

# SEFER YETZIRAH 5.1



משנה א': שתים עשרה פשוטות ה' ו' ז', ח', ט' י', ל' נ' ס',  
ע' צ' ק', יסודן שיחה הרהור הלוד, ראייה שמיעה מעשה, תשמיש  
ריח שינה, רוגז לעיטה שחוק:

5.1: Twelve Elementals: Heh, Vav, Zayin, Chet, Tet, Yud, Lamed, Nun, Samekh, Eyin, Tzadi, Kuf. Their foundation is speech, thought, motion, sight, hearing, action, coition, smell, sleep, anger, taste, laughter.  
(*Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation*)

5:1 Twelve plain, hey-vav-zayin-chet-tet-yud-lamed-nun-samach-ayin-tzaddi-kuf. Their foundation is conversation, reflection, walking, seeing, hearing, action, procreation, smelling, sleeping, anger, swallowing, laughter.  
(*Doc Benton translation*)

The twelve plain letters are presented above in the order in which they occur in the Hebrew alphabet, and the attributes given to each letter seem to refer to actions or sensations that help define our experience of the world. In the passage that follows, we will see these letters interpreted even more literally as boundaries. Hence, our boundaries are defined by what we perceive. Which of the characteristics above that goes with which letter is another one of those things, however, that varies from one version of the text to another. Below is a table of the assignments found in the different primary texts. Also, in the *Saadia* version, these characteristics are treated as double characteristics similar to what we saw with the seven double letters. In other words, seeing is perceived as the opposite of being blind and the sleep of the night is seen as being in opposition to the sleep of the dead.

## THE SENSATIONS

| <i>Letters</i> | <i>Assembler</i> | <i>GRA</i>   | <i>Short</i> | <i>Long</i>  | <i>Saadia</i> |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Hey            | conversation     | conversation | seeing       | seeing       | seeing        |
| Vav            | reflection       | reflection   | hearing      | hearing      | hearing       |
| Zayin          | walking          | walking      | smelling     | smelling     | smelling      |
| Chet           | seeing           | seeing       | conversation | conversation | conversation  |
| Tet            | hearing          | hearing      | swallowing   | swallowing   | swallowing    |
| Yud            | action           | action       | procreation  | procreation  | procreation   |
| Lamed          | procreation      | procreation  | action       | walking      | action        |
| Nun            | smelling         | smelling     | walking      | anger        | walking       |
| Samach         | sleeping         | sleeping     | anger        | laughter     | anger         |
| Ayin           | anger            | anger        | laughter     | reflection   | laughter      |
| Tzaddi         | swallowing       | swallowing   | reflection   | joy          | reflection    |
| Kuf            | laughter         | laughter     | sleeping     | sleeping     | sleep         |

Ultimately one has to ask why do we have these particular sensations associated with these particular letters? My best guess is that it is because there are related Hebrew words that begin with these letters. Below is a list of the words and correspondences that I have been able to find.

| Hebrew Letter | Glyph | Assignment in <i>Sefer Yetzirah</i> | Related Hebrew Word | Translation      |
|---------------|-------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| hey           | ה     | speech/conversation                 | הבטחה               | utterance        |
| vav           | ו     | thought/reflection                  | וכוח                | debate           |
| zayin         | ז     | motion/walking                      | זבוח                | flux, flow       |
|               |       |                                     | זח                  | to move          |
|               |       |                                     | זזוי                | moveable         |
|               |       |                                     | זעזעה               | oscillation      |
| chet          | ח     | sight/seeing                        | חזין                | vision, prophecy |
|               |       |                                     | חזיה                | seeing           |
| tet           | ט     | hearing                             | טרטור               | noise            |
| yud           | י     | action                              | ישמ                 | action           |
|               |       |                                     | גיעה                | exertion         |
| lamed         | ל     | coition/procreation                 | לבן                 | semen            |
|               |       |                                     | לבב                 | to attract       |
| nun           | נ     | smelling                            | נחיר                | nostril          |
| samech        | ס     | sleeping                            | סגום                | thick blanket    |
|               |       |                                     | סחרורי              | sleep walker     |
| ayin          | ע     | anger                               | עברה                | anger            |
|               |       |                                     | עשק                 | quarrel          |
| tz addi       | צ     | taste/swallowing                    | צרך                 | to consume       |
| kuf           | ק     | laughter                            | קפריסי              | humorous         |
|               |       |                                     | קריקז               | funny incident   |