

THE WAY OF THE KABBALIST



What I want to discuss now are various spiritual paths within the *Kabbalah* and Judaism. Of course, Judaism has been around a very long time, and consequently, Jews have explored just about every spiritual technique under the Sun. Thus, what I list here can hardly be considered comprehensive. Nonetheless, what I list here is what I have found to be valuable within my own life, and hopefully you will find value in it, too. So, without further ado, here are those things from *Kabbalah* that I have found most valuable in terms of a spiritual path that one can walk.

The Five Souls

Recall that the ancient rabbis identified five different names used for the soul – the *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *chaya*, and *yechidah*. These stand, respectively, for the vital soul, the moral soul, the spiritual soul, the living soul, and the unified soul. Of these, five souls, the *Zohar* discusses only the first three, and they are generally described as different levels of a single soul. However, in the *Kabbalah* that has come after the *Zohar*, some *Kabbalists* have restored the number to five. After many years, I have come to consider this doctrine of the five souls to be one of the most important teachings because it ultimately tells us what our goal in this lifetime is. Thus, let me begin anew with descriptions and discussions of each of these levels.

As mentioned previously, the *nefesh* is the lowest level, and it corresponds to just basic body functions and awareness of existence. It is what we are born with, but even though all children are precious, their focus is none the less primarily on themselves. That is why it is said that we are born with *inclination for evil*, and that our *inclination for good* doesn't begin to develop until around puberty.

Puberty is a time when we begin to become more keenly aware of others, and if we have developed properly, then we also exhibit at this time a greater sensitivity and compassion toward others. This is the time during which our *ruach*, our moral soul, begins to display itself, and the *inclination for good* begins to a maturation process. There is another level of evolutionary development beyond the *ruach* that is called the *neshamah*, but I'm not sure how many people experience that next level. Nonetheless, I have met a significant number of people in their elder years who are growing into their *neshmah* to at least some extent. It's the way things are supposed to progress.

The *neshamah* is the eternally spiritually connected part of us, or, if you will, the part of us that connects us to the spiritual world. For many people, the *ruach* may be as far as they can ever hope to get in this lifetime, but just as we naturally evolve from the *nefesh* to the *ruach* stage, so are we meant to continue our evolution to the next level of *neshamah*. And that's why I consider this doctrine to be the most important to be aware of in *Kabbalistic* spiritual practices because it delineates what our overall purpose is. Thus, let me describe what I know of the *neshamah* from my own life.

Whenever I am in a highly creative state, I feel a connection to my *neshamah*, and this is true regardless of whether it is creativity in mathematics, *Torah*, or even creating new songs for my guitar. However, I do probably feel it most strongly when I am involved with either *Torah* study or *Kabbalah*. In this case, I feel like there is an energy structure that connects my brain with something up above it, and I literally feel this structure existing both inside my brain and above it. It is through this structure or connection that creative thoughts and insights enter into the awareness inhabiting my brain. Also, I rarely drink alcohol these days, because when I do, this etheric structure comes tumbling down and it takes time to rebuild it. That's why I wonder if there are many people at all with this connection given the frequency with which alcohol flows in this world.

Not too long ago I read a teaching of the *Gaon of Vilna* that really resonated with me. It was a discussion that claimed that for most spiritual people the *neshamah* resides half within the body and half outside of it, and that is exactly how I experience it. I literally feel this structure half inside my brain and half above it, and it is the conduit for higher, creative thought. Furthermore, when these moments of creativity occur, the Gaon of Vilna refers to them as *neshamah sparks*. I, however, like to call it the *neshamah tingle* because the top of my cranium gets all tingly when this happens. I always wonder how many other people experience this sort of thing. Additionally, the *Gaon of Vilna* maintained that only one person was ever able to anchor and contain the full *neshamah* within the boundaries of their physical body, and that was *Moses*.

I generally like to spend much of my time with my awareness anchored in the *neshamah* simply because that results in an experience of a very delicious creativity, but beyond the *neshamah* is another level known as the *chayah* or *living soul*. That level is more distant to me than the *neshamah*, but from what glimpses that I do get of it, this is how I experience it. Generally, I experience the *chayah* as this gigantic soul of which I am but a small part. It's what some in other cultures have called the *Oversoul*. As such, it is something too large and too beyond individual personality to be contained in a mere mortal frame. By way of comparison, it is huge and I am very, very small. Nonetheless, I do sense it and glimpse it, and I can internally ask questions of it occasionally. As far away as it is, though, that is the next evolutionary step.

The final level of the soul is known as *Adam Kadmon* or *Primordial Man*, and it is supposed to be that part of us that is never really separated from *God*. Other than saying, “It’s there,” there really nothing more I can tell, and if I were there, then I doubt there would be anything left of me here to continue this conversation. Still, these five levels define our evolutionary trajectory, and as such, they define our overall purpose in life. Good luck in connecting with your *neshamah*!

The Commandments

Just because our overall purpose is the development of the soul, that doesn't mean that the commandments aren't important. They are very important in order that our souls develop to be pure and righteous and not twisted in any way. In other words, we need a good foundation upon which to build. But what do I mean exactly by the commandments? Even for Jews the commandments can mean different things. For the Ultra-Orthodox, ritual commandments are considered binding while for Reform Jews, it is only the ethical commandments that are considered important. Furthermore, each religion its own set of things to do and things not to do.

So, what is really important here! Well, for me what is most important to have a strong code of ethical behavior, and for the most part, when it comes to what is right and what is wrong, I think most religions are in agreement. Furthermore, in Judaism, the rabbis of the *Talmud* and *Midrash* argued that the injunctions of the rabbis were considered even more important than the actual 613 commandments listed in the *Torah*.

*“Of the words of the Scribes it is written, **“According to the law which they shall teach you (Deuteronomy 17:11).”** It does not say, “which the Torah shall teach you,” but “which they shall teach you.” Nor does it say “according to the judgment which it shall tell you,” but “which they shall tell you.” You shall not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare to you to the right hand nor to the left. If they tell you that the right hand is right and the left hand left, listen to them, and even if they shall tell you that the right hand is left and the left hand right, listen to them.”*

(Song of Songs Rabbah I:18)

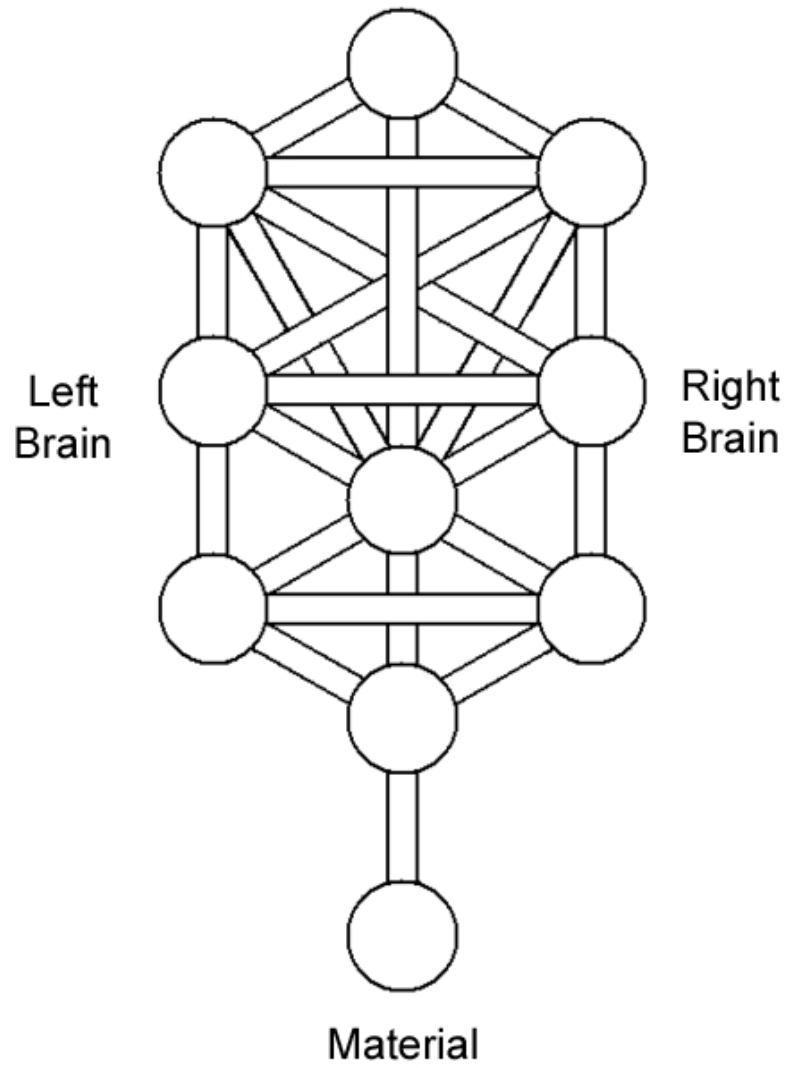
“The injunctions of the Scribes are more beloved than those of the Torah, as it says, “For thy love (dodeka) is better than wine (Song of Songs 1:2).” [‘Wine’ is a metaphor for the written Torah, and the Scribes are the lovers (dodim) of God.] If a man says, “There is no commandment to put on tefillin,” thus transgressing a law of the Torah, he is subject to no penalty. But if he says, “There are five compartments in the tefillin,” thus transgressing an sanction of the Scribes, he is subject to a penalty.” (Song of Songs Rabbah I:18)

Thus, I draw my code of behavior not only from the *Torah* and the rest of the *Hebrew Bible*, but also from the ethical observations of the ancient rabbis. The bottom line, though, is that it is important to understand good behavior and to act ethically, and this will help you grow and develop in the way that you should.

Using the Tree of Life for Balance

One of the easier ways to make use of the *Kabbalistic Tree of Life* diagram is as a tool for achieving balance. Recall that the right side of the tree corresponds to the right brain, the left side to the left brain, the top to what we experience as spiritual or abstract, and the bottom to physical or material world. We each have our own propensities and inclinations in this world, but it is good from time to time to take stock of one's self to determine where you spend most of your time on the tree. For example, by nature, I tend to be left brain and abstract, and thus, I need to consciously plan physical activities and right brain activities in order to be more balanced.

Spiritual



I do this, in part, by remembering to get exercise and be physically active, and by pausing my intellectual activities every now and then in order to play guitar and sing a few songs. A higher form of right brain activity, though, is to think of your friends and your family, the ones you love, and to mentally send each one a blessing. This corresponds to the path on the right side that goes from *Mercy* to *Wisdom* and is ruled by the Hebrew letter *bet* which stands for a *bracha* or blessing. Simultaneously, your blessings should happen on the physical level, too, by giving to charity.

The point of balance on the *Kabblistic Tree of Life* is *Tiferet* or *Beauty*. It is located in the center of the tree and it directly connects with most of the other *sephirot*. In the physical body, *Beauty* corresponds to the heart, and it also corresponds to the level of the soul known as *Ruach*, the moral soul. Hence, spend most of your time heart-centered and being an instrument of compassion for the world. And then from this point of balance you can easily move left, right, higher, or lower along the tree as needed.

Torah Study

Recall that our evolutionary goal is for our soul to continue developing beyond the level of *Ruach* to the level of *Neshamah*, our spiritually connected soul, and nothing assists this development like a good *Torah* study group. Our evolution is greatly assisted by engaging in analysis of the teachings of the text and by listening to the thoughts of others who may see things that we have missed. Furthermore, as we progress in *Torah* study, we add depth to our understanding with each “aha” moment that we experience. *Torah* study with a good, friendly, accepting, knowledgeable group is an important tool for achieving “*Neshamah* consciousness.” However, just as important as study is also deed. Understanding is incomplete unless we turn it into proper action. Furthermore, the ancient rabbis recommended that *Torah* study be combined with a worldly occupation. Again, balance is important.

“Once they had a discussion in the house of ‘Aliyath ‘Arim at Lydda on the question: Which is more important, study or action? R. Tarfon maintained that action was more important; R. Akiba maintained that study was more important. They took a vote and decided that study was more important, because it leads to action.”

(Song of Songs Rabbah II:38)

“MINGLED WITH OIL (Numbers 7:19) alludes to the Torah, the study of which must be mingled with good deeds.”

(Numbers Rabbah XIII:15, 16)

*“This represents good deeds; as we have learned: Not study, but its practical application, is the principal thing.”
(Numbers Rabbah XIV:10)*

*“These are the things the fruit of which man enjoys in this world, while the principal remains for him for the future world: Viz., honoring one's parents, the practice of loving deeds, and making peace between man and his neighbor, while the study of the Torah surpasses them all.”
(B. Kiddushin 40a)*

“By all means let a man engage in the study of the Torah and in good deeds, even if not for their own sake, because through the work for an ulterior purpose he will arrive at the stage of doing good for its own sake.”

(B. Arachin 16b)

*“STUDY IS NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING,
BUT DEED; WHOEVER INDULGES IN TOO MANY
WORDS BRINGS ABOUT SIN.”*

(Pirkei Avot 1:17)

*“ANYONE WHOSE DEEDS EXCEED HIS WISDOM,
HIS WISDOM IS ENDURING, BUT ANYONE WHOSE
WISDOM EXCEEDS HIS DEEDS, HIS WISDOM IS
NOT ENDURING.”*

(Pirkei Avot 3:9)

“ONE WHOSE WISDOM EXCEEDS HIS DEEDS UNTO WHAT IS HE TO BE COMPARED? UNTO A TREE THE BRANCHES WHEREOF ARE MANY AND THE ROOTS FEW, SO THAT WHEN THE WIND COMES, IT UPROOTS IT AND OVERTURNS IT UPON ITS FACE, AS IT IS SAID, FOR HE SHALL BE LIKE A TAMARISK IN THE DESERT, AND SHALL NOT SEE WHEN GOOD COMETH; BUT SHALL INHABIT THE PARCHED PLACES IN THE WILDERNESS, A SALT LAND AND NOT INHABITED. BUT ONE WHOSE DEEDS EXCEED HIS WISDOM, UNTO WHAT IS HE TO BE COMPARED? UNTO A TREE THE BRANCHES WHEREOF ARE FEW AND THE ROOTS MANY, SO THAT EVEN IF ALL THE WINDS IN THE WORLD COME AND BLOW UPON IT, THEY MOVE IT NOT OUT OF ITS PLACE, AS IT IS SAID, FOR HE SHALL BE AS A TREE PLANTED BY THE WATERS AND THAT SPREADETH OUT ITS ROOTS BY THE RIVER, AND SHALL NOT SEE WHEN HEAT COMETH, BUT ITS FOLIAGE SHALL BE LUXURIANT, AND SHALL NOT BE ANXIOUS IN THE YEAR OF DROUGHT, NEITHER SHALL CEASE FROM YIELDING FRUIT.”

(Pirkei Avot 3:17)

“Hillel said to him, ‘What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.’”

(B. Shabbat 31a)

“R. Johanan further said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: The service of the Torah is greater than the study thereof. For it is said: Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, who poured water on the hands of Elijah. It is not said, who learned, but who poured water. This teaches that the service of the Torah is greater than the study thereof.”

(B. Berachot 7b)

“R. Hanina observed thereon, If one who is not commanded to honor his parents, yet does so, is thus rewarded, how much more so one who is commanded and does so! For R. Hanina said: He who is commanded and fulfils the command, is greater than he who fulfils it though not commanded.”
(B. Kiddushin 31a)

“RABBAN GAMALIEL THE SON OF R. JUDAH THE PATRIARCH¹⁴ SAID: EXCELLENT IS THE STUDY OF THE TORAH TOGETHER WITH A WORLDLY OCCUPATION.”
(Pirkei Avot 2:2)

The Thread of Light

In the *Talmud*, *Resh Lakish* says that studying the *Torah* at night will result in a thread of grace being drawn into you. In the *Zohar*, however, this is changed from “*thread of grace*” to “*thread of light*,” thus making a connection with the primordial spiritual light that is reserved for the righteous. The bottom line, though, is that it is very good to study *Torah* or some other inspirational text before you go to bed at night. Doing so will elevate your consciousness and help draw more spiritual light into you as you sleep. In my case, text study causes a tingling sensation at the top of my skull that results in an enlightening “aha” moment. And then I see the light. It’s what I call the *Neshamah tingle*!

“Resh Lakish says, ‘To him who is engaged in the study of the Torah by night, the Holy One extends a thread of grace by day, as it is said, “By day the Lord will command his loving kindness, and in the night his song shall be with me. (Psalm 42:9)” For what reason will the Lord command his loving kindness by day? Because His song shall be with me in the night.’”
(B. Avodah Zarah 3b)

“Whenever the Torah is studied by night, a little thread of this hidden light steals down and plays upon them that are absorbed in their study, wherefore it is written, ‘The Lord commands His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song is with me (Psalms 42:9).’”

(Zohar Vol II:149)

Taking Care of the Environment

Keep in mind that we are physical as well as spiritual beings, and that we have to care for the world, both at the physical and the social level, just as much as we do anything else. Taking care of the world and making it a better place is what in Judaism is known as *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, and it is our obligation to keep the environment healthy for the generations to come. We can't pretend that we are not connected with it.

“One day Honi the Circle Drawer was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, ‘How long does it take for this tree to bear fruit?’ The man replied, ‘Seventy years.’ He then further asked him, ‘Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?’ The man replied, ‘I found ready grown carob trees in the world. As my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.’”
(B. Taanith 23a)

“When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the first man, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden, and said to him, ‘Behold My works, how beautiful and commendable they are! All that I have created, for your sake I created it. Pay heed that you do not corrupt and destroy My universe for if you corrupt it, there is no one after you to repair it.’”
(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:20)

Ignoring the Shadows

Ecclesiastes is part of the *wisdom literature* of the *Bible*, and much of Jewish mysticism can be traced back to its statements. It is simultaneously one of the most popular and one of the most misunderstood books of the *Bible*. Too often, for example, one hears its key verse, “*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,*” interpreted as simply an injunction against being a vain person. This common English translation of this verse (*Ecclesiastes* 1:2) comes directly from the Latin Vulgate, “*Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas.*” However, in the original Hebrew, “*Havel havelim, hachol havel,*” the word *havel* means “steam” or “vapor” suggesting that a lot of what we take to be important is just a lot of hot air. Consequently, this well-known passage can be better translated as, “*Futility of futilities, all is futile.*”

In *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* we find the word *havel* related in particular to Psalms 144:4, “*Man is like a breath (l’hevel), his days are like a passing shadow (k’tsel),*” and also to *Ecclesiastes* 6:12, “*Who can possibly know what is good for man in life during the days of his futile (hevlo) existence which he spends as a shadow (k’tsel).*” This connects the word for “vapor” with the word for “shadows” and sets the stage for a very astute discussion, in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, of what is futile and what isn’t. In particular, *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* makes a distinction between shadows that have substance and those that don’t.

For example, according to *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*, shadows cast by walls and shadows cast by date-palms both have substance to them. This is because their shadows are reflections of conditions that are relatively permanent. On the other hand, the following quote from *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* suggests that a person's life represents a different kind of shadow.

*Rav Huna said in the name of R. Aha, "Life is like a bird which flies past and its shadow passes with it." Samuel said, "It is like the shadow of bees in which there is no substance at all."
(Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:3)*

The bottom line is that much of what we experience in life is merely a reflection of temporary conditions, and as such they are “shadows without substance.” Other things, however, are reflections of more permanent virtues such as love and oneness, and, consequently, they are “shadows with substance.” Thus, as we go through life, we need to focus on the things of true substance and not worry so much about the rest. In particular, let go of anger.

“Be not hasty in your spirit to be angry; for anger rests in the bosom of fools.” (Ecclesiastes 7:9)

*“BE NOT EASILY PROVOKED TO ANGER.”
(Pirkei Avot 2:10)*

*“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”
(Proverbs 16:32)*

*“A fool vents all his anger; but a wise man quietly holds it back.”
(Proverbs 29:11)*

Thus, if you feel yourself becoming angry, put a stop to it as quickly as you can. What you are angry about is probably not that important anyway, and the anger will only cut you off from your connection with the divine light. Focus on what is really important, and disregard what isn't.

Drawing Down the Light

Once you learn how to rise to the level of your *Neshamah*, many new things become possible and many new perceptions become available to you. In particular, after awhile, entering the *Neshamah* state becomes a mere act of will, and if it is still a little difficult, then activities like *Torah* study and asking deep questions that you want answers to can help invoke this particular state of being. And once you are in the *Neshamah* state, you have access to a delicious, spiritual light that you can draw down through the top of your head and into your body. And from here the possibilities are endless.

From the *Neshamah* state, you can relax and feel your whole body filled with both healing and ecstasy. You feel connected to the entire universe and to every living thing. You feel connected both to all space and to all time. And from this state, many things are possible. But it's best that I leave it for you to discover these things on your own!



The *Shema*

The words of *Deuteronomy 6:4*, “*Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One,*” have come to be known as the *Shema* in Judaism, and these words are repeated twice daily, upon rising and upon going to bed, along with the second part, “*Blessed is the Name of the glorious Kingdom, forever and ever, Amen.*” When done mechanically, recitation of the *Shema* doesn’t accomplish very much, but when done with the proper intent, I believe it can transform the world. Let’s look at what the *Zohar* says about the *Shema*.

“The third precept is to acknowledge that there is a God, all-powerful and ruler of the universe, and to make due proclamation of his unity every day, as extending in the six supernal directions, and to unify them all through the six words contained in the Shema Israel, and in reciting these to devote oneself wholly to God. The word Ehad therefore must be dwelt on to the length of six words. This is implied in the passage, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place: that is, let the grades beneath the heaven be unified in it so as to form one whole, perfect in all the six directions. With God's unity one must further associate fear, for which reason one must dwell on the daleth, the last letter of Ehad, the daleth being for that reason written larger than the other letters.

And this is implied in the words “and let the dry land be seen”, that is, let the daleth, which is a “dry land”, be associated with that unity. After forming this union on high it is necessary to repeat the process for the lower world through all its multiplicity in the six lower directions. This is expressed in the verse we recite after the Shema, viz. “Blessed-be the-name-of the-glory-of His-Kingdom for-ever and-ever”, which contains another six words expressive of the unity. In this way, what was dry land becomes fertile soil to produce fruits and flowers and trees. This is implied in the passage: “And God called the dry land earth”, that is, by the manifestation of God's unity here below the earth was duly perfected.

It is for this reason that in the account of the third day the expression “that it was good” appears twice, once for the manifestation of the unity above and once for the manifestation of the unity below. As soon as that unity was made manifest at both ends, the text says “Let the earth put forth grass”, that is, the earth was then fitted to produce fruits and flowers according to its capacity.”

(Zohar I:12a)

“At the time when Israel is proclaiming the unity-the mystery contained in the Shema-with a perfect intention, a light comes forth from the hidden supernal world, which divides into seventy lights, and those seventy lights into the seventy luminous branches of the Tree of Life. Then the Tree and all the other trees of the Garden of Eden emit sweet odours and praise their Lord, for at that time the Matrona (the Shechinah) prepares Herself to enter under the shade of the canopy, there to unite herself with her Spouse; and all the supernal potencies unite in one longing and one will to be united in perfect union, without any separation whatsoever.”

(Zohar II:133b)

““In the debates in the schools of Shammai and of Hillel concerning the recitation of the Shema, the former held that the evening “Shema” should be recited in a reclining or resting position, and the morning “Shema” should be recited standing, their reason being that in the evening the Feminine aspect is included in the active energy and reign, while in the morning the Masculine aspect reigns exclusively in the supernal world, and it is therefore necessary to recite the Shema standing, as is done during the Prayer (Amidah) and at all times when the Masculine predominates.

The school of Hillel, on the other hand, made no such distinction. If the said aspects (Male and Female) were each entirely by itself, it might be necessary to do so, but as we, by our concentration and intention, unite them in our consciousness during the recitation and response, in the forty-nine aspects, and raise them towards the forty-nine gates, we need not emphasize their separateness, but should rather concentrate on the fact that they are both one without any separation whatever: the Masculine in six words-"Hear, O Israel, etc.", and the Feminine in six--"Blessed be the Name", etc. And the rule is always according to the school of Hillel."

(Zohar II:139b)

Both the first part of the *Shema* (“Hear, Oh Israel, ...”) and the second part (“Blessed is the Name, ...”) each contain six words in Hebrew, and this refers to the six cardinal directions that define our universe.

Furthermore, when reciting the *Shema*, our intent for the first part should be that we are opening our awareness to the unity of the *Divine*, and when we recite the second part, we should endeavor to experience this unit connecting everything in the physical world. This is why the *Shema* is so important. When said with the proper intent, it creates unity (or the experience of the unity already there) both above and below, and this can be all the difference between a harmonious world and a chaotic world. This is also why one should linger on the word *echad* (One) at the end of the first part of the *Shema*, because one wants to really feel that Oneness in their entire being.

If one takes a quantum physics point of view and sees reality as composed of waves, then the information of Oneness that we add to our own wave will instantly become a part of all other waves, and this helps overcome the voices of separation. On the other hand, if one takes the point of view of classical physics that reality is composed of discrete particles, then you are still changing yourself when you open yourself up to the experience of unity, and you subsequently become a pebble in a pond whose ripples can affect the larger whole. In other words, no matter which point of view you take, the Shema, when said the proper intent, can still be a voice of unity for both one's self and for the world, and this is so very important.

Being a Partner in Creation

A standard tenet of the ancient rabbis is that man is supposed to function in partnership with *God*.

Consequently, things are left undone for us to finish just as the wheat that comes up from the ground needs further preparation from us in order to become a loaf of bread.

“R. Samuel b. Ammi said: From the beginning of the world's creation the Holy One, blessed be He, longed to enter into partnership with the mortals.”
(Genesis Rabbah III:9)

“Whatever was created in the first six days requires further preparation, e.g., mustard needs sweetening, vetches need sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and man too needs to be finished off.”
(Genesis Rabbah XI:6)

The greater implication from this is that we are supposed to lead creative lives, and recall that the *Sefer Yetzirah*, describes two kinds of creations – *something from something* creation, and *something from nothing* creation. Recall also that *something from something* creation involves a mere rearrangement or permutation of what's already there, but as mundane as this may seem, it's something we have to engage in every day. Every single day we get up, we have breakfast, and we go about our day. That's all just a permutation of what already exists. However, if we act with greater awareness, then we can strive to bring about those permutation which help repair the world, *tikkun olam*.

We can not only repair things within our house, we can also repair our roads and infrastructure. We can repair our schools and our communities. And the list goes on and on. There is much good that can be done each day by engaging in appropriate *something from something* creation to repair our lives, our immediate environment, and the world.

The other type of creation discussed in the *Sefer Yetzirah* is *something from nothing* creation, and this is the type of creation we participate in whenever we have an “aha” moment. The steps in this creative process as described in the *Sefer Yetzirah* are (1) *decreeing* – an act of will on our part is what initiates the creative process, (2) *shaping* – we have to begin formulating our thoughts and ideas with regard to what we are trying to create, (3) *combining* – this is where the “aha” moment actually occurs, as we realize that this piece goes with another piece in order to make something new, (4) *measuring* – this is the process of making it real, where our creation becomes a measurable reality, and (5) *exchanging* – the mental process that allows us to transfer our creation from one frame of reference to another, without which we might be able, for instance, to experience something like an iPhone only at home but nowhere else.

Whether it is mathematics, art, physical activity, or music, we can all be and should be creative. Through *something from nothing* creation, we enter into partnership with the *Creator*, and we bring things into this world that reflect our own gifts and uniqueness. Furthermore, according to the *Zohar*, every insight we have literally creates a new world, and certainly our creations, whether they are intellectual or physical, have that power to create new worlds for both ourselves and others. And if you doubt this, let me mention just one name – Steve Jobs.

“How greatly is it incumbent on a man to study the Torah day and night! For the Holy One, blessed be He, is attentive to the voice of those who occupy themselves with the Torah, and through each fresh discovery made by them in the Torah a new heaven is created. Our teachers have told us that at the moment when a man expounds something new in the Torah, his utterance ascends before the Holy One, blessed be He, and He takes it up and kisses it and crowns it with seventy crowns of graven and inscribed letters. When a new idea is formulated in the field of the esoteric wisdom, it ascends and rests on the head of the 'Zaddik, the life of the universe', and then it flies off and traverses seventy thousand worlds until it ascends to the 'Ancient of Days'.

And inasmuch as all the words of the 'Ancient of Days' are words of wisdom comprising sublime and hidden mysteries, that hidden word of wisdom that was discovered here when it ascends is joined to the words of the 'Ancient of Days', and becomes an integral part of them, and enters into the eighteen mystical worlds, concerning which we read 'No eye hath seen beside thee, O God' (Isaiah 64:3). From thence they issue and fly to and fro, until finally arriving, perfected and completed, before the 'Ancient of Days'. At that moment the 'Ancient of Days' savors that word of wisdom, and finds satisfaction therein above all else.

He takes that word and crowns it with three hundred and seventy thousand crowns, and it flies up and down until it is made into a sky. And so each word of wisdom is made into a sky which presents itself fully formed before the 'Ancient of Days', who calls them 'new heavens', that is, heavens created out of the mystic ideas of the sublime wisdom. As for the other new expositions of the Torah, they present themselves before the Holy One, blessed be He, and ascend and become 'earths of the living', then they descend and become absorbed into one earth, whereby a new earth emerges through that new discovery in the Torah.

This is implied in the verse, 'For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I am making, rise up before me, etc.' (Isaiah 64:22). It is not written 'I have made', but 'I am making', signifying continual creation out of the new ideas discovered in the Torah.”
(ZoharI:4b-5a)

Walking in Beauty

The last practice I want to talk about is Jewish meditation, and over the millennial, Jewish mystics have explored the gamut of the various meditative practices that are available. However, I want to talk about just a few and how they are woven into my life these days. In this regard, I'll note that the earliest mention of Jewish meditation is probably found in *Genesis 24:63*.

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the evening time; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming.”
(Genesis 24:63)

This verse suggests several things. Namely, that meditation might have been a spiritual practice passed onto *Isaac* by his father *Abraham*, that the process involved going out into nature, and that evening time might be the preferred time to engage in such a process. Furthermore, the lifting up of the eyes might refer to more than *Isaac* seeing the approach of his bride, *Rachel*. In other words, it might also be part of the meditative process. As is well known to many mediators, turning the eyes upward during meditation helps direct energy and attention to the higher energy centers between the eyebrows and at the top of the head. Additionally, the reference might also mean to lift up the eyes so that one can see the infinite sky. Gazing upon the unbounded space can also affect and elevate one's state of consciousness, and this might even be what led to *Abraham's* epiphany of the one *God*.

In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, we find a more detailed instruction of a meditation that sounds very much like current practices of mindfulness.

“Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand with wisdom, and be wise with understanding. Examine with them and explore with them, and stand each word and thing on its wellspring, and return the Assembler to its base.”
(Sefer Yetzilah 1:4)

“Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint. Restrain your mouth from speaking and your heart from thinking, and if your mouth runs to words or your heart to reflections, return them to their place. Thus, it is said, “And the living beings (chayot) ran and returned (Ezekiel 1:14),” and upon this word a covenant was cut.”
(Sefer Yetzilah 1:8)

These verses tell us to center our consciousness at its source, and that by observing where each word and thought comes from, we can find that source. In the *Zohar*, however, the focus is more on the drawing down of spiritual light from one level to the next.

*“That light is the sacred and hidden temple (Hekal) wherein is concentrated that divine essence from which all the worlds draw sustenance, and all divine hosts are nourished and so subsist.”
(Zohar I;6b)*

“The whole world is constructed on this principle, upper and lower, from the first mystic point up to the furthest removed of all the stages. They are all coverings one to another, brain within brain and spirit within spirit, so that one is a shell to another. The primal point is the innermost light of a translucency, tenuity, and purity passing comprehension. The extension of that point becomes a “palace” (Hekal), which forms a vestment for that point with a radiance which is still unknowable on account of its translucency. The “palace” which is the vestment for that unknowable point is also a radiance which cannot be comprehended, yet withal less subtle and translucent than the primal mystic point. This “palace” extends into the primal Light, which is a vestment for it.

From this point there is extension after extension, each one forming a vestment to the other, being in the relation of membrane and brain to one another. Although at first a vestment, each stage becomes a brain to the next stage. The same process takes place below, so that on this model man in this world combines brain and shell, spirit and body, all for the better ordering of the world. When the moon was in connection with the sun, she was luminous, but as soon as she separated from the sun and was assigned the charge of her own hosts, she reduced her status and her light, and shells upon shells were created for covering the brain, and all for the benefit of the brain. Hence meoroth is written defectively. All this was for the benefit of the world, and hence it is written, “to give light upon the earth”.”

(Zohar I:19b-20a)

And so what do I do? Well, let me explain. When I was in my twenties, I certainly spent much time each day in a traditional yoga meditation posture, and I did, indeed, experience many ecstatic and rare states of consciousness including going beyond the subject/object dichotomy. However, in my old age, getting up from the floor is not so easy, and a full lotus position is downright impossible! However, that doesn't mean that I no longer meditate. The fact is that I am meditating for most of the day. It just happens now at every moment as I go about my business rather than at appointed times in appointed postures. Let me describe.

First, you need to learn how to go through your day with your awareness centered at the source of things rather than on the objects of perception themselves. The *Sefer Yetzirah* gives you technique for this by instructing you to focus on the source of where each thought and perception arises rather than the perception itself. Granted that this may be more difficult to do at work, but practice makes perfect.

Second, you need to have learned how to reach your *Neshamah* state of consciousness. This achievement comes about only when you have learned to detach a bit from the physical level, and this detachment makes it much easier to center your consciousness at its source. Furthermore, the *Neshamah* state allows you to experience the light and joy that are closer to the center of your being.

So what is the effect of such a centering while in the *Neshamah* state? For me it means being able to go about my daily affairs while still staying established at my center. It also means experiencing a continual influx of joy and spiritual light into my being, and it means being in a state that is accompanied by enhanced insights and creativity. It means, at the physical level, having my awareness centered in my heart, and being able to easily transfer it to either higher or lower centers as needed. It means being centered in balance and beauty. It is so powerful, in fact, that only a few things can pull us from this state. One is anger, and underlying anger is usually fear, and underlying fear is usually pain. Thus, do what you can to remove these negatives from your life, and then you can walk in beauty for the benefit of yourself and of others.

The Blessing Way

I am naturally left brained and frequently involved in mathematical inquiry. However, this creates a bit of an imbalance. While my highest creative thoughts take me to the level of *Binah* on the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*, these activities all belong to the left side of the tree and ignore the right. Thus, I have found the following exercise very beneficial for helping to establish my awareness in my higher wisdom. Again, on the *Sefirotic Tree of Life*, the highest sphere on the right hand side is *Wisdom*, and the vertical path on the right side of the tree that connects *Mercy* to *Wisdom* is ruled by the letter *bet* which represents a *bracha* or *blessing*. Thus, there are two ways in which I travel this path. One is by trying to remember to be a blessing to others through my action in the physical world, and the other is

to be a blessing in the non-physical world. To do this, I often lie in bed at night thinking of all the people I know and love and who I have been friends with, and as I think about them, I open up my heart and feel them being surrounded by blessings and love, and I trust in my sense that at this level we are all connected. I do this with both the living and the departed, and I in no way try to force my will upon anyone or make decisions for them. And sometimes I sense that a person isn't ready for this experience. But if they are receptive, then I direct my attention to letting them be surrounded with whatever light and love and blessings I can offer to help guide and heal their lives. And as with all exercises of this sort, it likely does even more for me than it does for them.

Walking with Enlightenment

In the first chapter of the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the oldest extant book on Jewish mysticism, we read the following words:

1:4 Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand with wisdom, and be wise with understanding. Examine with them and explore with them, and stand each word and thing on its wellspring, and return the Assembler to its base.

And this is followed by these words:

1:8 Ten sefirot/declarations of constraint. Restrain your mouth from speaking and your heart from thinking, and if your mouth runs to words or your heart to reflections, return them to their place. Thus, it is said, “And the living beings (chayot) ran and returned (Ezekiel 1:14),” and upon this word a covenant was cut.

These verses describe a powerful way to live in constant union with your spiritual center, but for it to be most effective, my experience is that one should first have achieved some mastery of “The Blessing Way” described above in order that one be established in *Chokmah* (Wisdom/right brain) as well as *Binah* (Understanding/left brain).

Our thoughts are always running and returning, as we say, and in some sense we could also say that our conscious awareness is running and returning. When we are young, awareness runs to everything that grabs its attention only for that perception to immediately disappear into awareness. Hence, consciousness constantly seems to be running toward objects and then perception returns everything back to consciousness. However, what the *Sefer Yetzirah* asks us to do is to keep our awareness, the assembler of our reality, centered on its base, the wellspring of consciousness. How to do this? Well, it's both very simple and very difficult at the same time. It's simple in that all you have to do is feel the center that observes everything, and then just stay there as the watcher.

But on the other hand, it is difficult because people often spend a lifetime trying to figure out what this means and how to do it. However, as I say, when you have developed both your left brain and your right brain to a high extent, when you have learned both to think analytically and experience the joy of sudden insight, and when you have learned to bless others and experience the joy of Oneness, then it suddenly becomes much easier to always keep your awareness seated at the center of being. And, of course, external dramas will still knock you off this center from time to time, but the more you practice this, the easier it becomes. And while I, myself, am no master of this procedure, I know that the more often I walk through my day with my awareness centered at its base, the more joy and enlightenment I experience at each precious moment.