

Sefirot

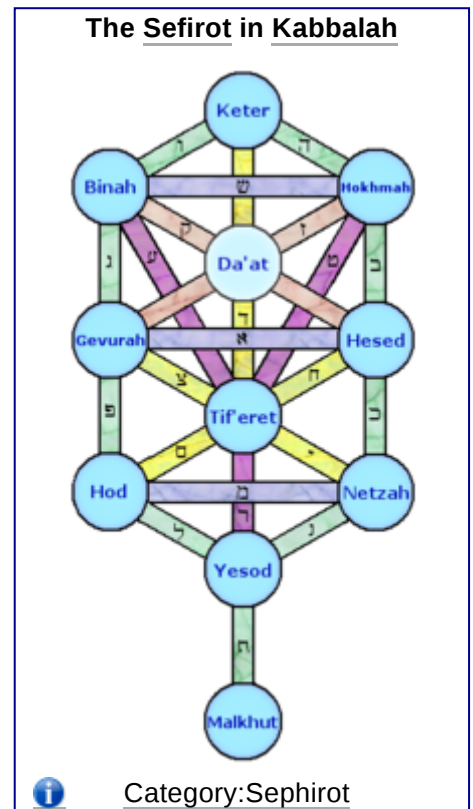
Sefirot (/sfiˈroʊt, ˈsfiroʊt/; Hebrew: סְפִירוֹת‎ *səḫīrôt*), meaning *emanations*, are the 10 attributes/emanations in Kabbalah, through which Ein Sof (The Infinite) reveals Itself and continuously creates both the physical realm and the chain of higher metaphysical realms (Seder hishtalshelus). The term is alternatively transliterated into English as *sephirot/sephiroth*, singular *sefirah/sephirah* etc.

Alternative configurations of the sefirot are given by different schools in the historical development of Kabbalah, with each articulating different spiritual aspects. The tradition of enumerating 10 is stated in the Sefer Yetzirah, "Ten sefirot of nothingness, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven". As altogether eleven sefirot are listed across the different schemes, two (Keter and Da'at) are seen as unconscious and conscious manifestations of the same principle, conserving the ten categories.^[1] The sefirot are described as channels of Divine creative life force or consciousness through which the unknowable Divine essence is revealed to mankind.

The first sefirah, Keter, describes the Divine superconscious Will that is beyond conscious intellect. The next three sefirot (Chokhmah, Binah and Da'at) describe three levels of conscious Divine Intellect. The seven subsequent sefirot (Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malkuth) describe the primary and secondary conscious Divine Emotions. Two sefirot (Binah and Malkuth) are

feminine, as the female principle in Kabbalah describes a vessel that receives the outward male light, then inwardly nurtures and gives birth to lower sefirot. Corresponding to this is the Female Divine Presence (Hebrew: שְׁכִינָה‎, *Shekhinah*). Kabbalah sees the human soul as mirroring the Divine (after Genesis 1:27, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them"), and more widely, all creations as reflections of their life source in the sefirot. Therefore, the sefirot also describe the spiritual life of man, and constitute the conceptual paradigm in Kabbalah for understanding everything. This relationship between the soul of man and the Divine, gives Kabbalah one of its two central metaphors in describing Divinity, alongside the other Ohr (light) metaphor. However, Kabbalah repeatedly stresses the need to avoid all corporeal interpretation. Through this, the sefirot are related to the structure of the body and are reformed into partzufim (personas). Underlying the structural purpose of each sefirah is a hidden motivational force which is understood best by comparison with a corresponding psychological state in human spiritual experience.^[1]

In Hasidic philosophy, which has sought to internalise the experience of Jewish mysticism into daily inspiration (devekut), this inner life of the sefirot is explored, and the role they play in man's service of God in this world.



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Ein Sof

The Ein Sof (lit: without end) is an important concept in Jewish Kabbalah. Generally translated as ‘infinity’ and ‘endless,’ the Ein Sof represents the formless state of the universe before the self-materialization of God. In other words, the Ein Sof is God before He decided to become God as we now know Him.^[2]

The Sefirot are divine emanations that come from the Ein Sof in a manner often described as a flame. The Sefirot emanate from above to below. As the first Sefira is closest to Ein Sof, it is the least comprehensible to the human mind, while in turn the last is the best understood because it is closest to the material world that humanity dwells on.^[2]

Ten Sefirot

Sefirot (ספירות, *sfirot*, singular ספירה *sfira*), literally means "counting, enumeration", but early Kabbalists presented a number of other etymological possibilities from the same Hebrew root including: *sefer* ("text" - ספר), *sippur* ("recounting a story" - סיפור), *sappir* ("sapphire" - ספיר, "brilliance", "luminary"), *sfar* ("boundary" - ספר), and *sofer*, or *safrā* ("scribe" - סופר, ספרא). The term *sefirah* thus has complex connotations within Kabbalah.^[1]

The original reference to the sefirot is found in the ancient Kabbalistic text of *Sefer Yetzirah*, "The Book of Formation", attributed to the first Jewish Patriarch, Abraham.^[1] However, the names of the sefirot as given in later Kabbalah are not specified there. Further references to the sefirot, now with their later-accepted names, are elaborated on in the medieval Kabbalistic text of the *Zohar*, which is one of the core texts of Kabbalah.

The sefirot are ten emanations, or illuminations of God's Infinite Light as it manifests in Creation. As revelations of the Creator's Will (רצון *רצון*),^[3] the sefirot should not be understood as ten different "gods" but as ten different channels through which the one God reveals his will.

In later Jewish literature, the ten sefirot refer either to the ten manifestations of God; the ten powers or faculties of the soul; or the ten structural forces of nature.^[1]

In Cordoveran Kabbalah, the forces of creation are considered as autonomous forces that evolve linearly from one another. By contrast, in Lurianic or Lurianic Kabbalah (the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria), the sefirot are perceived as a constellation of forces in active dialogue with one another at every stage of that evolution. Luria described the sefirot as complex and dynamically interacting entities known as partzufim, each with its own symbolically human-like persona.^[1]

Keter, the Crown, is the first sefirah. It is the superconscious intermediary between God and the other, conscious sefirot. Three different levels, or "heads", are identified within Keter. In some contexts, the highest level of Keter is called "The unknowable head",^[4] The second level is "the head of nothingness" (*reisha d'ayin*) and the third level is "the long head" (*reisha d'arich*). These three heads correspond to the superconscious levels of faith, pleasure and will in the soul.^[1]

In its early 12th-century dissemination, Kabbalah received criticism from some rabbis who adhered to Jewish philosophy, for its alleged introduction of multiplicity into Jewish monotheism. The seeming plurality of the One God is a result of the spiritual evolution of God's light, which introduced a multiplicity of emanations from the one infinite Divine essence. This was necessary due to the inability of mankind to exist in God's infinite presence.^{[5][6]} God does not change; rather, it is our ability to perceive His emanations that is modified. This is stressed in Kabbalah in order to avoid heretical notions of any plurality in the Godhead. One parable to explain this is the difference between the "Ma'Ohr" ("Luminary"-Divine essence) and the "Ohr" ("Light") He emanates, like the difference between the single body of the sun and the multiple rays of sunlight that illuminate a room.^[7]

Names of the sefirot

In Kabbalah, there is a direct correspondence between the Hebrew name of any spiritual or physical phenomenon and its manifestations in the mundane world. The Hebrew name represents the unique essence of the object. This reflects the belief that the universe is created through the metaphorical speech of God, as stated in the first chapter of Genesis. Kabbalah expounds on the names of the sefirot and their nuances, including their gematria (numerical values), in order to reach an understanding of these emanations of God's essence.^{[1][8]}

In the 16th-century rational synthesis of Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (Cordoveran Kabbalah), the first complete systemisation of Kabbalah, the sefirot are listed from highest to lowest:^[8]

Category:	Sefirah:
Super-conscious	1 <i>Keter</i> - "Crown"
Conscious intellect	2 <i>Chokhmah</i> - "Wisdom"
	3 <i>Binah</i> - "Understanding"
Conscious emotions	(Primary emotions:)
	4 <i>Chesed</i> - "Kindness"
	5 <i>Gevurah</i> - "Discipline"
	6 <i>Tiferet</i> - "Beauty"
	(Secondary emotions:)
	7 <i>Netzach</i> - "Eternity"
	8 <i>Hod</i> - "Splendour"
	9 <i>Yesod</i> - "Foundation"
(Vessel to bring action:)	
10 <i>Malkuth</i> - "Kingship"	

In the subsequent 16th-century transcendent Kabbalistic scheme of Isaac Luria, the sefirot are usually listed by omitting Keter and including Da'at (the conscious manifestation of the superconscious Keter. This difference of opinion reflects an earlier Medieval debate regarding whether Keter is the first sefirah, or the *Ohr Ein Sof* (Infinite light) itself. Luria includes Keter in the list only in relation to the inner light of the sefirot. In his usual list of the sefirot as formed attributes (vessels), Keter is considered too lofty to include.^[8] In this scheme, the sefirot are depicted as lying across three parallel vertical axes.

Category:	Left Axis	Middle Axis	Right Axis
Conscious intellect	2 <i>Binah</i> - "Understanding"	3 <i>Da'at</i> - "Knowledge"	1 <i>Chokhmah</i> - "Wisdom"
Conscious emotions (Primary emotions)	5 <i>Gevurah</i> - "Discipline"	6 <i>Tiferet</i> - "Beauty"	4 <i>Chesed</i> - "Kindness"
(Secondary emotions)	8 <i>Hod</i> - "Glory"	9 <i>Yesod</i> - "Foundation" 10 <i>Malkuth</i> - "Kingship"	7 <i>Netzach</i> - "Eternity"

Description of the names of the Sefirot, which emerged after the Sefer Yetzirah

As Aryeh Kaplan explains in his translation and commentary on the Sefer Yetzirah, "Although the Sefer Yetzirah does not name the Ten Sefirot, their names are well known from the classical Kabbalah. ... The names of the Sefirot are all derived from scripture."^[9] The "classical Kabbalah" Kaplan refers to is above all encapsulated in the Zohar and the later works derived from it. According to those sources, the Sefirot are often given diverse names, but the chiefly used terms are:

- *Keter* - "Crown": Divine Will to create/Infinite Light of the Creator/the Hebrew name of God "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh-I Am that I Am"
- *Chokhmah* - "Wisdom": First unbounded flash of an idea before it takes on limitations/male light/Divine Reality/first revelation/creation from nothingness
- *Binah* - "Understanding": the infinite flash of Chochmah brought into the vessel of understanding to give it grasp of breadth and depth/feminine vessel that gives birth to the emotions/reason/understanding brings teshuva return to God
- *Da'at* - "Knowledge": Central state of unity of the 10 sefirot, also called the Tree of Life.
- *Chesed* - "Kindness": Loving grace of free giving/love of God/inspiring vision
- *Gevurah* - "Severity": Strength/discipline/judgment/withholding/awe of God
- *Tiferet* - "Beauty": Symmetry/balance between Chesed and Gevurah in compassion
- *Netzach* - "Eternity": 'perpetuity', 'victory', or 'endurance'
- *Hod* - "Splendor": Withdrawal/Surrender/sincerity
- *Yesod* - "Foundation": Connecting to the task to accomplish/wholly remembering/coherent knowledge
- *Malkuth* - "Kingship": Exaltedness/Humility. All the other Sefirot flow into Malkuth (like the moon which has no light of its own), and it is the final revelation of the Divine; the receiver and the giver

Interinclusion of the sefirot

The first development that enabled the sefirot to unite in cooperation was the interinclusion within each of them of a further subset of the 10 sefirot, bringing them to a total of one hundred inter-included sefirot. In Kabbalistic interpretation, the seven emotive sefirot similarly inter-include to form 49 (seven times seven) emotional states. So, for example, Chesed contains Chesed within Chesed (loving-kindness within loving-kindness), Gevurah within Chesed (might within loving-kindness) etc. until Malkuth within Chesed (kingdom within loving-kindness). Likewise, there is Chesed within Gevurah (loving-kindness within

might, typified by a restriction performed out of love, like a father punishing a child)), Gevurah within Gevurah (might within might), etc. until Malkuth within Gevurah (kingdom within might) and so on, until the 49th level, Malkuth within Malkuth (kingdom within kingdom). This is the Kabbalistic interpretation of the mitzvah (Jewish observance) of Counting of the Omer between the festivals of Passover and Shavuot. Passover commemorates the Exodus from Egypt (in Hebrew, *Mitzrayim* מצרים, meaning "limitations"), which represents the unrectified level of the psyche, which we must escape through our daily spiritual development. Shavuot commemorates the receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. During this 49 day period Kabbalah teaches the benefit of focusing on the aspect of the 49 inter-included sefirot that is related to each particular day of the Omer. On each day of the Omer, a person would examine each of their spiritual qualities, as a rectification process of Teshuva (Return to God), as preparation for reliving the acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot.

Day of Counting the Omer:	Sub-divided sefirah:
First day of Passover Exodus from Egypt	
1	Chesed within Chesed
2	Gevurah within Chesed
3	Tiferet within Chesed
etc.	
47	Hod within Malkuth
48	Yesod within Malkuth
49	Malkuth within Malkuth
Festival of Shavuot Receiving of <u>Torah</u> at <u>Sinai</u>	

Three configurations of the sefirot

Two alternative spiritual arrangements for describing the sefirot are given, metaphorically described as "Circles" and "Upright". Their origins come from Medieval Kabbalah and the Zohar. In later, 16th-century Lurianic Kabbalah, they become systemised as two successive stages in the evolution of the sefirot, during the primordial cosmic evolution of Creation. This evolution is central to the metaphysical process of tikkun (fixing) in the doctrines of Isaac Luria.

Iggulim-Circles

One diagrammatic representation depicts the sefirot metaphorically as successively smaller concentric circles, radiating inwards from the surrounding Divine Omnipresence. The Four Worlds of the seder hishtalshelus ("Chain of Progression"), or with the addition of the highest Fifth World (Adam Kadmon), can be depicted in this diagram, starting with the highest and proceeding towards the centre of the circle to our lowest, physical realm. In each World the 10 sefirot radiate, as 10 successive steps in the downward chain of flow towards the next, lower realm. This depiction shows the successive nature of each of the 10 sefirot, as a downward chain, each more removed from Divine consciousness.

The surrounding space in the diagram is the Infinite Divine reality (Ein Sof). The outermost circle in the teachings of Lurianic kabbalah is the "space" made by the Tzimtzum in which Creation unfolds. Each successive World is progressively further removed from Divine revelation, a metaphorically smaller, more constricted circle. Emanation in each World proceeds down the 10 sefirot, with the last sefirah (Malchut-Actualisation of the Divine plan) of one World becoming, and being shared as, the first sefirah (Keter-The Divine Will) of the next, lower realm. The vertical line into the centre of the circle represents the path of downward emanation and constriction, from the initial first Ohr (light) of the "Kav" (Ray) in Lurianic doctrine.

Yosher-Upright

The most important and well known scheme of depicting the sefirot arranges them as a tree with 3 columns. The Right column represents the spiritual force of expansion. The Left represents its opposite, restriction. The Middle column is the balance and synthesis between these opposing tendencies. The connecting lines in the diagram show the specific connections of spiritual flow between the sefirot, the "22 Connecting Paths", and correspond to the spiritual channels of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Kabbalah sees the Hebrew letters as channels of spiritual life force. This derives from the account in Genesis of the Creation of the World, where Creation takes place through 10 Hebrew "Sayings" of God ("Let there be.."). In Kabbalistic theology, these letters remain the immanent spiritual forces that constantly recreate all existence. The paths divide into 3 Categories, shown in this diagram by their different colours, corresponding to the 3 types of letter.

Ish-Man

An alternate depiction of the sefirot is in the form of a man. The first sefira represents the head, the next three represent the cavities of the brain, the fourth and fifth sefirot represent the arms, the sixth sefira is the torso, the seventh and eighth are the legs, the ninth is the sexual organ, and the tenth is the all-embracing totality of this image. This man is also divided into two, with the right column being made up of the male sefirot and the left, the female sefirot.^[10]

The Man-metaphor in Kabbalah



Kabbalah relates the sefirot and Indwelling Shechinah Presence to Female-Male Divine principles, represented in the union of Jewish marriage Below. In Medieval Kabbalah the task of humans is Yichud- "Union" of Female and Male Divinity on High. In Lurianic Kabbalah humans redeem exiled Sparks of Holiness of the Shechinah from material Kelipot

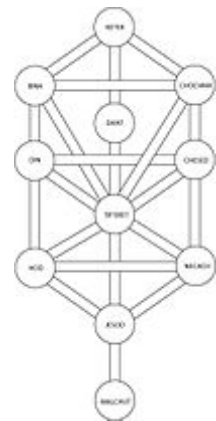
Kabbalah, the central system in Jewish mysticism, uses subtle anthropomorphic analogies and metaphors to describe God in Judaism, both the God-world relationship, and the inner nature of the Divine. These include the metaphor of the soul-body relationship, the functions of human soul-powers, the configuration of human bodily form, and female-male influences in the Divine. Kabbalists repeatedly warn and stress the need to divorce their notions from any corporality, dualism, plurality, or spatial and temporal connotations. As "the Torah speaks in the language of Man",^[11] the empirical terms are necessarily imposed upon human experience in this world. Once the analogy is described, its limitations are then related to, stripping the kernel of its husk, to arrive at a truer conception. Nonetheless, Kabbalists carefully chose their terminology to denote subtle connotations and profound relationships in the Divine spiritual influences. More accurately, as they see the emanation of the Material world from the Spiritual realms, the analogous anthropomorphisms and material metaphors themselves derive through cause and effect from their precise root analogies on High.

Describing the material world Below in general, and humans in particular, as created in the "image" of the world Above is not restricted in Rabbinic Judaism to Kabbalah, but abounds more widely in Biblical, Midrashic, Talmudic and philosophical literature.^[12] Kabbalah extends the Man-metaphor more radically to anthropomorphise particular Divine manifestations on high, while repeatedly stressing the need to divest analogies from impure materialistic corporality. Classical "proof texts" on which it bases its approach include,

"From my flesh I envisage God",^[13] and the Rabbinic analogy " As the soul permeates the whole body...sees but is not



Metaphorical representation of the Five Worlds, with the 10 sefirot radiating in each, as successively smaller *Iggulim* "concentric circles"



The Yosher-Upright configuration of the 10 sefirot, arranged into 3 columns

seen...sustains the whole body...is pure...abides in the innermost precincts...is unique in the body...does not eat and drink...no man knows where its place is...so the Holy One, Blessed is He..."^[14] Together with the metaphor of Light, the Man-metaphor is central in Kabbalah. Nonetheless, it too has its limitations, needs qualification, and breaks down if taken as a literal, corporeal comparison. Its limitations include the effect of the body on the soul, while the World effects no change in God; and the distinct, separate origins of the soul and the body, while in relation to God's Omnipresence, especially in its acosmic Hasidic development, all Creation is nullified in its source.

Soul faculties and Female-Male principles

The *Yosher*-Upright configuration of the sefirot arranges the 10 sefirot into a Partzuf interrelationship, where each sefirah relates and mediates the influence of the others. This metaphor for Divine interrelationships on High is arranged in the schematic relationship of a human soul, because alone amongst all Creation, Adam-Man is held to encapsulate all harmonized forces, while animals and angels embody only singular instinctive drives. The significance of this, as well as the full meaning of the Partzufim reconfiguration of the sefirot, emerges only in 16th century Lurianic Kabbalah, where the *Yosher*-Upright arrangement, the *Partzufim* and the souls of Israel represent the secondary World of Tikun-Rectification, while angels, animals and the root origins above of the Nations of the World embody the primordial World of Tohu-Chaos. Lurianic Kabbalah applies the verse, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them" to this reconfigured Tikun-Yosher arrangement. In the *Yosher* scheme, Divine principles are described through the soul faculties of Man, with Binah-Understanding and Malkuth-Kingship-Shechinah-Indwelling Divine Presence, encapsulating the Divine Feminine in Creation, the principle of receiving, nurturing and pregnant internalization.

In Medieval Kabbalah, the task of humans is the Yichud-Union on High of the Female-Male principles of Divinity, healing the apparent separation and concealment of the Shechinah Female indwelling Divine presence that sustains this world from the "Holy One Blessed Be He", the transcendent Divine on High. Separation and interruption of the Shefa-Flow of Divine vitality into this World is caused by human sin. Unification and revelation is opened by human benevolence, so that in Kabbalah human encapsulates the whole spiritual cosmos and upholds the Heavens. The 16th century Sefad Kabbalistic Renaissance enacted the prayer before performing Mitzvot Jewish observances, uniting Tiferet-Beauty, central principle in the male emotions (Zeir Anpin) with Malkuth-Kingship, the feminine Shechinah:

For the sake of the union of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and His Shechinah; to unite the name Yud and Hei, with Vav and Hei in the name of all Israel.

The sefirot and the Tetragrammaton

The four Hebrew letters of God's essential Divine name (known as the Tetragrammaton) correspond to the ten sefirot.^[1]

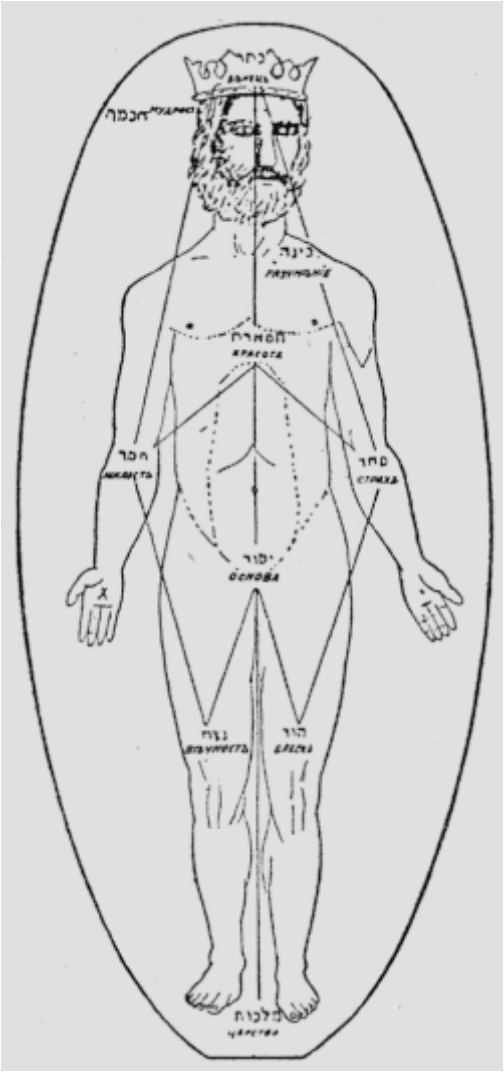
The letter *yud* (י) is depicted by a point with a cusp at its head. The point-like nature of the yud corresponds to the sefirah of chochmah, which is likened to the initial spark, or point of potential through which a new insight enters reality. The cusp, or tip of the yud reaches upwards and alludes to the super-conscious root of chochmah, which resides in Keter. The first letter *hei* (ה) of the Tetragrammaton represents the expansion of the point of the 'yud' into all three spatial dimensions. This corresponds to the sefirah of Binah, which expands and develops the seminal point of wisdom (chochmah) into a detailed idea. The letter *vav* (ו) resembles a vertical line that connects the higher intellectual faculties with the emotive powers of the psyche. The gematria of the letter *vav* is 6, corresponding to the six emotive sefirot from loving-kindness to foundation. The final letter *hei* (ה) of the Tetragrammaton represents the sefirah of malchut.

The cusp of the <i>yud</i> (קוּצוּ שֶׁל י') (י)	Keter
<i>yud</i> (י)	Chochmah
<i>hei</i> (ה)	Binah
<i>vav</i> (ו)	six sefirot: Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod
<i>hei</i> (ה)	Malchut

Configuration of the body

Despite the particular geometric depiction of the *Yosher* scheme, through each soul faculty in the body, physical human organs also reflect the supernal Divine forces on High, as the scheme of *Yosher* underscores the inter-relationship of the sefirot as a unit or body. In this context, the physical upright standing of humans contrasts with the horizontal forms of animals. The correspondence of the sefirot with the physical organs of a human:

Sefirah:	Organ:
<u>Kether</u> - Crown - כתר - חתר	Skull Encompassing crown Da'at elyon
<u>Chochmah</u> - Wisdom - חכמה	Right brain Brain
<u>Binah</u> - Understanding - בינה	Left brain Heart
<u>Da'at</u> - Knowledge - דעת	Central brain Da'at tachton
<u>Chesed</u> - Kindness - חסד	Right arm 10 fingers included
<u>Gevurah</u> - Severity - גבורה	Left arm 10 fingers included
<u>Tiferet</u> - Beauty - תפארת	Torso Front Pnimit-Internality Back Hitzoniut-Externality
<u>Netzach</u> - Victory - נצח	Right leg 10 toes included Right kidney
<u>Hod</u> - Glory - הוד	Left leg 10 toes included Left kidney
<u>Yesod</u> - Foundation - יסוד	Sexual organ Holy covenant Female and male partzufim
<u>Malkuth</u> - Kingship - מלכות	Mouth Speech-revelation Feet



Lurianic *Shevirah* (Shattering) and *Tikun* (Rectification)



Sefer Hakavanot from "Kisvei HaAri", disciples of the 16th century Lurianic Kabbalah. It moved the origin of perceived exile in the sefirot to Primordial Creation, before the influence of Man on supernal harmony, as in Medieval Kabbalah

Isaac Luria reinterpreted and recast the whole scheme of Kabbalah in the 16th century, essentially making the second of two different versions of the Kabbalah: the Medieval (the initial, direct understandings of the Zohar, later synthesised by Moshe Cordovero) and the Lurianic. However, he understood his new doctrine as no more than a new revelation-teaching of the true meaning of the Zohar. Lurianic Kabbalah became the dominant Kabbalistic system, displacing Cordovero's, and afterwards the Zohar was read in its light. Lurianic Kabbalists sought to integrate this with the Cordoverian scheme, seeing both as true, but describing different aspects ("Worlds") of the Divine process.

Medieval Kabbalah depicts a linear descending hierarchy of Divine vitality, the sefirot emerging from the Ein Sof to enact Creation. Lurianic Kabbalah describes enclothing processes of exile and redemption in the Divine flow, where higher levels descend into lower states, as souls to spiritual bodies. The first emanation in Creation leads to spiritual shattering of Divinity in a definitive "catastrophe" (*Shevirat HaKeilim* - "The Shattering of the Vessels"), and the exile of its "sparks" into the descending created realms. Cordovero had reconciled previous opinions of the sefirot by describing each as Divine Ohrot ("lights") invested in 10 spiritual Keilim ("vessels"), adapted by Luria to his scheme. In Lurianic Kabbalah, the first vessels of the sefirot shatter due to the sublime intensity of the light. Because each of the sefirot act as independent forces, Isaac Luria's attribution of the *Iggulim* (independent "Circles" arrangement of the sefirot) without cooperation, their immature vessels are weak. From the destruction of this primordial realm, the World of Tohu ("Chaos"), is built the subsequent World of Tikun ("Rectification"), characterized by lower lights and stronger vessels. The sublime lights of Tohu withdraw into the Ein Sof, while their sefirot vessels shatter down Creation. Sparks of the original high lights remain attached in exile to the descending fragments, and the Messianic task is the redemption of all the holy sparks of Tohu. In the World of Tikun in contrast, the sefirot vessels are mature, stronger and act together in harmony. To this reformed state, Isaac Luria attributed the former Kabbalistic concepts of *Yosher* (harmonised "Upright" arrangement of the sefirot), and the many Zoharic passages expounding the Partzufim (Divine "Personas/Configurations"-particular Divine manifestations). This systemised the classic concept of the Partzufim as the secondary, evolved arrangements of the sefirot in Creation.

Isaac Luria related the transition from *Tohu* to *Tikun* to Genesis 1:1-3:

"In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth", the initial source in potential, from which all would unfold. "And the earth was Chaos (Tohu) and Void (Vohu), with darkness over the surface of the deep...", each sefirah acts independently causing the shattering (*Shevirat HaKeilim*). "...And God said let there be Light", the ability of the harmonised sefirot of Tikun to reveal Divinity and enact stable Creation.

The Lurianic doctrine of the shattering of the emotional sefirot vessels describes the esoteric meaning of Genesis 36:31 and I Chronicles 1:43:

"These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel..."

Edom is described in Genesis as the descendants of Esau. In the Kabbalistic scheme, this is identified with unrectified Gevurah - Severity, the source of the vessels of the *World of Tohu* - Chaos. The eight kings listed who reigned in Edom before any king of Israel, embodied the eight sefirot of Daat to Malchut in the *World of Tohu*, the vessels that shattered. Of each it says they lived and died, death connoting the soul-light of the sefirot ascending back to its source, while the body-vessel descends-shatters. Attached to the broken vessels are the holy residues of the former light as *Nitzot* - "Sparks" of holiness, sustaining Creation by the Divine flow of Will. The sparks are the creative force of the sefirot down the Four Worlds. The unabsorbed residue of the broken

vessels in our physical, lowest World Assiah becomes the realm of Kelipot impurity. Genesis 1:2, "...And the Spirit of God hovered over the waters." *Merachepet* - "hovered" splits into the number "288 died", the root number of Divine sparks that then subdivide into innumerable fragments.

***Partzufim* – reconfigured sefirot**

The four realms of our created existence are together called the World of Tikkun ("Fixing"). In Tikkun, the sefirot evolve into new arrangements, where they can unite. The different realms Tikkun are characterized by lower lights and stronger vessels.

Subsequent to the interinclusion of the 10 sefirot within each other, in Lurianic Kabbalah they then develop into "*partzufim*" ("personas"). Wide discussion of the partzufim is found in the Medieval Kabbalah of the Zohar, before Isaac Luria. In the Zohar, Shimon bar Yochai expounds upon the spiritual roles of the partzufim, by talking about them as independent spiritual manifestations. "The Holy Ancient of Days", or "The Long Visage", two of the different Parsufim, are not just alternative adjectives for God, but are particular spiritual manifestations, levels and natures. Lurianic Kabbalah focused on the role of the Parsufim as the fully evolved stage of the primordial evolution of the sefirot, in the beginning of Creation. Instead of each of the 10 sefirot merely including a full subset of 10 sefirot as latent potential forces, the first stage of their evolution, in the Parsufim the sefirot become fully autonomous and interrelated. The name of each partzuf denotes that the sefirah from which it derived, has now become an independent scheme of 10 fully functioning sefirot in the "Upright" (Yosher) form of "Man". This reconfiguration is essential in Lurianic Kabbalah to enable the opposing spiritual forces of the sefirot to work together in harmony. Each Parsuf now operates independently, and unites with the other Parsufim. So, for example, "The Long Visage" is said to descend, and become encloded within the lower Parsufim. The sefirot now harmonise, to enable the Lurianic scheme of Tikkun (Rectification) to begin. The names of the fundamental partzufim and their English translations:

Sefirah: Original sefirah before evolution	Partzuf: Developed full "Persona" form
Above conscious Crown: <u>Keter</u>	Inner Keter: <u>Atik Yomin</u> "Ancient of Days" Outer Keter: <u>Arich Anpin</u> "Long Face/Visage" (Macroprosopus)
Intellectual Wisdom: <u>Chochmah</u>	Abba "Father"
Intellectual Understanding: <u>Binah</u>	Imma "Mother"
6 emotional sefirot: <u>Chesed</u> <u>Gevurah</u> <u>Tiferet</u> <u>Netzach</u> <u>Hod</u> <u>Yesod</u>	<u>Zeir Anpin</u> "Small Face/Visage" (Microprosopus) Male son
Last Emotional Sefirah: <u>Malchut</u>	Nukvah "Feminine" Counterpart of Zeir Anpin Feminine daughter

Inner dimensions of the sefirot and the powers of the soul

As all levels of Creation are constructed around the 10 sefirot, their names in Kabbalah describe the particular role each plays in forming reality. These are the external dimensions of the sefirot, describing their functional roles in channelling the Divine, creative Ohr (Light) to all levels. As the sefirot are viewed to comprise both metaphorical "lights" and "vessels", their structural

role describes the particular identity each sefirah possesses from its characteristic vessel. Underlying this functional structure of the sefirot, each one possesses a hidden, inner spiritual motivation that inspires its activity. This forms the particular characteristic of inner light within each sefirah.

Understanding the sefirot throughout Jewish mysticism is achieved by their correspondence to the human soul. This applies to the outer, Kabbalistic structure of the sefirot. It applies even more to their inner dimensions, which correspond to inner psychological qualities in human perception. Identifying the essential spiritual properties of the soul gives the best insight into their Divine source, and in the process reveals the spiritual beauty of the soul. In Hasidic thought these inner dimensions of the sefirot are called the *Powers of the Soul* (Hebrew: Kochos HaNefesh). Hasidism sought the internalisation of the abstract ideas of Kabbalah, both outwardly in joyful sincerity of dveikus in daily life, acts of loving-kindness and prayer; and inwardly in its profound new articulation of Jewish mystical thought, by relating it to the inner life of man.^[15] Articulation of the sefirot in Hasidic philosophy is primarily concerned with their inner dimensions, and exploring the direct, enlivening contribution of each in man's spiritual worship of God.^[16] Kabbalah focuses on the esoteric manifestations of God in Creation, the vessels of Divinity. Hasidut looks at the lights that fill these vessels, how the structures reveal the Divine essence, and how this inwardness can be perceived. This difference can be seen in the names of these two stages of Jewish mysticism. "Kabbalah" in Hebrew is derived from "kabal" (to "receive" as a vessel). "Hasidut" is from "chesed" ("loving-kindness"), considered the first and greatest sefirah, also called "Greatness", the wish to reveal and share. The names of the sefirot come from Kabbalah, and describe the Divine effect that each has upon Creation, but not their inner qualities. Hasidic thought uses new descriptive terms for the inner dimensions of the sefirot:^{[17][18]}

Sefirah: Outer function in Divinity and soul	Inner experience: Inner Divine motivation and human soul response
Above conscious: <u>Keter</u> -Crown	Essence of Keter: Emunah – "Faith" (expresses essence of soul in Infinite) Inner Keter: Taanug-unconscious source of "Delight" (soul rooted in delight) Outer Keter: Ratzon-unconscious transcendent "Will" (soul expresses through will)
First revelation of intellect: <u>Chochmah</u> -Insight of Wisdom	Bittul – "Selflessness" (Revelation inspires self nullification)
Grasped Intellect: <u>Binah</u> -Understanding	Simchah – "Joy" (Understanding awakens joy)
Assimilated Intellect: <u>Daat</u> -Knowledge	Yichud – "Union" (Union with idea awakens emotions)
Primary emotion of giving: <u>Chesed</u> -Loving-kindness	Ahavah – "Love" of God and Divine in all things (Response of Divine giving)
Primary emotion of restriction: <u>Gevurah</u> -Might/Severity	Yirah – "Fear" of God (Mystical awe of Divinity)
Primary emotion of balance: <u>Tiferet</u> -Beautiful harmony	Rachamim – "Mercy/Compassion" (Balances kindness with restriction)
Secondary emotion of giving: <u>Netzach</u> -Victory/Eternity	Bitachon – "Confidence" (Confidence inspires determination)
Secondary emotion of restriction: <u>Hod</u> -Splendour/Thanksgiving	Temimut – "Sincerity/Earnestness" (Sincere response to Divine Glory)
Secondary emotion of balance: <u>Yesod</u> -Foundation	Emet – "Truth" (Drive to verify connection in task)
Emotional vessel for action: <u>Malchut</u> -Kingship	Shiflut – "Lowliness" (Action through receiving higher sefirot lights)

The four Worlds

These ten levels are associated with Kabbalah's (Zohar) four different "Worlds" or planes of existence, the main part from the perspective of the descending "chain of progression" (Seder hishtalshelus), that links the Infinite Divine Ein Sof with the finite, physical realm. In all Worlds, the 10 sefirot radiate, and are the Divine channels through which every level is continuously created from nothing. Since they are the attributes through which the unknowable, infinite Divine essence becomes revealed to the creations, all ten emanate in each World. Nonetheless, the structure of the Four Worlds arises because in each one, certain sefirot predominate. Each World is spiritual, apart from the lower aspect of the final World, which is the "Asiyah Gashmi" ("Physical Asiyah"), the physical Universe. Each World is progressively grosser and further removed from consciousness of the Divine, until in this World it is possible to deny God. In descending order:

1. **World of Emanation** (Hebrew: אצילות, *Atzilut*): In this level the light of the Ein Sof radiates and is united with its source. Divine Chochmah, the limitless flash of wisdom beyond grasp, predominates.
2. **World of Creation** (Hebrew: בְּרִיָּה^[19] or alternatively בְּרִיאָה, *Beri'ah*): In this level, is the first creation ex nihilo, where the souls and angels have self-awareness, but without form. Divine Binah, the intellectual understanding, predominates.
3. **World of Formation** (Hebrew: יְצִירָה, *Yetzirah*): On this level, creation is related to form. The Divine emotional sefirot of Chesed to Yesod predominate.

4. **World of Action** (Hebrew: *הַעֲשִׂיָּה*, *Assiah*): On this level creation is relegated to its physical aspect, the only physical realm and the lowest World, this realm with all its creatures. The Divine Kingship of Malchut predominates, the purpose of Creation.

In the Zohar and elsewhere, there are these four Worlds or planes of existence. In the Lurianic system of Kabbalah, five Worlds are counted, comprising these and a higher, fifth plane, Adam Kadmon-manifest Godhead level, that mediates between the Ein Sof and the four lower Worlds.

As the four Worlds link the Infinite with this realm, they also enable the soul to ascend in devotion or mystical states, towards the Divine. Each World can be understood as descriptive of dimensional levels of intentionality related to the natural human "desire to receive", and a method for the soul's progress upward toward unity with or return to the Creator. (The terminology of this formulation is based on the exposition of Lurianic Kabbalah by the 20th century Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag).

Scriptural, numerological and spiritual associations of the sefirotic tree

Associations of the 3 columns

The sefirot are organized into three discrete columns or *gimel kavim* ("three lines" in Hebrew). They are often referred to as the three "Fathers," are derived from the three "Mothers," and are attributed to the vowels (Vav, Yud, and Heh.) They are as follows:

- Central column:

Kether heads the central column of the tree, which is known metaphorically speaking as the "Pillar of Mildness" and is associated with Hebrew letter Aleph, "the breath", and the air element. It is a neutral one, a balance between the two opposing forces of female and male tendencies. Some teachings describe the sefirot on the centre pillar as gender-neutral, while others say that the sefirot vary in their sexual attributions.

- Right column, in Hebrew *kav yamin*:

Chokhmah heads the right column of the tree, metaphorically speaking the "Pillar of Mercy", associated with the Hebrew letter Shin, the fire element, and the male aspect;

- Left column, in Hebrew *kav smol*:

The left column is headed by Binah and is called the "Pillar of Severity." It is associated with Hebrew letter Mem, the water element and the female aspect.

While the pillars are each given a sexual attribution, this does not mean that every sefirah on a given pillar has the same sexual attribution as the pillar on which they sit. In Jewish Kabbalah, of all the sefirot only Binah and Malkuth are considered female, while all the other sefirot are male.

Additionally (and this applies to both Jewish and Hermetic Kabbalah), each sefirah is seen as male in relation to the following sefirah in succession on the tree, and female in relation to the foregoing sefirah.

Alternative traditions consider the grammatical genders of the words involved. Thus, *Gevurah* is feminine because it has an atonal final *Heh*. Thus, Severity or Justice becomes a feminine attribute while *Chesed* (Mercy or Loving-kindness) becomes a masculine one, despite the modern Western tendency to genderize these terms in reverse manner.

Numerological meanings



The 10 sefirot, arranged into the 3 columns, with the 22 Paths of Connection of three types

In a numerological sense, the tree of sefirot also has significance. Between the 10 sefirot run 22 channels or paths which connect them, a number which can be associated with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Together the spiritual forces of the 10 sefirot and the 22 connecting channels are called the "32 Paths of Wisdom".

Rabbinic significance

As to the actual significance of the numbers 10 and 22 in context of Judaism goes into Kabbalistic interpretation of Genesis. God is said to have created the world through Ten Utterances, marked by the number of times Genesis states, "And God said."

- Gen 1:3 - "And Elohim said, 'Let there be Light.' and there was Light." (Kether)
- Gen 1:6 - "And Elohim said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the Waters, and let it divide the Waters from the Waters.'" (Chockmah)
- Gen 1:9 - "And Elohim said, 'Let the Waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so." (Binah)
- Gen 1:11 - "And Elohim said, 'Let the Earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth.' And it was so." (Chesed)
- Gen 1:14-15 - "And Elohim said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.' And it was so." (Gevurah)
- Gen 1:20 - "And Elohim said, 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.'" (Tiferet)
- Gen 1:22 - "And Elohim Blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.'" (Netzach)
- Gen 1:26 - "And Elohim said, 'Let us make People in our image, after our likeness: and let them have stewardship over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'" (Hod)
- Gen 1:28 - "And Elohim blessed them and Elohim said to them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and keep it: and have stewardship over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.'" (Yesod)
- Gen 1:29-30 - "And Elohim said, 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat.' And it was so." (Malchut)

As for the 22 letter-paths, there must first be an explanation of the three different types of letters in Hebrew.

- There are three "Mothers" (Aleph, Mem, and Shin) that represent the horizontal lines.
 - Their difference from the other letters is a matter for another article.
- There are seven "Doubles" (Bet, Gimel, Dalet, Kaf, Peh, Resh, and Tav) that represent the vertical lines.
 - Each double is attributed to a soft and hard sound, positive and negative meaning, direction, planet, gate of the soul, color, angels, and vowel.
 - Gimel, Dalet, Resh, and Tav's second pronunciations are lost or disputed, with different dialects using different sounds. Tav has no second pronunciation in Sephardi, but Ashkenazi use a 's' sound when the dagesh is absent.
- The twelve "Elementals" (Heh, Vav, Zayin, Chet, Tet, Yud, Lamed, Nun, Samech, Ayin, Tzaddi, and Qof) have one pronunciation, and represent the diagonal lines. Other sources say that they correspond to the twelve zodiacal constellations.

Each letter grouping has significance in Genesis 1:

- The Mothers represent the three times Genesis states "God made."
- The Doubles represent the seven times Genesis states "God saw."
- The elementals (or singles) represent the rest of the times "God" (Elohim in every instance of Genesis Chapter 1) is mentioned.

Gallery



Representation of sefirot
on the east wall of the
Cordoba Synagogue,
Spain

See also

- [Bible code](#), a purported set of secret messages encoded within the Torah.
- [Biblical and Talmudic units of measurement](#)
- [Chol HaMoed](#), the intermediate days during Passover and Sukkot.
- [Chronology of the Bible](#)
- [Counting of the Omer](#)
- [Gematria](#), Jewish system of assigning numerical value to a word or phrase.
- [Hebrew calendar](#)
- [Hebrew numerals](#)
- [Jewish and Israeli holidays 2000–2050](#)
- [Lag BaOmer](#), 33rd day of counting the *Omer*.
- [Notarikon](#), a method of deriving a word by using each of its initial letters.
- [Significance of numbers in Judaism](#)
- [The ten principal disciples](#)
- [Weekly Torah portion](#), division of the Torah into 54 portions.

Notes

1. Ginsburgh, Rabbi Yitzchak (2006). *What You Need to Know about Kabbalah*. Jerusalem: Gal Einai Institute. ISBN 965-7146-119.
2. Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism: An Introductory Anthology*. One World Oxford. p. 9.
3. *The Song of the Soul*, Yechiel Bar-Lev, p. 73, cited on Kabbalah page.
4. See the discourse "On the Essence of Chassidus", Kehot Publication Society, described on the [Hasidic philosophy](#) page. The acronym "RADLA" for this level is identified as the origin of the Torah of Hasidus.
5. Ginsburgh, Rabbi Yitzchak (2007). *Kabbalah and Meditation for the Nations*. Canada and Israel: Gal Einai. ISBN 965-7146-127.
6. See for example the classic passage from the [Zohar](#) beginning "Elijah opened his discourse.." that is read every Friday afternoon to prepare for the Sabbath, in the Habad Siddur "[Tehillat HaShem](#)".
7. E.g., [Tanya](#), Chapter 35
8. *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism* by [Jacob Immanuel Schochet](#). Kehot Publications. Chapter on the sefirot. Available separately, or printed at back of bilingual Hebrew-English edition [Tanya](#)
9. P. 23, Kaplan, Aryeh (1990). *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser. ISBN 0-87728-726-0.
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11. Talmud Berachot 31b and other sources in Chazal
12. *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, Jacob Immanuel Schochet, Kehot, Chapter 1, "Anthropomorphism and Metaphors"
13. Job 19:26
14. Talmud Berachot 10a, Midrash Tehillim 103:4,5, Tikunei Zohar 13:28a and later Kabbalistic commentary. Cited in footnote 7, chapter 1, *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*
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- *The Mystical Qabalah*, Dion Fortune (Originally published: London, Williams & Norgate 1935; Revised edition published in 2000 by Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC) (ISBN 1-57863-150-5)
- *Qabalistic Concepts: Living the Tree*, William G Gray (1997). Samuel Weiser, Inc. (ISBN 1-57863-000-2)
- *The Secret Teaching of All Ages* by Manly P. Hall (October 27, 2003). Tarcher. (ISBN 1-58542-250-9)
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- *On The Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, Gershom Scholem (1996). Schocken. (ISBN 0-8052-1051-2)

External links

- The Ten Sefirot: Introduction (<http://www.inner.org/sefirot/sefirot.htm>)
- Kabbalah (https://curlie.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Judaism/Mysticism) at Curlie
- Diagram of 10 Sefirot and Attributes (<http://people.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Sefirot/Sefirot.html>)
- Sefirotic Systems in the Sefer Yetsira, Bahir and Post-Zohar Kabbalah (http://www.psyche.com/psyche/qbl/comparative_sephirot.html)

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