

Sefer Haredim

The Book of the Pious

of the Master Kabbalist,
Rabbi Elazar Ezkari

The Unity of G-d, Chapter Seven

*Herein will be explained that the
Supernal Union and the Indwelling of the Shekhina
are Dependent upon Shalom.*

Translation and commentary by
Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok

Introduction

The Master Kabbalist, Rabbi Elazar Ben Moshe Ezkari was one of the great prophetic Kabbalists in Tzfat (Safed, Israel) during the late 1500's. He was one in a generation that included some of the greatest Kabbalists of all times. Among Rabbi Ezkari's peers was Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the authoritative Code of Jewish Law and the Ari'zal, the master of all later Kabbalah.

Rav Ezkari is said to have spent his entire life devoted to writing works on Torah and prophetic meditation. He never held any official Rabbinic office, nor did he engage in secular work.

From among his many works, Rabbi Ezkari is best loved for his spiritual Kabbalistic love poem, Yedid Nefesh (Beloved of the Soul), which has become a regular addition to Friday night Sabbath prayers.

His most famous work, Sefer Haredim (the Book of the Pious), was originally published in Venice one year after his death in 1601. Since then, it has become a staple of moralistic/Kabbalistic learning for the entire Jewish community.

Rabbi Ezkari begins Sefer Haredim, the Book of the Pious, by explaining one of the most important Torah concepts: the unity of G-d. In explaining this most important concept, he emphasizes how G-d's unity must be reflected in human unity. He endeavors to show how unity among men is the only true way to proclaim G-d's unity. Kabbalists have long preached this message.

In our days, where there is all too much general strife, personal slander and inter-community religious arguments, I feel that Rabbi Ezkari's exhortations for peace are most needed. We are truly blind to the spiritual damage caused by our physical conflicts. I pray that Rabbi Ezkari's words might serve to awaken our hearts and assist us in changing our actions.

In order to help make the Kabbalistic references in the Sefer Haredim more intelligible, I have included a running commentary. In order to fully appreciate Rabbi Ezkari's work, I must ask that you read the commentary as you proceed. In translating, I always endeavor to remain as true to the original text as possible. I do not like

to add into the translation those explanations which are necessary to understand it. Thus there develops the need for a commentary. Many things are explained therein.

Without the commentary to explain the Kabbalistic terminologies and concepts, much of Rabbi Ezkari's message would be lost. Indeed his message is too important. It needs to be heard. Understand it. Heed it well.

***The Book of the Pious,
The Unity of G-d, Chapter Seven***

It is a wondrous thing that G-d has taught His creation that He alone directs them all¹.

We thus serve Him, fear Him and are in awe of Him, in the same way as it is written in Gittin (68A) regarding what was told to Asmodai (the king of the demons), *"The Name of your Master is above you." Upon hearing this he became angry and afraid, and threw himself upon the ground.*"²

The reason for this is that the ten [Divine]

¹ The greatest teaching of the Torah is the lesson of monotheism. There is only ONE guiding force which directs all things in all universes. There is no group of competing "super-beings" whom we must placate. Realizing that there is only ONE force, we understand that the universe has meaning, purpose and direction. This truly is a comfort in our lives, which often feel chaotic.

² Pagan mythology portrays the world as being split into two camps, the good and the evil. The good is ruled by G-d and the evil is ruled by the Devil. The Pagans teach that the two of them thus fight over the souls of men for control of the world. Torah dismisses this mythological thinking as spiritual immaturity. G-d and G-d alone is in charge of all. He is in charge of good and evil and is L-rd of man and angel, demon and the Devil. Asmodai is one of the ancient names of the Devil. This Talmudic story is quoted to show that even the Devil is in fear of G-d and obeys Him without question.

sefirotic [emanations]³ are summed up in the four letters of His great Name, YHWH as is known.

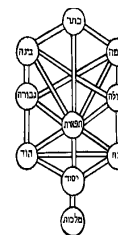
The crown of the Yod refers to Keter.

The Yod itself refers to Hokhma.

The Hey refers to Binah.

The Vav to the next six sefirot.

The final Hey refers to Malkhut.



In the beginning, in the realm of [Mind] Beriah,⁴ when G-d was about to create the world He created four

³ This topic was discussed in detail in Panu Derekh #13, the "Basic Concepts and Terminologies in Kabbalah." G-d revealed Himself from His unknowable essence through the form of ten filters of Divine Light, known as the Sefirot. These sefirot together manifest that which we call G-d's Name. G-d created the universe through His holy Name. The Rabbi is here showing us how the four letters of the holy Name correspond with the ten sefirot.

⁴ The universe spoken of in creation (Genesis 1) was created from that realm called "G-d's Mind". This realm is called in Kabbalah the "world of Beriah." The realm of Beriah (Mind) is the second of the four realms; spirit being the first. The first realm (of spirit) is invisible and corresponds to G-d's holy Name YHWH. Thus the invisible is the source of the visible. The Torah (and thus the creation story) begin with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, "Beit" to suggest that creation became manifest through the second realm (the visible) and not the first realm (the invisible).

columns.⁵ They are under the direction of His ten sefirot.

Also in the realm of [Heart] (Yetzirah) there are the four camps of the Divine Feminine Presence (the Shekhina).⁶ In the realm of the physical world (Asiyah) there are the four foundations [of fire, air, water and earth].⁷

[All in the] physical and spiritual [are united] in accordance to the secret of A'Be'Y'Ah (Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, Asiyah).⁸

Intelligence was given to mankind that he should place within his heart that "*The*

Name of your Master is above you", for we are created from the four foundations, whose origins are the four letters of his great Name.⁹ Of this it is written, that the Patriarchs, they themselves are the [holy Merkava chariot], each one individually by himself, and together they form the collective Merkava.¹⁰

Avraham is [the attribute of mercy] (Hesed), by which the [letter] Yod is revealed.¹¹

Yitzhak is [the attribute of severity]

⁵ The four columns are usually a reference to the four general sefirot, Hokhma (father-abba); Binah (mother-imma) Tiferet (small face, son, ZA) and Malkhut (shekhina, daughter, Nok). All ten sefirot manifest the interactions of these four.

⁶ The realm of Heart (Yetzirah) is the level of the angels and demons. The Shekhina, the Divine Presence of G-d revealed in the lower worlds, is served by the "camps" of the angels. The number of camps is four, corresponding to the four realms and the four letters of G-d's holy Name YHWH. This image is best expressed by the prophet Ezekiel in the famous vision of the holy Chariot (Ezek. 1).

⁷ Each realm, spirit, mind, heart and body each have within them four subdivision. Each realm connects with and slightly overlaps the one above it. The physical world is made up of four types of matter: solid (earth), liquid (water), gas (air) and plasma (fire).

⁸ These are the Hebrew names of the four realms. Atzilut:spirit; Beriah:mind; Yetzirah: heart; Asiyah: body. All four manifest the supernal pattern inherent in the holy Name YHWH. All four together form one concentric whole.

⁹ The bodies of Mankind, as physical beings, are created from the four elements of the physical realms. The source of these elements is G-d's Name YHWH, thus the source of our bodies is also the holy Name.

¹⁰ The merkava is the holy chariot. The souls of the righteous allow G-d to flow through them and thus through them manifest godliness in the physical world. Thus the righteous are called G-d's chariot. Thus this name was applied to the Biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. These four established G-d's presence in the world.

¹¹ The letter Yod normally refers to the sefirot Hokhma, which in the sefirotic columns is directly above Hesed in the right column. It is said to refer here to Avraham because his attribute is Hesed. Being that he and the other Patriarchs together manifested G-d's light in the world, they together form a complete chariot, i.e., merkava, which is made up of the four holy letters YHWH. Thus the application here to the Patriarchs is manifesting a subjective YHWH and not the objective. For those of you more familiar with Kabbalistic terminology, the YHWH spoken of here is the Havaya d'MAH.

(Gevurah), by which the Hey is revealed.¹²

Ya'aqob is [the attribute of heart and body] Vav and the final Hey. "*Ya'agel Ya'aqob*" (let Jacob rejoice) with the Hey, "*Yis'mah Yisrael*" (Israel will be happy) with the Vav, as it is written in the Zohar.¹³

When Israel went forth from Egypt, and G-d brought them to Mt. Sinai, every person individually merited to become the merkava.¹⁴ Therefore were the Ten Commandments spoken in the single tense saying "*I am HaShem your G-d*" (*Eloekha* - In singular, not plural). The commandments were spoken to each person individually as the RaMBaN has spoken.¹⁵

What this means is that HaShem your

¹² The first Hey usually corresponds to Binah. Here it is applied to Gevurah, which is directly beneath Binah on the left side of the Sefirotic column.

¹³ Jacob, who is Israel has two distinct sefirotic Faces. The first, Israel, is Tiferet. The second, Jacob, is Yesod, not Malkhut. Together Israel and Jacob are called the Small Face (Z.A.) However, being that Malkhut is "the wife of Z.A." Jacob, her husband is called by her name Malkhut.

¹⁴ Being that each and every soul of the more than 3 1/2 million people who stood at Mt. Sinai "saw" the Voice of G-d, each one fully received the Divine imprint and were thus enabled to fully manifest G-d's supernal pattern here on earth.

¹⁵ RaMBaN is Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, a famous Kabbalist and Bible commentator of the 13th century. His point here is that although G-d was speaking to an entire nation of people, He still spoke to them using the singular tense of grammar. This was done to emphasize the individual character of the revelation. G-d was not only saying He was the collective G-d of the nation, but the specific G-d of each and every soul there.

G-d (in the singular) rules over you through your four foundations. Each letter [of His holy Name] corresponding to its foundation.¹⁶

Yod corresponds to the foundation of water. Hey corresponds to the foundation of fire. Vav corresponds to the foundation of air. The final Hey corresponds to the foundation of earth.

When the Shekhina (the Divine Presence) dwells amongst [the Children of Israel], they became the four camps (of the Shekhina).¹⁷ They became one (unified) Merkava, in the image of the four camps of the Shekhina that are in Yetzirah.¹⁸

The Torah also speaks to the Children of Israel in the collective form in Parashat Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:2), where it is written, "*I am HaShem Your G-d*" (in the plural) corresponding to "*I am HaShem your G-d*" (mentioned in the singular in the Ten Commandments. "*A man will fear his mother and father*" (Leviticus 19:3), corresponding to Honor your father,

¹⁶ Our physical human bodies are made up of the four foundational elements of matter. As the letters of G-d's Name are the spiritual sources of these elements, so is G-d's Name thus the spiritual source of all in our bodies.

¹⁷ This is a reference to the Book of Numbers, where the order of the camps were arranged in the wilderness by Divine order during the forty years of desert wandering.

¹⁸ The four camps of Yetzirah is the order of the angels. In the wilderness the children of Israel manifested this order on earth. They thus became G-d's chariot on earth as are the angels in their own realm.

etc... as our Sages have explained.¹⁹

As HaShem's ten sefirot are all united, His Throne, which is in the realm of Beriah, is also united.²⁰

This is also true in Yetzirah, as we say (in our daily prayers), All are loving, all are one.²¹

This is also true in Asiyah, where the chosen nation is commanded "love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus. 19:18), and "do not hold a grudge or take revenge against a member of your people." (Leviticus. 19:17) and "not to hate your brother in your heart." (ibid.).²²

The commandments that are between man and man were given by G-d with the intent to make mankind unite as one so that they would be in the image of the three worlds that are above: Yetzirah, Beriah and Atzilut. All of them are united.

If, G-d forbid, there is found argument

¹⁹ The one group of laws corresponds to the other group. One was said in the singular, the other in the plural to emphasize the individual and collective responsibilities in observing them all.

²⁰ The Throne of G-d is called the realm of Beriah. This is the realm of our Higher Selves, called the Neshama souls. It is in the souls that G-d becomes manifest. He "sits" upon them, metaphorically speaking. Thus the souls, which embody the Divine presence are metaphorically called G-d's "throne."

²¹ This is a reference to a section in the Jewish prayer service, taken from the Bible, which speaks of the angels unified service before G-d.

²² All of these laws are designed to promote unity. In this way will G-d have a unified chariot in the Jewish people, who themselves are united through brotherly love.

and division among people the Shekhina will not rest amongst them, as [the Bible commentator] Rashi has commented on the verse, "And He is at one (B'Ehad), who will return us." (Job 23:13).

Our Sages have pointed out that the verse does not say, "is one" (Ehad), but rather "is at one" (B'Ehad), meaning that **the Shekhina will not dwell in a place of conflict, but only in a place of unity.**

And what does, "who will return us" mean? In accordance to what our Sages have taught, When Israel dwells together in unity, the dark side can have no hold over them, as it is written, "A united bundle of wood is Ephraim" (Hoshea 4:17).

The Shekhina will not depart from among (the Jewish people), even if they practice idolatry.²³ This is the meaning of "who will return us", meaning there is no sin [other than loss of love] that can cause the Shekhina to depart from (the Jewish people). This is how it was in the generation of Ahav,²⁴ even though Israel practiced idolatry, because they were at peace with one another, when they went out to war, they would still be victorious.²⁵ However, when there is no peace between the people, they fall, even if they were all righteous men like in the generation of David, (according to Midrash Raba, Bereshit 38:6).

²³ This is truly a shocking statement! The message is that G-d cares more for how we treat one another than how we treat Him. Theology and religious debate must take second place. Loving one neighbor must always come first.

²⁴ A King in Biblical Israel (the northern kingdom).

²⁵ Victory at war is always a sign of Divine favor.

Therefore has our exile been prolonged due to the strife and hatred that exists among us.

We are still not free from it.

All the worlds are intertwined, and when there is disunity here below we cause there to correspondingly be disunity in the worlds above us.²⁶

There is no greater idolatry than this.²⁷

Therefore is it written in the Gemara (Yebamot 96B), *“There was once an argument in the synagogue in Tiveria. One person rose up and said, because of this sin (of division) this synagogue is destined to become a house of idolatry,”*

²⁶ The power of mankind is indeed that great! We are G-d's throne and chariot. If we do not do our job of manifesting G-dliness here upon the earth, then G-dliness will remain concealed. This causes the gamut of human sufferings. When we suffer, the worlds above us are equally imbalanced. Therefore, our responsibility are tremendous, for ourselves, the angels and the rest of creation.

²⁷ Let this serve as a warning to those who cause strife and division among G-d's children. Do not hide behind the excuse that you are weeding out G-d's enemies or that you are defending G-d's truth. G-d does not need you to do these things. Rather we are commanded to place brotherly love before our differences. Even if we are all idolaters, G-d's presence is still upon us, if we stand together. So the old saying holds so true: United we stand. Divided we fall. G-d wants our unity above and beyond all of our differences. While many of our differences need to be debated and the word of G-d made to be supreme. This cannot be at the expense of unity. We can only debate if we accept as the ground rule that this is a family discussion. No matter how heated the discussion gets, we are all still family, united and one. When discussion is done, we must all sit down to dinner together, put argument aside and act like a family. This is clearly the will of G-d and the right course of human action. Will we listen?

mida k'neged mida, (G-d repays in equal measure) and so it was.²⁸

Also, being that the souls of Israel are carved out²⁹ from under the Throne of Glory; all of them together form the union of the one Name. Thus is the singular tense used in the verse (Exodus 1:5), *“seventy soul”* (and not “souls” went down into Egypt.

If there is ever disunity amongst us below, this causes division in the Throne of Glory above.³⁰

Therefore when the time of our redemption comes, Elijah the prophet will come and make great peace in Israel, as it is written, (Mal. 3:23) *“Behold I send to you Elijah the Prophet, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the hearts of the children back to their fathers.”* This verse means he will make peace, as we have said.

²⁸ The man who spoke was not a prophet or clairvoyant. He simply understood the necessary outcome of argument and strife. The people wanted strife and that is what they received, measure for measure.

²⁹ This is a reference to that discussed earlier. The souls are the Throne, yet when they manifest here below, they are said to be carved out of the Throne. This is another traditional Kabbalistic metaphor.

³⁰ According to Rabbi Haim Vital, in his work “Olat Tamid”, the supernal worlds are dependent upon the tranquility of mankind. Metaphorically speaking, we assist G-d in maintaining universal harmony, by ourselves being in harmony and peace. As it is below so it is above. If we are imbalanced, so are the upper worlds. The responsibility is ours.

This is also what we recite in the Minha prayer recited on Sabbath afternoons, which speaks of the days of Mashiah. *"You are one, Your Name is one, and who is like Your people Israel, one nation in the land"* (ref. II Chronicles. 17:21).

When we, the seed of Israel, become one nation in the [holy] land, on that day will HaShem be one and His Name one...

Therefore each and every person must be fearful of ever causing a blemish in the supernal unity by the sins of hatred, slander, or G-d forbid, arguments.

One must place upon one's heart to fulfill the first commandment, *"One thing has G-d spoken, two things have I heard"* (Psalm 62:12), meaning *"I am HaShem your G-d"* and *"Have no other g-ds before me"*. (Exodus 20:2).³¹

One must have an abundance of love, peace and brotherhood with all Israel.³²

Also we must endeavor to make peace in the world.

The Sages, knowing this secret, are very careful with it, as it is written (Ber. 64A), *"The Sages spread peace throughout the world."* They do this in order to fulfill the first commandment, which is the source and essence of all.

³¹ At Mt. Sinai G-d spoke a single utterance, yet within that one sound was heard the first two commandments. (ref. Bahya commentary).

³² This is a very difficult task. For all Israel includes the twelve tribes. Today we do not know who is a descendant of Israel and who is not. For everyday matters we follow Jewish law in regards to this matter. Yet, with regards to the commandment to show love, love must be expressed to everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. These sentiments have been expressed by many great Rabbis, especially the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi A. I. Kook tz"l.