

The Sefirot

By Nissan Dovid Dubov

The names of the ten *Sefirot* are:

- *Chochmah* - wisdom,
- *Binah* - understanding,
- *Daat* - knowledge,
- *Chessed* - kindness,
- *Gevurah* - strength,
- *Tiferet* - beauty,
- *Netzach* - victory,
- *Hod* - splendor,
- *Yesod* - foundation,
- and *Malchut* - kingship.

Everything that happens in the spiritual worlds takes place through the medium of the *Sefirot*. However, as previously mentioned, they are not G-d, and the Kabbalists warn that one should not pray to them. In the words of Tikkunei Zohar: Elijah opened his discourse and said: 'Master of the worlds, You are One but not in the numerical sense. You are exalted above all the exalted ones, hidden from all the hidden ones; no thought can grasp You at all. You are He who has brought forth ten "garments," and we call them ten *Sefirot*, and revealed worlds; and through them You conceal yourself from man.

You are He who binds them together and unites them; and inasmuch as You are within them, whoever separates one from another of these ten *Sefirot*, it is considered as if he had effected a separation in You.

As previously discussed, *Tzimtzum* is the concealment of the *Or Ein Sof* which allows a *Seder Hishtalshelut*, a "series of intermediary stages" or worlds that makes the creation of the finite world possible. Each of these worlds has a spiritual infrastructure, the most basic component being the *Sefirot*.

The *Sefirot* are ten modes or attributes through which G-d manifests Himself. The *Sefirot* are not G-d, but they are the medium through which specific qualities and attributes can be ascribed to Him. The word *Sefirah* is related to the verb *lesaper*, which means to "express" or "communicate." This implies that the function of a *Sefirah* is to express a certain attribute. It is also related to the word "sapphire" (*sapir*). A sapphire is a gemstone that is brilliant and illuminating, implying that the function of a *Sefirah* is to give Light. Combining these two concepts, one may say that the *Sefirot* have two basic functions, one as lights or luminaries that serve to reveal and express, and another as Vessels that limit and define the Light so that specific qualities are manifest. The *Sefirot* may be compared to the two hands of a king. Sometimes the king operates with his right hand and sometimes with his left. Ultimately, it is the king himself who is acting through the medium of his hands.

In fact, every *Sefirah* is divisible into the two aspects of Lights and Vessels. The Lights of the *Sefirot* are simple and formless. They reflect G-d's infinite power as revealed within the *Sefirot*. The Vessels have specific characteristics, and thereby reveal G-d's power of limitation and finitude. It is through the *Sefirot* that the *Ein Sof*—which by definition is infinite—creates and conducts the finite worlds.

In order to understand the dynamics of the *Sefirot* we can take a look at man, for man was created in the image of G-d.

In many places in the Torah, scripture speaks of G-d as if He had human features, "the eyes of G-d", the "hand of G-d," etc.

Yet we know that G-d has neither body nor form of body.

Why then does the Torah use a human description of G-d? The answer is that the Torah speaks in the language of man.

G-d borrows terms from His creatures to express His relationship with the world. G-d has no eyes, yet He creates the eye and is aware of everything that happens in the world. G-d has no hand, yet He creates the hand and His providence guides the world's destiny. When the Torah tells us that G-d made Man in His image, it means that Man is a microcosm of the *Sefirot*, with the entire spiritual infrastructure reflected in him.

It is the *Sefirot* that make it possible to speak about G-d's immanence in creation—what He does, without referring directly to what He is. Those Divine attributes are reflected within Man, both in his spiritual makeup and more literally in his physical build. Hence, the Kabbalists chose to depict the *Sefirot* as corresponding to various limbs and functions of the human body. Still, when trying to grasp the dynamic of the *Sefirot* in the higher realms; one may make reference to the human conceptual model, and then reflect these concepts above. In this manner, we can speak in the language of man to appreciate the higher spiritual realms. One must be cautious in doing so, and realize that this human model is only a reflection of the *Sefirot*. All analogies have their human dimension which may not be applicable in the higher realms.

The *Sefirot* are also reflected in Man's spiritual make-up, with each faculty in Man derived from the supernal *Sefirot*.

When one utilizes the ten soul powers within him in his Divine service here in this world, he is able to affect their source, the *Sefirot*, in the higher worlds.

The ten *Sefirot* are generally divided into two categories: Intellect (*sechel*) and Emotions (*middot*). The category of Intellect includes the three intellectual powers of *Chochmah*, *Binah*, and *Daat*—which are an acronym for the word *ChaBaD*. The emotive powers are represented by the seven channels of *Chessed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, *Netzach*, *Hod*, *Yesod*, and *Malchut*. They are also referred to as the Three Mothers and the Seven Doubles.

The first three are viewed as “mothers” because they are the source and root of the other seven, just as a mother is the source of her offspring. The seven Emotions are called doubles because they manifest themselves in a two-fold manner as shall be explained.

The first of the *Sefirot* is called *Chochmah*. *Chochmah* is the soul faculty that conceives any matter, and hence is made of the words *koach mah*, meaning the potential of what is. It produces the original idea, and is often referred to as the first flash of intellect. It already contains within it all the details of the idea but as yet they are concentrated and obscured. It is everything in potential. This potential has been likened to a dot, in which everything is contained, but nothing is actualized or given definition. In the Tetragrammaton, this is represented in the first letter, *yud*, which resembles a dot.

The second *Sefirah* is *Binah*. *Binah* means, “to understand or derive one matter out of another matter.” *Binah* takes the original idea and expands and develops it both in breadth and depth. It crystallizes and clarifies the details of the idea that were obscured in *Chochmah*. That which was in concentrate form is now revealed and understood. In the name of G-d, *Binah* is the letter hey. Its shape, which is more elongated and comprised of strokes, implies the expansion of the dot in breadth and length. *Chochmah* and *Binah* are equitable to two good friends who can never be separated. The Zohar describes them as “a dot in the palace,” with the dot *Chochmah* being realized in the palace of *Binah*. The *koach mah* of *Chochmah* (potential of “what is”) is realized in *Binah*.

An idea once conceived may remain abstract. The meaning of *Daat* denotes attachment and union as in the verse, “and Adam knew (*yada*—from the word *Daat*) Eve.” The faculty of *Daat* brings the abstract concept into actuality. An idea must be felt and implemented, and *Daat* has the power to unite the intellect and the emotions. It is only by great attachment to an idea, by binding and unifying oneself to the idea to the extent that one not only understands the idea, but also feels for it, that it can be brought into practice. It is clear how *Daat* is the connector between *Chochmah* and *Binah* and the rest of the body (*Sefirot*). In the human body, the three cognitive faculties of *ChaBaD* correspond to the right cerebral hemisphere, left cerebral hemisphere, and cerebellum; from which stems the spinal cord connecting the brain to the rest of the body.

The next three *Sefirot* are the Emotions. In the body, *Chessed* corresponds to the right arm, *Gevurah* to the left arm, and *Tiferet* the heart. The Kabbalists draw parallels between the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the three supernal *Sefirot* of *Chessed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*.

Chessed (loving-kindness) is the attribute which diffuses benevolence to all without limit. Creation itself is an act of *Chessed*, as it is stated, “The world was built with *Chessed*.” The attribute of *Chessed* is also called “greatness” (*Gedulah*), for life issues from Him to an unlimited number of worlds and creatures. As we learn from Abraham, it is the nature of the benevolent to do goodness. In Abraham, who embodies *Chessed*, we see the paradigm of endless loving-kindness. His tent was open on all sides and he extended the warmest hospitality to all.

Where *Chessed* is boundless, *Gevurah* is the attribute of restraint. It has the power and ability to limit and contract. In the act of creation, *Gevurah* conceals from the created beings the activating force within them. This enables them to exist as tangible entities, instead of being utterly nullified within their source. The patriarch Isaac is paralleled with *Gevurah* due to the dominance of this *Sefirah* within him. He restrained his emotions magnificently at the *Akeida* (the binding of Isaac).

Gevurah is also called “law” and “judgment” (*Din*). Judgment demands that *Chessed* be distributed justly in proportion to the recipient's merit and not in a boundless, gratuitous fashion.

Without *Gevurah*, *Chessed* would not have the boundaries needed in order for Creation to exist. In terms of humanity, if *Chessed* was dominant, the earth would be full of sinners since love would cover all iniquity. Conversely, if *Gevurah* was dominant, no man could withstand the scrutiny of judgment.

Both *Chessed* and *Gevurah* operate successfully through a mediating faculty, the *Sefirah* of *Tiferet*. *Tiferet* blends *Chessed* and *Gevurah* with harmonious and beautiful results. It can be compared to a garment dyed with many colors and blended in such a way that gives rise to beauty and decoration. Within man, it is equated with the attribute of “compassion” (*Rachamim*).

Whereas *Chessed* would give even to a person to whom compassion is not at all appropriate; *Tiferet* seeks to pity a person to whom compassion is appropriate, and then to extend benevolence to him as well regardless of worthiness. *Tiferet* is also equated with “truth” (*Emet*) in the sense that both *Chessed* and *Gevurah* agree to its flow. In the body, *Tiferet* is the heart, whose central position in the torso mediates between right and left and creates harmony. In the Patriarchs, *Tiferet* is seen in Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. The children of Jacob, who is the perfect balance of *Chessed* and *Gevurah*, were all righteous.

The next three *Sefirot* are *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*. These three are extensions of *Chessed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*. *Netzach* is an extension of *Chessed*, *Hod* of *Gevurah*, and *Yesod* of *Tiferet*.

In their parallels within the human body; *Netzach* and *Hod* correspond to the two thighs and *Yesod* the reproductive organ, the *Brit Kodesh*. Just as the thighs support the body and transport the body to its destination, so too *Netzach* and *Hod* channel the upper *Sefirot*. The Kabbalists parallel *Netzach* with the personality of Moses, *Hod* with Aaron, and *Yesod* with Joseph.

The word *Netzach* comes from the word *menatzeach*, meaning to “conquer” or “overcome.” *Netzach* therefore denotes the idea of dominance. By giving in an unlimited way, one is overwhelming the other, and in this respect it is an extension of *Chessed*. *Hod* is just the opposite. Being an extension of *Gevurah*, it denotes with strain to the point of submission. *Hod* stems from the word *Hodaah* meaning to “thank,” “admit,” or “submit.” Total dominance over another is a *Netzach*

relationship, while total submission is a *Hod* relationship. *Yesod* balances the two, facilitates communication, and is therefore the foundation of the world.

The action of *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod* (known in its abbreviated form as *NeHiY*) on *Chessed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet* (known in its abbreviated form as *ChaGaT*), may be analogous to a father teaching a son. Once *ChaGaT* is aroused, the function of *NeHiY* is to deliberate as to how the recipient will receive.

In the analogy, *NeHiY* has a triple function. If the father will impart the knowledge in its totality as it appears in his own mind, the son will be unable to absorb it. Rather, the father has to rearrange the subject matter in such a way that little by little the child will be able to understand. In this respect, *Netzach* and *Hod* are referred to in Kabbalistic terminology as “the kidneys that advise” and are “the two testicles” that prepare the sperm. This means that they adapt a subtle concept in the father’s mind, and modify it to match the capacity of the child.

Netzach and *Hod* are also referred to as “grinders” and “millstones.” Just as a millstone grinds the wheat germ into flour, so too a father has to break up concepts and determine which should be presented and which withheld. *Netzach* and *Hod* serve to contract a concept in all its dimensions. Finally, *Netzach* also allows for the father to prevail over himself and not withhold any beneficial influence or learning from his son.

Carrying this analogy further will also explain the *Sefirah* of *Yesod*. Even if the father will privately rehearse what he is going to teach his son, it cannot be compared to the actual moment of teaching. At that moment, the father binds his intellect to the child and communicates with love. He truly desires that his son understand the subject matter. The greater the desire and delight of the father is, the greater the influence and learning of the son. The son is able to absorb more and the father communicates proportionally. This bond uniting the father and son is the attribute of *Yesod*. *Yesod* acts as a funnel through which all the previous *Sefirot* are channeled.

We may now understand why the triads of *ChaGaT* and *NeHiY* are called doubles. *ChaGaT* are the emotions as they exist within one, without taking into consideration the recipient.

NeHiY are the powers that focus the emotions of *ChaGaT* so that they may be received by others. Hence, *ChaGaT* and *NeHiY* ride in tandem and are called doubles, as each is dependent upon the other.

In summary, *Chessed* denotes unlimited giving. *Gevurah* parallels unlimited restraint, while *Tiferet* is a harmonious blend of the two. *Netzach* and *Hod* adapt the influence for transmission, and *Yesod* transmits with deep attachment. The six *Sefirot* of *ChaGaT* and *NeHiY* are often grouped together.

Sefirotic Triangles

Kabbalistically, they are called “little faces,” *Zeir Anpin*. In the Tetragrammaton, *yud* represents *Chochmah*, *Hey* is *Binah*, and *vov* is *Zeir Anpin*.

The tenth *Sefirah* is called *Malchut*. It is the ultimate realization of the first *Sefirah* of *Chochmah*. *Chochmah* is *koach mah*—the potential of what is, and *Malchut* is called *Mah*—that which is. In the Tetragrammaton, *Malchut* is the final hey, and in the human body *Malchut* is the mouth. Kabbalah parallels *Malchut* to the personage of King David. Essentially, *Malchut* is the receiver or recipient of influence from the higher *Sefirot*. In this respect *Malchut* has a feminine quality. Just as a woman receives from a man and gives birth to a child, so too *Malchut* receives from *Zeir Anpin* and creates a new entity. In a kingdom, a king “receives” the people’s acceptance of his sovereignty and in return he provides all the people’s needs.

As the last *Sefirah*, *Malchut* does not exert any influence of its own except that which the other *Sefirot* pour into it. It is often compared to the moon which, though it has no light of its own, reflects the sun’s light as a new entity. The fusion of *Zeir Anpin* and *Malchut* is called in Kabbalah *Yichud Zun*—*Zeir Anpin* and *Nukvah* (*Malchut*) combined. As in a physical union that can procreate, all supernal diffusions are effected by the *Yichud Zun*.

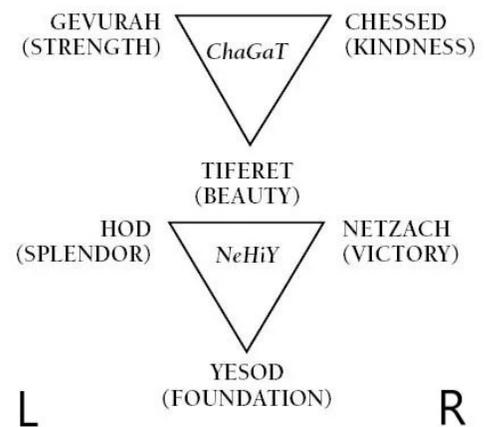
The purpose of creation is to reveal G-d’s sovereignty through the creation of “subjects” who are separate entities.

These subjects are distant and distinct from the level of the king, and subsequently accept upon themselves the yoke of his kingship. This was the whole purpose of the *Tzimtzum*, to obscure and hide the life force of the world and thereby make it appear as an independent entity. It is through the *Sefirah* of *Malchut* that time and space came into being. In the dimension of space, we can call G-d a king “above without end and below without limit,” and likewise in all four directions. In the dimension of time, G-d reigns, has reigned, and will reign. Because *Malchut* is the *Sefirah* in which the *Or Ein Sof* becomes manifest within the creation, it is called the *Shechinah*.

Malchut is also identified with the “mouth of G-d” or “G-d’s speech,” for it reveals G-dliness to the worlds.

Although we have enumerated the ten *Sefirot* above as including the *Sefirah* of *Daat*, some Kabbalistic texts count the *Sefirah* of *Keter* instead of *Daat*. The word *Keter* means “crown” and stands above all the other *Sefirot*, like the crown stands above the head. A king’s crown distinguishes him from his people so that they can subjugate themselves to him. The subjects of a sovereign are called “subjects of the crown” due to their loyalty, and nullification to the crown and its authority. *Keter* is the *Sefirah* that stands above all the *Sefirot*, and is equated with “Divine will” (*Ratzon*) and “Pleasure” (*Taanug*). Divine will is the external level of *Keter* and Pleasure the internal level of *Keter*. The highest, most transcendent level is “Faith” (*Emunah*).

In the human model, Intellect and Emotions, intellect and emotions are soul powers that dwell within the body.



Intellect is in the mind and the Emotions in the heart. A person's willpower and pleasure, however, transcend any particular organ. In a sense it is peripheral and is described as *Keter*. *Keter* has an internal dimension known in Kabbalah as *Atik Yomin* (lit. "the ancient of days") and an external dimension called *Arich Anpin* (lit. "the long countenance").

In any stage of the *Seder Hishtalshlut*, *Keter* acts as the intermediary between one level and the next. *Malchut* of the higher level becomes *Keter* of the next. For example, in the four worlds, *Malchut* of *Atzilut* becomes a *Keter* to *Beriah*.

The Atik Yomin of *Keter* is bound with the higher level and *Arich Anpin* is bound with the lower level.

We may now draw a diagram of the *Sefirot* as they group themselves within man, reflecting the supernal *Sefirot*.

THREE LEVELS OF *Keter*

Emunah (Faith). Taanug (Pleasure). Ratzon (Will)

Sefirot of Man

As mentioned above, the *Sefirot* are the infrastructure of all the worlds and are reflected with the microcosm of man.

They are the infrastructure of man's soul; both his animal and G-dly soul (see Ch.22). Both souls are a combination of Intellect and Emotions. In the *Nefesh HaBehamit* (animalistic soul), the predominant powers are the Emotions and are often classically referred to as the Evil Inclination (Yetzer HaRah). Intellect is dominant in the *Nefesh Elokit* (G-dly Soul) and is referred to as the Good Inclination (Yetzer HaTov). The intellectual faculty of the *Nefesh HaBehamit* is used primarily to serve the Emotions, whereas with the *Nefesh Elokit*, Emotions are an expression of the meditative Intellect. The arousal of emotions in the *Nefesh Elokit* is primarily through the power of meditation, which affects the emotions.

The *Sefirot* all have their internal and external dimensions.

This is how they affect the person, and how they affect others.

Chessed is internally translated into love, and externally into kindness. Within the *Nefesh HaBehamit*, one may love the forbidden and be kind to the undeserving. The main thrust of Hassidism is *Tikkun HaMiddot*—"correcting the negative character traits" of the *Nefesh HaBehamit*. This shall be discussed at length in Ch. 27.

We will now study in more detail the *Sefirot* as they appear in the *Nefesh Elokit*. When a Jew utilizes the ten soul powers within him in his Divine service here below, he is able to affect their source, the *Sefirot* of the higher worlds. With regard to the *Sefirot* in the Divine soul, which are described as a "part of G-d above," all the internal and external attributes of the *Sefirot* are directed to G-d alone. When a Jew utilizes the ten soul powers within him in his Divine service here below, he is able to affect their source, the *Sefirot* of the higher worlds.

Chessed: The internal aspect of *Chessed* is love of G-d and the great desire to cleave to Him. This affects the external attribute of *Chessed* in a way that the person desires to practice *Chessed* in order to emulate G-d and cleave to His attributes.

Gevurah: The internal aspect of *Gevurah* is the fear of G-d.

This expresses externally by reproof and chastising the wicked with the punishments of the Torah, prevailing over the Evil Inclination, and sanctifying himself in that which is permitted. By building a fence and hedge around the Torah, safeguards are put in place preventing transgressions.

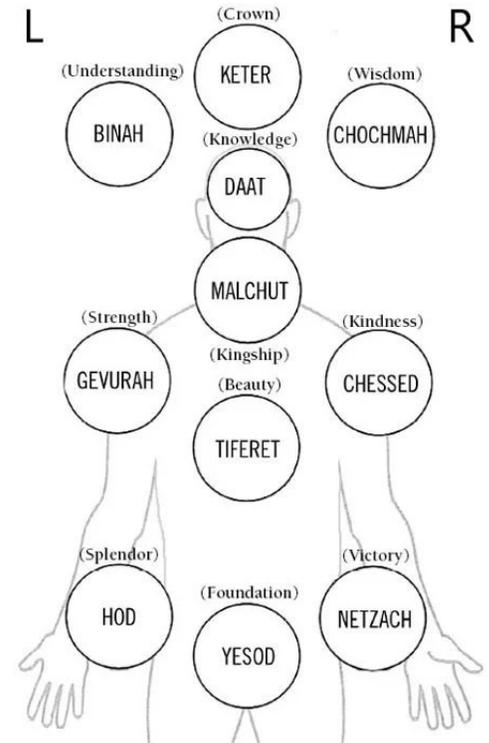
Tiferet: The power to seek to glorify G-d and follow His Torah mercifully in all ways possible. This is expressed in *Hiddur Mitzvah* (the "beautification" and "punctiliousness" in the performance of *Mitzvot*), such as having beautiful tefillin and mezuzot, even when it costs more money. It is also expressed by praising G-d in all ways possible—in thought, speech, and action.

Netzach: The power to prevail over anything that would restrain Man from the service of G-d and from cleaving to Him. This includes external battles over the forces of evil in order to fill the earth with the glory of G-d, as in the wars fought by King David.

Hod: Through self-abnegation and acknowledging the transcendence of that which defies his mortal understanding, man seeks to prostrate himself and self-effacingly praise G-d.

Even though man sees a material world, he acknowledges that in truth it is G-d who animates and creates everything.

His limited vision is due to his earthbound perspective. He expresses gratitude to G-d for all the favors that He has bestowed upon us and offers thanks to G-d for all His praiseworthy deeds, attributes, and workings in the creation of the upper and lower worlds. In this context, *Hod* has the meaning of being sincere in one's acts of gratitude.



Yesod: Cleaving to truth with intense desire and pleasure to the extent that one's soul is bound up with G-d, the very source of life and truth.

Malchut: to accept the yoke of G-d's sovereignty and to serve G-d like a true servant to his master, i.e. out of awe and fear.

All the above Emotions of the *Nefesh Elokit* are activated by the Intellect of the *Nefesh Elokit*. *Chochmah* is the source of the "selflessness" (Bittul) that comprehends G-d and His greatness.

Binah is the great "joy" (*Simchah*) that comes as a result of this comprehension in the length, breadth, and depth of understanding.

The deep comprehension of *Binah* along with the "unification" (Yichud) of *Daat* gives birth to the emotions of love and fear of G-d. *Daat* represents the bond and with which the soul is bound up in this understanding.

In summary, we may now see clearly how the *Sefirot* are represented in microcosm within man's soul and how they reflect and affect the supernal *Sefirot*. We may also see that Tikkun HaMiddot is primarily affected through *ChaBaD*—a thorough intellectual attachment to G-d and His purpose in creation.

Sefirah Chart

Sefirah	External Aspect within Creation (Macrocosm)	Internal Aspect within Man (Microcosm)
INTELLECT		
<i>Chochmah</i>	Wisdom	Selflessness
<i>Binah</i>	Understanding	Joy
<i>Daat</i>	Knowledge	Unification
EMOTIONS		
<i>Chessed</i>	Kindness	Love
<i>Gevurah</i>	Strength	Fear
<i>Tiferet</i>	Beauty	Mercy
<i>Netzach</i>	Victory	Prevail
<i>Hod</i>	Splendor	Sincerity
<i>Yesod</i>	Foundation	Bonding
<i>Malchut</i>	Kingship	Service

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