

GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

THE CONCEPTS OF GOD IN THE
MYSTICAL WRITING OF THE ZOHAR

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God is described as unchanging. Yet God also supposedly created the world. How could a God who did not change create the world? Even if this paradox is forgotten, how could an unchanging God be capable of interacting with the world? Why then is God seen as the helper of people? Would an eternal God be able to have a preference of one people over another? These questions have been examined through many different avenues for various religions. By examining one religious thought, the problems and the solutions to the question of a God who is unchanging and yet can act in the world can be better understood. This work will provide a better understanding of how the problem of this contradictory God is framed in the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism¹) and how an answer is sought. Through the examination of this image of God a better understanding of how images of God should be constructed.

This work will examine the Kabbalah because it has not received much scholarly attention. Idel notes, "Kabbalah does not yet enjoy the same degree of honor as Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist mysticism. Only rarely are Kabbalistic concepts or ideas mentioned in comparative studies."² This lack of attention devoted to the Kabbalah should be addressed by examining closely the works and teachings about its understanding of God. Also, the Jewish understanding of God is very relevant to the Christian understanding of God, because both are derived at least partially from the same book. This relevance holds special significance for the author because he is trying to understand the problem of God in Christianity.

¹ The Kabbalah is not the only Jewish mysticism. However, the Kabbalah is the only one discussed in this paper.

² Idel, Moshe. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. (Yale, University Press, 1988), 17.

The Book of the Zohar

The whole of the Kabbalah is diverse, so this paper will deal with the specific writing contained in the works called the *Zohar*, a writing in Kabbalah. The *Zohar*, which is the Hebrew word for splendor, is a series of three works that are commentaries on the Pentateuch. In addition to the commentaries in the *Zohar* called the '*Sefer Ha-Zohar*', the work also includes the '*Sifra-di-Tseniuta*' (The Book of the Veiled Mystery), '*Sitre Torah*' (Secrets of the Torah), '*Ra 'ya Mehemna*' (The True Shepherd), '*Midrash Ha-ne'lam*' (Recondite Exposition), *Tosefta* (Additions), '*Hekaloth*' (Halls or Palaces), *Indra Rabba* (Greater Synod) and *Indra Zuta* (Lesser Synod). These are all distinct sections of the *Zohar*. However, all have approximately the same style and similar messages.³

The *Zohar* claims to have been written in the second century by Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai. However, the *Zohar* was first referred to in the thirteenth century by Moses de Leon. Gershom Scholem, a very famous scholar of the Kabbalah, believes that Moses de Leon wrote the *Zohar*. Many other scholars disagree with this and propose either multiple authors or an unknown author.⁴ There is also disagreement about when it was first written. While parts of it may have been written before the thirteenth century, the main work is generally dated to about the thirteen century. Although the exact date and authorship are in doubt, the work has been used widely in the works of the Kabbalah and

³ *The Zohar*. trans: Sperling, Harry, and Simon, Maurice. (New York: The Soncino Press, 1984), xii-xiii. Some scholars will argue that these additional parts actually predate the rest of the document. The similarity of prose then is based on the author of the commentary imitating the original style of the sections.

⁴ Yehuda Liebes. trans: Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, Penina Peli, *Studies in the Zohar* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 85-90.

is based in that tradition. It is, therefore, an important work and has authority based not on author, but rather on usage in the community of the Kabbalah.

On Mysticism

Gershom Scholem began his lecture on mysticism by saying, “there is no such thing as mysticism in the abstract. ...There is no mysticism as such, there is only the mysticism of a particular religious system, Christian, Islamic, Jewish mysticism and so on.”⁵ There are, of course, traits by which all mystics can be compared, but when dealing with a mystical tradition, one must examine it in the context of its religious affiliation. For Judaism, this means examining its “commandments and liturgy, and its sacred texts, legal and speculative.”⁶ The major text of Judaism is the Torah, but the *Zohar* says:

Woe to the sinners who look upon the Torah as simply tales pertaining to things of the world, seeing thus only the outer garment. But the righteous whose gaze penetrates to the very Torah, happy are they. Just as wine must be in a jar to keep, so the Torah must be contained in an outer garment. That garment is made up of the tales and stories; but we, we are bound to penetrate beyond.⁷

These words from the third work of the *Zohar*, section 152a (*Zohar* III 152a), give a warning to those who overlook the significance of the Torah. They prescribe a deeper significance to the words than can be gotten from their literal meanings.

The view presented in the *Zohar* about the Torah is very different from the mainstream Judaism called the rabbinic tradition. The rabbinic tradition affirms the importance of the Written Torah as well as the importance of the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah consists of the writings and discussions of the Rabbis relating to the practices of the Jewish people. The Oral Torah explains and expands the written Torah. The belief is

⁵ Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Gershom Scholem: The Man and His Work*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

that these writings embody the message of God to the Jews given to Moses at Mount Sinai. When Moses received the Ten Commandments, he wrote down part of God's message and repeated the rest to the people.⁸

Most Jews ascribe to rabbinic tradition. In it, emphasis placed on the law is called Halakhah.

During the last two hundred years of Jewish history, the authority of Jewish law, Halakhah, has been one of the central issues with which many Jews have struggled, ...[but] the majority of Jews continued to affirm their basic loyalty to Rabbinic Halakhah, even if their personal practice fell short of the ideal. ...The internal cohesiveness of the Jewish community, coupled with the constant external pressures of a non-Jewish population intent on maintaining economic and social segregation (to varying degrees) essentially made fidelity to Halakhah a given for most Jews.⁹

This means that the Jewish Mystic tradition was in the minority. Most of the Jewish mystics would have also followed the Halakhah, but would have gone above that to try to experience God directly. The rabbinic authorities tried to suppress the esoteric thoughts of Jewish mysticism about God in order to allow people to better contemplate the Halakhah.¹⁰

Jewish mystics seek to gain a personal interaction with God. In Judaism, the rabbinic tradition attempts to understand and follow the laws of the Torah while the mystic tradition tries, as the *Zohar* says, to "penetrate beyond" the stories to know God. "But the Torah, in all of its words, holds supernal truths and sublime secrets."¹¹ Scholem argues that mystics view tradition and history as symbols which can be used to see the

⁷ Gershom Scholem, *Zohar: The Book of Splendor*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 122.

⁸ Jacob Neusner, *The Theology of Rabbinic Judaism*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 1-3.

⁹ Michael S. Berger, *Rabbinic Authority*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

¹⁰ Idel, xii.

divine truth, while philosophers see tradition, and history as allegories by which the truth in terms of reason can be shown.¹² This allows philosophers to use a much more precise and defined terminology. Events and traditions are allegorical and, therefore, can be analyzed, having the truth distilled out of them. The mystical tradition, on the other hand, has much more fluidity to it. The truth cannot be distilled out of events and traditions, because these events and traditions are themselves part of the truth they hold. "The appeal to mystical symbols presupposes that a given expression of the Jew's religious reality is an essential aspect of the truth it is meant to disclose; indeed, symbols are intrinsic manifestations of a truth otherwise inexpressible."¹³ This fluidity, however, presents problems when trying to understand the mystics. If the truth is partially contained within the symbols used, then you cannot discuss the truths without using the symbols. In the case of Jewish mysticism, this inability to have the truths away from the symbols by which they are represented will present a problem when the different views of God are examined. Although all of the views of God are separate, they are still all one. These different views of God cannot be logically separated into different beings to be examined because they are always part of God and cannot be discussed outside of this knowledge.

The relationship may be better explained by example. Sperling described these mystic bonds by saying,

They (the vague mystical yearning of man) can, however, fitly be compared to that invisible chain that binds husband to wife, parents to children, relation to relation, friend to friend, social unit to social unit. Without these lesser mysticisms society would dissolve into its first atoms; without the larger

¹¹Scholem, *Zohar*. 121.

¹²Mendes-Flohr, 4.

¹³Ibid., 5

mysticism man would break away from his Maker and be flung into nothingness.¹⁴

Kenneth Rexoth claims, "On these [Sperling's] words hang all the Law and the Prophets. This is the essence of Judaism."¹⁵ The Kabbalah is, then, an attempt to gain this deeper understanding of God through the Law and the Prophets.

An example of the way members of the Kabbalah use symbols is shown by how they use words. Most of their study is trying to find the hidden meaning in texts. Often they feel that normal words hide meanings that need to be elucidated. One of the methods they use is called *gimatria*, which is the transforming of every word into a numerical value. Different words with the same numerical value can then be exchanged.¹⁶ Another tool that is used is called *Temurah*, which is treating a word like an acronym interpreting it.¹⁷ These methods can be used to find the hidden meaning in the Torah. It could be argued that by using these types of techniques, one could create meanings that were not originally there. Mystics would claim, however, to only discover the meanings that God wanted them to discover. Rabbi Simeon in the *Zohar* says,

Be careful in your adornments: counsel, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, vision, your hands and your feet. Acclaim as your king Him in whose dominion there is both life and death, in order that you might decree words of truth—words to which the supernal holy ones will listen and in which they will rejoice, to hear and to know.¹⁸

If mystics are right with God, they will not make judgments that are not shown to them by God. Therefore, a mystic's relationship with God would guard against errors. Also,

¹⁴ A.E. Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah*. (New Hyde Park, University Books, 1960), p. VII.

¹⁵ Ibid., VII.

¹⁶ Moshe Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 13.

¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

the tradition of interpretation is already set so anything radically different from that would be seen to be in error.

THE GODHEADS

In the *Zohar*, three different images of God can be identified: the Ancient One; the Holy One, blessed be He; and Shekhinah. The Ancient One is the philosopher's God. He is limitless and changeless. In his being is the whole world created. The Holy One, blessed be He, is the God who acts in the world. He chooses Israel and gives or spares punishment. Shekhinah is the spirit of God in the world. Through Shekinah, God is constantly within the creation.¹⁹ Through these three images, God is entirely beyond the world, completely in control of the world, and completely inside of the world. However, each of these images must be closely examined to understand how they operate in relation to the world and how they are derived from the Jewish tradition. These Godheads and how they relate to the world can be shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interaction Of Godheads with the World

<u>Godhead</u>	<u>Action towards world?</u>
Ancient One	Cannot act in world
Holy One, blessed be He	Acts towards world
Shekhinah	Acts in world

¹⁸ Roy A. Rosenberg, *The Anatomy of God: The Book of Concealment, the Great Holy Assembly and the Lesser Holy Assembly of the Zohar with The Assembly of the Tabernacle*. (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc, 1973), 48.

¹⁹ Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*. (New York Schocken Books, 1991), p. 141.

The Ancient One

In the *Indra Rabba* (Greater Synod), Rabbi Simeon says, "It is taught: The Most Ancient One, the Most Concealed, had neither beginning nor end until the various formations of the King came into being, and the many crowns that are his. At first he hewed out an opening within himself and spread a canopy before it."²⁰ The Ancient One is only once referred to in the Torah. This reference occurs when the Small Countenance swears to Abraham, "The angel of the LORD (YHWH) called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the LORD (YHWH): Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you.'"²¹ In the passage, the first reference to the Lord can be interpreted as the Small Countenance (although such is not always the case). When the LORD swears 'by myself,' the LORD is swearing by the Ancient One. This is the only point where a spoken reference to the Ancient One is made.

The spoken reference is not the only evidence that is given for the existence of the Ancient One. According to the *Zohar*, twice the Ancient One refers to the Small Countenance as Israel.²² The first place is Genesis 48:20. "So he blessed them that day saying, 'By you [beka] Israel will invoke blessings, saying, "God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.'"²³ The other is in Isaiah 49:3. "And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom [beka] I will be glorified.'"²⁴ Since the only one who could refer

²⁰ Rosenberg, 51.

²¹ *HarperCollins Study Bible New Revised Standard Version*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989), 33.

²² Rosenberg, 60.

²³ *HarperCollins Study Bible* 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1083.

to the Small Countenance as Israel is the Ancient One, these references show us there must be the Ancient One.

The Ancient One is the first cause of any action. Through the Ancient One, creation was done. According to Kenneth Hanson, the Hebrew at the beginning of Genesis, "In the beginning, God created..." can also be read, "With beginning."²⁵ The arrangement of the sentence in Hebrew according to Hanson is then "With Beginning created God the heavens and the earth." According to the *Zohar*, this betrays a hidden noun. This hidden noun is the Ancient One. It would then read, "With Beginning _____ created Elohim."²⁶ The Ancient One is then the prime cause of everything.

Even though Elohim creates through the Ancient One, the two are not separate. The Israelites ask, "is the Lord among us, or not?"²⁷ The *Zohar* explains that "the Israelites wished to ascertain whether the manifestation of the Divine which they had been given was of the Ancient One, the All-hidden One, the Transcendent, who being above all comprehension, is designated 'ayin [nothing], or whether of the "Small Countenance [a Godhead that can act in the world]," the Immanent, which is designated YHWH. It further tells that they were chastised because "they made distinctions between these two aspects in God, and 'tried the lord.'"²⁸ The two aspects are still the same God.

The Ancient One is described as 'ayin or "nothingness." This is not a nothingness as is common usage in Modern English but rather an undistinguishable everything.

²⁵ Kenneth Hanson, *Kabbalah Three Thousand Years of Mystic Tradition*. (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1998), 134.

²⁶ Ibid., 134. Elohim, in the new revised standard version and most other versions, is read as God. The sentence would then be read, "With Beginning Ancient One created God the heavens and the earth." Although the syntax does not work in direct translation, in the original text this would indicate that God, through the hidden actor of the Ancient One, created the world.

²⁷ *HarperCollins Study Bible*, 111.

“‘Nothingness’ (*‘ayin*) becomes not total absence of being, but a mystical symbol of the infinite fullness of being, which because it is beyond man’s comprehension, is paradoxically called ‘Nothingness.’”²⁹ In the combination of everything, there would be no point that is outside and able to look and evaluate or categorize the everything. Therefore, it would be called nothing because it is beyond categorization or evaluation. This state of everything is *‘ayin*. Creation is then seen as the Ancient One withdrawing from an area for there to be a place of creation. This, however, does not mean that wherever the Ancient One withdraws from is no longer a part of the Ancient One for everything is still part of the Ancient One. For as well as being *‘ayin*, the Ancient One is also *en sof* [infinite].³⁰ *En sof* is “the absolute and undifferentiated unity of Being and Nothingness, and perforce of all reality.”³¹ *En sof* means there is no part of the universe that is not also part of the Ancient One. “There is no other to be compared with it or associated with it. It would be impossible to speak of it except by denying what it is not, or by placing it above all that is intelligible; that is, describing it in terms which are negative or superlative, or again, interrogatory.”³² This *en sof* does not say that the Ancient One is the universe. This assertion would be pantheistic, which most scholars say Kabbalah is not.³³ The reason Kabbalah is not pantheistic is because the Ancient One is more than the sum of all creation. Cordovero says, “God is all that exists, but not all that exists is God.”³⁴

²⁸ Scholem *Zohar*, 82.

²⁹ Mendes-Flohr, 57.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

³² Leo Schaya, *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books Incorporated, 1973), 36.

³³ Mendes-Flohr, 63.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

At the same time that the Ancient One is the *'ayin*, the *Zohar* describes many things about him. Descriptions of his skull, hair, forehead, eyes, nose, and beard all show how he is embedded in the universe. The fact that the Ancient One is supposedly unknowable is not addressed. The descriptions of his physical state are given; for example, we learn that the Ancient One has white hair. This is supported by the fact that Daniel 7:9 says, "The hair of his head is like pure wool."³⁵ More important than this is how the description of the Ancient One explains his role in the universe. The skull and forehead of the Ancient One will be examined to show the Ancient One's place.

The skull of the Ancient One contains within it thirteen thousand myriads of worlds that are supported by it. From the skull drips dew that sustains all of these worlds.³⁶ The description goes on to show how the formation of the skull itself is integral to the role of the Ancient One sustaining the universe. The description itself is very detailed, and much of the importance of the analysis lies in the details themselves. "With regard to the skull, its whiteness shines in thirteen directions that are hewn round about it: four on the side, four in front, four behind, and the last above. In this direction the length of the face is extended into 370 myriads of worlds."³⁷ This detail is important because it distinguishes the Ancient One from the Small Countenance, which can change size. This level of detail is also confusing because it is unknown how exactly the author(s) arrived at these measurements. How long is a world? It is not given; the important thing is that the very structure of the Ancient One himself is based upon sustaining the universe by providing it with dew. The Ancient One is unchanging and, therefore, the universe has a stable basis upon which to be formed.

³⁵ *HarperCollins Study Bible*, 1318.

³⁶ Rosenberg, 51-52.

The forehead of the Ancient One is also a constant in the universe. The forehead is called *ranson* or favorable will. In the forehead of the Ancient One, mercy and forgiveness are found. The *Zohar* describes, "This forehead that is called *ranson* is the revelation of the entire head and skull. When it is covered, it includes 420 worlds. When it is uncovered, the prayers of Israel are accepted. ...At that hour wrath is assuaged and favor is found, so prayer is accepted."³⁸ The forehead of the Ancient One always shows mercy. There is no way for the forehead of the Ancient One to bring judgment. This shows how the Ancient One is beyond the universe and incapable of interacting within it.

The Small Countenance

The Character of the Ancient One keeps it from interacting with the world. The *Zohar*, therefore, sets up a different mechanism through which the Ancient One can act. This figure is referred to as the Small Countenance, because it was sectioned off from the Vast Countenance, which was everything. The Vast Countenance (also called the Greater Countenance) is the Ancient One; the term Vast Countenance serves to contrast with the Small Countenance, which can act with and in the World.

Now let us prepare and set our minds to discuss the formation of the Small Countenance, considering how he is established, and how he is garbed in his formations that stem from the formations of the Ancient of Days, the Most Holy and Most Concealed, the one who is concealed from all... The formations of the Small Countenance are derived from those of the Vast Countenance. They develop on all sides as if in human form, so that the breath of him who is Most Concealed might rule over him.³⁹

Whereas the Ancient One could not interact with the world, the Small Countenance can. The Ancient One had the rules for creation contained within its formations. The Small Countenance is seen more as a reflection of the Greater Countenance that can be known.

³⁷ Ibid., 52.

³⁸ Ibid., 55.

The way the Countenances are referred to by the people of Israel show their level of interaction.

This lower Eden is called the beginning, which one may not say concerning the Ancient One, for he has neither beginning nor end. Since he has neither beginning nor end he cannot be called You. Being Concealed and not revealed, he is instead called He. It is at the place where the beginning manifests itself that he comes to be addressed as You, and Father, as it is written, "For You are Our Father." In the Tradition of the School of Rabbi Yeha the Elder the general principle that sustains all, the Small Countenance, is called "You," while the Holy Ancient One, who does not disclose himself, is called "He."⁴⁰

The Small Countenance could be understood and referred to directly, whereas the Ancient One, being completely concealed could not but could only be referred to in the third person. Direct interaction with the Vast Countenance could not occur.

How then is the Small Countenance a reflection of the Vast Countenance? A. E.

Waite argues that this is an imprecise term. He says:

The distinction between the two Countenances is the distinction of the profile and the full face, for whereas the God who comes forth is revealed in so doing, the Great Countenance is only declared partially, whence it is obviously inexact to speak of Microprosopus [Small Countenance] as a reflection: He is rather a second manifestation, taking place in the archetypal world.⁴¹

In order to understand the relationship, we must look to the features because the best description of the Small Countenance is given in these. These features will serve to contrast the descriptions of the Ancient One provided.

First, the skull of the Small Countenance is examined. The Ancient One created the skull out of ether. It was formed with pure ether on one side and a pure flame on

³⁹ Rosenberg, 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 144-145. The quote inside the quote comes from Isaiah 63:16.

⁴¹ A. E. Waite, *The Holy Kabbalah* (New York: University Books, 1960), 137. "MICROPROSOPUS" is capitalized in the text. There is no stated reason why this is done. It is probably a sign of respect for the name of God. However, in other sources "Microprosopus" is not all capitalized. Since the names of God are not treated that way throughout all this paper, the capitalization has been removed in this quotation.

another. The Vast Countenance drips dew on this Skull, forever filling it. This dew is both red like the flame and white like the ether. These dews can be used in order to save (white) or condemn (red) the peoples of the world.⁴² The two types of dew allow the Small Countenance to be active in the world through which the Ancient One can act toward the world.

At a time when there is need, the countenance expands and is lengthened; this is when it gazes upon the countenance of the Most Ancient One, and life is provided for the world. In the skull there is one opening that proceeds in the direction of all those who are below; it reflects the light in the direction of the Ancient of Days when they come to be numbered under his scepter. For this purpose there is a cleft in the skull underneath so that those below might come forward to be numbered. It is this Cleft that reflects the light to the Ancient of Days.⁴³

From the Ancient One, only white dew drips down and in the Small Countenance some of it becomes red. Mercy is associated with the Ancient One and judgment is associated with the Small Countenance. The skull allows the Small Countenance to act as a judge in the world.

The relationship of the hairs to the skull cavities shows that the parts of the Small Countenance are very interrelated. There are three cavities in the skull covered by thin membranes, which are "not as hard or as concealing as that of the Ancient of Days [Ancient One]. Therefore is the brain able to expand and illumine the thirty-two paths of Wisdom[sic]."⁴⁴ The more flexible membranes of the Small Countenance's brain allows them to interact with the world and "burst forth" with "Wisdom" (first cavity), "Understanding" (second cavity), and "places of assembly and convocation" (third

⁴² Rosenberg, 85-86. The biblical support is drawn from "For the Dew of Lights is your dew" (Isaiah 26:19).

⁴³ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 86.

cavity).⁴⁵ From the cavities of the skull flow the formations of the hair. The hair flows from the cavities of wisdom, understanding, and places of assembly and convocation. From wisdom there are 32 fountains of hair, from understanding there are 50 fountains of hair, and from places of assembly there are thousands upon thousands. These hair formations are important to understand about the Small Countenance because they allow the Small Countenance to be differentiated.

All of these hairs and locks that flow forth from the three cavities of the brain of the skull hang down and spread over the sides of the ears. For this reason it is written, "My God, incline your ear and hear." In these curls hang both right and left, light and darkness, mercy and judgment, depending upon the Small Countenance, not the Ancient One.⁴⁶

The differentiations of the opposites of the Small Countenance allow it to be interactive with the world.

These and the other aspects of the Small Countenance show the Small Countenance has in itself judgment and through the Ancient One, mercy. This distinction is further shown in the discussion of the forehead of the Small Countenance.

It is taught that when this forehead is revealed all the lords of judgement are awakened and the entire world is delivered into judgement. This occurs except at the time when the prayers of Israel ascend before the Ancient of Days. If, as a result, he desires to show mercy to his children, the forehead of his supreme will is revealed and shines upon that of the Small Countenance, so that judgement is assuaged.⁴⁷

These beliefs about how judgment works set up an interesting dichotomy between the Ancient One who is seen as mercy and the Small Countenance who is seen as judgment. The dichotomy is not complete, as is shown by the hair. Even though the Small

⁴⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 88. The text that is quoted comes from Daniel 9:18.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 89.

Countenance is mainly justice, it has the ability to become differentiated and also contain mercy. The chart containing these first two entities is observed in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Names of Godheads and How They Interact with the World

<u>Name</u>	<u>How does it interact with world</u>	<u>Features</u>
Ancient One	Cannot interact with world	Skull--sustains world Forehead--shows mercy to world
Small Countenance	Can interact with world	Skull--pours dew to judge or show mercy Hair--allows differentiation of action Forehead—judgment (unless shows Ancient One through it which then means mercy is shown)

The dichotomy between the Vast and Small Countenances alone would not be enough to allow an all-powerful God to act in the world. The two forces, mercy and judgment, exist in the Small Countenance, but there is no means by which to choose between them. The Small Countenance has the ability to act in the world, but it still needs a driving force. This driving force in the action of the Small Countenance is known as the Holy One, blessed be He. This part of God is the one that has a direct power over Israel. Sperling and Simon, translators of the *Zohar* say, “As the promoter of man’s moral strivings, God is usually termed in the *Zohar* ‘The Holy One, blessed be He.’ ...Man knows of God in this aspect through his own *nashamah*, the consciousness—based primal on his *neshimah* (breathing power)—of his individuality.”⁴⁸ That is the God that interacts with people. When Rabbi Simeon is telling of The Great Holy Assembly,⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Sperling and Simon, Volume V, 394.

⁴⁹ The Great Holy Assembly is written in a story of Rabbi Simeon explaining to his companions the allusions made in the Book of Concealment.

he tells his companions, "Woe if I reveal these secrets, and woe if I do not reveal them. The Companions who were there remained silent, until Rabbi Abba stood and said to him, If our master wishes to reveal these matters is it not written, 'The secret of the Lord belongs to those who fear him,' and do not these Companions tremble before the Holy One blessed be He?*[sic]*"⁵⁰ The interaction is directly with the Holy One, blessed be He.

The Holy One, blessed be He is the entity who, acting through the Small Countenance, either condemns or shows mercy to the people of the world. Answering the question of why the earth was destroyed by water, Rabbi Judah accredits the Holy One, blessed be He with the choice of punishment for the sins of the people.⁵¹ It is also the Holy One, blessed be He that interacts with David and forgives him for the sin of the affair with Uriah's wife, which the Holy One, blessed be He argues is not actually a sin.⁵² It was for the Holy One, blessed be He that the Temple was built, and it was he who brought punishment to the people.

From the day when the Temple was built, the Holy One, blessed be He, used to contemplate it fondly, and every time he came to the sanctuary, He used to put on the purple cloak. ...But when Israel sinned, and provoked their King, the Temple was destroyed, and the mantle was rent. Only on that occasion did God mourn the destruction of the wicked, but at any other time the Holy One, blessed be He takes joy in nothing so much as in the destruction of the world's sinners....The truth is that He does take joy in the destruction of the wicked, but only when He has been long-suffering with them and they have still remained unrepentant.⁵³

The person of the Holy One, blessed be He is then the one who can interact with the people and pronounce judgment upon them. Through the Small Countenance, the Holy One, blessed be He accomplishes this. We now add the Holy One, blessed be He to our figure to further compare the Godheads (figure 2.2).

⁵⁰ Rosenberg, 48. The quote from scriptures in the passage is Psalm 25:14.

⁵¹ Sperling, Volume I, 202.

⁵² Ibid., 34.

Figure 2.2: Names of Godheads and How They Interact with the World

Name	How does it interact with world	Features
Ancient One	Cannot interact with world	Skull-sustains world Forehead-shows mercy to world
Small Countenance	Can interact with world	Skull-pours dew to judge or show mercy Hair-allows differentiation of action Forehead--judgment (unless shows Ancient One through it which then means mercy is shown)
Holy One, blessed be He	Acts towards the World through the Small Countenance	Has subjectivity in that He can decide to give mercy or to destroy Is known by people and traits are not listed and described like the Countenances

Shekhinah

Whereas the Ancient One and the Holy One, blessed be He are outside the bounds of the world, the Shekhinah⁵⁴ is God's presence within the world. Shekhinah is the only image of God in the *Zohar* that is female. She is not a manifestation of a trait of God; rather, she is all of God immanent in the world.⁵⁵ She brings people comfort, but it is unclear how much actual power she has to affect the world. The *Zohar* teaches that sin can make the Shekhinah abandon a person. "Take note that every sin which is committed openly repels the *Shekinah* and causes her to remove her abode from this world. The

⁵³ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁴ Actually two manifestations of the *Shekinah* are referred to in the *Zohar*. There is the upper and the lower *Shekinah*. For the purposes of this paper only the lower *Shekinah* has been examined. The upper *Shekinah* interacts with God and does not interact with humanity. The upper *Shekinah* is defined as "his [God's] place" (Sperling 98); the lower *Shekinah* is "his [God's] glory" and is what interacts with the world. The relationship of the upper and lower *Shekinah* is not very well defined.

contemporaries of Noah committed their sins openly and defiantly, so they drove the *Shekinah* away from the world, in punishment for which God [shown earlier to be Holy One, blessed be He] removed them from the world in accordance with the maxim, 'Take away the dross from the silver, and there cometh forth a vessel for the finer; take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness'"⁵⁶ Shekhinah, however, does not act toward the people but rather can only remove herself from people.

The Shekhinah is brought to a man through his wife. Originally the *Shekinah* was within all people before they sinned and were forced to leave Eden. In marriage, the person is made complete. Therefore, the Shekhinah comes back to the full person (made of both male and female). The combination of man and woman to make a person whole is the reason for marriage. This final Godhead completes our chart (figure 2.3) examining the images of God used in the *Zohar*.

⁵⁵ Scholem, *On the Mystical*. 148.

⁵⁶ Sperling and Simon, Volume I, 185-186. The biblical quote comes from Proverbs 25:4-5.

Figure 2.3: Names of Godheads and How They Interact with the World

Name	How does it interact with world	Features
Ancient One	Cannot interact with world	Skull-sustains world Forehead-shows mercy to world
Small Countenance	Can interact with world	Skull-pours dew to judge or show mercy Hair-allows differentiation of action Forehead--judgment (unless shows Ancient One through it which then means mercy is shown)
Holy One, blessed be He	Acts towards the World through the Small Countenance	Has subjectivity in that He can decide to give mercy or to destroy Is known by people and traits are not listed and described like the Countenances
Shekhinah	Immanent in the world	She is the presence of God in the world

THE SEFIROT

The images of God are very unique and diverse. How does the Kabbalah assure that all of these images of God are the same being? How could the Ancient One who is totally *en sof* and the Shekhinah who is immanent in the world be part of the same being? The answer lies in the ten sefirot⁵⁷. The sefirot are the attributes of God. "The God who manifests Himself in His sefirot is the very same God of traditional religious belief, and consequentially despite all the complexities such an idea involves, the emanation of the Sefirot is a process within God Himself."⁵⁸ Members of the Kabbalah believe that God chose to reveal himself to humanity in ten attributes or sefirot. These attributes are

⁵⁷ Although spelling and usage may vary, in this paper sefirot is plural and sefirah is singular. Other spellings include sephiroth and sefiroth.

Kether (crown), *hokhmah* (wisdom), *binah* (intelligence), *hesed* (grace), *din* (judgment), *tifereth* (beauty) *netsah* (victory), *hod* (glory), *yesod* (foundation), and *malkhuth* (kingdom). Theoretically, there could have been more or fewer sefirot but God chose to reveal himself in ten.

“The Sefiroth in their totality constitute the doctrinal basis of Jewish esotericism; they are to the Kabbalah, or mystical ‘tradition’ of Judaism, what the Ten Commandments are to the Torah, as the exoteric Law.”⁵⁹ The belief of the Kabbalists is not only that these are the attributes of God, but they also are applied to the way in which the world is created. The *Zohar* speaks of the first three sefirot-- *kether*, *hokhmah*, and *binah*--as being part of the original creation. The next six are the called the supernal days. The last is the seventh supernal day, which is kingdom. The sefirot are therefore bound inseparably to the creation of the universe. Due to the great importance of the sefirot, each sefirah should be discussed individually.

Kether—

Kether is the actual embodiment of *en sof*. In many ways it is what the Ancient One was postulated to be. However, in the Ancient One, there is a lot known about it. *Kether* has nothing known about it beyond its unity of all things. There is no separation in *kether*. “It is reality without condition, without definition, in which God is what he is, beyond being; for Being is not the absolute reality as such, but its first affirmation.”⁶⁰ It is a complete mystery. Unlike the Ancient One, who is a being and therefore things are known about Him, in *kether* there can be no description beyond the fact that it is the

⁵⁸ Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*. (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1974), 98.

⁵⁹ Schaya, 21.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

combination of everything. It is nothingness but a nothingness which is nothing because it cannot be categorized and not because it does not have substance. *Kether* is seen as the cause of all causes. *Kether* contains all of the Sefiroth, while at the same time this does not impair their ability to be other than *Kether* in the tree of the Sefiroth. *Kether* is also used in a lot of king imagery. That is why it is referred to as the crown.⁶¹

Hokhmah—

The first emanation from *kether* is known as *hokhmah* (wisdom). This pattern is derived from Job 28:12, “From whence [me-ayin] shall wisdom be found?”⁶² This statement, according to Hallamish, is turned into, “Wisdom emerges from nothingness [ayin],”⁶³ by many in the Kabbalah. *Hokhmah* is where God’s Wisdom first becomes sentient and is aware of itself.

There, no difference in being or in knowledge exists between him and one or another essence; for *hokhmah* is the eternal resolution of oppositions, the indifferentiation of every trace of duality, the ultimate meeting of extremes the principal fusion—without hierarchical confusion—of all that is: “Even the darkness is not dark for thee and the night shineth as the day; the darkness is even as light.”⁶⁴

The *hokhmah* in being the wisdom of God is also unknowable but can be discerned as an object to humans. It can be differentiated from the rest of the universe, but not understood by humans. “By ‘thinking’ and ‘meditating’, [sic] God simultaneously projects and resolves his thought and all its content; but where he does not ‘think’—at the eternal ‘end of thought’ in *ain*, his non-determination and non-knowledge or

⁶¹ Hallamish, 129.

⁶² Ibid., 131.

⁶³ Ibid., 131.

⁶⁴ Schaya, 39.

superconsciousness—there are no creatures and no archetypes.”⁶⁵ The *hokhmah* of God then is seen as a direct emanation from *kether*.

Binah—

The undifferentiated wisdom of *hokhmah* is limited and contained within the being of *binah*. The imagery used most often in the literature is the image of *binah* as a mother. The *hokhmah* is like a father in that it provides the seed, but the mother is the one who limits and creates from this emanation.⁶⁶

Hokhmah, as the first sparkling, could continue to glitter, perhaps endlessly, if not for the limitation inherent in the receptacle of *Binah*. Yet *Binah* does not merely halt emanation and keep it from continuing, but shapes what it has taken into itself, just as a mother does. ... There are two aspects to this role of shaping: one positive and creative, suggested above and the other negative and limiting. They are two sides of the same coin, because if not for limitation, formation would be impossible.⁶⁷

The *binah* is what contains the *hokhmah* and allows it to emanate further into the world.

By this limitation the contradictions (which are not contradictions in *hokhmah*) become all one emanation.

Hesed—

The next six sefirah are postulated by the *Zohar* as the primordial days. The first, *hesed* (grace), is the light which shines on the first day. It is a radiation of the ‘sacred happiness’ and charity⁶⁸ of the Godhead. This serves to contrast the fifth sefirah known as *din* (judgment). The two are the opposites that are seen in the Small Countenance. They are seen as the two hands of God. “Grace is called the ‘right arm’ of God and the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁶⁶ Hallamish, 132. The thought of the father providing the seed and the mother shaping is obviously a medieval image. Today it is known that both mother and father provide an equal number of chromosomes to the new child. However, this image is still used because of its pervasiveness in the literature.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 132.

law is his 'left arm'. [sic] Thanks to these two opposite but complementary manifestations, God keeps all creation in balance. The Creation indeed could not exist through grace alone, nor through his rigor alone."⁶⁹ If *din* did not limit *hesed*, then *hesed* could not interact with the finite world. Conversely, if not for the *hesed*, *din* would negate all that was not God.

Din—

The role of the *din* is to test the worthiness of creation for reception of *hesed*. This is why on the second day the Bible does not record that God said it was good. *Din* is not God's anger or wrath but rather his judgment. His wrath is contained within his judgment toward all that is not God. However, since everything in creation is part of God through the creation via *en sof*, then all that *din* opposes are those things which set up another god above God. *Din* then is shown in God's wrathfulness of idolatry. However, this wrath is not the main trait of *din*. By negating all that is not God, *din* actually affirms all that is God. Thus *din* is complimentary to *hesed*, and together they provide a way for God to fight evil while continuing to love all that is in creation.

Tifereth—

Tifereth is God's beauty. *Tifereth* holds a place of importance in the tree of the sefirot because it is in the middle of the tree and thus has connection with all other of the sefirot. The tree of the sefirot is a way of aligning the sefirot such that you can see the mystical connection to each other. *Tifereth* balances the left and the right side of God by combining opposites such as *din* and *hesed*. These connections are pictured in figure 4 and discussed later in more detail. In the creation account, on the third day God says,

⁶⁸ Schaya, 46.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 46.

“And it was good” twice. He says this because the world could be sustained when *tifereth* came into being. *Tifereth* is also important because “It is a symbol of the written Torah, which embodies the religious-national essence of the Jewish people, and it is the object of that people’s prayers.”⁷⁰ This position in the tree and the fact that it is the written symbol of the Torah are central to the fact that *Tifereth* is “God’s ‘beauty’, [sic] in his infinite unity in so far as it is revealed as the plentitude and blissful harmony of all his possibilities. ... This is shown by the verse in the *Zohar* that reads, ‘When the colours (or qualities of the principle) are intermingled, he is called *tifereth*.’”⁷¹

Netsah and *Hod*—

Like *din* and *hesed*, the seventh and eighth sefirot *netsah* (victory) and *hod* (glory) are held in creative tension with each other. They are the manifestations that interact with the prophets bringing them visions from God.⁷² *Netsah* is the manifestation of *hesed*, “*Netsah* graces Israel with its mercy...issues decrees in Israel’s favor...and never goes back on itself.”⁷³ It is then the flowing of *hesed* into action in the world. Likewise, *hod* is the manifestation of *din* in the world. *Hod* “clothes itself in the attribute of *Gevurah* [*din*], gaining the power to overcome enemies, be victorious in battle, and rescue those who love God. And in the place where wars were won and miracles and wonders are performed[!]⁷⁴—that is the site where words of thanksgiving are said.” *Hod* is the glory of all that is God and with God. Therefore it negates that which is not God.

⁷⁰ Hallamish, 135.

⁷¹ Schaya, 50.

⁷² Ibid., 56.

⁷³ Hallamish, 135.

Yesod—

All of the sefirot flow to *yesod* (foundation). Specifically, however, it is seen as the combination of the Sefirot *hod* and *netsah*.

Such is the nature of the two attributes or powers of God's eternal act; this creative and destructive act is in itself a specific archetype, namely, *yesod*, the 'foundation' of cosmic existence. The *Zohar* says that the union of the light and active emanation, *netsah*,...with the dark and receptive emanation, *hod*,...is what causes the ninth Sefirot, *yesod*, to appear, this being the 'basis' of the created world.⁷⁵

Yesod and the eight preceding sefirot are seen as the male in relation to the tenth sefirah, which is female. These sefirot flowing into *yesod* are the flowing of God into the world. In the sefirot tree, there is no other sefirot linked directly to the tenth sefirah. It is the foundation or cosmic existence of the world. It is the male entering the female world.

Malkhuth—

The last sefirah is the emanation of Kingdom. This sefirah, while being part of God, is actually all of creation. *Malkhuth* is the recipient of all of the other sefirot and is located at the bottom of the sefirot tree. Since it has this position, it is seen as having no light of its own but rather reflecting back the light of the other sefirot.⁷⁶ The example that is used is that *malkhuth* is the moon reflecting back the glory of the sun (God) to the world. *Malkhuth* is a female. She receives the emanation from the other sefirot and manifests them in herself. She is in creation and the experience of people with the sefirot. She is the final day of creation, when creation is complete.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 135.

⁷⁵ Schaya, 55.

⁷⁶ Hallamish, 139.

The Sefirot as Emanations

In the *Zohar*, the sefirot are seen as emanations from God. The first sefirah is closest to the being of *en sof*. From this flows things more distinguishable to humans. *Hokhmah* can be conceived as more than a nothingness. From *hokhmah* flows *binah*, which can further be understood by people. The *Zohar* sees the sefirot in terms of creations as shown by the names given to each sefirot (see figure 3). In this creation view, creation starts at the crown (*kether*) and ends at the manifestation of the world (*malkhuth*).

Figure 3: Descriptions of Sefirot in *Zohar*

Sefirot	Description	Description in <i>Zohar</i>
<i>Kether</i>	Crown	B' (<i>en sof</i>)
<i>Hokhmah</i>	Wisdom	Reshith (Beginning)
<i>Binah</i>	Intellect	Elohim (Heaven and Earth)
<i>Hesed</i>	Grace	First Day
<i>Din</i>	Judgment	Second Day
<i>Tifereth</i>	Beauty	Third Day
<i>Netsah</i>	Victory	Fourth Day
<i>Hod</i>	Glory	Fifth Day
<i>Yesod</i>	Foundation	Sixth Day
<i>Malkhuth</i>	Kingdom	Seventh Day

The emanations in the sefirot are very similar to the Neoplatonic view of the world and indeed may have been influenced by it.⁷⁷ However, the sefirot are unlike neoplatonism because they allow for a much wider range of connections and movement between themselves. Even though they emanate from God into the world, they are all associated directly with God. None of the sefirot is any nearer to God than any other sefirot. "Although there is a specific hierarchy in the order of the Sefirot, it is not

⁷⁷ Idel, 136.

ontologically determined: all are equally close to their source in the Emanator. It is possible for them to join together in mystical unions, and some of them move up and down within the framework of the hidden life of God.”⁷⁸ These connections allow the sefirot to be pictured in other ways than the straight emanation from God to the world.

The Sefirot Tree

The connections between the sefirot can be pictured in several ways.⁷⁹ The most widely used in the literature is the sefirot tree, shown in figure 4, a way of imagining the mystical connection formed by the sefirot. Important things to note in the tree are the three distinct pillars, known as the left, right and center pillars. The left pillar contains *binah* (intelligence), *din* (judgment), and *hod* (glory). From this side, judgment flows. The right pillar, on the other hand, is the side of life containing *hokhmah* (wisdom), *hesed* (grace), and *netsah* (victory). The center column contains *kether* (crown), *tifereth* (beauty), *yesod* (foundation), and *malkhuth* (kingdom). This column is the “Hypostases in the Divine Essence”⁸⁰ because it contains that which is related to existing as God. These three then act. The *Zohar* addresses the pillars when Rabbi Simeon is talking about Deuteronomy 32, “The next words are: I kill and make alive, etc. That is to say, through the Sefirot on the right side I make alive, and through the Sefirot on the left side I kill; but if the Central Column does not concur, sentence cannot be passed, since they form a court of three.”⁸¹ This action shows the importance of *tifereth*, which is best able to act through both sides since it is connected to all the sefirot on the right and left pillars.

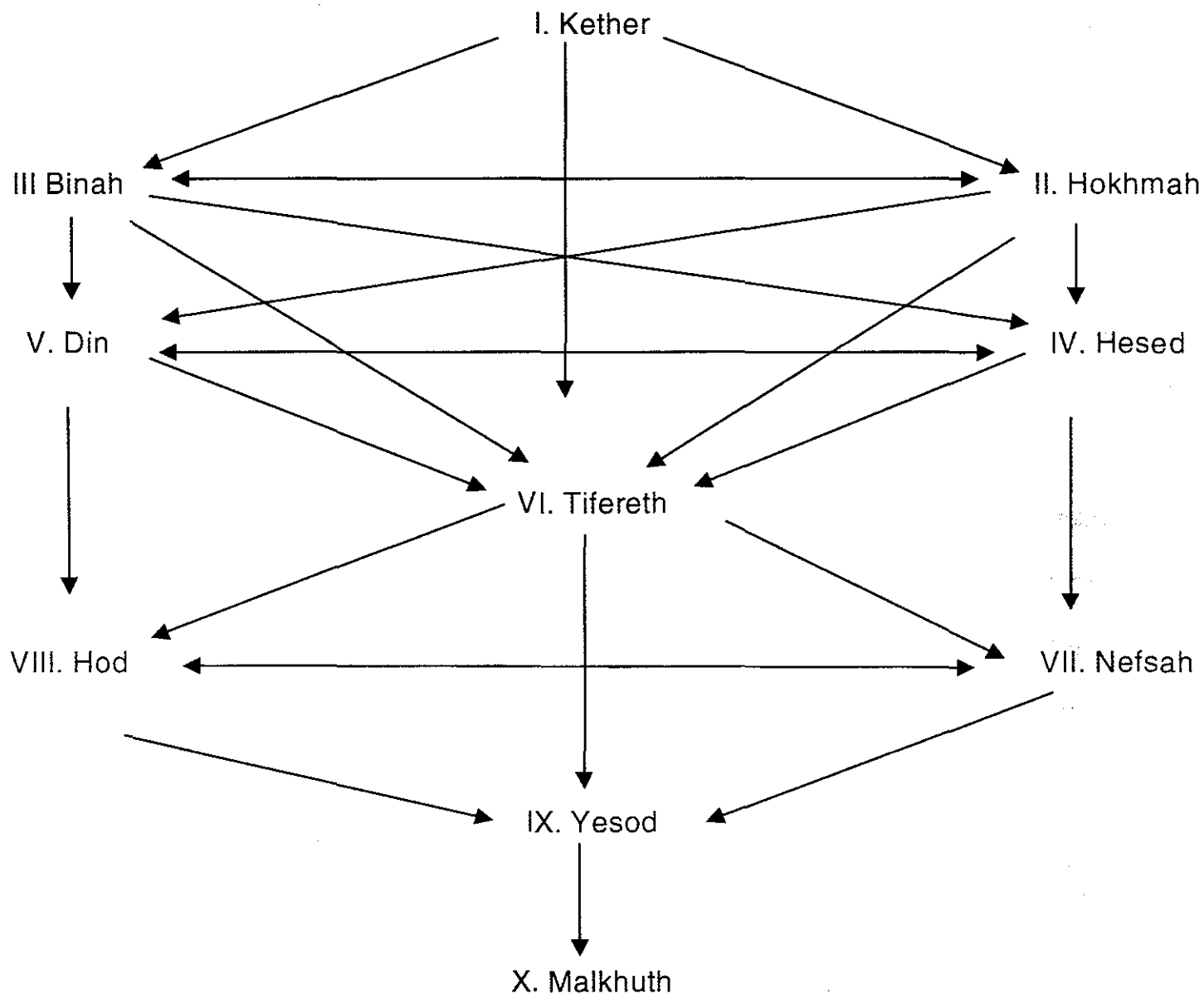
⁷⁸ Scholem, *Kabbalah*. 101.

⁷⁹ Due to the limitations of the paper, the only two diagrams of the relationship are the emanation and the sefirot tree. If more diagrams are wanted, Schaya 29 should be examined.

⁸⁰ Waite, 201.

⁸¹ Sperling, Volume I, 93-94.

Figure 4: Sefirot Tree



In this figure the different colors stand for the various Godheads that they represent. The red indicates the Ancient One. The blue and purple indicate the Small Countenance. The purple alone stands for the Holy One, blessed be He. The green indicates Shekinah.

There are several other things to note about the diagram. First, *kether* is always emanating. *Malkhuth* is always receiving emanations, so it is seen as female. *Yesod*, on the other hand, has all other sefirot passing through it in order to send their emanations to *malkhuth*. This is why *yesod* is seen as male. When examining the sefirot tree, it is

important to realize that all the sefirot are still seen as part of God and indeed all inseparable. It is the mystical view that allows them to have complex interactions with each other and still all be part of the same being.

THE RELATION OF THE GODHEADS TO THE SEFIROT

Rather than only using the sefirot to see one set of features and the Godheads to see another, practitioners of the Kabbalah have combined them. In the Kabbalah, each Godhead is made up of different sefirot. Thus, if one has accepted that the sefirot can all be part of God and yet separate, then it is easy to see that if certain sefirot worked together (or had a closer relationship than some of the others) in the form of a Godhead, they would still make up a single being. This close linking of the sefirot to Godheads allows the Kabbalah to have both an immanent and transcendent God. The relationships of the sefirot to the Godheads are shown in figure 5.

Figure 5: Relation of Sefirot to Godheads

Name	How does it interact with world	Features	Sefiroth related to the Godhead
Ancient One	Cannot interact with world	Skull-sustains world Forehead-shows mercy to world	<i>Kether</i> <i>Binah</i> <i>Hokhmah</i>
Small Countenance	Can interact with world	Skull-pours dew to judge or show mercy Hair-allows differentiation of action Forehead--judgment (unless shows Ancient One through it which then means mercy is shown)	<i>Din</i> <i>Tifereth</i> <i>Hesed</i> <i>Yesod</i> <i>Hod</i> <i>Netsah</i>
Holy One, blessed be He	Acts towards the World through the Small Countenance	Has subjectivity in that He can decide to give mercy or to destroy Has personal relationship with humans Traits are not listed and described like the Countenances	<i>Tifereth</i>
Shekhinah	Immanent in the world	She is the presence of God in the world	<i>Malkhuth</i>

The Godhead of the Ancient Holy One is made up of the sefirot of *kether*, *hokhmah*, and *binah*.⁸² *En sof* in the form of *kether* emanates through the wisdom, which is limited by intellect. The combination of these is seen in the creation story of the *Zohar*. The first three sefirot are all there at the beginning of creation and form the supernal days.⁸³

Up to this point the words 'The Lord our God the Lord' represented three grades corresponding to this deep mystery of bereshith bara Elohim. Bereshith represents the primordial mystery [*kether*]. Bara represents the mysterious source from which the whole expanded [*hokhmah*]. Elohim represents the force which sustains all below [*binah*].⁸⁴

The being of the Ancient One encompasses the description of all three. The Ancient One is *en sof* (*kether*), and thus has the all possibilities (*hokhmah*) in him. Through the dew, he passes along the possibilities for everything that is created. However, he also, through the passing of possibilities, limits them in some manner (*binah*).

The holy Ancient One exists with three heads (or principle aspects: *kether*, *hokhmah*, *binah*), which form only one (ontological reality); or again; 'everything is in them; all the mysteries are contained in them; (and) they themselves are contained in the holy One, the Ancient of Ancients: in him, all is enclosed; he contains all.' Inasmuch as the face of the supreme mirror, *binah*, is turned towards the face of pure being, *kether*, it forms but one 'great face' with it and with its

⁸² These distinctions are not specifically made in the *Zohar*. Correlating the text with the actions of each of the attributes shows how each of these conclusions can be made. There is some disagreement about the way in which I am assigning the sefirot to the Godheads. Hallamish says "Kether is called arikh anpin (long countenance) [*sic*] and Tifereth z'eir anpin (short countenance)[*sic*]"(135). However, I believe this is limiting the scope of how we see the richness of the tradition. It is important to note that there is enough room in the original text and tradition to have multiple interpretations of how to assign the sefirot to the Godheads. However, most of the literature I consulted suggested they were divided in the way I have done it. Also, even though it is possible to see just *kether* and *tifereth* as the Vast and Small Countenances, it is also possible at the same time to see them as more than just those two sefirot, but rather encompassing the first nine sefirot.

⁸³ Sperling, 381.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 64.

radiation, *hokhmah*: the transcendental 'great face' of God, who embraces being and super-being in his infinity.⁸⁵

The combined traits of the first three sefirot describe the actions of the Ancient One and, therefore, make up that Godhead.

The character of the Small Countenance can also be determined through the creation story. The six supernal days are seen as one actor and are described as acting together in *yesod*. The *Zohar* says,

Rabbi Jose propounded the question: 'What are the "six days of bereshith [creation]" of which the Rabbis speak so often?' Rabbi Simeon answered: "these are, in truth, "the cedars of Lebanon which he has planted". [*sic*] As the cedars spring from Lebanon, so these six days spring from bereshith. These are the six supernal days which are specified in the verse: "Thine, O Lord, are the Greatness (*Gedulah* [*hesed*]), the Might (*Geburah* [*din*]), the Beauty (*Tifereth*), the Victory (*Nezah* [*netsah*]), and the Majesty (*Hod*)." The words "For all" refer to the Zaddik (righteous one), which is *Yesod* (foundation of the world)."⁸⁶

If the actor is then examined, it is shown to be an actor in the world. This actor named would be the Small Countenance because it shows the traits of the Small Countenance.

First, the Small Countenance, by allowing both judgments, through *din* and *hod*, and mercy, through *hesed* and *netsah*, to flow through itself, can act in the world. The central pillar allows it to choose either of these. The actor also, by the nature of its place in the sefirot tree, is able to act within the world because it is far enough removed from *kether* to be differentiated in the world. Further Schaya says, "It [Small Countenance] designates, strictly speaking, the six active Sefirot of construction, which manifest

⁸⁵ Schaya, 43.

⁸⁶ Sperling and Simon, Volume I, 118-119. The verse quoted from the Torah in this verse is I Chronicles 29:2. The replacement of the words for some of the sefirot is a matter of both translation and the history of the theory of the sefirot. Although the original names in the *Zohar* were *Gedulah* for *hesed*, *Geburah* for *din*, and *Nezah* for *netsah*, through usage these terms evolved to the form I use in the rest of the paper. They, however, mean roughly the same things and do indicate the same sefirot.

through the receptive sefirot, *malkhuth*, divine immanence.”⁸⁷ This then identifies our actor concretely.

Since the fourth through ninth sefirot are the Small Countenance, *tifereth*, which is at the center, can be seen as the way in which action is chosen through the Small Countenance.⁸⁸ The first would be its interconnection to all parts of the Small Countenance. This connection allows *tifereth* to act toward both pillars of the Small Countenance. In the sefirot tree, *tifereth* is an emanation directly from all parts of the Ancient Holy One, most importantly *kether*. This allows it to be complete, whereas all other parts of the Small Countenance are connected to *kether* through other sefirot. This place in the sefirot tree allows *tifereth* to be active in the world in a decision-making capacity. It is far enough away from *kether* to interact with the world but a direct emanation from it.

The last sefirot, *malkhuth*, corresponds to the last of the Godheads, *Shekinah*.⁸⁹ This identification is easy to make because both are almost identical in attributes. Both are seen as females and manifestations in this world and both are directly interactive with people. The *Zohar* says that the Torah opens with *bereshith*, “it created six,” because these could not be known. The last day, however, could be known. In the same way, *Shekinah* can be known. Therefore, the *malkhuth* must represent *Shekinah*.

This interpretation of creation allows mystics of the Kabbalah to have one God, who is combined in the sefirot and also has the multiple Godheads of the Ancient Holy

⁸⁷ Schaya, 45.

⁸⁸ The Blessed One, holy be He can also be seen as a reference to God in his totality, a figure who cannot be described because he is all of God and, therefore, unknowable. In this context, however, I believe that the designation as *tifereth* is more accurate.

One, the Holy One, blessed be He, Small Countenance, and *Shekinah*. The sefirot are definitely defined as all parts of the same God. By creating the Godheads through the sefirot, one has a unity and a way of making sure they are the same individual. This allows members of the Kabbalah to talk about each individual Godhead and the way they interact without being polytheistic.

If I were a Jewish mystic, the conclusions of how to use the sefirot and Godheads would bring me closer to the view of God that would have transcendence and immanence. I believe the argument for understanding the synthesis of views between the sefirot and the Godheads as a way of understanding a transcendent and immanent God in the *Zohar*, has value as it adds to the amount of knowledge and discussion about the Kabbalah. However, more important for me are the things the Kabbalah can teach Christians about images of God. The main issues that must be dealt with are methodology, mystic logic (the accepting of paradox in the Godheads),⁹⁰ the concreteness of the images they use, and the interconnectedness of images.

The topic of methodology in the Kabbalah is very broad. Things such as *gimatria* (the use of numbers with words) and *Temurah* (treating a word like an acronym) hold little value for Christians today. Methodology like this was used in constructing *The Bible Code*, a book that has little merit. What was said directly in the Torah strictly limited what the members of the Kabbalah could say about God. This limitation is shown by how they quote the Torah to defend every point. Very few arguments do not have direct Biblical evidence. Methods, such as *gimatria* and *Temurah*, allowed the Torah to

⁸⁹ This observation only applies to the lower *Shekinah*; the upper *Shekinah* would not be identical with *malkhuth*.

⁹⁰ The term mystical logic is not used in the text. It is my way of understanding how seeming contradictions are not allowed to detract from the greater images.

be expanded to say more about God and allow a broader range of interpretations. In the modern world, strict adherence to images and deductions directly from the text is no longer necessary. Biblical scholarship and the understanding of the Bible have allowed for differing images to be created and utilized. The supremacy of only Biblical images has given way to a wide variety of other images that achieve similar ends as Biblical images but are more understandable in our time. Therefore, I believe these methods can be replaced for Christians by well reasoned arguments. In the end, I believe this will be more helpful, since we can discuss the merit of images and deductions instead of "conjuring them out of the text," giving them each divine weight.

The second issue is the use of mystic logic. An example of mystic logic is the way the Ancient One is *en sof*. This should mean that he is totally unknowable, yet the Kabbalah describes him in great detail. This contradiction can be explained by saying that the *kether*, which makes up the Godhead, is *en sof* and the *binah* and *hokhmah* are not. However, when something is described as *en sof*, it should have no divisions at all. The mystic logic then allows seemingly contradictory statements to exist. I believe acceptance of these contradictions is necessary for an understanding of God. When multiple images of God come into contact, as in the sefirot relating to the Godheads, there will be concepts that do not make perfect sense from one point of view. Mystic logic allows us to accept and learn from part of the images, even though other parts of it may contradict. This can be seen in the fact that the sefirah *tifereth* is both part of the Small Countenance which does not have the impetus to act and is still the Holy One, blessed be He, which is the actor in the Small Countenance. Although these seem to

contradict, we can see through mystic logic that this seeming contradiction should not destroy the entire theory of the sefirot.

Mystical logic can be very helpful in developing complex and rich images of God. If there is too much contradiction, perhaps the images are not valid and should be rethought. I think the criterion for making sure your images are not too contradictory would be that even though from one viewpoint the contradiction exists, in yet another it can be worked out. This criterion would make sure completely contradictory images could not be claimed under the banner of mystic logic. In the making up of the Ancient One, we see it is not contradictory if we think of the three sefirot, *kether*, *binah*, *hokhmah*. Then we see that even though *kether* is *en sof*, the other parts *binah* and *hokhmah* are knowable. This safeguards against making an image of the physical description of *kether* because *kether* is only *en sof* and could not be described physically. The contradiction in *tifereth* also meets this criterion. *Tifereth*, in its relation to all the other sefirot, can be totally non-active. Since *tifereth* emanates from the Ancient One (who can act) and is involved as the middle of the Small Countenance, there would be no impetus for action. When seen on its own with the being of God flowing into it directly from *kether*, it can be active.

The next issue is the concreteness of the images of God. The concreteness is not in the invariability but in the details the Kabbalah provides. Members of the Kabbalah painstakingly analyze everything about both the Ancient One and the Small Countenance. These details about the beards, eyes, and other body parts allow us to have a more concrete God. We are not stuck with a God whom we cannot describe but rather a God who can be thought about and discussed. I believe Christian images can often use more

concreteness. It is fine to say that God is love, yet that seems to be too abstract for a person to relate to when suffering intensely. The suffering person could ask, "What can it mean for God to be love when I suffer like this?" I believe that Christians have a great concrete image in the figure of Jesus. The narrative of Jesus gives many details about who he was and what he did. The stories about Jesus do not allow him to be an abstract character. Jesus wept, partied, and even angered. Often the images of the father and the spirit lack this sort of concreteness. Of course, the images we create are only images and that is why mystic logic is so important. Mystic logic allows us to have very concrete images of God without limiting God by them.

The last place that Christianity can learn from the Kabbalah is in the interconnectedness of images. The *Zohar* goes to great lengths to make sure the sefirot and the Godheads combine into a unified image. This unified image is filled with a richness that a single image could never have. In fact, first, the *Zohar* shows how the ten sefirot combine to be all part of the one God. Then, they are connected with the Godheads. If any of the sefirot or Godheads were removed, the image of God would not be as complete. In Christian thought, if the image of God as love is used almost exclusively, then the wrathful God is missed. To describe God as only merciful would deny God's fullness. I believe multiple images should be combined. Combining images can be as the *Zohar* did, through postulating two different types of separations in God, or it can be done by switching back and forth between many images all at the same time. For me, the complexity of combined multiple images allows the unified image a life which it otherwise lacks. Looking back to Christianity, many different images are associated with Jesus: Savior, Son of Man, Son of God, Christ, Lamb, King, Word, and

many others. There is never a point where Jesus as Lamb can be separated from Jesus as Son of God. They are interconnected because as the Son of God, Jesus had the responsibility and chose to be the lamb. This interconnectedness is important to keep images from limiting a view of God.

When examining the Kabbalah, Christians can gain an appreciation for the complexity with which another religion explored the issue of an immanent and transcendent God. Christians can further learn to appreciate the importance of concreteness and interconnectedness among the images of God.

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