



The Ten Sefirot

“Therefore the Holy People should constantly utter praise of their Lord, setting their aspiration to arrange for the upper world—who is master of the house, *husband of Elohim* (Deuteronomy 33:1)—*a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp*, so that there is perfection every day, above and below.¹³⁴

“When Israel enacts the unification of the mystery of שמע ישראל (*Shema Yisra'el*), *Hear O Israel!* (Deuteronomy 6:4) with perfect intention, one radiance issues from secrecy of the upper world, and that radiance strikes a spark of darkness and scatters into seventy lights, and those seventy flash into seventy branches of the Tree of Life.¹³⁵

“Then that Tree wafts fragrances and aromas, and all the trees of the Garden of Eden waft fragrances and praise their Lord, for then *Matronita* is adorned to enter the canopy with Her Husband. All those supernal limbs unite in one desire, in one aspiration, to be one with no separation. Then Her Husband is arrayed for Her, to bring Her to the canopy in single union, to unite with *Matronita*.¹³⁶

134. the Holy People should constantly utter praise... Thereby arranging all these aspects of *Shekhinah* for Her Husband, the upper world.

See above, note 123. “Master of the house” means Master of *Shekhinah*. See above, p. 35, n. 101.

Moses is called איש האלהים (*ish ha-elohim*), *man of God* (Deuteronomy 33:1; Psalms 90:1), which is understood midrashically as “husband of God” (able to command Him) and kabbalistically as “husband of *Shekhinah*” (united with Her). Here, Rabbi Shim'on applies this title to the upper world. See above, note 94. In 2 Kings 4:9 (interpreted here), Elisha is called איש אלהים (*ish elohim*), *a man of God*.

135. When Israel enacts the unification... When the people of Israel recite the *Shema* with full intention, declaring the oneness of God, they unify the *sefirot*. A ray of light issues from the highest realm and strikes a spark of darkness, scattering into seventy lights, which generate seventy branches of the central *sefirah*, *Tif'eret*, symbolized by the Tree of Life. The seventy branches correspond to the seven *sefirot* from *Hesed* through *Shekhinah*, whose core is *Tif'eret*.

“A spark of darkness” renders בוצינתא דקריינותא (*botsina de-qardinuta*), “a lamp of impenetrable darkness.” The spark is so potently brilliant that it overwhelms comprehension. This blinding light is the impulse of emanation flashing from *Ein Sof* and proceeding to delineate the various *sefirot*. See below, p. 560, n. 35.

The opening verse of the *Shema* in Deuteronomy reads: *Hear, O Israel! YHVH our God, YHVH is one*. On the significance of the *Shema*, see *Zohar* 1:12a, 18b; 2:43b (*Piq*), 160b–162a, 216b; 3:162a, 195b, 203b–204a, 236b, 262b–263a, 264a–b, 268a; *ZH* 48a, 56d–58d (*QhM*); Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:971–74. On the connection between the number seventy and the *Shema*, see *Zohar* 2:160b.

136. Then that Tree wafts fragrances... *Tif'eret*, symbolized by the Tree of Life, emits aromas, along with all the trees of the Garden of Eden (corresponding to the various powers of *Shekhinah*), as the Bride (*Shekhinah*) is adorned in preparation for marrying *Tif'eret*. The sefirotic male limbs (from *Hesed* through *Yesod*) converge in preparation for this union.

On *Matronita* as a title of *Shekhinah*, see the Glossary.

"Therefore we arouse Her, saying שמע ישראל (*Shema Yisra'el*), *Hear, O Israel!* (Deuteronomy 6:4)—Adorn Yourself! Behold, Your Husband is near You in His array, ready to meet You.¹³⁷

"YHVH our God, YHVH is one (ibid.)—in one unification, in one aspiration, without separation; for all those limbs become one, entering into one desire. As soon as Israel says *one*, arousing six aspects, all those six become one. This mystery is ו (vav), one extension alone, with no other attachment, expanded by all, one.¹³⁸

"At that moment, *Matronita* prepares and adorns Herself, and Her attendants escort Her to Her Husband in hushed whisper, saying 'Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever!' This is whispered, for so must She be brought to Her Husband. Happy are the people who know this and compose the supernal arrangement of faith!¹³⁹

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137. we arouse Her, saying שמע ישראל (*Shema Yisra'el*), *Hear, O Israel...* The opening words of the *Shema* are now understood to mean: *Listen, Shekhinah!* Prepare and adorn Yourself, for Your Husband, *Israel* (namely *Tif'eret*, whose full name is *Tif'eret Yisra'el*, "Beauty of Israel"), is ready to join You!

138. YHVH our God, YHVH is one... The rest of the first line of the *Shema* completes a verse of six words: שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד (*Shema Yisra'el YHVH Eloheinu YHVH ehad*), *Hear O Israel! YHVH our God, YHVH is one.* By reciting the complete verse, Israel actualizes the unification of the six *sefirot* from *Hesed* through *Yesod*, centered in *Tif'eret*. This sixfold unity is symbolized by the letter ו (vav) in the name יהוה (YHVH), whose numerical value is six and whose shape is one extended line, seamless ("with no other attachment").

On the sixfold unification, see BT *Berakhot* 13b, where the recitation of the first line of *Shema* is described as enthroning God "above, below, and over the four directions of heaven."

139. At that moment, *Matronita* prepares... Now that *Tif'eret* is unified with the *sefirot* surrounding Him, *Shekhinah* prepares to join Him under the canopy. Her

angelic retinue escorts Her, whispering the next line of the *Shema*, which is whispered simultaneously by Israel below.

On whispering this line, see BT *Pesahim* 56a: "Rabbi Shim'on son of Lakish said, '...[Upon his death bed] Jacob wished to reveal to his sons the end of days, but *Shekhinah* departed from him [depriving him of inspiration]. He said, "Perhaps, Heaven forbid, there is a blemish in my bed [i.e., someone unfit among my children], like Abraham, from whom issued Ishmael, or like my father Isaac, from whom issued Esau." His sons answered him, "*Hear, O Israel!* [i.e., Jacob]. *YHVH is our God, YHVH is one*—just as there is only *one* in your heart, so there is only *one* in our heart." At that moment our father Jacob opened and exclaimed, "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever!" Our rabbis said, 'How should we act? Should we recite it [i.e., "Blessed be the name..."]? But Moses our teacher did not say it [i.e., this line does not appear in the passage from Deuteronomy]. Should we not recite it? But Jacob said it!' They ordained that it should be recited in a whisper."

See *Zohar* 1:234a–b; Vol. 3, p. 418 and nn. 573–75. Below, Rabbi Shim'on offers a different reason for whispering.

"As Husband and Wife unite as one, a proclamation issues from the south: 'Present yourselves, hosts and camps, who manifest love to your Lord!' Then one celestial officer arouses—Boel, master of camps—in whose hand are four keys that he has obtained from the four corners of the world. One key is engraved with the letter י (*yod*), one key is engraved with the letter ה (*he*), and one key is engraved with the letter ו (*vav*). Another key, engraved with the letter ה (*he*), he places beneath the Tree of Life. Those three keys, engraved with these three letters, become one. As soon as they become one, that other key ascends, stands, and joins with the other, totality of three. All those camps and hosts bring these two keys into the Garden, and they all enact unification, corresponding to the pattern below.¹⁴⁰

"יהוה (YHVH)—inscription of the letter י (*yod*), supernal head of the Holy Name. אלהינו (*Eloheinu*), *our God*—mysterious inscription of the supernal letter ה (*he*), second letter in the Holy Name. יהוה (YHVH)—a flow conducted below by mysterious inscription of the letter ו (*vav*), for those two letters are drawn here, and it is one. All these three are one in one unity.¹⁴¹

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140. As Husband and Wife unite... Now the angelic camps who adore *Shekhinah* are called to present themselves. The presiding angel appears, holding four keys, which unlock the treasures of emanation for the lower worlds. Each of these keys is engraved with one letter of the name יהוה (YHVH). The first three keys turn into one, and the fourth key then joins with this one composite key. By bringing these two keys into the Garden, the angels stimulate the union of the divine couple, corresponding to Israel's act of unification (by reciting the *Shema*) below.

The individual letters of יהוה (YHVH) symbolize all of the *sefirot*. The י (*yod*) symbolizes the primordial point of *Hokhmah*, while its upper stroke symbolizes *Keter*. The first ה (*he*), often a feminine marker, symbolizes the Divine Mother, *Binah*. The ו (*vav*), whose numerical value is six, symbolizes *Tiferet* and the five *sefirot* surrounding Him (*Hesed* through *Yesod*). The second ה (*he*) symbolizes *Shekhinah*.

Here the unification of the first three keys symbolizes the unification of the upper *sefirot*, in preparation for the wedding with *Shekhinah*, symbolized by the fourth key, which

is engraved with the second *he*. The Tree of Life corresponds to *Tiferet*, so the fourth key (representing *Shekhinah*) is placed beneath this tree.

For various interpretations, see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:1024; OY; Galante; *MmD*. The name בואל (*bo'el*), Boel, means "God is in him." Elsewhere he is identified with the archangel Raphael. See *Midrash Kohen* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:27); Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 67; *Zohar* 2:147a-b, 209b-210a; ZH 48c; Margaliot, *Mal'akhei Elyon*, 18.

On the sefirotic significance of the letters of יהוה (YHVH), see above, p. 158, n. 55.

141. יהוה (YHVH)... אלהינו (*Eloheinu*)... יהוה (YHVH)... These three divine names, in the middle of the opening line of the *Shema*, symbolize the range of *sefirot* from *Hokhmah* through *Yesod*. The initial letter of the first occurrence of the name יהוה (YHVH) is י (*yod*), representing the primordial point of *Hokhmah*.

The name אלהינו (*Eloheinu*), *our God*, alludes to *Binah*, who is the source of Judgment, which is associated with the name *Elohim*. As indicated in the preceding note,

"Once all this has been unified as one, and all remains in mystery of the letter ו (vav) complete, from the source of the spring and the innermost chamber, and He inherits from Father and Mother, then they bring *Matronita* to Him. For now He is complete with all sublime goodness and can sustain Her, providing Her with nourishment and satisfaction fittingly. All those limbs of His are all one; then they bring Her to Him in a whisper. Why in a whisper? So that a stranger will not mingle in this joy, as is said: *In his joy no stranger will share* (Proverbs 14:10).¹⁴²

"Once He unites above in six aspects, She too unites below in six other aspects, so that there will be [134a] oneness above and oneness below, as is said: *YHVH will be one and His name one* (Zechariah 14:9). One above in six aspects, as is written: *שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד* (*Shema Yisra'el YHVH Eloheinu YHVH ehad*), *Hear O Israel! YHVH our God, YHVH is one* (Deuteronomy 6:4)—six words corresponding to six aspects. One below in six aspects: *ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד* (*Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le-olam va-ed*), Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever!—six other aspects in six words. *YHVH one, above; and His name one, below.*¹⁴³

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Binah is symbolized by the second letter of יהוה (*YHVH*): ה (he).

The final one of these three names, the second יהוה (*YHVH*), represents the emanation of *Tif'eret* (along with the other five *sefirot* from *Hesed* through *Yesod*). As indicated in the preceding note, *Tif'eret* (together with these *sefirot*) is symbolized by the third letter of יהוה (*YHVH*): ו (vav). The preceding two letters—*yod* and *he* (symbolizing, respectively, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*)—"are drawn here," i.e., they convey the flow to *Tif'eret*, who "is one" with His surrounding *sefirot*. Now "all these three"—namely יהוה אלהינו יהוה (*YHVH Eloheinu YHVH*), or יהיו (yod, he, vav), or *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, and *Tif'eret*—"are one," prepared to unite with *Shekhinah*.

Medieval Christian polemics asserted that these three divine names in the opening line of the *Shema* signify the Trinity. Here, instead, the *Zohar* presents a kabbalistic trinity, insisting that "these three are one." See Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:973–74; Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, 18–19; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 140–45; below at note 669.

142. Once all this has been unified...

At this point, all the upper *sefirot* have been unified and their energy channeled into the letter ו (vav), from *Hokhmah* ("the source of the spring") and *Binah* ("the innermost chamber," who contains the seed of *Hokhmah* and generates the lower *sefirot*). *Tif'eret* (symbolized by this vav) has inherited the treasures of emanation from Father *Hokhmah* and Mother *Binah*, and now the angelic escorts convey *Shekhinah* to Him. These angels whisper so that the demonic stranger will not hear of the imminent union and interfere or share in the joy.

On *Tif'eret* inheriting from *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, see *Zohar* 2:51b; 3:291a (*IZ*). The full verse in Proverbs reads: *The heart knows its own bitterness, and in its joy no stranger shares.*

143. Once He unites above... The six words of the opening line of the *Shema* symbolize the unification of *Tif'eret* with the five *sefirot* surrounding Him (*Hesed* through *Yesod*). The six words of the following line symbolize the unification of *Shekhinah*, or *Malkhut* (Kingdom), with Her angelic reti-

"Now, you might say, 'Look, אָחַד (*eḥad*), *one*, is written above, whereas below *one* is not written!' Well, וְעַד (*va-ed*), and ever, is אָחַד (*eḥad*), *one*, in an interchange of letters. Letters of the male do not interchange, whereas letters of the female do, and in this the male is more praiseworthy than the female. To prevent the evil eye from dominating, we interchange letters, not saying *eḥad*, *one*, openly. But in the time to come, when that evil eye will be eliminated and no longer prevail over Her, She will be called *one* openly. For now, when that Other Side clings to Her, She is not *one*—though we unify Her in a whisper, in the mystery of other letters, saying *va-ed*, and ever. However, in the time to come, when that side will separate from Her and be eliminated from the world, She will surely be called *eḥad*, *one*, for She will have no other clinging association, as is said: *On that day YHVH will be one and His name one*—openly, explicitly, not by whispering, not in secret.¹⁴⁴

nue, which corresponds to *Tiferet's* sefirotic retinue. The divine Bride and Groom must each be complete and unified before they can join as one.

Tiferet is often identified with *YHVH*, while *Shekhinah* (the Divine Presence) is designated as God's *name* (making Him known in the world). Thus the verse in Zechariah alludes to the both of them. The full verse reads: *YHVH will be king over all the earth; on that day YHVH will be one and His name one.*

The second line of the *Shema* alludes doubly to *Shekhinah* as both "name" and "kingdom." On the first two lines of the *Shema*, see above, note 139; *Zohar* 1:12a, 18b; 2:139b; 3:264a. On *Shekhinah* as God's name, see *Targum Onqelos* and *Targum Yerushalmi*, Exodus 20:21.

144. *one* is written above, whereas below *one* is not written... If the first two lines of the *Shema* both indicate unification, why doesn't the second line conclude with the word אָחַד (*eḥad*), *one*, like the first? Rabbi Shim'on explains that the final word of the second line—וְעַד (*va-ed*), "and ever"—is actually an encoded form of אָחַד (*eḥad*), *one*. The initial letter of each word—א (alef) and ו (vav)—is a consonantal vowel (that is, a consonant that can indicate a vowel sound) and thus (according to Rabbi Shim'on) in-

terchangeable with the other. The second letter of each word—ח (*het*) and ע (*ayin*)—is a guttural letter and thus interchangeable. The third letter of each word—ד (*dalet*)—is identical. Hence, וְעַד (*va-ed*), "and ever," is simply a cipher of אָחַד (*eḥad*), *one*.

The word *eḥad* (along with the entire first line of the *Shema*) pertains to *Tiferet*, who is male, and (in this word) these letters are not interchanged. The word *va-ed* (along with the entire second line) pertains to *Shekhinah*, who is female, and these letters are interchanged. The constancy and stability of the male (and his letters) is more praiseworthy than the inconstancy and fluctuation of the female (and hers).

Here, in the unification of *Shekhinah*, the coded form *va-ed* replaces *eḥad* in order to fool the evil eye and thwart demonic interference. Because of Her vulnerability to the Other Side, *Shekhinah* is not yet fully and openly *one*; but in the Messianic age, when evil will be eliminated, She will be called *one* explicitly, no longer in a whisper or cipher, as demonstrated by the verse in Zechariah.

On female and male letters, see *Zohar* 1:159a–b; 2:205b, 228a–b; *ZḤ* 66c (*ShS*) 74c–d (*ShS*); above, note 106. On the interchangeability of letters pertaining to *Shekhinah*, see *Zohar* 1:18b (Vol. 1, p. 141, n. 261).