRITUALITY

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot* 9, p. 25

A number of Talmudic statements inform us that heavenly voices regularly call upon us to better our ways. This is rather puzzling. What could be the point of issuing calls that people fail to hear?

The answer is that part of us indeed hears these calls. For part of our soul remains on high and does not descend into the body. This part of the soul, which resides in the spiritual realms, clearly hears the heavenly voices—and its reaction stirs the part of the soul that is installed within the body.

The result of this process is discernable in individuals who suddenly feel inspired to become more connected with G-d—even though they did nothing at all to invite such spiritual feelings. Rather, their inspiration is the trickle-down effect of a heavenly call that is heard by the part of the soul that resides in Heaven.



SPIRITUAL RETURN

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, Miketz 32d

Our sages taught that “in the afterlife, there is no eating, drinking, procreation, business dealings, jealousy, hatred, or competition. Rather, the righteous sit with crowns on their heads and enjoy the splendor of the Divine presence” (Talmud, Berachot 17a).

What is the splendor of the Divine presence that the souls enjoy in Paradise? It is a radiance of G-d’s infinite light that the souls in Paradise are capable of perceiving.

There are two general levels within Paradise: Higher Paradise is located in the spiritual world of *Beriah*, while Lower Paradise is located in the spiritual world of *Yetzirah*. Within these two divisions, however, there exist infinite sublevels.

Souls in Paradise constantly advance. They rise from one level to the next, as they refine their capacity to perceive the radiance of the Divine Light. When a soul desires to graduate to the next level, it must first immerse in *nahar di’nor*, the “fiery river,” an experience that allows it to erase its memory of its previous understanding of the Divine. This is necessary because the perception attained on any given level is insignificant compared to the perception available on the next level and disturbs the absorption of the advanced understanding.

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot* 14, pp. 34–35

The Talmud (Berachot 64a) states that “the righteous have no rest—not in the present world, nor in the next, as it is stated, ‘They will go from strength to strength’” (Psalms 84:8).

While the soul of the deceased constantly ascends within Paradise, it experiences a quantum leap on each anniversary of its passing (*yahrtzeit*). That is because the death of the body allowed the soul to undergo its first quantum leap, releasing it from the physical world to the spiritual realm. Similarly, within Paradise, each major ascent of the soul requires “death,” a release from its previous level within Paradise. That is precisely what occurs on each anniversary of the soul’s departure from this world, allowing the soul to experience another quantum leap within Paradise.

For that reason, we recite the Kaddish prayer on each anniversary of passing, and observe related practices—for at that time, the soul experiences a similar propulsion to the day of mortal demise.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar 2b, note

A soul’s post-life experience in the lower Gan Eden is far more profound than its pre-life experience in the higher Gan Eden.

Three Types of Angels

Isaiah and Ezekiel frequently encountered angels in their prophetic visions. They employed rich and detailed metaphors to describe them.

The angels of Heaven are divided into three general categories, each occupying a distinct spiritual realm.

The following texts are selections from the prophetic visions that describe the various forms of angels, together with explanatory texts that highlight the unique qualities of each particular form.



ANGEL ABOVE THE SHTETL (DETAIL)

Ksenija Pecaric. acrylic on canvas, New Jersey, 2009

BERIAH

Seraphim: Flaming Entities

Isaiah 6:1–4

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the L-rd sitting on a high and exalted throne, and His lower extremity filled the Temple. Above Him stood Seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they would fly.

The Seraphim were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the L-rd of Hosts! The entire earth is filled with His glory!”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts shook, and the house was filled with smoke.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Torah*, Emor 32b

Seraphim reside in *Beriah*, the realm in which there is a high degree of comprehension of G-d’s infinite light. The angels of this world perceive G-d as He transcends the entire process of Creation. For that reason, they proclaim, “Holy!” (*Kadosh*)—because the term *kadosh* connotes something entirely separate and distinct.

As a result of their mental concentration and their comprehension of this aspect of G-d, the Seraphim burn with passion to fully perceive G-d’s glory.

YETZIRAH*Chayot: Holy Animals***Ezekiel 1:13–14**

The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire, like torches. The fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures rushed back and forth like flashes of lightning.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya, Likutei Amarim*, ch. 39

The holy *Chayot* reside in the world of *Yetzirah*, while the *Seraphim* dwell in *Beriah*.

Beriah is a world of intellectual revelation of G-d, and the *Seraphim* are therefore in a constant state of *bitul*, standing in the same spot without change.

By contrast, in the world of *Yetzirah*, G-d's emotive attributes—Divine love and awe, etc.—are revealed. The angels of this realm are referred to as *Chayot*, “animals,” because like animals, they experience emotions rather than intellect. Being primarily emotional creatures, the *Chayot* of *Yetzirah* are highly excitable, and as they experience the revelations of *Yetzirah*, they rush back and forth.

ASIYAH*Ofanim: Wheeling angels***Ezekiel 1:16**

This was the appearance and function of the wheels: They had the appearance of crystal, and all four looked alike. Each appeared and functioned like a wheel within a wheel.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Or HaTorah, Shemot* 5, pp. 1467–1468

Ofanim reside in the spiritual layer of the world of *Asiyah* (as opposed to the material layer of *Asiyah* that mortals inhabit). *Asiyah* is a world of action, devoid of the depth of understanding and profundity of feeling available in the higher realms. Consequently, the *Ofanim*'s perception of G-d takes the form of uncomplicated acknowledgment and straightforward acceptance.

Due to their lack of intellectual understanding, the *Ofanim* are incapable of distinction and complexity. This is why they are described as round like a wheel, without a particular beginning or conclusion, and within which no position carries uniqueness over any other.

Therefore, whereas the *Chayot* express their emotional perception of G-d in rushing movements, racing upward, then racing back down, the *Ofanim* express their acknowledgment of G-d as a steady, simple motion, like the unfluctuating turning of a wheel.

IV. LESSONS

Several insights emerge from an analysis of *BiYA*: Firstly, *BiYA*'s sense of independence from G-d implies that humans are endowed with the ability to control their actions, speech, and even thoughts, irrespective of one's internal makeup. Furthermore, the existence of *BiYA*'s three rungs and their specific hierarchy imparts insight into human planning, consulting, and implementation. In addition, it is possible to begin each day with a *BiYA*-exercise to facilitate an adequate sense of grounding that is coupled with spiritual focus.



EXERCISE 1.1

Peruse the following list, and mentally identify one trait that does *not* pose a challenge for you. Then mentally identify one that *does*.

Anger

Extravagance

Jealousy

Arrogance

Fickleness

Laziness

Crassness

Flakiness

Pessimism

Cynicism

Frivolity

Pettiness

Dishonesty

Greed

Selfishness

Disloyalty

Insensitivity

Stinginess

Disorganization

Intrusiveness

Timidity



TEXT 7

In Control

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,
Torat Menachem: Sefer Hamaamarim Melukat 3, p. 382

מַחֲשָׁבָה דְּבוּר וּמַעֲשֶׂה הֵם לְבוּשֵׁי הַנֶּפֶשׁ. וְלִכְּנֹן כָּמוֹ
 שֶׁלְבוּשֵׁי הַגּוּף . . . בִּיכָלְתוֹ לְפוֹשְׁטָם, וּמִכָּל שֶׁכֵּן
 שְׂאִינוֹ מְכַרְח בְּלְבוּשִׁים אֵלּוּ (שְׁלוּבֵשׁ עֲכָשׁוֹ) וּבִיכָלְתוֹ
 לְהַחֲלִיפָם בְּלְבוּשִׁים אֲחֵרִים, עַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה הוּא בְּלְבוּשֵׁי
 הַנֶּפֶשׁ, דֵּה לְבוּשִׁים דְּבוּר וּמַעֲשֶׂה אֶפְשָׁר לְפוֹשְׁטָם. וְגַם
 הַמַּחֲשָׁבָה שֶׁהִיא בְּתַמִּידוּת, נִחְלָפֶת בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה אַחֶרֶת.
 מָה שְׂאִין כֵּן הַשִּׁכֵּל וְהַמְדוּת הֲרִי הֵם מֵהוּת
 הַנֶּפֶשׁ, וְלִכְּנֹן בְּכַדִּי לְשִׁנוֹתָם צָרִיךְ לִיגִיעָה.

Thought, speech, and action are merely garments to the soul. Just as we are able to remove . . . the body's garments, so we can remove the soul's garments of speech and action by refraining from speaking or acting. And just as we can exchange one article of clothing for another, so can we switch our thought, which constantly runs, from one subject to another.

This is in contrast to the intellect and emotion that, as part of the actual soul, demand much effort to effectively change.

**RABBI MENACHEM
 MENDEL SCHNEERSON
 1902-1994**

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe’s scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.



FIGURE 1.6

Human = Thought, Speech, Action

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Torah, Behaalotecha* 31c

HEBREW LETTER	ENGLISH	REPRESENTING THE WORD	MEANING
א	A	Alefcha	Thought (lit., teaching/ learning)
ד	D	Dibur	Speech
מ	M	Maaseh	Action



THE WISE SON
Joel ben Simeon Feibush,
from *The Ashkenazi
Haggadah*, an illuminated
parchment manuscript from
South Germany, c. 1460.
(British Library, London)



Kabbalistic tips on how
to control your mind
and emotions:
myjli.com/kabbalah



TEXT 8

The Physiognomist

Rabbi Betzael Ashkenazi, *Shitah Mekubetzet*, Nedarim 32b

מעשה בחכם אחד שלח דמות פרצופו לחכם
אחר שהיה מכיר בדמות הפרצופין.

נטמן פני מביעותיה דההוא פרצוף.
לסוף שאל לו למה נטמן ממנו.

וענה: אותו הפרצוף מאדם רע שאין פדמותו -
חמדן ונואף ולסטים - ואין להביט אליו.

והמביאו נתיירא מלשוב אל אדניו, עד ששלח
אליו שלא יירא ממנו. ושאל לו כל הענין, ואמר
לו כל מה ששמע ולכן יראתי לשוב אליה.

אמר: בודאי אין חכם כמו אותו בעל הפרצוף, שמן
הכל אמר אמת - שיצרי מגרה בי ומסית אותי לעשות
כל זאת. אבל החכמה שבי מונעת אותי מכל זה.

There was once a sage who sent a drawing
of his face to a physiognomist—a master
who discerns temperament and character
from one's outward appearance.

When the master saw the drawing, he immediately
blocked his face in fright. The messenger who
brought the drawing asked him, “Why have you
blocked your face from looking at the drawing?”

**RABBI BETZALEL
ASHKENAZI
c. 1520–1592**

Rabbi and scholar; lived
in Egypt and Israel.
While in Egypt he
studied under the Radvaz
and, upon the latter's
immigration to Israel,
assumed leadership of
the community. Later,
he himself immigrated
to Israel, where he
became the leader of the
Jerusalem community.
He is best known for his
Shitah Mekubetzet, an
anthology of classical
commentaries to the
Talmud. His most
important disciple was
the famous kabbalist,
Rabbi Yitzchak Luria.

The master replied, “I’ve never seen the face of such a horrible person before. I saw in him coveting, adultery, and robbery. One shouldn’t gaze at the face of such evil.”

The messenger was obviously terrified of bringing back this reading to the sage. However, the sage sent word that he should return without fear. Upon his return, the sage inquired about what had occurred. The messenger conveyed everything that he had heard, concluding, “That’s why I was afraid to return to you.”

The sage replied, “Surely, this physiognomist outshines all others. Everything he said about me is true. My internal inclination drives me and seduces me to commit all of the wrongdoing that the master saw. Yet, I use my wisdom to refrain from acting on it.”

**EXERCISE 1.2**

Rate yourself in terms of the following three statements:

A. I strategize and plan well. **1 2 3 4 5**

B. I solicit helpful advice from others. **1 2 3 4 5**

C. I get the job done. I'm an implementer. **1 2 3 4 5**

5 = very much

4 = pretty well

3 = average

2 = somewhat weak

1 = very weak



**TYPES OF JEWS,
JERUSALEM**

James Tissot, ink on
paper mounted on board,
France, c. 1886 or 1889
(Brooklyn Museum, N.Y.)



TEXT 9

Plan, Consult, Act

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,
Sefer Hasichot 5750:2, pp. 464–467

די הנהגה פון א געזונטן און פולקאמענעם מענטש (א בר שכל) איז באגרינדעט און ווערט אנגעפירט דורך דריי זאכן - מחשבה דבור און מעשה: צום אלעם ערשטן טראכט ער; דערנאך ברענגט ער ארויס זיין מחשבה אין דבור צו אנדערע, דערציילן זיי וואס ער טראכט, זיך באראטן מיט ידידים מבינים (אין דעם תחום מסים) בכדי קלערער און ריכטיקער פארשטיין די זאך; דערנאך קומט ער צו א מסקנא לפעל, און ברענגט ארויס זיין מחשבה ודבור אין מעשה בפעל...

אן אדם שלם באנוגנט זיך ניט מיט מחשבה אליין, אדער אפלו מיט מחשבה און דבור, נאר ער ברענגט ארויס זיינע פלענער (במחשבה ודבור) אין מעשה בפעל (דער ענין השלישי)... לאידך גיסא: בכדי די מעשה זאל זיין בשלמות דארף זיך אין איר אנהערן ווי זי איז אן ענין שלישי, וועלכער איז באגרינדעט און קומט נאך מחשבה ודבור: זיין מעשה זאל ניט זיין סתם געכאפט און געטאן, נאר זי זאל קומען דוקא נאך דעם וואס ער האט עס גוט דורכגעטראכט און דורכגעזעט מיט אנדערע...

און פנים ווי שלמות האדם באשטייט פון אלע דריי ענינים פון מחשבה דבור ומעשה, און דוקא אלס שלשה דרגות און בסדר זה - אזוי איז דאס אויך אין עולם, אז שלמות השתלשלות העולמות... ווערט אויפגעשטלט דוקא דורך די דריי דרגות הנזכרות לעיל ובסדר זה דוקא.

The behavior of properly functioning people is based on and guided by three things: thought, speech, and action. First comes thought. Those thoughts are then expressed via speech to others, such as when consulting friends who understand a specific field, for the sake of arriving at a clearer and more accurate picture of the matter. This allows a person to arrive at a practical conclusion, whereby their thoughts and discussions are translated into concrete action. . . .

Thought alone is insufficient. Similarly, contemplation with subsequent discussion is not enough. We must bring our plans to *action*. . . . At the same time, in order for an action to be complete, it must reflect the reality that it is simply the third link in a chain, following forethought and helpful discussion. Otherwise, our actions will be rash. . . .

When we engage all three (thought, speech, and action, and in that particular order), we can reach our full potential, just as the hierarchy of the worlds is complete . . . only with all three worlds present in their specific order.



TEXT 10

Daily Exercise

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*,
Mahadura Tinyana 1:4–6

וּמִיד שְׁנֵעוֹר מִשְׁנָתוֹ . . . יִחַשְׁבַּ בְּלִבּוֹ לִפְנֵי מִי הוּא שׁוֹכֵב,
 וַיֵּדַע שְׁמֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא חוֹפֵף
 עָלָיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "מִלֵּא כָּל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ" (יִשְׁעִיָּה ו, ג) . . .

וְטוֹב לְהִרְגִיל עֲצָמוֹ לומר מִיד שְׁנֵעוֹר מִשְׁנָתוֹ
 (מוֹדָה אֲנִי לִפְנֵיךְ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם שֶׁהַחַיּוּת בִּי
 נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה רַבָּה אֶמְוִנְתָּךְ), וְעַל יְדֵי זֶה יִזְכֹּר
 אֶת ה' הָעוֹמֵד עָלָיו, וַיִּקּוּם בְּזִרְזוּת . . .

וּלְפִי שֶׁבִּנְסַח זֶה אֵין בּוֹ שׁוּם שֵׁם מִז' שִׁמּוֹת שְׂאִינָם
 נִמְחָקִין, אֵין אֶסוּר לְאָמְרוֹ קֹדֶם שֶׁנִּטָּל יְדִיו.

As soon as we wake up . . . we should
 contemplate before Whom we are lying, and
 become aware that the King of kings is close
 at hand, as it is stated, "The entire earth is
 filled with His glory" (ISAIAH 6:3). . . .

It is best to habituate ourselves immediately
 upon waking to recite *Modeh Ani*—"I thank You,
 living and eternal King, for You have mercifully
 restored my soul within me. Great is Your
 faithfulness!" This will remind us of G-d's intimate
 presence and inspire us to rise energetically. . . .

Seeing that the *Modeh Ani* does not include a Divine name, we are permitted to recite it before ritually washing our hands.



Title page of *Seder Hayom*, by Rabbi Moshe ben Machir of Safed, from the first printed edition, Venice, 1599. This work is the first-known source of the custom to recite the *Modeh Ani* prayer.

KEY TERMS

1. Seder hishtalsbelut

The many degrees of systematic descent that stretch between G-d's desire to create the universe and the tangible result of that goal

2. BiYA

Acronym for the grouping of the three spiritual worlds, **B**eriah, **Y**etzirah, and **A**siyah

3. Yesbut

Existence with a sense of self-awareness and independence

4. Bitul

A subdued sense of self due to being absorbed by something overwhelmingly impressive, and the desire to become one with it

5. Levushei hanefesh

Thought, speech, and action—the soul's behaviors, which are external to the soul itself

KEY POINTS

- 1 The study of Jewish mysticism is not simply a pursuit of fascination and mystique but is primarily geared to bear a positive effect on how we live our lives.
- 2 Kabbalah is largely an exploration of *seder hishtalshehut*. In addition to thereby advancing our knowledge of G-d, this material allows us to better understand many aspects of life.
- 3 Analyzing the human character and soul yields much insight into *seder hishtalshehut*, because the human is created in the Divine image.
- 4 When studying kabbalah, we must avoid perceiving spiritual ideas in a literal, physical sense.
- 5 Kabbalah teaches that the first existence with *yeshut* (independent sense of self) is the spiritual world of *Beriah*. However, because *Beriah* senses G-d acutely, it remains in a constant state of overwhelming *bitul*. By contrast, the subsequent worlds of *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah* sense G-d to far lesser degrees, resulting in more extreme degrees of *yeshut*.

- 6 We are able to tap into these higher worlds and reside in them temporarily during moments in which we sense G-d acutely and are overwhelmed by His presence.
- 7 Human thought, speech, and action correspond to *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*. We can use these three areas of life to advance our understanding of *BiYA*. The same is true in reverse: studying *BiYA* produces numerous insights into living more effectively through thought, speech, and action.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 The disposition of our internal character need not automatically dictate what occurs in the realm of our thought, speech, and action. We can control our *levushim* irrespective of our personality.
- 2 Our actions should be preceded by proper planning (thought) and consultation (speech). On the other hand, we must make certain to graduate from planning and discussion to engage in concrete action.
- 3 We can begin each day with a motivational exercise that is a built-in feature of Jewish practice: to first *think* about the Creator, then *verbalize* our gratitude toward Him, and then *act* by ritually preparing our hands. This brief early morning tour through *BiYA* sets the appropriate tone for our entire day.