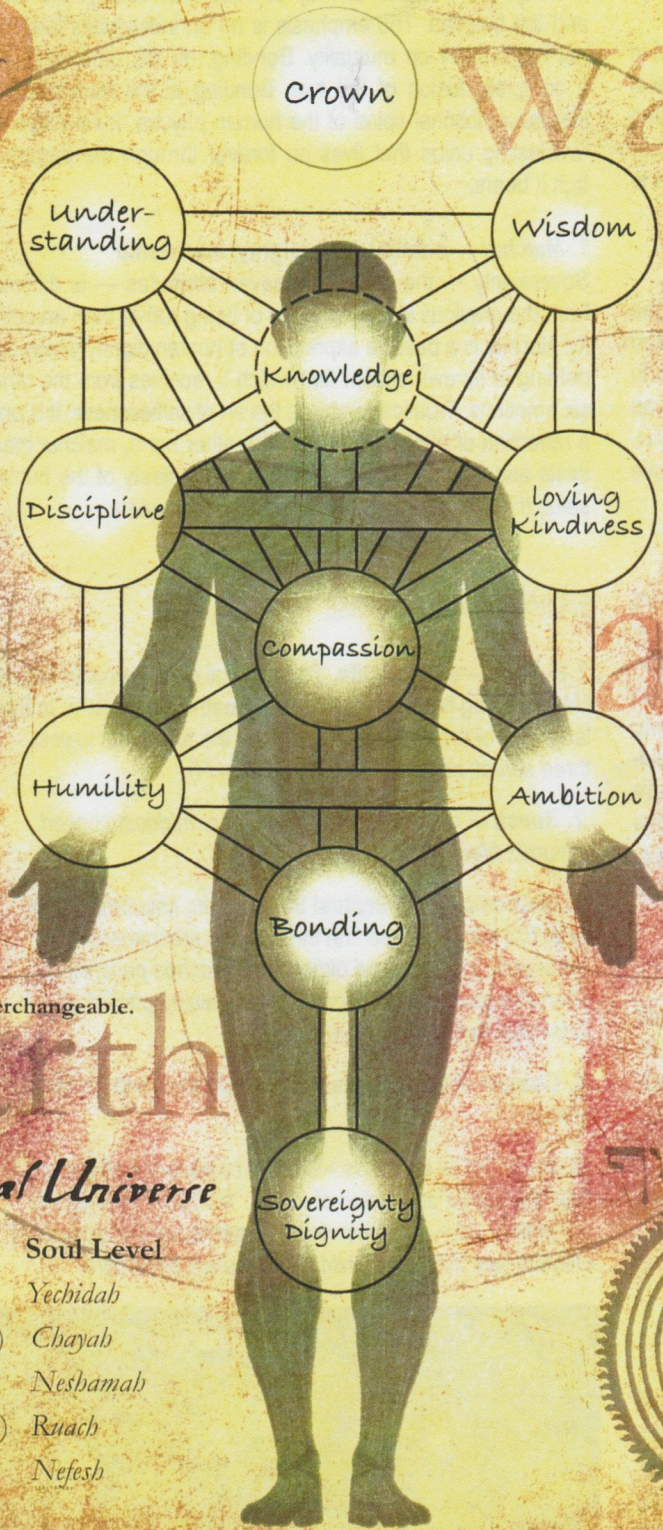


The Tree of Life



10 Sefirot

- Keter*
- Chochmah
- Binah
- Da'at
- Chesed
- Gevurah
- Tiferet
- Netzach
- Hod
- Yesod
- Malchut

* Keter and Da'at are interchangeable.

5-Dimensional Universe

World	Soul Level
Ein Sof (Infinite)	Yechidab
Atzilut (Emanation)	Chayah
Beriah (Creation)	Neshamah
Yetzirah (Formation)	Ruach
Asiyah (Action)	Nefesh

3 INTELLECTUAL ATTRIBUTES

1. **Chochmah** — wisdom, conception
2. **Binah** — understanding, comprehension
3. **Da'at** — knowledge, perception

7 EMOTIONAL ATTRIBUTES

1. **Chesed** — loving kindness, benevolence

Love is the single most powerful and necessary component in life. Love is the origin and foundation of all human interactions. It is both giving and receiving. It allows us to reach above and beyond ourselves; to experience another person and to allow that person to experience us. It is the tool by which we learn to experience the highest reality — G-d.

2. **Gevurah** — justice, discipline, restraint, awe

If love is the bedrock of human expression, discipline is the channel through which we express love. It gives our life and love direction and focus. Like a laser beam, its potency lies in the focus and concentration of light in one direction, rather than fragmented light beams dispersed in all different directions. Another aspect of *gevurah* is respect and awe. Healthy love requires respect for the one you love.

3. **Tiferet** — beauty, harmony, compassion

Compassion blends and harmonizes the free outpouring love of *chesed* with the discipline of *gevurah*. *Tiferet* possesses this power by introducing a third dimension — the dimension of truth, which is neither love nor discipline and therefore can integrate the two. Truth is accessed through selflessness: rising above your ego and your predispositions, enabling you to realize a higher truth. Truth gives you a clear and objective picture of your and others' needs. The imbalance of love and discipline is a result of a subjective, hence limited perspective. Introducing truth, by suspending personal prejudices, allows you to express your feelings in the healthiest manner.

4. **Netzach** — endurance, fortitude, ambition

Endurance and ambition is a combination of determination and tenacity. It is a balance of patience, persistence, and guts. Endurance is also being reliable and accountable, which establishes security and commitment. Without endurance, any good endeavor or intention has no chance of success. Endurance means to be alive, to be driven by healthy and productive goals. It is the readiness to fight for what you believe, to go all the way. Without such commitment any undertaking remains flat and empty. It is an energy that comes from within and stops at nothing to achieve its goals.

5. **Hod** — humility, splendor

If endurance is the engine of life, humility is its fuel. As *gevurah* (discipline) gives *chesed* (love) focus, *hod* gives *netzach* (endurance) direction. Humility is the silent partner of endurance. Its strength is in its silence. Its splendor is in its repose. Humility — and the resulting yielding — should not be confused with

weakness and lack of self-esteem. Humility is modesty; it is acknowledgment (from the root of the Hebrew word, *hoda'ah*). It is saying "thank you" to G-d.

6. **Yesod** — bonding, foundation

Bonding is the ultimate emotional connection. While the first five qualities (love, discipline, compassion, endurance, and humility) are interactive, they still manifest duality: the lover and the beloved. The emphasis is on an individual's feelings, not necessarily on mutuality. Bonding, on the other hand, is a complete fusion of the two. Bonding is the foundation of life: the emotional spine of the human psyche. It develops an everlasting union that lives on forever through the perpetual fruit it bears.

7. **Malchut** — nobility, sovereignty, leadership

Sovereignty — the last of the seven attributes — is different from the previous six. It is a state of being rather than an activity. Nobility is a passive expression of human dignity which has nothing of its own except that which it receives from the other six emotions. True leadership is the art of selflessness; it is only a reflection of a Higher will. On the other hand, *malchut* manifests and actualizes the character and majesty of the human spirit. It is the very fiber of what makes us human.

5-DIMENSIONAL UNIVERSE

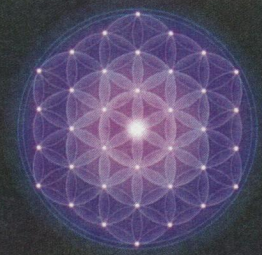
1. **Nefesh** — sensory life. The medical definition of biological life: a beating heart, a live brain, a breathing organism. In the language of the kabbalistic *sefirot* — the functional lowest three *sefirot*; *netzach, hod, yesod* (*NeH"l*).

2. **Ruach** — emotional life. The higher *middos*; *chesed, gevurah, tiferet* (*ChaGa"l*)

3. **Neshomo** — intellectual life. *Mochin, chochma, binah, da'at* (*ChaBaD*). These first three levels are immanent, conscious, and localized dimensions (*kochos penimi'im*). Then comes the transcendent, non-localized powers of *keter* (the crown above the head).

4. **Chayah** — transcendent life. *Arich* (the lower dimension of *keter*).

5. **Yechidah** — oneness — the pure essence of the soul. *Atik* (the higher dimension of *keter*). *Yechidah*, oneness, is the *pintele yid* — the inner dot, the purest point of your most intimate self. The inner child of innocence. Your core.



What to know more?
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This four-part series dissects the fundamental building blocks of existence. Just as DNA is a blueprint that contains the genetic instructions of all living organisms, the kabbalah is a blueprint that stores the spiritual genetics of all living souls, information vital for the development and function of everything in existence. Access these forces and learn how they can help transform your life and relationships.

SIGN UP ▶



Each of the days From the second night of Passover, the festival of receiving Torah (where we receive the principles for civilization as a spiritual practice) became a spiritual pilgrimage of self-refinement and expanded consciousness for the Kabbalists -- which we can follow, too. In the grid below, each of the seven lower qualities (*sephiroth*) of the Tree of Life, the Eitz Chayyim, are arranged so that each day has a pair for contemplation. For example, on Day 12 the pair for contemplation would be gold wrapped with blue, or the stories of Aaron or Avigail considered within those of Isaac or Miriam, or the qualities of Humility when wrapped with Strength, and / or turn your attention to the lower left and upper left side. Consider doing this Omer practice with a partner, or create an Omer practice group. Should you miss a night of counting, catch up in the morning without the blessing (from your choice of prayerbook0 and in the evening continue with the next day's blessing, pair of *sephiroth*, and count.

	CHESED Abundance Loving-Kindness Embraced in Love <i>Upper Right Side</i> Sarah & Abraham	GEVURAH Strength, Limits, Restraint Boundaries <i>Upper Left Side</i> Miriam & Isaac	TIFERET Beauty, Harmony, Balance <i>Center, Heart</i> Devorah & Jacob	NETZAKH Endurance, Ambition Drive <i>Lower Right Side</i> Hannah & Moses	HOD Containing, Incubating, Humility, Refining, Discretion <i>Lower Left Side</i> Avigail & Aaron	YESOD Foundation Conducting Transmitting <i>Genital Area</i> Hulda & Joseph	MALCHUT Dissolving into Manifestation Creation & Shabbat <i>Feet</i> Esther & David
	FROM SATURDAY AFTER SUNDOWN	FROM SUNDAY AFTER SUNDOWN	FROM MONDAY AFTER SUNDOWN	FROM TUESDAY AFTER SUNDOWN	FROM WEDNESDAY AFTER SUNDOWN	FROM THURSDAY AFTER SUNDOWN	FROM FRIDAY AFTER SUNDOWN
CHESED	Day 1: March 31 Chessed (within) sheh b'chessed	Day 2: April 2 Gevurah (within) sheh b'chessed	Day 3: April 3 Tiferet (within) sheh b'chessed	Day 4: April 4 Netzakh (within) sheh b'chessed	Day 5: April 5 Hod (within) sheh b'chessed	Day 6: April 6 Yesod (within) sheh b'chessed	Day 7: April 7 Malchut (within) sheh b'chessed
GEVURAH	Day 8: April 8 Chessed sheh b'gevurah	Day 9: April 9 Gevurah sheh b'gevurah	Day 10: April 10 Tiferet sheh b'gevurah	Day 11: April 11 Netzakh sheh b'gevurah	Day 12: April 12 Hod sheh b'gevurah	Day 13: April 13 Yesod sheh b'gevurah	Day 14: April 14 Malchut sheh b'gevurah
TIFERET	Day 15: April 15 Chessed sheh b'tiferet	Day 16: April 16 Gevurah sheh b'tiferet	Day 17: April 17 Tiferet sheh b'tiferet	Day 18: April 18 Netzakh sheh b'tiferet	Day 19: April 19 Hod sheh b'tiferet	Day 20: April 20 Yesod sheh b'tiferet	Day 21: April 21 Malchut sheh b'tiferet
NETZAKH	Day 22: April 22 Chessed sheh b'netzakh	Day 23: April 23 Gevurah sheh b'netzakh	Day 24: April 24 Tiferet sheh b'netzakh	Day 25: April 25 Netzakh sheh b'netzakh	Day 26: April 26 Hod sheh b'netzakh	Day 27: April 27 Yesod sheh b'netzakh	Day 28: April 28 Malkhut sheh b'netzakh
HOD	Day 29: April 29 Chessed sheh b'hod	Day 30: April 30 Gevurah sheh b'hod	Day 31: May 1 Tiferet sheh b'hod	Day 32: May 2 Netzakh sheh b'hod	Day 33: May 3 Hod sheh b'hod	Day 34: May 4 Yesod sheh b'hod	Day 35: May 5 Malkhut sheh b'hod
YESOD	Day 36: May 6 Chessed sheh b'yesod	Day 37: May 7 Gevurah sheh b'yesod	Day 38: May 8- Tiferet sheh b'yesod	Day 39: May 9 Netzakh sheh b'yesod	Day 40: May 10 Hod sheh b'yesod	Day 41: May 11 Yesod sheh b'yesod	Day 42: May 12 Malkhut sheh b'yesod
MALCHUT	Day 43: May 13 Chessed sheh b'malchut	Day 44: May 14 Gevurah sheh b'malchut	Day 45: May 15 Tiferet Sheh b'malchut	Day 46: May 16 Netzakh sheh b'malchut	Day 47: May 17 Hod sheh b'malchut	Day 48: May 18 Yesod sheh b'malchut	Day 49: May 19 Malkhut sheh b'malchut

The Shekhinah - — Rabbi Jill Hammer

Where can we find a powerful image of the Divine feminine within Jewish sources? One name for Her which has been with us for centuries is the Shekhinah, the “dweller within.” In ancient times, the Shekhinah was a Talmudic word for the glory of God that rested on the mishkan (the mishkan was the Tabernacle, God’s sacred dwelling space in the wilderness (see Exodus 26-28). The Israelites saw the “glory of God” (kavod adonai) as tangible, powerful, and sacred, a pillar of fire or cloud guiding the Israelites through the wilderness.

According to the Talmud, the Shekhinah, the Indwelling, is the Divine that resides within the life of the world, dwelling on earth with the Jewish people and going into exile with them when they are exiled. While the traditional Jewish image of the transcendent God is male, in the kabbalah, that image has been accompanied by the feminine image of the Shekhinah—the inner glory of existence.

In the Zohar (a medieval mystical work), there are ten facets or sefirot of the Divine, and the Shekhinah (also known as malchut) is the tenth and final one, closest to the created world. She is a mystical embodiment of the feminine, earth-centered presence of God, and was also called the bride of God, the Sabbath, the Torah, the moon, the earth, and the apple orchard. Mysticism depicts the Shekhinah as female, but she can be both female and male. Two biblical figures who symbolize her are Rachel (wife of Jacob and mother of the Israelite nation) and David (shepherd, psalmist, and king of Israel). The Shekhinah rests on those who study, pray, visit the sick, welcome the new moon, welcome guests, give charity to the poor, dwell in the harvest booth called the sukkah, or perform other sacred activities.

The Shekhinah embodies joy, yet she is also a symbol of shared suffering and empathy, not only with a nation’s exile, but with all the hurts of the world. Mystics believe that in messianic times She will be reunited with her heavenly partner and that they will become one. Many Jewish poets of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries have reclaimed her as a powerful feminine image of God.

Yet the Shekhinah as She is portrayed by Jewish sources is not a panacea for all that ails the way we look at God. Until recently kabbalists have considered Her the lowest and most inactive part of the Godhead, the last and least in a series of ten steps of creation.

The Shekhinah embodies traditional feminine traits like passivity and nurturing, and at the same time she is associated with death and darkness. These images, taken uncritically, can be damaging to women and to the male conception of the feminine. To discover the Shekhinah as the full embodiment of the feminine Divine, we must transform her from a stereotype into a living divinity who speaks to us in many different kinds of voices: mother and daughter, old and young, light and dark, compassion and anger, revelation and mystery.

We can rediscover the Shekhinah throughout Jewish text, throughout history, and throughout the natural world. God in the Bible is sometimes mother eagle and sometimes Holy Wisdom crying out in the streets. In the Talmud and midrash, the Divine is sometimes portrayed as a nursing mother or as the (female) twin of Israel. In the Zohar, there are multiple feminine God-images, such as Binah (understanding), also known as Immah Ilaah (the higher mother), who is called the womb and palace of creation, the fountain of understanding, the well of souls. Then there is Lilith, a mythic figure whom the tradition demonized but who for some is the embodiment of sexuality and freedom.

We also cannot forget that the images and stories of the Shekhinah are connected to traditions of the Divine feminine around the world, from the ancient goddess Inanna, who is described as a warrior for her people just as the Shekhinah is in the Zohar; to the Virgin Mary, who is an intercessor in matters of Divine judgment like the Shekhinah; to Kuan Yin of Asia, who embodies compassion for those who suffer, just as the Shekhinah does. Jews have been afraid to acknowledge the Shekhinah's relationship to goddesses and goddess-like images because of the traditional Jewish prohibition against idolatry. Yet to deny our connection to the Divine feminine as it is expressed and loved by others is to deny our connection to the human, and feminine, religious experience, and to render invisible some of the sources of our own spirituality.

Today feminist theologians and earth-centered Jews have reclaimed the Shekhinah as a unified deity in her own right, dwelling within living things and the earth, seeking peace and promoting human connection, speaking through women as well as men, working through the neglected and invisible, promoting change and healing brokenness. She is the Goddess—an image of the forces of life and the mysteries of creation.

As a rabbi, a feminist scholar, and a seeker, I have been looking for the Divine feminine for many years. In my own dreams, I have seen the Shekhinah as a pregnant woman glowing with light, as a great bird, as an old, secretive woman in a black robe, and as a stone with feathers. While I constantly look for her in texts, I believe that our own experience of Her will guide us toward Her, if we can open our eyes and ears.

The Shekhinah, for some, is a reminder that there is no division between creation and divinity. The Shekhinah allows us to break through the exclusively male and hierarchical visions of God and imagine a God that changes as we change, that evokes nature as well as the supernatural. Melissa Weintraub writes: "Shekhinah, Mother of all being, you are the stream that runs through our veins, and dances through the soil..." When we speak to the immanent Shekhinah, She speaks not to us, but through us, and through all the varied facets of the world.

Malkhut / kingdom / Shekhinah: the final week of the Omer - Rabbi Rachel Birenblat

We're entering the final week of the counting of the Omer: the week of malkhut. Malkhut means something like kingship or kingdom -- in a gender-neutral term, sovereignty.

The "kingdom of God" may be a term more comfortable for Christians than for liberal Jews. When we hear it, many of us think of The Lord's Prayer -- "for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory" -- and these don't feel like Jewish ideas to most of us. But they are Jewish ideas! We use these words in our liturgy every day (though in Hebrew, so they don't push the same buttons for us which may be pushed by the English terms of Christian liturgy.) And these weeks of the Omer have been a journey through these facets of God. Glory -- that's tiferet, week three. Power -- that's gevurah, week two. And kingdom is malkhut, the week we're beginning now.

Malkhut is deeply associated with the Shekhinah, the immanent indwelling divine Presence of God which is understood as feminine. Jewish tradition has attached all sorts of symbolism to malkhut and Shekhinah -- there's a partial list of associations, among them the matriarch Rachel, the wellspring, the bride, the apple orchard, the garden of Eden, and Shabbat, here at Jewish Virtual Library. (For more on Shekhinah, I recommend Rabbi Jill Hammer's beautiful teaching *The Shekhinah at Tel Shemesh*.)

Some teach that malkhut is the only sefirah we can truly access. Divine emanation streams from the limitless ein-sof (the most transcendent part of God, that which we can neither conceptualize nor encounter) through the ten sefirot, spiraling down in a chain of blessing and being modulated and transformed as it flows. Only when it reaches malkhut has it been gentled into a form which won't blow out our spiritual circuits. We can't connect directly with the higher sefirot, but we can connect to malkhut. Malkhut is divine immanence, God to Whom we can relate.

Some associate malkhut with the world of speech. Jewish mysticism teaches that God created everything through speech (and our liturgy tells us that God continues to speak the world into being even now.) Malkhut is associated with oral Torah -- the aspect of Torah which is spoken rather than written, interactive rather than static. This is a week to ask, how does my speech manifest God's kingdom on earth? Do I use words wisely and well in a way which helps me to serve something greater than myself?

In the last line of the aleinu, which Jews recite at the end of every worship service, we pray for the day when we will see God's presence permeate creation, l'taken olam b'malkhut shaddai, to heal the world with God's sovereignty. Malkhut is what we experience when we experience God's greatness reverberating and emanating from within creation itself. And this isn't power-over which damages: this is sovereignty in its highest form, sovereignty which heals and repairs all which is broken.

This is a week to ask, how can I experience God's presence in creation? Can I relate to the divinity immanent in all things? How do I feel about accepting God's sovereignty -- if that's an uncomfortable idea for me, what internal work might that inspire me to do? What can I do with the tension between malkhut as kingship (power from beyond creation) and malkhut as Shekhinah (immanent presence within creation)? What does malkhut mean in my life this week? And how might this week, the culmination of seven weeks of counting, prepare me to receive revelation on Shavuot?

Inner.org - Malchut

Malchut is the last of the ten sefirot, and the final emotive attribute within Creation (or, more precisely, the power to express one's thoughts and emotions to others).

Malchut appears in the configuration of the sefirot at the bottom of the middle axis, directly beneath yesod, and corresponds in the *etzelem Elokim* to the "crown" of the procreative organ (the corona in the male; the labia in the female), or to the mouth.

Malchut is associated in the soul with the power of self-expression. Kabbalah identifies three basic "garments" (*levushim*) of the soul which enable it to achieve expression: "thought" (*machshavah*), by which the soul is revealed inwardly; and "speech" (*dibur*) and "deed" (*ma'aseh*), by which it is revealed outwardly.

Malchut as a whole is often referred to as "the world of speech" insofar as the spoken word represents the essential medium of self-expression, allowing one to not only reveal himself to outer reality but to guide and influence that reality as well. Hence, speech allows one to exercise authority and "kingship," the literal meaning of malchut.

Malchut also serves as the means for establishing an identification with outer reality. Exercising kingship requires utmost sensitivity to the needs of the realm which one seeks to rule. Hence malchut demands that every agent of influence within Creation assume a recipient posture vis a vis the Divine source of all authority, for only then can the ultimate good of the mundane realm be assured.

The soul, in its meditation of Divinity, can only perceive and ascend to the higher sefirot through the "pane" and portal of malchut. "This is the gate to God, the righteous shall enter through it" (Psalms 118:20). In one's devoted service to God this means receiving upon oneself, in total commitment, "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven."

Malkhut - ALICIA JO RABINS

"That which defines space can stand aloof from space. That which defines time, on the other hand, cannot remain apart from it." — Aryeh Kaplan

The field of time stands up
and grows a face.
Arms sprout from his side,
wings from the arms, blue mouth
burning between the feathers.
The field of time changes the air
around him as a sunken pothole
changes the road, as a flaming tree
illuminates the yard. Then
takes a brush and begins
to sketch us: double helix paint
on a canvas of cells.

Practice Sovereignty With Humility - David Jaffe

I want to share some brief thoughts about this season inspired by my own practice and living in Israel. As I mentioned last month I've been combining the sefira for the week of the omer (eg. Chesed, Gevura, Tiferet) with the middah that is on my personal soul curriculum for that week. This Saturday night I began focusing on Anavah/Humility and the Sefira switched to Malchut/Sovereignty, thus this week for me is Malchut of Anavah, or the kingship and dominion of humility. At first glance these seem like opposites – humility and kingship. How does one practice sovereignty with humility or humility with sovereignty? To make things even more interesting, yesterday was Yom Yerushalayim, the day celebrating the return of Jewish sovereignty, in 1967, over all of Jerusalem, including the Western Wall and Temple Mount. This past month in Israel the triumphs and heartbreak of Jewish sovereignty are ever present though Holocaust remembrance day, memorial day and independence day, as well as the conclusion of forming a new government.

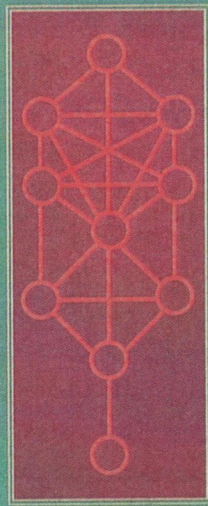
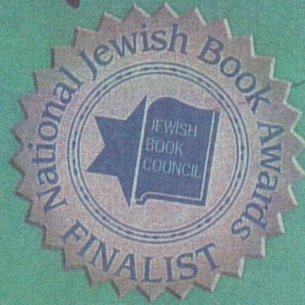
As Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, and others have noted, the founding of the State of Israel marked the formal return of Jews to power. Politically powerless for close to 2000 years, Jews now have a modern state with an army and an economy and all the things that give power to influence events in the world. How we are to use this power may be the most compelling question facing contemporary Jewry. Enter Malchut of Anavah. Just as it is important for me on a personal level to figure out how to combine sovereignty with humility, so it seems crucial to our spiritual well-being as a people that we figure out how to exercise sovereignty with humility. Events yesterday in Jerusalem give a stark example of sovereignty without humility. Each year on Jerusalem day there is a Jewish parade through the Muslim quarter of the Old-City with Israeli flags waving to demonstrate Jewish sovereignty over all of Jerusalem, including predominantly Arab areas. Invariably there are violent clashes between slogan chanting Israeli Jews and angry Palestinians. There is growing opposition to this march among Israeli Jews and counterdemonstrations this year were the biggest ever.

While Israel has much bigger challenges than this parade I think it symbolizes the struggle to exercise malchut with anavah. Can we be a fully powerful nation that, to paraphrase Alan Morinis, is "right sized." Can we take space and assert sovereignty when called for, and pull back and give space, when that is the prudent move. On a political level conservatives and progressive will have different instincts for what type of anavah is needed at any moment. Nevertheless, I think it is important that we ask the question in spiritual terms. Just as we do in our individual spiritual practice, a nation can also ask, "What is the best way to manifest malchut and anavah in this situation?"

May this omer period help us transform not only into wiser and more balanced individuals, but may its influence extend to our people so we are truly a wiser and more spiritually balanced nation acting with Malchut d'anavah on the world stage.

אהיה
E H Y E H

A
KABBALAH
FOR
TOMORROW



Arthur Green

ad infinitum. The dialectic is an unending process. So too is the task of inner growth, the challenging and refining of human personality. But the point has already been made, and once is enough. A tenfold model has a simple perfection about it that would be lost if we were to carry it further. The first nine *sefirot* thus represent three triads, one describing the primal process out of which personhood, both divine and human, is born; followed by the two triads of tension and resolution, taking us to the place of peace. Life-energy is endlessly coursing through this pattern, binding the *sefirot* together into a single whole. This is the energy that will flow from God into the world, allowing all creatures to exist as varied manifestations of the single One. Before the border can be crossed from Oneness into multiplicity, however, that energy must be received into the great and transformative storehouse of Being, represented by the final link in the inner divine process, God as *shekhinah*, or abundant Presence.

THE TENTH SEFIRAH: PROCESS FULFILLED

Shekhinah (Malkhut)

The word *shekhinah* derives from the Hebrew root שכן meaning “to dwell.” One noun formed from that root is *mishkan*, the tabernacle or dwelling place of God in the wilderness. *Mishkan* means “the place of dwelling;” *shekhinah* is more like “that which dwells.” *Shekhinah* is the presence of the One amid the many, the palpable reality of divinity within the here-and-now. The first nine *sefirot* refer to a reality that transcends our ordinary life experience. They represent the transition or the inner journey from hiddenness to manifestation, from *Eyn Sof* to *shekhinah*, in both God and person. The final *sefirah*, especially as understood in the Hasidic sources, is the God who is fully immanent within the natural and physical world, the God who is the subject of our regular awareness that “the whole earth is filled with God’s glory.”

The imagery associated with *shekhinah* in kabbalistic teaching is particularly rich. She is *malkhut*, the “kingdom” into which the King enters and in which perfect harmony and fulfillment are found. Most of the verbal images portray *shekhinah* in feminine terms or in aspects of nature, such as land, sea, and moon, natural elements that are often linked to femininity. This has to do with the deeply sexual character of kabbalistic thought. The flow of energy or being through the sefirotic channels, while sometimes likened to both light and water flowing from a hidden source, is very much experienced by the kabbalist as the flow of a man’s inner sexual energies, concentrated in the semen that he pours into his mate at the moment of sexual climax. Kabbalah rejects the usual Western separation of the physical from the spiritual realm. The flow of divinity from hiddenness to revelation, the flow of mental energies from egolessness to fullness of personality, and the flow of sexual energies from their deep inner sources to fulfillment in the act of sexual union are all manifestations of the same process.

The kabbalists, like people of all ages, were filled with wonder at the human reproductive process. Their teachings are in part a reflection on the links between love, its passionate fulfillment, and the flow of creative energies throughout the universe. The connection between our words *creation* and *procreation* derives from this same perception of reality. The forces within our human make-up that lead us to bring forth new generations lie in a continuum with the power that brought us here in the first place. Thus the human soul and even the existence of the lower worlds altogether are depicted by Kabbalah as resulting from an act of sexual union within God, of the flow together of divine male and female energies.

The Kabbalah of previous centuries was created, transmitted, taught, and studied exclusively by men. Books written for women, usually in the vernacular rather than Hebrew, were notably devoid of kabbalistic teachings. It is thus no surprise that the sex-

ual model offered by Kabbalah is designed entirely from a male point of view. The "upper" six of the seven *sefirot* that constitute divine and human personhood are usually seen as male; only the seventh, the receptive partner, is female. *Shekhinah* is like the moon, having no light of her own, waiting to receive the light of the sun as it shines forth upon her. She is the sea, into whom the waters flow; the holy city, entered by the holy King. *Shekhinah* is the bride of God, longing for her husband to join her under the canopy that represents their love. She also represents the exiled Community of Israel, who longs for her absent spouse to return to her and restore her former glory.

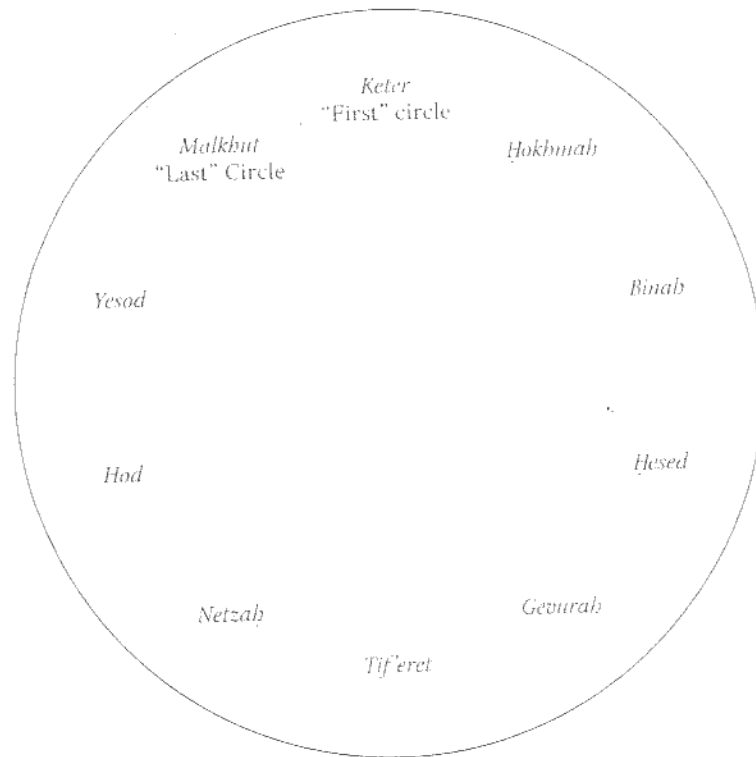
Shekhinah is not without significant power, however. It is she who must begin the arousal of love. Energized by the devotion of her followers, she turns to arouse her divine Lover and awaken the flow from beyond. Energy thus courses in both directions: forward through the sefirotic channels and into *shekhinah*, but also back from the outer world, into *shekhinah* and up through the *sefirot*, reaching back toward *keter*. The *sefirot* may be seen in the image of Jacob's dream, a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels going up and down on it. *Shekhinah* is the ground on which the ladder stands; it is she who sends the angels upward. The *Zohar* compares *shekhinah* to the holy Sabbath, a day on which no manna fell in the wilderness and when no productive work is allowed, but the day that is the source of blessing for all the others. Were it not for the blessings sent forth by *shekhinah*, the life-force flowing through the upper channels could never come to fruition.

A Kabbalah for our times, taught and studied by women as well as men, will need to develop new and more nuanced understandings of this inner union from a female as well as a male perspective. As a male teacher of Kabbalah, I would not presume to say what form this development will take. It may portray female understandings of all the *sefirot* or it may open *shekhinah* herself to multiple levels of discovery and understanding. The growth of

these teachings will require time, patience, much knowledge, and true inspiration. These teachings cannot be artificial or seem superficially imposed. If they are deeply rooted in the traditions of the past and remain faithful to the essential values of uniting all and revealing the One manifest in both male and female, I trust that they will eventually be accepted.

COMPLETING THE CIRCLE

As we conclude our discussion of the ten *sefirot*, we need to talk about the special relationship between the first and the last of the ten. One of the most important names for *shekhinah* in Kabbalah is *'atarah*, another Hebrew term for "crown." The first and last



Sefirot as the Circle of Existence

sefirot are both crowns, *keter* and *'atarah*. We said above that the word *keter* also means "circle," because the crown is round. Now we should see the *sefirot* as a sacred circle, "its end tied to its beginning and its beginning to its end," as the ancient *Sefer Yetzirah* teaches. The ten *sefirot* as a circle represent the fullness of God, the complete circle, the Oneness of Being. Because *shekhinah* dwells within us and we within it, we, too, are part of that circle. The circle of life includes all that is. In order to understand the process, to trace the origins of the many back to the One, we have allowed ourselves to open that circle, to turn it temporarily into a series of straight lines, so that we might see its progression, going from one stage to another. This is the way our linear minds work; it is the style of what we sometimes call right-brain thinking. Now that we have come to the end of the system, we must remember, as the kabbalists are quick to remind us, that really we understand nothing at all. Therefore we rejoin the circle, tie its ends back together, and allow ourselves to dance within it.

Here again, we are ready for a meditation. The ten *sefirot* must become a way of thinking for us, not a body of knowledge. They are the choreography for a dance of the mind, to be apprehended always by the left side of the brain, that which appreciates poetry and hears its inner music. Let us try to contemplate the *sefirot* in a kind of poetic framework.

Nothing is at the beginning.
Nothing is at the end.
Let me be a vessel,
Drawing together
One with One,
So they become One in my hands,
So that we become one in Your hands.
One within, One beyond;
One above, One below;
One right, One left;
One he, One she;

*One I, one Thou.
Ten in One,
One in Ten
Present here,
Present now.
All is at the beginning.
All is at the end.*