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Between Sefer Yezirah and Wisdom Literature: Three Binitarian Approaches in Sefer Yezirah

This paper presents three basic ideas which are interrelated with one another: 1) The assertion that a single subject unites all the discussions in Sefer Yezirah, from beginning to end: namely, the nature of Wisdom, upon which the world stands (or is suspended); 2) A stylistic-linguistic analysis leading to the division of Sefer Yezirah into three "accounts," around which are crystallized the style and contents of the book as a whole. The Account of the "Sealing of the Ends" is the latest of these accounts, and was written by the editor of the book, who joined his account with the other two to form a single book; 3) The assertion that the worldview reflected in Sefer Yezirah acknowledges the existence of a secondary power alongside God, that assists Him in the Creation and ongoing existence of the universe (as against doctrines claiming the existence of an additional force in conflict with God). The term I use in this context is binitarianism. In the earliest of the three accounts, that of the Covenant, this power assumes the form of an angel, while in the other two it is more abstract. This paper lays the foundations for this claim but, due to the limitations of this paper, I do not enter into discussion of its far-reaching implications. I hope to continue this discussion elsewhere, on another occasion.

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Sefer Yezirah is one of the most important, basic books in the area of Kabbalah, and in the Middle Ages was also one of the basic books of Jewish philosophy.¹ This short book has been the subject of endless learned commentaries, and within the context of scholarship there have been serious disputes regarding the manner in which it is to be understood. The debate surrounding the date of the book may be seen as mirroring the intensity of this dispute: there are those who date it during the first century CE; others who see it as having been written between the fourth to sixth century; and yet others who place it around the ninth century CE.² In any event, these different explanations created an opportunity for different scholars to identify a wide variety of intellectual or ideological parallels to the book, leading to a rich and fruitful discussion.

I hope that there is nevertheless room left for me to say something new, for which reason I wish to suggest a different viewpoint from that which has been emphasized thus far.³ This is neither the place nor the framework to go beyond the scope of a brief

paper and to enter into a full-scale monograph; therefore, I cannot relate here to all the numerous and important contributions of my predecessors, nor to explain every word, sentence or idea in the book.⁴

1. The Lexicon as Evidence of the Connection Between Sefer Yezirah and Wisdom Literature

Sefer Yezirah is well-known for its unique language—rich, rhythmic, poetic and addressing the heart. Among the variety of linguistic characteristics of this book, I wish to draw attention to the presence therein of many words or expressions that are characteristic of Wisdom Literature.

It is impossible, within the framework of a limited paper, to discuss the nature of Wisdom literature and its numerous offshoots and branches. Briefly put we can say though: biblical Wisdom literature, whose roots are found in the literature of the ancient world and particularly in ancient Egypt, deals with what is at times perceived as one of the qualities of God, and at other times as a separate entity, known as Wisdom. Wisdom as a distinct entity was created before the world (Prov. 8:22) and includes a wide variety of different kinds of knowledge—ethics and everyday norms alongside what would today be called the laws of nature. This literature continued to assume different forms over the course of subsequent centuries, and the boundaries between it and other doctrines dealing with the forces and entities that mediate between the world and God in the tasks of creation, revelation, providence, redemption and so forth, become obscured. One may thus see variations of Wisdom in teachings different from one another—in Philo and in Christianity (as Logos), among the Gnostics (as Sofia or the Demiurge), and among others as angels (Metatron and other angels).⁵

In order to demonstrate the connection of *Sefer Yezirah* to Wisdom literature, I shall present a number of terms from Biblical and post-Biblical Wisdom Literature that reappear in *Sefer Yezirah*.

One should note, first and foremost, that the terms most characteristic of Wisdom literature — חכמה/חכמה, *hakham/hokhmah* (wise/wisdom), הבן/בינה, *haven/binah* (understand/understanding) —appear several times in *Sefer Yezirah*. One should make particular mention of its opening: “By means of thirty-two... paths (נתיבות) of Wisdom...”⁶ (§1; 1.1).⁷ Regarding the term נתיבות, *netivot* (“paths”), that appears in this opening sentence, see especially the phrase in Job 24:13: “There are those who rebel against the light, who are not acquainted with its ways, and do not stay in its paths.” That is to say, in the Book of Job, which belongs to Wisdom Literature, God has “paths”; as against those who rebel against the light, those who follow in the paths of God are meant to know Them. Even more important for our subject, according to the Book of Proverbs the place where Wisdom stands is called בית נתיבות, “the house of its paths” (Prov 8:2).

The opening sentence of *Sefer Yezirah* describes the “paths” (or perhaps Wisdom itself) as פלאות, *pela’ot*. In the Book of Job one finds the root of this term in the sense of “wonders” or “wondrous.” Note, for example, how God addresses Job (Job 37:14-16): “Hear this, O Job; stop and consider the wondrous works of God. Do you know...the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge.” Thus, in the Bible this root relates to “every thing or event that is distinctive and unusual.”⁸ But in post-Biblical literature this root assumes the meaning of that which is hidden, concealed, secret. The best

known example appears in *b. Tractate Hagigah* (13a): “There is another firmament above the heads of the creatures, as is written, ‘Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, shining like awesome crystal, spread out above their heads’ (Ezek 1:22). To this point you are permitted to speak, from here on you are not allowed to speak, as is written in the *Book of Ben-Sira*, ‘In that which is hidden from you, do not expound; and that which is concealed from you, do not search out. Contemplate that which you have been permitted, and have no traffic in hidden things.’” The latter quotation is indeed taken from *Ben-Sira* (3:21-22), which belongs to the post-Biblical Wisdom literature, the sense of the quotation being to place limits upon the searching out, examination, contemplation and speaking about certain sublime subjects. The fact that *Sefer Yezirah* specifically incorporates the term *pela’ot*, “concealed,” in its opening sentence, a sentence that serves as a kind of a heading for the rest of the text, suggests the opposite possibility. It is as if the author turns to his readers and says: “Here in this book you will learn about the paths of wisdom that are hidden from the human eye; here we will tell you about things of which one generally speaking is not allowed to speak at all.”

Sefer Yezirah is known for introducing the term *sefirot*, whose various meanings will be discussed below. However, this term always appears in this book as part of the expression ספירות בלימה, *sefirot belimah*. The term *belimah* originates in the Book of Job (26:7), in which God is described as He who “stretches out the north over the void, and hangs the earth upon (*toleh* ‘al) *belimah*.” While most commentators see this verse as indicating that the earth is stretched over nothingness,⁹ I would assert that *Sefer Yezirah*, by the very coining of the idiom *sefirot belimah* and the rich discussion thereof, attributes to it a positive meaning. In this *Sefer Yezirah* may rely upon creating a parallel between the first verse and another one: “Thou didst set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be shaken” (Ps 104:5). According to the former verse, the earth hangs upon *belimah*; according to the latter, the earth stands upon a positive entity which is its foundation. Since there is in fact a parallelism in the Hebrew language between the two idioms (*’omed* ‘al/*taluy* ‘al; “stand upon”/“hang upon”) one might also add here certain Rabbinic speculations that continue Wisdom literature regarding the subject of Creation: “Upon what does the earth stand? Upon the pillars... [There are those] who say: It stands upon twelve pillars... There are those who say: upon seven pillars... Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamua says: Upon one foundation, and *Tzaddik* [the Righteous] is its name.”¹⁰ It would therefore appear that the idiom which appears in *Sefer Yezirah*, *sefirot belimah*, is to be seen as a clarifying parallel; the *sefirot* are themselves the *belimah*. Or, to formulate matters differently, *belimah*, as the real foundation and ground of the world, is referred to by *Sefer Yezirah* by the title *sefirot*.

Two other terms in *Sefer Yezirah* may be viewed as synonyms to the term *sefirot belimah*: קצוות, *qezavot* (“extremities”, “ends,” or “edges”), and עומקים, *’omaqim* (“depths” or “dimensions”).¹¹ Several verses in Wisdom literature evidently served as the basis for this usage: e.g., “the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isa 40:28); “For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens” (Job 28:24); “He uncovered the deeps out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light” (Job 12:22); “As the Heavens for height and the earth for depth” (Prov 25:3);¹² “All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, ‘I will be wise’; but it was far from me. That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?” (Eccl 7:23-24).

Sefer Yezirah defines a number of activities that God performs in the world. Among other things, He hews and weighs. To this we may add the idea of measure, also men-

tioned in relationship to the *sefirot belimah*. Thus, for example: “their measure is ten” (§7; 1.5). One of the basic verses of Wisdom literature is formulated thus: “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars” (Prov 9:1). The subject of fixing weights and measures is a striking feature of Wisdom literature. Thus, in the Book of Job (28:20-25): “Whence then comes wisdom? And where is the place of understanding?... God understands the way to it...when he gave to the wind its weight, and meted out the waters by measure.”¹³

In *Sefer Yezirah*, man is also asked to perform certain activities. It is incumbent upon him, for example, to be wise, to understand, to test and to investigate (§4; 1.4). There is no need to elaborate as to the wide dissemination of the first two verbs in Wisdom Literature. However, we must again emphasize that one is dealing here with the opposite of the usual reservations about this matter, such as found in *Masekhet Hagiga* or the Book of Ben-Sira. The root *חקר*, *hq”r* (“to search out / to investigate / to study”) generally appears in the Bible to exemplify the imbalance between man’s abilities and those of God. It is stated regarding God that, from the human purview, “His understanding is unsearchable” (Isa 40:28; cf. Jer 31:36). By contrast, God’s hands plumb “the depths of the earth” (*mehqerei aretz*, Ps 95:4; cf. Job 5:9). Man is totally unable to investigate God. “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7), whereas He “does great things beyond understanding (*אין חקר*), and marvelous things without number” (Job 5:9; 9:10). There was nevertheless one figure who succeeded, more than the rest of mankind, in searching out these matters: “Besides being wise, Kohelet... weighed and studied (*חקר*) and arranged proverbs with great care” (Eccles 12:9). It would appear that *Sefer Yezirah* expects its students to follow in this path, specifically.¹⁴

2. On Books and on Accounts

In the opening sentence of *Sefer Yezirah*, a simple and universally known term, *sefarim* (“books”) is used. However, the context turns it into something enigmatic and strange:

[§1; 1.1] By means of thirty-two concealed paths of wisdom Yah, the Lord of Hosts, carved out His Name [or: By means of thirty-two ... paths ... Yah, the Lord of Hosts is His Name, carved out]; by means of three *separim* : by means of *spr*, *spr wspr* [following Source P].¹⁵

There are several problems in this sentence. What is the actual meaning of the terms “books” (*sefarim*, *sefer*) and what is their syntactic status? What is the object of the verb “carved out”? In order to ease the reader’s puzzlement, early manuscripts already added an additional verb and object to the sentence. Thus, for example, according to Source K, which also represents the short version, we read:

[§1; 1.1] By means of thirty-two concealed paths of wisdom Yah, the Lord of hosts... The Living God... carved out His Name [or: By means of thirty-two ... paths ... Yah, the Lord of hosts... The Living God... is His Name, carved out]; He created his universe by means of three *sefarim*: by means of *spr spr wspr*.

There are several opinions concerning the meaning of the term *sefarim*. There are those who assert that it refers to writing (that is, a book), to number, or to a story or spoken account (i.e., *sefer*, *mispar*, *sippur*). Others claim that it refers to one of the other three-fold divisions appearing in the book, upon which we will elaborate further below, such as the division of the letters into three groups, or the division of the universe into three categories: “world,” “year” (i.e., – time) and “soul” (i.e., person); or perhaps to a hook, sphere, and heart.¹⁶

At this point I wish to draw attention to a fact that this root—i.e., ספר, *sp*"r—also belongs to the lexicon of words frequently used in Wisdom Literature, a point that further strengthens the claim that *Sefer Yezirah* belongs to this literature. In the Book of Job, for example, we are told that God is omniscient with regard to wisdom, and in particular that “then he saw it and declared it (ויספרה; *vayesaprah*); he established it and searched it out” (Job 28:27). Perusal of the comments of some of the exegetes and scholars on this verse reveals that the word *vayesaprah* is understood in one of the following ways: “He counted its letters” (Rashi, who here relates explicitly to *Sefer Yezirah*), or to number in general (Ibn Ezra); telling or writing in a book (Ibn Ezra); the establishing of laws, or their being so-to-speak recorded in a book (Ralbag); relating or enumerating its characteristics (Hartum).

The root also appears in the verse, “Who can number (*mi yesaper*) the heavens by wisdom?” (Job 38:37), on which verse Ibn Ezra comments, “*mi yesaper*: in the sense of: who made them like sapphire [*even sapir*, a precious stone], like a solid speculum, and there are those who say it is from the word ‘book,’ and others say from ‘number,’ and others say, who can relate the wisdom of the heavens.”

The meanings of the verb discussed here confirm the understanding mentioned earlier: namely, that the intention is to writing (i.e., of a book), to number,¹⁷ and to telling or relating in the sense of speech; to which we may now add—in the sense of enumerating qualities.¹⁸

As we shall see presently, the present paper claims that, among other things, *Sefer Yezirah* presents the reader with three descriptions of Wisdom, all three of which belong to Wisdom Literature. In wake of the use made of the root ספר, *sp*"r, in Wisdom Literature as well as in *Sefer Yezirah*, I saw fit to allude to these connotations. Thus in my following comments. I shall refer to the three descriptions presented in *Sefer Yezirah* as “accounts” (*sippurim*).

3. The Subject of Sefer Yezirah

The fact that *Sefer Yezirah* uses a not-insignificant lexicon of terms characteristic of Wisdom Literature indicates to us that the book belongs to this literature, as is indeed confirmed by examination of the opening sentence of the book. This sentence states, quite simply and clearly, *the one subject to be discussed throughout the rest of the book*: namely, how God formed his world by means of an entity divided into several “paths,” known as “Wisdom.” The book does not discuss the question as to how and when Wisdom itself was created, but starts with the assumption that it exists.¹⁹ And, let us again emphasize—the opening sentence is not simply the first sentence, but the key sentence, the heading of the book, the definition of its exclusive subject.

The concept of Wisdom as it appears within the framework of Wisdom literature unites various areas which in later times were considered separate and unconnected with one another: the manner of conduct of this world and ethics (see, e.g., the Book of Proverbs); the creation of the world, the ordering of the world²⁰ and the laws of nature, that is, what became known in later times as “science” (see, e.g., the Book of Job); and the Holy Spirit (see, e.g., the book of *Wisdom of Solomon*).²¹ The concept of Wisdom thus explains in a natural way the appearance within *Sefer Yezirah* of all these areas, or of different, seemingly contradictory points-of-view. It also explains why there were so many disagreements among scholars of the book: the opposing characteristics they

observed do indeed exist in *Sefer Yezirah*, so that there is nothing left but for us to unify them under one heading: the House of Wisdom.

From the opening sentence we learn that Wisdom has an internal structure by which it is divided into thirty-two paths. This complex is *described as pela'ot*, concealed; this being so, we learn that *Sefer Yezirah* as a whole is based upon the promise to include the readers in a special secret that not every person is privileged to know—the secret wisdom by whose means God hewed out the world (the covert assumption being that Wisdom is not only the source of the world, but that it is that which allows its continued existence since then). In the very next sentence, one of the secrets is revealed: namely, that the thirty-two paths are divided into two categories: ten *sefirot* and twenty-two letters (§2; 1.2).

It is my view that *Sefer Yezirah* presents several different answers to the question of the meaning of these claims: alternative solutions whose conceptual worlds are close to one another, yet nevertheless differ in several significant aspects. The opening of the book may therefore be read as presenting a shared, common claim or, alternatively, as posing the question presented for discussion. By the nature of things, such a presentation is done by one who knows and is familiar with the possible solutions—namely, the editor of the text.

The nature of the problem presented at the beginning of the book may be formulated in a number of different ways, or through means of several different conceptual systems. Thus: upon what does the world stand? The “discussants” agree that the world stands upon Wisdom and that it has such-and-such components, but what is the exact significance of this statement? What is the nature of these components (apart from the number thirty-two upon which they agree)? Moreover, it would appear that all of the “discussants” agree that the relationship between Wisdom and the world is not a one-time connection related to a primordial event, but that Wisdom also continues to sustain the world and to act within it. It follows that the problem may also be formulated in the following manner: What are the bases of the world? Or, what are the foundations of the world? Is Wisdom the foundation of the world from an ontological viewpoint, or is there perhaps an abstract system of laws that determines the nature of its activity? Or does one perhaps need to clarify the meaning of the connection between Wisdom and the world within the framework of theological concepts?

From this point on, one says one thing and the other another: each one presents his own “book” or “account” as an answer to the question of the nature of Wisdom. I have made use of rather simple literary analyses and analyses of content in order to define the various answers of the “discussants,” as well as to determine the position of the editor who connected them all. This paper’s point of departure is thus that all the formulae that are before us today, and whose chain of transmission is examined so carefully in the editions of Ithamar Gruenwald and Peter Hayman, are posterior to the writing of the original answers. This claim applies equally well to the shorter version, which is considered one of the relatively early texts. Within the framework of this paper I shall therefore appeal only sporadically to this chain of transmission.²²

The order of presentation is based upon convenience of discussion, and not on the order found in one or another edition or textual version. Hence, this order of presentation is not to be understood as implying the actual historical sequence.

4. The First Account—The Sealing of the Ends

The Sefirot

All the scholars engaged in research divide their answers into two distinct parts: they begin with the *sefirot* and continue with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. We shall do so as well. And indeed, this is one of the more complex answers to the basic question of the book. We shall begin with the manner of relating to the *sefirot*:²³

[§10; 1.9] Ten *sefirot* [*belimah*²⁴]. One— the Spirit (*ruah*) of the Living God. Twice blessed is the name of the Life of the Worlds. Voice, and air (*ruah*) and word— this is the Holy Spirit (*ruah*).

[§12; 1.10] Two— air/wind (*ruah*) from Spirit (*ruah*). [He] carved and hewed in it the twenty-two basic letters – three “mother” [letters], and seven doubles, and twelve simple [letters].²⁵

[§13; 1.11] Three – water from air/wind (*ruah*). [He] carved and hewed in it *tohu* and *bohu*, mud and mire....

[§14; 1.12] Four – fire from water. [He] carved them and hewed in it the throne of glory, and the *Ofanim* and the *Serafim*, and the holy living creatures, and the ministering angels. And from the three of them he founded his abode...

[§15; 1.13] Five – [He] sealed above. [He] chose three simple [letters] and fixed them in his great name. And [He] sealed with them the six edges (of the universe), and [He] turned upwards and sealed it.

Six – He sealed below, and He turned downwards and sealed it.

Seven – He sealed the east, and He turned downwards [rd. in front] and sealed it.

Eight – He sealed the west, and He turned behind and sealed it.

Nine – He sealed the south, and He turned to his right and sealed it.

Ten – He sealed the north, and He turned to his left and sealed it.

[§16; 1.14] These are the ten *sefirot belimah*: the Spirit (*ruah*) of the Living God; and air/wind (*ruah*), water, fire; above, below, east, west, north and south.

This account attributes to Wisdom—and, for the present, we shall discuss only one component thereof, that called *sefirot belimah*—a wide variety of functions in the existence of the universe. Here wisdom plays a role, first and foremost, in the very creation of the ontological reality of the world. The source of the basic elements of nature—air/wind, water and fire—are found therein. True, according to this account, this “Mendelian Table” of wisdom includes not only these three elements, but would appear to include seven elements.²⁶ Thus, the element of fire (as the fourth *sefirah*) has two aspects: fire, evidently meaning the source of the earthly fire that is familiar to us; but also of that fire from which the angels of Heaven, and even the Throne of Glory, are made. The element of water (as the third *sefirah*) is the source of water in this world, but also undergoes a transformation such that it becomes the element of the earth’s soil (mud and mire). This secondary division into two distinct entities stands out in particular with respect to *ruah* (which, despite the shared name, may be either wind/air or spirit), in which case the two different functions are each attributed to a different *sefirah*. *Ruah* as the second *sefirah* is evidently the source of one of the natural elements, called “air” (wind), while *ruah* as the first *sefirah*, i.e., spirit, belongs to an entirely different realm—that of the Holy Spirit, which in this account is connected to prophecy and revelation (discussed again in that part of *Sefer Yezirah* that I have referred to as the “General Introduction to the Discussion of the Letters”).²⁷

The twenty-two letters were hewn and shaped from the *sefirah* representing air (wind) as one of the elements of nature (i.e., the second *sefirah*). As we shall see below, according to the following chapters of *Sefer Yezirah*, the letters serve for the creation of innumerable numbers of additional entities. This account supports the claim that Wisdom is composed of ten basic elements, ten *sefirot*, each one of which creates many secondary elements: the twenty-two letters with all their “products,” the earth, the angels, the Throne of Glory, etc. etc. From this point on, it would appear that the incorporation of various elements, both primary and secondary, is responsible for the functioning of this world.

The next six *sefirot*, referred to also as “ends” or “edges” (Hebrew: קצוות, *qezawot*),²⁸ serve as the Cartesian axis of the world: they determine the boundaries of its expanse in a way independent of the matter found therein. These six axes are identical to what are referred to today as the “three dimensions of space,” except that each dimension is considered in *Sefer Yezirah* as divided into two axes or vectors, pointing in opposite directions from the central point of the world.

God Himself is doubtless found at the central point, shared by Wisdom and the world, as in the final passages of this account God addresses each of the winds of Heaven in order to “seal in” the *sefirot*. From the fact that this central point is not considered one of the elements of Wisdom, we may infer that both God and Wisdom are considered as transcendent, or at least beyond the limitations of space.²⁹

The textual version cited above notes that God seals the six dimensions by means of “three simple letters”—that is, by means of three letters that belong to the category of the “simple letters”—which serve, not only to seal the creation, but are also “fixed within His great Name.” All the other sources (as mentioned in Hayman’s edition) state that this refers to the letters יהו, *YHW*—an interpretation accepted by all of the commentators and researchers. These sources also tend, generally speaking, to note that six seals were created from these three letters, each seal being a different one of the six possible combinations of these three letters—*YHW*, *YWH*, and so on.

The idea that one needs to seal the edges of the earth clearly belongs to a magical world of concepts, a point that has already been noted in studies of *Sefer Yezirah*.³⁰ The world-view implied here asserts a struggle between the forces of order and disorder. This is a world of chaos that repeatedly attempts to spread and to burst forth, to destroy that which exists, to sweep away its boundaries; against it stands God, who polices the primeval world, fixes its boundaries (in both the simple meaning of this word and in its borrowed meaning), and says—“Enough!” According to this account, in order to do so God uses the power of His Name—a name made from three of the letters of the Ineffable Name. One must emphasize that this magical power is combined with the system presented in this account as a new element, attributed, not to Wisdom, but seen as God’s direct tool of activity in the world, in addition to Wisdom. Between the lines, an explicitly dynamic element is also introduced: in our world, intense movement occurs from the center (that is, the point of meeting of the six edges) outwards, while God brakes and halts this movement, determines finite limits to the world, and does not allow it to spread out indefinitely. It is also quite possible that this idea of extension and halting originated in wake of reflections upon the term *belimah*, mentioned in the Book of Job, which may be also understood as meaning “stopping” or “halting.”³¹

The characteristics of the *sefirot belimah* upon which the world is suspended therefore belong, according to this first “account,” to a world of theological, physical and

magical concepts:

The first element is the Holy Spirit, *ruah hakodesh*, or prophecy and revelation. While the text does not go into detail concerning the significance of this subject, these concepts are almost certainly related to the unique connection between the people of Israel and its God, including the revelation of the Torah.³² This connection is the first in a hierarchy of elements organizing the activity of the world. One might therefore formulate the assertion that the first *sefirah* corresponds to the Holy Spirit as meaning that the world is based first and foremost upon God, Torah, and prophecy.

The second group of elements upon which the world is based, in order of importance, is connected with the constituents of the world. This refers to the elements—air/wind/spirit, water and fire—and the manner of their double revelation, both in the supernatural world (as, for example, angels) and in this world. These are the building blocks of both these worlds, and Wisdom, as the foundation of the world, provides the components of the cosmic ontology which is lower than its own level.

The third group of elements in importance would be classified, from a modern viewpoint, in the single category of the dimensions of space.

In addition to the above, God himself acts directly in the world by means of the (magical) power inherent within His Name.

In conclusion, we should direct our attention to an outstanding stylistic feature of this “account”: that, in practice, it presents its answer twice—once in detail, and a second time, when it summarizes its approach in brief (§16; 1.14). That is, the author of the account has a tendency towards order, towards an aesthetic of structure, towards the importance of clarity of understanding—in addition to having an ear sensitive to the rhythm and tone of his words. Is he also the general editor of the book?

Already at this point we find clear and strong evidence for this claim, which further on in our discussion will become ever clearer. At the beginning of the book God’s activity is depicted as an act of hewing, as in stone. We shall immediately see that, among the three accounts dealing with the *sefirot*, the Sealing Account is the only one to make use of this verb. While this verb appears numerous times in the discussions of the letters, this is always by the author of the Sealing Account. Moreover, the author of this account makes use of the term “the living God” as the Name of God (§10; 1.9). Apart from this, this name only appears in editorial passages—in the opening passage, in the above-mentioned passage that summarizes and concludes the subject of the *sefirot* (§16; 1.14), and in the concluding passage on the subject of the letters (§56; 5.4).³³ We shall return further to this claim regarding the explicit connection between the author of the Sealing Account and the editor.³⁴

The Letters

The beginning of *Sefer Yezirah* defined Wisdom as a combination of ten *sefirot* and twenty-two letters. Several times during the course of the book there is presented the division of the twenty-two letters into three “mothers” or “matrices,” seven double letters, and twelve simple letters (see, e.g., §2; 1.2). The three “mothers” are defined as the letters *ש*, *מ*, *שׁ*, (*alef*, *mem*, *shin*); gallons of ink have been spilled over the question of the criteria for the choice of these specific letters.³⁵ The seven double letters are בג"ד כפר"ת, that is, the letters *beit*, *gimmel*, *dalet*, *kaf*, *peh*, *resh*, and *tav*,³⁶ while the “twelve simple letters” refers to all the other letters. We shall now need to identify those passages from this account that deal with the letters, as well as to connect them with the beginning of

the Sealing Account, that deals with the *sefirot*.

In attempting to create a correspondence between the discussion of the letters and that of the *sefirot*, such that they will indeed be shown to belong to the same account, we shall use several simple means: on the one hand, the attempt to identify common or shared ideas, choice of words, or style; and, on the other hand, elimination of certain possibilities due to clear internal contradictions.

We shall begin with the descriptions of the seven double letters. The book presents us with three alternative descriptions.

According to one of them, these seven letters allude to the seven dimensions of space, referred to here as *qezavot*, “ends” or “edges” (§38; 4.3). Six of them represent what are referred to today as the three dimensions of space; but the central point, the locale of the Holy Sanctuary, is also considered as an “end” or “edge” to be counted, a seventh one. However, as we have seen above, the Sealing Account states that there are no more than six edges; hence, it would seem that this passage does not belong to the “account of the sealing.”

The second description (§37; 4.1) does not reveal, at this stage of our journey, explicit signs of either similarity or contradiction.

But the final description that remains for us to examine (§§39-43; 4.3-4.12) displays clear points of similarity to the Sealing Account: both make use of the combination of verbs *hqq* and *hzv*, “to hew” and “to mine”;³⁷ the verb *צרף*, *zrf* (“combine”) appears several times in this description of the letters, and one can in addition find an entire passage (§40; 4.12) that exemplifies the principle of combination in practice. True, the description of the *sefirot* in the Sealing Account does not use the verb *zrf*; nevertheless, it exemplifies in practice various different combinations (i.e., of the letters *YHW*; see §15; 1.13). The description of the *sefirot* in this account betrays an explicit tendency towards magic based upon magical names. Even the crowns of the letters, mentioned repeatedly in the present discussion of the letters, is connected with this world. More generally, the entire connection between certain stars and what occurs in this world, a connection so strongly emphasized in this description, belongs to the world of magic, albeit not necessarily on that form of magic based on magical names. It would therefore seem that this description of the letters belongs to the second part of the “account of the sealing.”

Having stated this, it will be easier for us to identify those descriptions of the three “mothers” and twelve simple letters that belong to the Account of the Sealing, because the description that we have already identified is relatively lengthy and well-developed, providing us with further points of reference, in the form of repeated stylistic formulae. Thus, if in the sections describing the seven double letters we have found the group of verbs, “He carved and hewed them, he combined them, and formed with them” (§39; 4.4), it is possible to discern that such a group also appears in some of the descriptions of the three “mothers” and the twelve simple letters (§31; 3.5, and also in §46; 5.2). This phenomenon helps us determine which of them belong to the Account of Sealing. One may immediately discern how the stylistic formulae that characterize the descriptions of the seven double-letters belonging to our account are repeated as well in the other two descriptions (i.e., of the three “mothers” and the twelve simple letters).

Upon further examination, it becomes clear that these stylistic models, as well as the combinations of verbs mentioned above, also appear in another general description of the twenty-two letters, which ought by right to be added to the Sealing Account.

We will present here the description of the letters that, in our opinion, belong to the Sealing Account; albeit, due to its length we shall need to skip over several passages.

The presentation of the passages that have been chosen on the basis of the above-mentioned criteria creates a text of impressive stylistic unity:

[General Introduction to Discussion of the Letters]

[§17; 2.3] Twenty-two letters. They are hewn out in the air, carved out by the voice, fixed in the mouth in five positions: *Aleph, Het; He, Ayin; Bet, Waw; Mem, Pe; Gimel, Zayin; Kaph, Qof; Dalet, Tet; Lamed, Num, Taw; Zayin, Samek; Shin, Resh, Sade*.³⁸

[§18; 2.4] The twenty-two letters are their foundation. They are fixed³⁹ on a wheel with two hundred and thirty-one gates. The wheel rotates backwards and forwards. And this is the sign: There is no good better than pleasure (*oneg*); there is no evil worse than affliction (*nega*).⁴⁰

[§19; 2.2] Twenty-two letters: He carved them out, He hewed them, He weighed them, He exchanged them, He combined them and formed with them the life of all creation (or: all creatures) and the life of all that would be formed.

[§19; 2.5] How did he weigh and exchange them? *Aleph* with them all, and them all with *Aleph*; *Bet* with them all, and them all with *Bet*. And they all rotate in turn.⁴¹... The result is that all creation (or: all creatures) and all speech go out by one name...⁴²

[Three Mother-Letters]

[§24; 3.2] Three mothers: *Alef, Mem, Shin*— a great secret, hidden and ineffable, and sealed with six rings [*taba'ot*].⁴³ And from it go out fire, and water and air (*ruah*), and they are divided into male and female.

[§31; 3.5] Three mothers: *Alef, Mem, Shin*. He carved them, hewed them, combined them and formed with them the three mothers in the universe, and the three mothers in the year, and the three mothers in the soul (*nefesh*, person), male and female.

[§32; 3.6] He made *Aleph* a king over air (*ruah*), and bound to it a crown, and combined them [the letters] with each other, and sealed⁴⁴ with them air (*awir*) in the universe, humidity in the year, and the chest in the soul (*nefesh*)⁴⁵...

[§33; 3.7] He made *Mem* a king over water, and bound to it a crown, and sealed with it earth in the universe, cold in the year, and belly⁴⁶ in the soul (soul)...

[§34; 3.8] He made *Shin* a king over fire, and bound to it a crown, and combined them [the letters] with one another, and sealed with it heaven in the universe, heat in the year, and the head in the soul (*nefesh*)...

[Seven Double Letters]

[§39; 4.4] Seven double [letters]: *Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaph, Pe, Resh, Taw*. He carved and hewed them, he combined them, and formed with them the planets in the universe, the days in the year, and the apertures in the soul (*nefesh*), by sevens.

[§40; 4.12] How did he combine them? Two stones build two houses; three build six... seven build five thousand and forty.⁴⁷ From here on go out and ponder what the mouth cannot speak, and what the ear cannot hear.

[§41; 4.5-11] (1) He made *Bet* a king, and bound to it a crown, and combined them [the letters] one with another, and formed with it Saturn in the universe, the Sabbath in the year, and the mouth in the soul [*nefesh*].

(2) He made *Gimel* a king, and bound to it a crown, and combined them [the letters]

one with another, and formed with it Jupiter in the universe, the first day of the week in the year, and the right eye in mankind the soul [*nefesh*]...

(7) He made *Taw* a king, and bound to it a crown, and combined them [the letters] one with another, and formed with it the Moon in the universe, the sixth day of the week in the year, and the left ear in the soul [*nefesh*].⁴⁸

[§42; 4.4] And with them were carved out seven firmaments, seven earths, seven hours and seven times. Therefore he loved the seventh under heaven [after Eccles 3:1]⁴⁹...

[Twelve Simple Letters]

[§49; 5.2] Twelve [simple] letters: *He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof*. He carved them and hewed them out, he weighed them and exchanged them, and formed with them the twelve constellations in the universe, the twelve months in the year, the twelve principal organs [*manhigim*; “leaders”] in the soul [*nefesh*].

[§49; 5.2] These are the twelve constellations in the universe: Aries, Taurus... And these are the twelve months: Nisan, Iyar... And these are the twelve principal organs in mankind: the right hand, the left hand...

[§52; 5.2] He made [the letter] *He* a king and bound it to a crown, and combined them [the letters] one with another, and formed with it Aries in the universe and Nisan in the year, and the liver in the soul [*nefesh*]...⁵⁰

The Sealing Account is thus a lengthy, richly-developed account that in practice takes up most of *Sefer Yezirah*, for which reason it also had great influence upon the subsequent development of the Kabbalah.

This account speaks extensively about the power of the letters. If in the first part, which dealt with *sefirot*, the letters had (magical) power to rule over the world and to give it boundaries, in the section focused upon the letters they have additional power. In practice, the text sees the letters as literal building blocks, the world therefore being tantamount to a house. It is for good reason that he refers to them in §40 (4.1) as “stones” that build the “houses,” to which there were also added “gates” (§18; 2.4). The essence of this account lies in the enumeration of which letters—which, as mentioned, constitute Wisdom—participate in the formation of which part of the physical world, in the sense of a house—heaven and earth and all that is within them. By association, we arrive at the dictum that “Bezalel combines the letters with which heaven and earth were built.”⁵¹ But, as is known, Bezalel knew this wisdom in the context of his task as builder of the Tabernacle. We therefore see that this associative connection leads us to the understanding that this account speaks of a world constructed upon the model of the Tabernacle (that is, the Tabernacle built by Bezalel was a kind of model and mirror of the structure of the cosmos as a whole). Or, from another viewpoint, the very structure of the world which this account relates indicates its holiness! In the same way, this house alludes to the house of Wisdom, evidently the world as a house built thereby. For, according to Wisdom literature, “wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars” (Prov 9:1)—and she herself raises her voice and calls upon human beings (by means of *Sefer Yezirah*?) when “On the heights beside the way, in the paths she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud” (Prov 8:2-3). In the dialogue that takes place among the three accounts in *Sefer Yezirah*, the Covenant Account claims, as we shall see below, that the “Holy Tabernacle”

serves as the *axis mundi*. The Sealing Account responds to this by saying that the entire world, and not just its center, is the Holy Tabernacle.

The text also speaks extensively about the constellations, suggesting that we are also dealing here with an astrological world-view. The “products” of the letters are presented in the text under a further division—universe, year, and soul. The category of universe includes the aspects of the heavens and its division into firmaments, the planets and the constellations, the earth (or the seven lands), and the air between heaven and earth. The category of year relates to the hours of the day, the seven days of the week, and the seasons of the year, while the category of soul relates to the various different organs of the human body.

The text that I have designated by the title, “General Introduction to the Discussion of the Letters,” also deals with the human aspect, elaborating upon the manner of pronunciation of the letters by man, and of the creation of the combinations per se. On the face of it, this text seems to deal only with the manner in which God “formed with them the life of all creatures ion (or: all creatures) and the life of all that would be formed.” However, if it were relating to the deeds of God, why does it need to explain where in man’s mouth the letters are shaped and even to elaborate how the “wheel” is made⁵² to assist in the creation of these combinations? Clearly, the implication is that it is fitting that man himself ought to engage in these combinations, similar to God. What might be the likely goals of engaging in such combinations? One goal is evidently alluded to at the beginning of the section dealing with the *sefirot*, that is, the Holy Spirit (§10; 1.9) It is difficult to escape the impression that a second purpose is concrete involvement in magic, in all its possible varieties, from amulets to the creation of living beings, such as a three-year old calf or a golem.⁵³

In conclusion, the Sealing Account presents a broad picture of a structure of the world based upon *sefirot* and letters, making use of a world of concepts taken from theology, physics, verbal magic and astrological magic. The tendency of the author of this unit to return repeatedly to certain stylistic formulae, and the idea of combinations of letters, help us to locate the various parts of this account, which are scattered among the different chapters of the book.

5. The Second Account: The Depths

The Sefirot

In the second “account,” a different answer is given to the basic question of our book—namely, what is meant by the *belimah* upon which the world is suspended—as follows:

[§7; 1.5] Ten *sefirot belimah*. Their measure is ten, for they have no limit: depth [‘omeq; [or: “dimension”] of beginning and depth of end, depth of good and depth of evil, depth of above and depth of below, depth of east and depth of west, depth of north and depth of south. And the unique Lord, a trustworthy divine king, rules over them all from his holy abode for ever and ever.

This account, more than the preceding one, emphasizes the inability of human beings to fully comprehend the idea of *belimah*. While, it is true, it shares with us certain extraordinary secrets, despite this—or perhaps because of this—we must remember that, in the final analysis, the *sefirot* are without end; that is, that man as such is unable to fully comprehend them.⁵⁴ For this reason the *sefirot* are designated by the name

עומקים, 'omaqim ("depths"), thereby alluding to the words of Kohelet, "that which is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?" (Eccl 7:24). The author of the Depths Account thus pays attention, already at the beginning of his discussion, to the subjective nature of human knowledge, and particularly to its limitations.⁵⁵

The aspects of the *sefirot belimah* as seen by the author of the Depths Account are different from those of the Sealing Account, more strongly emphasizing the physical and ethical aspects thereof:

The dimension of time, which from his viewpoint is considered as two *sefirot*—the depth of the beginning and the depth of the end.

The ethical dimension, which is also seen by him as double or binary—the depth of goodness and the depth of evil. He almost certainly considers the ethical dimension to be one that incorporates the entire Torah, with all of its commandments and with the imperative to hearken to God's words per se. In this way, a theological element also penetrates into his account.

The realm of space, with its six directions.

The author of the Depths Account claims that not only God, but also His habitation (*me'on qodsho*), transcend both Wisdom and the world.⁵⁶ Likewise, God continues to rule over His world, not only by means of wisdom, but also in a direct manner, although the account does not explain exactly how.

The Letters

We may now continue to seek the second half of the Depths Account, the part which deals with letters.

We will begin with the three "mothers." It is fairly easy, by means of elimination, to find those passages that belong to the Depths Account. §§24, 31-34 (3.2, 5-8) have already been attributed, on the basis of explicit signs, to the Sealing Account. We shall establish, with the same degree of certainty, that §§23, 25-26, and 28-30 (3.1, 3-4; 6.1) belong to the Covenant Account. This leaves us only with a few remaining passages, clearly demarked, that deal with the three "mothers," and are thus part of the Depth Account.⁵⁷

These passages draw a connection between the three "mothers" and the concepts of universe, year and soul, which we have already encountered in the Sealing Account. The discussion turns from there to identifying the "king" who rules in each one of these three above-mentioned realms. The king in the realm of space is the *Teli*, that is, the "Heavenly Dragon";⁵⁸ the king ruling over time is the "Wheel," that is to say, the circle of the zodiac; while the king in the realm of the soul, i.e., within man, is the heart. Immediately following this passage the text again presents the binary approach to the world, concluding with the optimistic and definitive statement: "Good is stored up for the good and evil is kept for the evil" (§60; 6.2).

On the other hand, the connection drawn by this account between the "mothers" and the above-mentioned concepts is indirect, if not serpentine. Note the following passage:⁵⁹

[§27; 3.2] Three mothers: *Alef, Mem, Shin*. And from them were born three fathers from whom everything was created.

This entire passage, as has been noted by several scholars, seems artificial and apologetic.⁶⁰ It is characteristic of someone who is interested in preserving an author-

itative intellectual tradition, while simultaneously giving it a new meaning. My conjecture is thus that the author of the Depths Account had an extant tradition regarding the three “mothers” related to the three elements of fire, water and air, by whose means the universe, the year, and the soul were created. He needs §27, which we cited above, in order to deviate from his own tradition and present his discussion as follows:

[§58; 6.1] Three fathers and their offspring... And a proof for the matter— trustworthy witnesses: the universe, the year and soul.

Let us now turn to a discussion of the seven double letters. *Sefer Yezirah* contains three descriptions of these letters. We have already seen that the description relating to the planets (§§39-43; 4.3-12) belongs to the Sealing Account. Another description, referring to the seven “edges” (§38; 4.3), is not appropriate to our account for the same reason that it is not appropriate to the Sealing Account—namely, that it asserts the existence of seven dimensions in space, and not six.

We are therefore left with the third description (§37; 4.1). This passage presents a binary picture of reality, consistent with the binary approach to ethics which we have found in the section of this account dealing with the *sefirot*, one which in practice even expands it. There, we find “depth of good and depth of evil” (§7; 1.5), while here we find “opposites” and polarities—life and death, peace and evil, and so on. The claim made in §7 (1.5), that God is “the unique Lord,” now emerges as a deliberate presentation of opposites: the entire world is composed of opposites, and God alone is the unique Lord.⁶¹

It should be emphasized that there is no special connection presented here between any particular letter and pair of opposites—this, in contrast to the Sealing Account, in which each of the seven double-letters is connected to a particular entity, even if this connection is artificial. It also differs from the description of the three “mothers,” in which an attempt may be seen to create a connection between the indicator letter and the name of the element indicated (i.e., *alef* corresponding to *avir*, air; *mem* corresponding to *mayim*, water; and *shin* to *esh*, fire). The author of the Depths Account directs his attention to only two aspects of the “building blocks of the universe”: the number of letters (i.e., seven double ones), and a phonetic characteristic.⁶² By contrast, in the Sealing Account, one sees a more explicit connection to writing, particularly to hewing and shaping. These “building blocks” are hewn and shaped, and only thereafter is an attempt to enunciate the combination.⁶³

We shall conclude our discussion of this account with the twelve simple letters. Unlike the other sections of the book, here we find that the unraveling of the labyrinth of ideas encounters more difficulties. It seems to me that one may reasonably conjecture that the extant discussion of the twelve simple letters is the result, both of loss of material and of the mixing of two distinct accounts: the Depths Account and the Covenant Account (to be discussed below). This mixing may have derived from the fact that the one account initially borrowed one or another passage from the other.

§45 (5.1) draws a connection between the twelve letters and twelve activities of human beings (“soul,” in the language of *Sefer Yezirah*)—seeing, hearing, sleeping and the like. In terms of deciding with which account to identify this passage, one may bring two arguments. On the one hand, a certain stylistic pattern that appears in this passage—“twelve simple [letters]... their basis...”—appears both in the Covenant Account, to be discussed below,⁶⁴ and in the Depths Account (§37; 4.1), and may therefore belong to either one of the two. On the other hand, as we shall see, the Covenant Account tends

to be more poetic, making the technical style of this passage unsuitable to it.

§46 includes a stylistic form that is characteristic of the Covenant Account rather than of the Depths Account—"twelve and not eleven." It is absent in the short version, for which reason Peter Hayman tends to think that it is a later addition.⁶⁵ I nevertheless wonder whether this may not be an old remnant of this account that anticipates the following passage, which likewise belongs to the Covenant Account, whose very existence testifies to its source. An alternative thesis to that of Hayman might thus be that the author of the Depths Account was the one who deleted it (in other words, the Covenant Account preceded it), but that it survived in other hands.

§47 (5.1) draws a connection between the twelve letters and twelve "diagonal lines." There are three considerations in support of the view that this passage belongs to Depths Account. First, that it appears in the short version immediately after §45 (this argument is valid only in the event that this last passage does in fact belong to the Depths Account), such that §§45-47 would seem to be one unit. Second, it contains a linguistic expression found in the Depths Account that does not appear in either of the other accounts—namely, מִדָּתָן, *midatan* ("their measure"; §7; 1.5). Finally, one passage that is included in the Depths Account and which discusses the three "mothers" mentions the twelve diagonal lines (§58; 6.1). Against this, there are three other considerations in favor of its belonging to the Covenant Account: one, that the language of this passage is poetic and archaic; second, that it includes a linguistic expression found, not only in the Depths Account, but also in the Covenant Account—namely, עַד עַד, *'adei 'ad* ("forever and ever"; in §7, as well as in §38; 4.3, to be discussed below); and third, the "testimony" of §46, as mentioned above, that may serve as its introduction and which bears linguistic characteristics of the Covenant Account.

It is therefore difficult to determine where §47 belongs. It is also possible that it belongs to both accounts, for which reason, regarding the twelve simple letters, we do not have three full and separate accounts.

Of all these passages, §48a is most similar in character to what we have found thus far regarding the Depths Account. It presents a binary approach, based upon the Book of Ecclesiastes, which is also mentioned in this account's discussion of the three "mothers."

[§48a; 5.2] He made them a sort of lawsuit, he arranged them in battle array, *one opposite the other God made them* (Eccles 7:14).

On the other hand, the exact context of these things is not entirely clear. According to the short version, this passage appears immediately after the discussion of the "twelve principal organs in the soul" (§49b; 5.2), which in terms of contents belongs to the Sealing Account.

This point may also relate to the following passages, which have a binary nature and which use a linguistic phrase already found in the section dealing with the *sefirot*—"the divine, trustworthy king rules over them all." [§7; 1.5]

[§48b; 6.3] ... Twelve stand in battle array: three love but three hate; three give life but three kill. And the divine, trustworthy king rules over them all. ...

Simultaneously, elsewhere in §48b there appears a phrase characteristic of the Covenant Account: "one is the law which holds the balance between them."

Finally, even if our understanding of the section dealing with the twelve simple letters has not been fully articulated, we can still clearly distinguish that the worldview of the author of the Depths Account is binary, a characteristic relating not only to moral behavior, but to all aspects of life. To live well and in peace, to have offspring, to be

wealthy, wise, handsome and powerful—this is good—and is an explicit sign of a proper ethical life, for “good is stored up for the good.” Poverty, ugliness, slavery and other opposites of the previous list are taken as signs of the person’s negative ethical character, for “evil is stored up for the evil.” This approach, it is true, acknowledges the absolute place of God, and hence of the service of God (remember the sentence, “the unique Lord, a trustworthy divine king, rules over them all from his holy abode for ever and ever”), but together with that is very earthly and practical, without any hint of asceticism. The Holy Spirit, the highest and most important element in the Sealing Account, is not mentioned here at all. The spiritual elevation and sectarian self-closure which we will find below in the Covenant Account do not appear here at all. The account reflects a fundamentally conservative, establishment-oriented, self-satisfied social attitude. While astrological magic is alluded to here by the very mention of the zodiac, letter magic, which is more likely to carry an underground or revolutionary character (as in the making of a golem, for example), is not mentioned here at all. Moreover, all of the discussions of letters by the author of the Depths Account are only concerned with external aspects (i.e., their number; classification by type), and not with other characteristics that might be found therein, which were found in them by the author of the Sealing Account.

Notwithstanding that the general subject of *Sefer Yezirah* is the nature of Wisdom, identified with the *belimah* upon which the entire world is suspended, the emphasis in the Depths Account (at least from the quantitative viewpoint) is specifically the conduct of this world. One might present its position as follows: let us briefly consider the nature of Wisdom—the world is based upon the dimensions of time, space and ethics—but there is no reason to elaborate upon this matter overly much. These are the “depths” which “have no end” and it “is deep, very deep, who can find it?.” We can never succeed in fully understanding them. While it is perhaps desirable that we know one or two things about the subjects mentioned, from there on we ought to be concerned with our own matters (and one cannot escape the awareness that proper care about the *mitzvot* is among these). The essential message is thus that the binary, established, earthly ethics that characterizes this world has its basis in the foundations of the world itself. This ethics is absolute, not relative; there is absolutely no doubt in the matter—the rulers, the wealthy, etc., are ethically good; there is no other possibility. The Depths Account testifies to their righteousness and strengthens the existing social order! If the problem presented for discussion at the beginning of the book related to the characteristics and paths of wisdom, the author of the Depths Account comes along and says that the ways of Wisdom are sufficiently known in this world and man needs to walk therein. Indeed, as in the words of Job cited at the beginning of this paper (24:13), if we do not wish to be counted among those who rebel against the light, we must “consider” the ways of God and wisdom, follow the righteous path, the path of life, of goodness, listen to all the words of God—and we shall thereby see blessing in our labors. Everything we need to know about these paths is already known to us, and there is no need for us to delve into that which in any event is beyond our ken.

We shall now present those passages dealing with the letters within the framework of the Depths Account, noting that the selection of passages describing the twelve simple letters was filled with difficulties and puzzles. In any event, it is interesting to note that, alongside the binary approach, we find that most of the ideas here appear in descriptions of either two or four words, generally speaking in a more rhythmic Hebrew than that of the Sealing Account:

[Three Mother-Letters]

[§27; 3.2] Three mothers: *Alef, Mem, Shin*. And from them were born three fathers from whom everything was created.

[§58; 6.1] Three fathers and their offspring, and seven dominant ones⁶⁶ and their hosts, and the twelve diagonal lines. And a proof for the matter – trust-worthy witnesses: the universe, the year and the soul [*nefesh*].

[§59; 6.1-2] There is a law of ten, three, seven and twelve.... The *Teli* in the universe is like a king on his throne; the zodiac in the year is like a king in a province; the heart in the soul [*nefesh*] is like a king⁶⁷ at war.

[§60; 6.2] *So God has created every object,*⁶⁸*one opposite the other* (cf. Qoh 7:14): good opposite evil – good from good and evil from evil. Good brings evil to light and evil brings good to light. Good is stored up for the good and evil is kept for the evil.

[Seven Double Letters]

[§37; 4.1] Seven double [letters]: *Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaph, Pe, Resh, Taw*. They are pronounced with the tongue in two different positions. Their basis is life and peace, wisdom, wealth, prosperity, beauty and mastery.... They are double [letters] because they are opposites. The opposite of life is death; the opposite of peace is evil; the opposite of wisdom is folly; the opposite of wealth is poverty; the opposite of prosperity is desolation; the opposite of beauty is ugliness; and the opposite of mastery is slavery.

[Twelve Simple Letters]

The following passages were mixed up, evidently as a result of the sharing of material between the Depths Account and the Covenant Account. Those passages which were almost certainly adopted by one from the other are marked with an asterisk.

* [§45; 5.1] Twelve simple [letters]: *He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof*. Their basis is sight, hearing, smelling, talking, eating, sexual intercourse, action, walking, anger, laughter, thought, sleep.

[§46] Twelve simple [letters]: *He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof*. Twelve and not eleven. [Twelve and not thirteen].⁶⁹

* [§47; 5.1] Their measure is twelve diagonal lines: the north eastern line, the south-eastern line,... And they expand continually⁷⁰ for ever and ever and *they are the arms of the universe* (based on Deut 33:27).

* [§48a; 5.2] He made them a sort of lawsuit, he arranged them in battle array, *one opposite the other God made them* (Qoh 7:14).

[§48b; 6.2] Three – each one stands by itself; seven are at loggerheads – three against three, and one is the law which holds the balance between them.

* Twelve stand in battle array: three love but three hate; three give life but three kill. And the divine, trustworthy king rules over them all

One on top of three, and three on top of seven, and seven on top of twelve. And they all adhere to each other.

6. The Third Account: The Covenant

The Sefirot

This account is written in particularly poetic language, which over the generations captivated the hearts of many people. Its writing is characterized by an abundance of par-

allelisms, by attention to euphony (rhythm and sound of the words), as well as to rich visual imagery. Particularly well-known is the formula of an explicit stylistic nature—“ten and not nine, ten and not eleven.”

[§3; 1.2] Ten *sefirot belimah*. Like the number of the ten fingers—five opposite five, and the covenant of the Unique One is exactly in the middle, in the covenant of the tongue and the circumcision of the flesh.

[§4; 1.4] Ten *sefirot belimah*. Ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand Wisdom, and become wise in regard to Understanding. Test them and investigate then, and set up the thing on its proper place and return the Creator (*Yozer*) to His throne.

[§5; 1.8] Ten *sefirot belimah*. Restrain your mouth from speaking, restrain your heart from thinking. And if your heart races return to the place [which you have left], for thus it is written: (like) *running and returning* (Ezek. 1:14). And concerning this matter the covenant was made.

[§6; 1.7] Ten *sefirot belimah*. Their end (*sofan*) is fixed in their beginning [and their beginning in their end] as the flame is bound to the burning coal. For the Lord is unique, and he has none second to him; and before one, what can you count?

[§8; 1.6] Ten *sefirot belimah*. Gazing upon them is quick as lightning [or: their aspect is like the sight of lightning]... And His word is in them *as though running and returning* (Ezek. 1:14), and they pursue His command like the storm wind, and before His throne they bow down.

There is no doubt that this account focuses particularly on the human viewpoint: on the difficulty in principle in perceiving the *sefirot*, but also on the wonderful attainment of one who, despite all, succeeds in doing so, if even for a fraction of a second. A person requires great wisdom, extraordinary understanding; it is fitting that a man devote his life to searching out a matter which it is impossible to fully investigate, to plumb that which is without end. Then, if he merits to see, to perceive the *sefirot* in a vision, he must hold back from continuing his thought and contemplation, but remove himself from the experience—all the more so that he must refrain from speaking of it.⁷¹ The duality of this sectarian ethics stands out particularly here—in a text which reveals and simultaneously warns against revealing, in which both the sectarianism and the Jewishness of this sect are alluded to in the concept of the Covenant, and particularly in the covenant of the tongue.⁷² The Covenant Account presents as its point of departure the enormous tension, the lack of resolution between the revealed and the hidden, between revelation and concealment, a tension that runs like a thread throughout the history of Jewish mysticism, and is particularly well-known in connection with the mishnah *Ein Dorshin* (in the second chapter of *Hagiga*).⁷³

But the experience is fragile and fragmented, not only due to the limits of human comprehension, but also because of the very nature of the *sefirot belimah* themselves. They are themselves in constant motion: “they pursue his command like the storm wind,” and in a brief moment they halt themselves and prostrate themselves before God. And more generally: just as the heart which contemplates them runs back and forth to its place, so too are they in a constant state of “running and returning.”⁷⁴

But what are these entities of whom one can say that “they pursue his command like the storm wind,” and who even halt and bow down? It seems highly doubtful whether one can describe the elements of nature or the dimensions of time, space and ethics, mentioned in the previous accounts, in this fashion. The answer seems to be that

they are some kind of angels (or perhaps they ought to be referred to as princes? or at the very least as supernatural forces?). Indeed, these *sefirot* are depicted in terms that in the Book of Ezekiel are reserved for the Holy Creatures; it is the angels who always set out on God's mission, and of whom one may therefore say that "his word is in them," or even to celebrate the description of their being ready for activity at a word—for not only do they flee like a storm at His word, but they do so with humility and reverence. Finally, we should note that, like the Sealing Account and many other sources, the author of the Covenantal Account claims that these angels are made out of burning fire.⁷⁵

But while it seems to follow from all these passages that one is speaking of many angels, the repeated introductory phrase qualifies this statement: the text is dealing with only ten angels, those ten referred to as the "ten *sefirot belimah*." It should be emphasized that the author of this account does not elaborate anywhere just what is distinct about each one of the ten; the description remains an overall one.

However, the *sefirot* are described in the Covenant Account in an additional way. The first passage (§3; 1.3) specifically describes them as a single entity with an anthropomorphic structure.⁷⁶ "Ten *sefirot belimah*. Like the number of the ten fingers—five opposite five, and the covenant of the Unique One is exactly in the middle, in the covenant of the tongue and the circumcision of the flesh." The fingers of that same great figure are mentioned in particular (perhaps in the bodily gesture of Priestly Blessing?). Nor is it for naught that the sign of the covenant is mentioned here, corresponding to the sign of the covenant obligating those who dwell below, whether one is speaking of a sectarian covenant or that of the nation.

In either event, another passage sheds light on the nature of that anthropomorphic figure. At the beginning of this passage the author of the Covenant Account turns to his confidante and asks him—"Understand Wisdom" – that is, to deepen his understanding of a specific entity called Wisdom. The continuation of his appeal, "test them and investigate them [i.e., the *sefirot*]" is a full parallel, as Wisdom is identical to the ten *sefirot*. The continuation of this address to his confidante delimits by means of a further parallel the result of this subjective process: "and set up the thing⁷⁷ on its proper place and return the Creator (*Yozer*) to his throne." Wisdom, which is identical to the ten *sefirot*, which is equivalent to the "thing," which is the Creator (*Yozer*), will be set firmly on its throne! The power of man's thought thus has theurgic influence over this cosmic figure.⁷⁸ This being so, it may be treated as an obligation, or at very least as the obligation of special individuals, to set it properly. In any event, as he is called the Creator (*Yozer*), the author of the Covenant Account would seem to refer here to a figure taken from one of the intellectual sources of the Gnostic Demiurge: namely, the "Author of Creation; *Yozer Bereshit*." From this, as well, it is clear that the book's title, *Sefer Yezirah*, "the Book of Creation," is the most suitable and natural name.⁷⁹ In any event, it follows from the identity between the ten *sefirot*, who are angels, and the Author of Creation, who has fingers and a covenantal organ, that one is speaking here of angels in human form;⁸⁰ or, to formulate it otherwise, of a single, great, anthropomorphic angel composed of many angels, reminiscent in particularly of Alitheia, of the Gnostic Marcos.⁸¹

The author of the Covenant Account presents a system of ten *sefirot* without enumerating what they are or how they differ from one another. Nevertheless, here too one may also see a three-fold division between the lines of his description. Thus, when the author argues that – "Ten *sefirot belimah*. Like the number of the ten fingers – five

opposite five, and the covenant of the Unique One exactly in the middle” (§3; 1.3), he is in practice describing a division into right, left and center. Further on, when we discuss that part of the account dealing with the letters, this last conceptual model shall repeat itself.

Before concluding our discussion of the *sefirot* in the Covenant Account, we shall turn our attention to the unique stylistic formula which became noted in connection with *Sefer Yezirah* in general but which, in practice, only appears in this account. “Ten *sefirot belimah*. Ten and not nine, ten and not eleven.” I wish to suggest that this formula is a variation of the model of numerical sayings.⁸² This model appears in various parts of the Bible, but particularly in the Wisdom Literature⁸³—both in that branch dealing with theoretical speculations and in that concerned with ethical behavior, two central concerns of the discussions in *Sefer Yezirah*. A biblical example of the former category is found in those verses dealing with the qualities of God. “Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God; and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love” (Ps 62:12). An example of the second category is “There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers” (Prov 6:16-19). Some of these cases are specifically connected to the genre of riddles.⁸⁴ Thus, for example, “Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden” (Prov 30:18-19). And perhaps we should add that the characteristic stylistic model of *Sefer Yezirah* was also created as an alternative to the numerical pattern characteristic of biblical riddles, in the sense of a protest whose entire essence lies in its giving an answer to the riddle, in resolving the “wondrous and hidden things.” After the Bible, as well, this numerical model was widespread.⁸⁵ This is particularly true of *Mishnah Abot*, which also belongs to Wisdom Literature. In practice, most of it, whether explicitly or using more covert models, falls into this literary category. One example shall suffice: “Simeon the Righteous... used to say: On three things the world stands: on Torah, on the [Divine] Service and on acts of kindness.”⁸⁶

In the formal pattern widely used in the Bible, this model includes two parts: a heading, stating both the number of items to be mentioned and their common characteristic; and the actual list of items, listed one after another, at times with an ordinal number.⁸⁷ Precisely the same pattern is found in all three accounts of *Sefer Yezirah*. The heading of §10 (1.9), for example, is “ten *sefirot [belimah]*”: that is, it indicates the number of items—ten—and their shared characteristic—that they are *sefirot belimah*. It proceeds from there to enumerate them: “One—the Spirit of the Living God. Two... air from spirit,” and so on. All of *Sefer Yezirah* is made up of a combination of sections constructed on this model, and the discussion of the thirty-two paths among them.

Moreover, as in *Sefer Yezirah*, the Biblical lists are also frequently lists composed of two, three, seven, ten or twelve items.⁸⁸ These numbers have, among other things, explicit mnemonic values,⁸⁹ but within the framework of theoretical speculations their fixing is of ideational significance in its own right. See the following remarks of Roth:

The numerical saying can be defined as a type of list. What distinguishes it from all other types of lists is the use of a numerical value in the title-line. The numerical element adds a limiting factor and emphasizes the fact that a certain, exactly

defined number of items shares this or that characteristic feature with each other. This added numerical factor is of comparatively little importance in a narrative setting but of great importance in reflective and hortative numerical sayings. In the reflective use of the pattern the number is that device through which an existing (or seemingly existing) and discovered structural order in different phenomena of nature, life, society etc. is defined and fixed. Here the numerical value is the result of reflection and appears as the desired outcome of the reflection.⁹⁰

This description by Roth seems to fit precisely the spirit of that variation of the Biblical formulae presented by *Sefer Yezirah*: “Ten *sefirot belimah*. Ten and not nine, ten and not eleven.”

In this context, we should also mention that Gershom Scholem interpreted the term *sefirot* in a neo-Pythagorean context, as alluding to numbers.⁹¹ Yehudah Liebes suggested interpreting this term in the sense of “things that are counted.”⁹² Indeed, one may strengthen this additional suggestion, both in light of the speculative background suggested by the Sages in their discussions of the enumerated “things upon which the world stands,”⁹³ and in light of the generic background mentioned in the previous sections. One should note in particular the conjecture of Alexander Rofé, that sayings based upon a numerical model were already called by the Rabbis *מאמר ספורות*, *ma’amar sefurot*, “a saying (of things that are) counted.”⁹⁴ The creation of such sayings seems to have been characteristic of one of the educated groups within Jewry, the *sofrim* (usually translated as “scribes”), and followed by the activity of the creators of the Masorah, the textural tradition. According to this conjecture, *Sefer Yezirah* presents a classification and cataloging of different elements in the world on the basis of specific criteria, just as the creators of the Masorah catalogued the Biblical texts according to numbered groups. Some of these groups had ready-made names—“letters,” with all of their divisions; but one of the more complex categories that did not have a general name was therefore referred to in the most general possible way, by the name *sefurot* or *sefirot*.

In the first part of this account, the author of the Covenant Account presents a system which is entirely theological. The *belimah*, or wisdom, upon which he hangs the entire world, is evidently the Author of Creation, or angels who are included within Him (or perhaps also those who stand outside of him). This account does not mention the laws of nature; it does not mention natural elements in this world or in the supernal world. The angels set out on their mission appointed by God, and this suffices to explain what happens in the world!

The Letters

Already in the previous section, dealing with the *sefirot*, we identified a three-fold structure in the Covenant Account, even if it was not entirely explicit: “Ten *sefirot belimah*. Like the number of the ten fingers, five opposite five, and the covenant of the Unique One is exactly in the middle in the covenant of the tongue and the circumcision of the flesh” (§3; 1.3). The pattern is: right hand, left hand, and the tongue and covenantal organ located in the center. The conceptual view implicit in this visual pattern is connected with mediating, with bridging, and might be formulated as a joining together of the opposed elements, that is, as conditioning the very existence of the thing—or, alternatively, as creating a balance among the different elements. This pattern is clearly different from the binary pattern which we discerned in the Depths Account.

This three-fold pattern is clearly expressed in that part of the account dealing with

letters: “the scale of acquittal and the scale of guilt, and the tongue of law holds the balance between them” (§23; 3.1). Instead of the two hands and the organ of the covenant, there is now posed the image of a scales—two pans and a pointer between them. To this, there are also added the contexts of the idea of scales—equity, law, and justice. It is also possible that the unusual idiom, לשון חק, *leshon hoq* (“the tongue of the law”), rather than *leshon moznayim* (“the tongue of the scales”), is influenced by the Arabic word *haq*,⁹⁵ which carries a range of meanings related to ideas of truth and justice, and which fits in well with this important characteristic of Wisdom Literature.⁹⁶ In any event, it appears from this that the archaic cosmic structure is “balanced”; hence, the implication is that lack of righteousness or lack of balance—that is, evil—comes from another place: possibly, an allusion to the acts of human beings.⁹⁷

In the discussion of the three “mothers,” one finds certain expressions of some of the aspects discussed above: mediacy, bridging, balancing, justice, the joining together of opposed elements and providing a possibility for their existence. The three “mothers” represent the three elements: fire, wind/air, and water. One ought to note that the approach suggested here is different from that of the Sealing Account. In the Sealing Account, there is described (in the framework of some of the *sefirot*) a process of flow (or perhaps emanation?) in which spirit is the most sublime entity, and from it flow out air/wind, fire and water. Here, by contrast, fire is clearly the most sublime element, water the least so, while the task of mediacy and joining falls upon the air. As in the other accounts, here too the text adds another division into categories: universe, year, and soul albeit here these categories include fewer elements than those which exist in the Sealing Account. In each of these categories, the elements work in a different way. The picture drawn of the manner of activity of the different elements is as follows:

Letters	Elements	Universe	Year (Time)	Soul (Person)
<i>Shin</i>	Fire	Heaven	Heat	Head
<i>Alef</i>	Air/wind	Air/wind	Humidity	Chest
<i>Mem</i>	Water	Earth	Cold	Belly

This table could also serve for our description of the text of the Sealing Account, but in practice, even if the formal list of the building blocks and their products is identical in the two accounts, the lawfulness acting therein is different. In the Sealing Account there were depicted (in the framework of some of the letters) processes by means of the verbs *zrf* (“to combine,” that is, to combine letters) and *htm* (“to seal”). Thus, while fire in fact creates the heavens, this is so only through a certain combination of the other two letters, and not by itself—and so on. As against that, here two elements, fire and water, are each depicted as being created separately, while the third element, the air or spirit, is described as “holding the balance between them.”

Of the passages about the seven double-letters, §38 (4.3) would appear to belong to the Covenant Account. This is so because, first of all, as we have seen, the description of the seven “edges” as seven dimensions in space is inconsistent with the other two accounts; second, because it contains a linguistic phrase that also appears in the section of this account dealing with the *sefirot*: namely, that there the “covenant of the Unique One” is placed in the middle (*mekhuvenet ba-emza*) (§3; 1.3), just as here the Holy Tabernacle is in the middle (*mekhuvan ba-emza*). This point also brings us to distinguish

the conceptual similarity: here too, the middle has an important function in joining or bridging together the other elements. This function finds expression in this passage in the claim that the Holy Temple “supports them all”—that is, all of the “edges” or “extremities”. This is similar to certain Rabbinic sources which see in the *Even ha-Shetiyah*, the Corner Stone of the Temple, the place upon which the world is based.⁹⁸

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that we are speaking of seven letters, each one of which can be articulated in two different forms, here too, similar to the author of the Sealing Account, the author of the Covenant Account relates only to the fact that there are seven, and not fourteen. The Depths Account is the only one that relates to the duplication as such. However, similar to the Depths Account (and in contrast to the Sealing Account), the author of the Covenant Account does not draw any specific connection between a given letter and a given entity. From this point of view, any other seven different signs could serve the same purpose.⁹⁹

In several versions the following sentence appears prior to the description in the Covenant Account of the seven double letters: “Seven double letters: *Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaph, Pe, Resh, Tav*. Seven and not six, seven and not eight” (§38; 4.2). Peter Hayman emphasizes that this sentence does not appear in the short version of *Sefer Yezirah*, for which reason it would appear to be a later addition whose purpose is to create stylistic harmony with the beginning of the book. In strengthening his claim, he mentions that this phenomenon (i.e., the existence of a given formula in the long version but not in the short version) repeats itself with regard to the twelve simple letters, a stylistic feature completely lacking in the description of the “mothers.”¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that this formula is included, not only in the long version, but also in that of R. Saadya Gaon; our suggestion is further strengthened by the fact that it appears specifically as an introduction to a passage which apparently belongs to the Covenant Account. Is it possible that the author of the long version received a fuller text than that which survived as the “short version”? I would tend to support this possibility.

We have already discussed the difficulties raised by the Depths Account’s discussion of the twelve simple letters, and have suggested that some of these passages may have been lost or that one of the accounts borrowed material from another. We shall not return to those passages which have already been discussed, but shall now bring the entire combined text.

The following, then, is the discussion of the letters within the framework of the Covenant Account:

[Three “Mother-Letters”]

[§23; 3.1] Three mothers—*Alef, Mem, Shin*. Their basis is the scale of acquittal and the scale of guilt, and the tongue of law holds the balance between them.

[§25; 6.1] Three – fire, water and air/wind (*ruah*); fire above, water below, and air/wind (*ruah*) is between them, And this is a sign for the matter, that fire evaporates [or: carries up] water.

[§26; 6.1] Three mothers – *Alef, Mem, Shin*. *Mem* [is silent], and *Shin* hisses, and *Alef* holds the balance between them.

[§28; 3.3] Three mothers – *Alef, Mem, Shin* – in the universe: air/wind (*ruah*), and water and fire. Heaven was created first from fire, and earth was created from water, and [air] (*avir*) was created from the wind (*ruah*), holding the balance between them.

[§29; 3.4] Three mothers – *Alef, Mem, Shin* – in the year: fire, and water and air/wind

(ruah). Heat was created from fire, and cold was created from water, and humidity from air/wind (ruah) holding the balance between them.

[§30; 3.4] Three mothers - *Alef, Mem, Shin* - in the soul. The head was created from fire, the belly from water, and the chest¹⁰¹ from air holding the balance between them.

[Seven double letters]

[§38; 4.2] Seven double [letters]: *Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaph, Pe, Resh, Taw*. Seven and not six; seven and not eight.¹⁰²

[§38; 4.3] Seven double [letters]: *Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaph, Pe, Resh, Taw*. Six edges of place, and the holy place set within the middle. One- the upper edge, two- the lower edge, three- the eastern edge, four- the western edge, five- the northern edge, six - the southern edge. And the seventh edge is the eternal edge, and the holy temple set in the middle and it supports them all.¹⁰³

[Twelve Simple Letters]

The following passages were evidently included as the result of the mixing of materials from the Depths Account with the Covenant Account. Those sections which were almost certainly adopted by the author of the Covenant Account are indicated by an asterisk.

* [§45; 5.1] Twelve simple [letters]: *He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof*. Their basis is sight, hearing, smelling, talking, eating, sexual intercourse, action, walking, anger, laughter, thought, sleep.

* [§46] Twelve simple [letters]: *He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof*. Twelve and not eleven, [twelve and not thirteen.]¹⁰⁴

* [§47; 5.1] Their measure is twelve diagonal lines: the north eastern line, the south-eastern line... And they expand continually for ever and ever and *they are the arms of the universe* (cf. Deut.33:27).

[§48a; 5.2] He made them a sort of lawsuit, he arranged them in battle array, *one opposite the other God made them* (Eccl 7:14).

[§48b; 6.3] Three - each one stands by itself.

* Seven are at loggerheads - three against three, and one [is the law which] holds the balance between them.

Twelve stand in battle array: three love but three hate; three give life but three kill. And the divine, trustworthy king rules over them all

One on top of three, and three on top of seven, and seven on top of twelve. And they all adhere to each other.

7. The Editing

In this paper we have portrayed *Sefer Yezirah* as a book whose editor presents a certain problem for discussion at the beginning, and in the course of the work offers three different solutions, three “accounts” of the Creation and of its nature; three accounts of the *belimah* upon which the earth is suspended.

From the point of view presented in this paper, the Sealing Account reflects a practitioner of magic of broad perspective who, on the one hand, seeks the Holy Spirit and, on the other, seeks practical attainments (perhaps to create a golem? or to write amulets?). Together with these, he also wishes to utilize astrology. As part of his broad

worldview, he attempts to comprehend the building blocks of the universe (letters, water, air, fire, and so forth), and its laws (for example, how God rules through the act of sealing the cosmic chaos).

The Depths Account, by contrast, seems to represent the approach of a worldly person, a member of the conservative establishment, for whom understanding a few basic principles of the Creation is sufficient.

The Covenant Account presents the visionary, a man of spirit and poetic temperament, who confines himself to the narrow world of his own sect. From what is extant of his writings,¹⁰⁵ at least from the view-point discussed in this paper, he does not display any longing for accomplishments in the practical arena of life, albeit he does reveal some interest in the intellectual understanding of the structure of the world and its laws. But in principle there is only one subject that is his highest yearning—to join the dance of the angels, to run back and forth like them in their longing for the Creator. They, as he puts it, pursue His word like the storm wind, and he seeks the fragile, tempting and fascinating experience of that which is not and which is: the *belimah* upon which the world is suspended.

With which of these views does the editor identify? Or does he, perhaps, maintain a studied neutrality?

It seems to me that one can say two things about the editing of this book. While the history of *Sefer Yezirah* undoubtedly entailed a long, gradual, complex process involving the addition of numerous glosses, the essential core of the book is based upon a deliberate process of editing. This statement is implied by the very structure of this paper, which traces all parts of the different accounts, and notes the high degree of cohesiveness of its components. Second, the editor identifies with the Sealing Account, so much so that it seems that the two are one and the same.

This last statement is based upon the observation that the activity of editing is particularly discernible in relation to the conceptual world of the Sealing Account. This is already recognizable at the beginning of the book, where the editor “presents” the problem for discussion (§1; 1.1). God’s activity in the world is described by means of the verb *hq”q*, “to carve,” a verb found exclusively in the Sealing Account. Some versions of this opening section mention ten names of God. Among all these names, only one combination, “the living God,” appears in the rest of the book—that is, in the Sealing Account itself.¹⁰⁶ Further along in the book, there are two additional passages which bear the nature of an editorial insertion or summation. The one summarizes the discussion of the ten *sefirot* (§16; 1.14), the other, that of the twenty-two letters (§56; 5.4)—both of them specifically in the spirit of the Sealing Account.

The concluding passage is written in full identification with the message of the Sealing Account, but in the course of doing so incorporates an impressive group of linguistic elements also taken from the Covenant Account. This feature lends a harmonistic atmosphere to this summary, implying an appreciation of the value of the latter account. It displays an attitude of respect, a sense of continuity and development of ideas, where in practice a somewhat harmonistic atmosphere exists from the outset by the very process of editing, through which all three accounts are integrated into one.

The concluding section explicitly clarifies what may have already been felt between the lines—namely, that *Sefer Yezirah* was intended for concrete realization in human life. The archetype of this application is the Patriarch Abraham, who followed in the path of *Sefer Yezirah* and “succeeded in doing so.” Some of the verbs mentioned here character-

ize the magical and activist spirit of the author of the Sealing Account—He carved and hewed, combined and formed—and also “bound twenty letters unto his tongue,” an allusion to the Holy Spirit, suiting the verbal nature of this account. To this one should add those verbs characteristic of the visionary and meditative spirit of the author of the Covenant Account—“Abraham our father gazed (*zf’h*) and looked, and saw, and investigated, and understood.”

One should note that the two latter verbs, in practice, underlie the general framework of the book as whole, by virtue of the involvement in the question of Wisdom. Based upon the claim presented in this passage, all the verbs mentioned thus far relate to activities which man initiates in the framework of his spiritual strivings. The result of this activity is presented by means of a new verb: *גלה*, *gl’h* (“revealed”): “the Lord of all was revealed to him”; “and the Omnipresent revealed to him his secret.”

This passage speaks extensively of the dual aspect of the covenant—the covenant of the nation and the covenant of the mystical circle; this may allude to the fact that the Sealing Account also reflects the atmosphere of a closed circle, similar to that of the Covenant Account.

Abraham’s efforts brought about an additional reward: great closeness between himself and God, and his being considered the lover (*ohavo*) of God—similar to Yedidiah, “beloved of God,” the honorific name that was given to Solomon,¹⁰⁷ with all its associations to Wisdom Literature. This subject constitutes a connection to the mystical literature of the first millennium, as in the *Shiur Qomah* literature the mystic is also referred to by the name *yedid*.¹⁰⁸

The book concludes with an ecstatic description of success, as understood by the Sealing Account. And indeed, Abraham succeeded in combining and unifying between the vessels of his activity and their results: letters were drawn down and flowed until they became water, literally, or else they became air and fire, made clamor and burned. Moreover, Abraham succeeded in dominating and guiding the activities of the constellations of the zodiac.¹⁰⁹

This is the text of the concluding section:

[§61; 6.4] When Abraham our father gazed (*zf’h*) and looked, and saw, and investigated, and understood, and carved, and hewed, and combined, and formed, and succeeded, the Lord of all was revealed to him. And He made him sit in His lap, and kissed him upon his head. He called him His lover [cf. Isa 41:8] and named him His son, and made a covenant with him and his seed for ever. *And he trusted in the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness* (Gen.15:6). He made with him a covenant between the ten toes of his feet – it was the covenant of circumcision. He made with him a covenant between the ten fingers of his hands – it was the covenant of the tongue. He bound twenty[-two] letters to his tongue, and the Omnipresent revealed to him His secret.¹¹⁰ He drew them out¹¹¹ into water, he burned them into fire, he shook them into the air, he branded them into the seven,¹¹² he led them into the twelve constellations.¹¹³

One conclusion that follows obviously from the assertion that the author of the Sealing Account is the editor of the book is this: that the Sealing Account is the latest of the three, and that it was written in relation to the other two. This conclusion strengthens what has already emerged from our discussion of the concluding passage of the book, particularly in relation to the author of the Sealing Account and the Covenant Account—namely, that one sees in the book an attitude of respect and continuity

towards a particular intellectual tradition, while renewing and enriching it.

This commitment to the “chain of tradition” may explain a number of matters in which there appears to be a certain intellectual inconsistency in the Sealing Account. Notwithstanding the general claim of *Sefer Yezirah* that Wisdom has thirty-two paths, ten *sefirot*, and twenty-two letters, in this account the twenty-two letters are derived from the second *sefirah* (§12; 1.6). In practice, the author of the Sealing Account reduced the number of elements that comprise Wisdom—it is divided into ten *sefirot*, the letters and all other entities being derived therefrom.¹¹⁴ The three elements—air, water, and fire—also appear once as the three supernal and most important *sefirot* (§§12-14; 1.6-12), while further on (§§32-34; 3.6-8) they appear a second time as part of a rather vague and somewhat hazy description that obscures the contradiction in the description of the combinations of letters that seal various aspects of universe, time and soul. Likewise, three of the simple letters are in one passage connected to the description of the seals of the *sefirot* (§15; 1.13) and another time to a description of the zodiac (§52; 5.2).

The most likely explanation of this inconsistency is that, within the framework of an account which in itself has a very definite stylistic unity, the editor attempted to continue the “chain of tradition” presented him by means of the Covenant Account. This tradition included at least the following elements: the claim regarding the existence of Wisdom that mediates between God and the world, and upon which the world stands; the division of Wisdom into ten *sefirot belimah* and twenty-two letters; the division of the letters into three categories of “mothers,” double letters, and simple letters; and the connection between the “mothers” and the three categories of universe, year (time), and soul (person). From this point on, the author of the Sealing Account creates a new picture, one that is far richer and has far-reaching practical implications.

We shall now turn our attention to the fact that, in practice, the Depths Account also relates to the Covenant Account. This is particularly recognizable in the manner in which it accepted the tradition connecting between the three “mothers” and the three categories of universe, year, and soul, but simultaneously adapted them (without any particular attempt to hide the points where it was “stitched” together) to his own intellectual interest—i.e., his own lack of interest in the three elements of fire, water, and air—by turning the “mothers” into fathers.¹¹⁵ From this point on, it is easy to discern that he also took from the Covenant Account the same elements as were accepted by the author of the Sealing Account. These were, in practice, those elements shared in common by all three accounts.

Finally: the Covenant Account is the earliest of the three and was the first one to present, within the framework of this specific “chain of tradition,” the basic assumptions common to them all. The Depth Account is later and builds its description through acceptance, rejection, and change of the tradition that was before him. This is likewise the case of the author of the Sealing Account, who is later than all of them, who unites and edits all three accounts together.¹¹⁶

8. A Comment About Context

The intellectual context of *Sefer Yezirah*, whether Jewish or foreign, is extremely rich, and its discussion by various thinkers fills thousands of pages. It is worthwhile adapting this discussion to the stratification of the book according to the three accounts discussed here, but that too is an enormous project upon which we cannot elaborate here. For the present we shall suffice with one brief comment on this subject, in the hope that

we shall have an opportunity to discuss this subject in the future (including the most puzzling issue of all—the date of the writing of *Sefer Yezirah*).

The picture of the world presented in these three accounts is one which I would describe as a binitarian worldview—that is, one which asserts the existence of an entity secondary to God, which assists in the creation of the world and serves the purposes of ongoing mediation between God and the world.¹¹⁷ In the Covenant Account, this entity is an angel, while in the other two accounts it is more abstract and involves other emphases, among which one should note in particular the areas of ethics and of physics. Alan Segal and Larry Hurtado have demonstrated that the earliest patterns of binitarian approaches already exist in the Bible, and are characterized by the fact that the secondary entity is an angel.¹¹⁸ This pattern does not completely bypass the world of Judaism after the appearance of Christianity and Gnosis, but continues to exist within a sectarian mystical framework, at the margins of the Rabbinic establishment. The latter was opposed to binitarian worldviews, primarily in order to separate itself from the rival religions.¹¹⁹ These ideas were still current even centuries later, among Jews, Christians, Gnostics, Jewish-Christians, Samaritans and Karaites (e.g., the 9th century Benjamin al-Nahawandi).¹²⁰ The conclusion that follows from this paper is that the Covenant Account constitutes a new and fitting example of this tendency,¹²¹ one that has thus far been unnoticed. Thanks to the exegetical transformations of the text, first in the framework of the other two accounts appearing in *Sefer Yezirah* itself, and thereafter by means of the abundance of both philosophical and Kabbalistic interpretations,¹²² it succeeded in returning with great success to the bosom of the establishment.

Let us briefly mention two further examples of a binitarian approach within the literature of first millennium Jewish mysticism. Joseph Dan has noted in the past the connection existing in this literature between the angel Anpiel and the concept of the “Author of Creation,” as names representing, depending upon the definition of its functions and its nature, the same auxiliary entity.¹²³ Note the following comparison, that appears explicitly in these texts: “Anpiel... as Maker of the World, Anpiel... as Author of Creation.”¹²⁴ If this is so, one may also draw a connection between the characteristics of the Author of Creation, alluded to in the Covenant Account, and the characteristics of Anpiel.

Let us begin with a seemingly marginal detail, but one which suggests that there is perhaps such a connection between the traditions. In general, Anpiel is not mentioned frequently in this literature, making it interesting to note that in one of the sources his fingers are mentioned, specifically: “R. Akiva said: When I ascended,[in order] to gaze at the upper world, I saw in the paths of Heaven... Anpiel the Prince, who with the tips of his fingers played upon the the heaven, *Aravot* .”¹²⁵ That is, the music of the heavens was played by his means. As mentioned earlier, the fingers of the Author of Creation are also mentioned in the Covenant Account. It is possible that the author of this account was also sensitive to musical tones, for his writing is very rhythmic and he often describes the intensive motion of the *sefirot*: they are described as “running and returning,” they pursue his command “like the storm wind, and before his throne they bow down.”

An important feature of the figure of Anpiel is his serving as guardian of the entrance to the highest sanctuary in the Heavenly Chambers. As such, he determines for which human beings the gate will be opened and to whom it will be closed; in par-

particular, he was responsible for Enoch's ascent to the heights of heaven.¹²⁶ That is, he plays a central function in the experience of the chosen son who succeeds in ascending heavenwards; or, in other words, in the connection of revelation between the supernal world and people of this world. Interestingly, most of the section dealing with the *sefirot* within the framework of the Covenant Account deals in practice, as we have seen, with the experience of revelation. It may be that the common tradition which underlies these things is that which creates the connection between the concept of the Author of Creation and the human experience.

Moreover, the status of Anpiel is explained by the fact that "the seals of heavens and earth are given over in his hand." If one is indeed speaking of a similar tradition in the Covenant Account, then the source of the "seal" characteristic of the Sealing Account is already found there, with all the magical aspects involved in this concept.¹²⁷ This may also suggest that the original accounts include far more material than that which is extant today.

The second example is concerned with the *Shiur Qomah* literature. The "Creator" is a central term in this literature, and there is a scholarly debate as to what is meant by it. Does it relate to God Himself, or does it perhaps refer to some entity that is distinct from Him, which assists Him in the processes of creation? That is, does this literature represent a binitarian approach? This question raises in turn the issue of the connection to Gnosticism.¹²⁸ In any event, the discussion of the "Creator" is integrated in this literature within the description of the human experience: R. Ishmael ascends to Heaven and learns secrets "that are concealed from all human beings"; and he is also promised, on the threshold of his learning them, that "I shall tell you the dimensions of our Creator, may He be blessed."¹²⁹ The subject of the measurements,¹³⁰ quantities and "calculations"¹³¹ is also a central subject here, and these measurements, involving myriads upon myriads of parsangs and cubits, are repeatedly enumerated. This tendency is also strengthened by the citation of suitable verses from the Wisdom literature, similar to those mentioned at the beginning of this paper: "who has marked off the heavens with a span" (Isa 40:12), and so on.¹³² In the Covenant Account, as in the *Shiur Qomah* literature, we thus find three components that go together: the phrase, "the Creator"; the human experience of direct or indirect encounter with the Creator (however this concept is understood); and the interest in the measurements of the Creator.

* * * * *

Upon concluding this paper, one may say that if, at the beginning of our discussion, we argued that *Sefer Yezirah* deals with one exclusive subject—namely, the nature of Wisdom or *belimah* upon which the world hangs—at its end we might offer a different formulation. *Sefer Yezirah* deals with the details of a binitarian approach, asserting the existence of a secondary entity to God, one which assists Him in the creation of the world and serves as a mediator between them.

This book was created through the combination of three different answers to this question (in the language used in this paper, three "accounts"), edited into a single coherent whole. The contradictions in contents between the different accounts seem to have remained as they were, but the "stitches" connecting the different accounts to one another are not particularly recognizable, as all three were written in the stylistic pattern of a "numerical saying" and in all three there is a relatively high degree of rhythm.

In the worldview of the Covenant Account, which has a number of sectarian characteristics, there is a “unique Lord,” there is a world, and there is an angel who “holds the balance between them,” who joins them together and makes a covenant between them. To the author of this account, the most attractive aspect of the “covenant” is the ecstatic experience: just as the angels dance about dizzily, turn about and stop in the supernal world, so does his heart run back and forth and then stop.

The Depths Account reflects the process of integration within the establishment. This integration is made possible as the result of a number of changes. This account presents an ethical worldview of a conservative, establishment-oriented character. The secondary entity undergoes great abstraction; it is no longer considered as an angel (an unacceptable approach in the Rabbinic world), but has more abstract attributes—time, space and ethics. Likewise, the argument regarding the abstract nature of Wisdom, it being too deep to investigate and beyond the comprehension of human beings, negates the possibility of human experience thereof and the independent and underground aspect inherent within it.

The author of the Sealing Account took the earlier accounts, learned from them, reworked them, and edited them into a single, quite coherent unit. In many senses, the clock turned backwards in his hands, outside of the Rabbinic establishment. Once again one sees here interest in the experience of connection with the supernal worlds (this time, its main concern is evidently more verbal and not only visionary), to which is added a significant interest in magic. But this magic is to a large extent involved with the physical world, to the extent that the characteristics of this world stand out far more than those of magic. This attribute was evidently one of the reasons why this book’s path into the establishment succeeded.

Notes

- * I wish to thank my father, Daniel Dishon, as well as friends and colleagues who shed light on various matters pertaining to this paper: Noa Dolev-Israeli, Boaz Huss, Menachem Lorberbaum, Meira Polliack, Neta Sobol, Judith Weiss, and Tzahi Weiss. I am also grateful to Prof. Idel, who read this paper and offered his comments before either of us knew it would be dedicated to him.
- 1 See, for example, the summary of this phenomenon in Dan, “*Sefer Yezirah*”; Jospe, “Philosophical Commentaries.”
 - 2 For a selection of partial discussions of the contents of *Sefer Yezirah* and its time, see the bibliography at the end of this paper. A particularly rich bibliography is to be found in Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*.
 - 3 This point of view as such is not new (see, for example, Alloni, “Zunz,” 43), but to the best of my knowledge there is no scholarly study that presents this as unifying all parts of the work.
 - 4 For discussions that contain a detailed, word by word analysis of the text, and not only discussion of its general aspects, see especially: Gruenwald, “Notes”; Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*; *Yezirah*, ed. Gruenwald; *Yezirah*, ed. Hayman.
 - 5 We will suffice with only a few bibliographical allusions: Murphy, *Etz Hayyim*; Hurtado, *One God*; Segal, *Two Powers*; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, Ch. 3.
 - 6 According to source P in the Hayman edition. For details about the different

sources see the next note. In this paper I made extensive use of Hayman's excellent translation, for which I express my gratitude, but also introduced various changes in accordance with the understandings expressed in this paper, without specifically indicating this in every case.

⁷ Explanation of the form of indicating section numbers in *Sefer Yezirah*: following the sign §, there appears the paragraph number in Hayman's edition of *Sefer Yezirah* (which follows the system used in Gruenwald's edition); following the semi-colon I have indicated the number of chapter and mishnah of that same passage in the popular editions of *Sefer Yezirah*, published by Levin-Epstein. If not otherwise marked, I used the short version from the Hayman edition, referred to there as Source K; i.e., MS. Parma 2784.14 (De Rossi 1390), written in 1286 in Italian script, and which is the earliest of all manuscripts of the shorter version. On occasion I used other manuscripts, all of them based on the testimony of Hayman's edition. In presenting, § 1, I made use of Source P—MS. Cincinnatti 523 (short version), written in the 15th century in Spanish script. For §18, I used Source F, British Library Or. 1263 (Margoliouth 600, short version), possibly written in Byzantine script in 1433 or slightly thereafter. For §38, I used Source S—Leiden, Warn 24, Cod. Or. 4762, written in 1540, possibly in Hebron, in Byzantine script. For §§38, 46 and 52, I used a very early manuscript from the 10th century—namely A, which specifically includes the long text, MS. Vatican 299. For a comprehensive discussion of all these sources and additional ones, see the introduction to Hayman's edition of *Sefer Yezirah*.

⁸ See s.v. פּלֵא, Mandelkern, *Concordance*, 948, and Ben-Yehudah, *Dictionary* 10.4942.

⁹ Rashi explains this as follows (ad loc.): “*Al belimah*—upon nothingness.’ There is nothing in the foundation because they stand in the air supported by the arms of the Holy One blessed be He; and cf. Klein, Horowitz and Tzevati, *Sefer Iyov*, 145, who interpret *belimah* as “nothing... naught.”

¹⁰ *b. Hagiga* 12b; and we shall not bring here further lists of “things” upon which the earth stands.

¹¹ See §7; 1.5 and §38; 4.3, and adjacent to n. 28.

¹² Compare to the phrase עוֹמֵק רוֹם (“the dimension/end of above”) in *Sefer Yezirah* (§7; 1.5).

¹³ Cf. Jer 31:36; Isa 40:12.

¹⁴ For further examples of use of terms taken from Wisdom Literature, see, e.g., notes 68, 77 below, and also the section, “On Books and Accounts.”

¹⁵ I have transcribed here the consonants of these Hebrew words alone, as there is some question as to their correct vocalization.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Hayman's edition, ad. loc.

¹⁷ Discussion of this aspect of the book drew much attention among scholars. For more on this matter, see below, near footnotes 82, 94.

¹⁸ For further discussion of these “books,” see Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 3 and end of Ch. 4, including his notes; Wasserstrom, “Further Thoughts”, 216–218.

¹⁹ The connection between *Sefer Yezirah* and the concept of wisdom has already been mentioned frequently in the past (see, e.g., Scholem, “Jewish Gnosis”). However, it has not been presented as the sole subject bridging the different parts of the book. In this context, it is extremely interesting to note the parallel drawn by Liebes

between the opening sentence of *Sefer Yezirah* and the opening words of the Torah, “In the beginning, God created...” and particularly to the *Targum Yerushalmi* of these words: “With wisdom, God created...” In light of this, he sees the opening of *Sefer Yezirah* as a paraphrase of Genesis 1:1. See Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, 33, 165.

- 20 On the longing for order, justice, truth and law as a striking characteristic of the Wisdom Literature, see, e.g., Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 115-118.
- 21 Together with this, one must emphasize the lack in *Sefer Yezirah* of one of the best known characteristics of Wisdom Literature: the femininity of wisdom. By contrast, in the Covenant Account, as we shall see below, we find Wisdom as explicitly masculine.
- 22 Ithamar Gruenwald has suggested that *Sefer Yezirah* be seen as the result of the editing and combination of two different texts: one that deals with the *sefirot* (Chapter 1 in the Levin-Epstein edition), and the other (the rest of the book) concerned with the letters. In his opinion, the opening phrase of the book is a product of the later process of editing and unification (Gruenwald, “Notes”). When I first began my efforts to analyze this book, I accepted this position and used it as a starting point in my quest for a division of the text into secondary units that would lead to a relative unity of contents and style. However, in the end this path led to a dead end. For that reason, I turned to the assumption that underlies this paper: namely that the division into *sefirot* and letters is shared by all of the secondary sections. Gruenwald’s assumption that the opening passage belongs to the editorial stage remains valid. These working assumptions led me to creating what seems to me a higher level of unity, in which the primary problems that remain concentrate on the description of the twelve simple letters, and this in only two of the “accounts.”

Moreover, the approach of Peter Hayman (see especially *Sefer Yezirah*, ed. Hayman, “Introduction”), in seeking a significant text is based upon the search for the earliest text of *Sefer Yezirah* that can be reconstructed, through careful examination of all the extant textual witnesses. In my work here I have made significant use of his edition and, like him, have preferred the shorter version among the three central texts—albeit at times I also made use of the long version. My working method was based upon the following assumptions and criteria: first, that even the earliest extant text constitutes a reworking of earlier materials and that too must to be analyzed in order to reconstruct the underlying process of its creation. Secondly, that the longer versions are not only testament to later glosses, but might have preserved earlier versions not preserved in the short version. Third, that criteria of contents and style constitute a means of deciding among the value of different versions.

- 23 The words appearing in square brackets were chosen from among the alternate readings presented by Hayman in his edition.
- 24 Here and in the rest of the quotations in this article, any addition in brackets is either from one of the other manuscripts, or added by me for sake of clarification.
- 25 This division of the letters will be discussed further along in the paper.
- 26 This is but one of numerous examples that *Sefer Yezirah* has an interest to create a system of typological numbers of components.
- 27 See the discussion below, near footnote 53 and before it.

- ²⁸ Cf. above, near n.11.
- ²⁹ It should be noted that the Divine Throne of Glory is enumerated among the secondary elements of the *sefirot belimah* (§14; 1.12) and is not transcendent. There is basis for the view that this contradiction indicates that the sentence concerning the Throne of Glory is a later gloss, a point upon which I cannot elaborate here. Compare, on the one hand, n. 114, and on the other hand the Depths Account (below, near n.56), and the Covenant Account (below, near n. 98). For a further discussion of God as the center of the world, see Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch 24.
- ³⁰ See, e.g., Hayman, “Was God a Magician?”; Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Chs. 22-23. Regarding the general question as to whether *Sefer Yezirah* may be seen as having magical aspects, opinion is divided. See, in addition to this: Scholem, “The Idea of the Golem,” esp. 169-172; Idel, *Golem*, Ch. 2; Dan, *Sefer Yezirah*, 254; Schäfer, “The Magic of the Golem”; Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 11.
- ³¹ See Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 9.
- ³² On the question of the Jewishness of *Sefer Yezirah*, see e.g. Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 28; Wasserstrom, “Reappraisal,” 21–29.
- ³³ The following is the text of §56; 5.4: “These are the twenty-two letters [on which] Yah, Yahwah, God, the Lord of Hosts, the Living God, the God of Israel, God almighty, *high and lofty, dwelling for ever, and holy is his name* (Is.57:15), [founded] (the universe)”
- ³⁴ See below in the section headed “Editing.”
- ³⁵ See, e.g., the summary in Aloni, “Zunz”; Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 3; Wasserstrom, “Reappraisal,” 2–7.
- ³⁶ Again, opinions are divided as to the criterion for the choice of this specific group of letters. See, especially, Epstein, “Studies,” 185-190; Liebes, “Seven Double Letters”; idem., “Response”; Morag, “Seven Double Letters”; idem., “Response”; Pines, “Points of Similarity,” 111; Kahle, *Geniza*, 184.
- ³⁷ One should emphasize that these verbs are not found in the other two accounts.
- ³⁸ This passage relates to the way in which the letters are produced by the mouth.
- ³⁹ For another use of this root, see above, in the section on the *sefirot* in the Sealing Account—§15; 1.13.
- ⁴⁰ This passage describes the technical method of creating of combinations of letters: all the letters are written in two concentric circles (the “wheel”), the circumference of the upper one being somewhat smaller than that of the lower one, and the circles are rotated in opposite directions to one another. A similar method was used by Abraham Abulafia; see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 23–24. *Oneg* and *nega* are two examples of different combinations of the same letters.
- ⁴¹ For a parallel to this in terms of contents, see §40; 4.12.
- ⁴² The formulation of §18 is taken from Source F (short version). It should be noted that I have skipped the text (and the ensuing discussion) of §§20, 22; 2.6.
- ⁴³ The rings mentioned here may refer to the manner of creating the combination; see n. 40. One should also mention the idiom, טבעת חותם, literally, “sealing ring.”
- ⁴⁴ Compare §15; 1.13, in the section on *sefirot* in the Sealing Account.
- ⁴⁵ From this sentence and many others, it follows that the term *nefesh*, “soul,” relates to the entire human complex of body and soul.

- 46 In the source, “וּפְרֵי בֶטֶן”—i.e., the fruit of the womb; as Hayman himself notes, this formula is evidently erroneous.
- 47 The passage explains how many different permutations may be formed from each number of the letters. From two letters it is possible to create two different permutations; from three, six; and so on. I have omitted the explanation of four, five and six letters.
- 48 The section explains how the letters *bg”d kpr”t* are responsible for the creation of three levels in the creation—the seven planets, the seven days of the week, and the seven apertures in the human head. I have skipped the text of several of the letters in the middle of this passage.
- 49 I have skipped the translation of §43.
- 50 The final paragraph according to source A (long version; see above, n. 7). However, I see no reason to reject it for this reason, as it is consistent with the other parts of this account in its style and contents.
- 51 *b. Berakhot* 55b. One should take note that the proof brought immediately thereafter is based upon the creation of a parallel between the acts of Bezalel and God’s activity, in the spirit of the Wisdom Literature: “It says here, ‘and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship’ (Exod 35:31), and it says there, ‘The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens’ (Prov 3:19).”
- 52 On the “wheel,” see note 40.
- 53 See *b. Sanhedrin* 65b and the references mentioned in note 27.
- 54 The intention of the term *Ein Sof*, “infinite,” is not that the *sefirot* have no ontological boundary—the world of *Sefer Yezirah* is a finite and delimited world, as we have already seen in the first account. This term refers to man’s epistemological ability and not to the characteristics of the objective world per se.
- 55 The author of the Sealing Account testifies in §40: “From here on go out and ponder what the mouth cannot speak, and what the ear cannot hear.” But according to the context, this limitation relates to the huge number of possible permutations, a vastness which a person cannot comprehend. By contrast, according to the author of the Depths Account, the obstacle to knowledge is not quantitative, but rather its essence.
- 56 For the author of the Sealing Account, God’s Habitation (that is, the Throne of Glory) is not transcendent to the world, but the result of one of the *sefirot*. Compare what is said above in n. 29.
- 57 This refers to the following passages: §27; 3.2; §§58-60; 6.1-2.
- 58 For greater elaboration on the concept of the *Teli*, see, for example, Sharf, *Donnolo*, Ch. 3; idem., *Byzantium*, 178-179; Vajda, “Commentaire,” 32-33.
- 59 See also in Hayman’s edition, §50; 5.3.
- 60 See the summary of these claims in Hayman’s edition.
- 61 It is difficult to ignore the connection between the Depths Account and *Midrash Temurah* (Eisenstein, *Ozar*, 580-583). Thus for example, six of the opposites presented in the Depths Account are also represented there, Ch. 2 (in practice, the only pair lacking there is “rulership/slavery”). Near the end of Ch. 3 of that midrash, there is a paraphrase of the next passage from our account (§7; 1.5). Zunz

(Zunz-Albeck, *Ha-Derashot*, 57); and Jellinek (*Beit Midrash*, Part I, xx) claimed that this midrash is from the 13th century. But does not the similarity between the two works suggest that *Midrash Temurah* as it is known to us had a more ancient source, closer in time to *Sefer Yezirah*? Indeed, Yehudah Liebes devoted a special chapter in his book to this parallel text (Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 7). The difference between our respective claims lies in my focus on the parallelism between this midrash and the Depths Account, specifically, and not to all of *Sefer Yezirah*. In any event, other scholars have also speculated that this midrash has an earlier layer than the 13th century (Liebes, *ibid.*; Freudenthal, *Ha-Avir*, 212.) It may also be possible to connect between the Depths Account and the world of ideas mentioned in Pines, “Points of Similarity.”

- ⁶² Attention to the phonetic aspect also appears below, in the Covenant Account; see §26; 6.1: “*Mem* is silent and *Shin* hisses.”
- ⁶³ See §17; 2.3.
- ⁶⁴ See below §23; 3.1.
- ⁶⁵ See below for the discussion in §38; 4.2, as part of the Covenant Account.
- ⁶⁶ Some of the versions have here the word *kokhavim* (“stars”) instead of *koveshim* (dominant ones); however, it should be noted that the discussion of the three fathers occurs in connection with the concept of the king, a concept that belongs to the semantic field of rulership. This will make it easier for us to distinguish that words belonging to this semantic field also appear in the following description of the seven double letters, that is: “strong and weak...rulership and slavery.” It would therefore seem that the term “seven (dominant ones)” refers to the seven double letters as described in the Depths Account.
- ⁶⁷ In the source the word appears twice כמלך כמלך —“like a king, like a king.”
- ⁶⁸ A combination of Eccles 3:1 (“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven”) and Eccles 7:14, “God has made the one as well as the other”). On the former verse, Rashi writes: “Every matter”—to every thing, all things are called matter [*hafazim*] in mishnaic language.”
- ⁶⁹ The addition in brackets is taken from Source A (long text), and see n. 7 above.
- ⁷⁰ מהרבים והולכין — based on *b. Hagiga* 12a, “the sea got wider and wider.” Compare this to the discussion in the Sealing Account, above, near n. 30.
- ⁷¹ And one should note the equivocal nuances in the phrase - “Concerning this thing the covenant was made.” The root meaning “thing” (*db”r*) is the same as that for “word” or “speech”; while the root *krt* implies both making a covenant as well as cutting or stopping.
- ⁷² Attention has been drawn to its sectarian nature in particular by Ithamar Gruenwald (Gruenwald, “Notes,” 486-488).
- ⁷³ *m. Hagiga* 2.1, and cf. the words of Ben Sira quoted at the beginning of this paper. Particularly extensive literature has been written about this tension; see, most recently, Halbertal, *Seter ve-Giluy*.
- ⁷⁴ One should take note that this expression appears twice in the Covenant Account. Yehudah Liebes has already called attention to the nature of the human experience in this passage. See Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 8, and see there for further details.
- ⁷⁵ See particularly the designation of these supreme entities in III Enoch as “hewers of

fire” (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §9).

⁷⁶ Perhaps this is the focus of R.Saadya Gaon’s veiled criticism of the anthropomorphic structure of *Sefer Yezirah*. See Ben-Shammai, “Saadya”, 6–9.

⁷⁷ On *hadavar* (“thing” or “word”), see above, n.71; Prov 25.2; and several times in Rabbinic Literature, e.g., *b. Hagiga* 12a.

⁷⁸ See Idel, *Golem*, chap. 2.

⁷⁹ Cf. Ben-Shammai, “Saadya”, 3–4.

⁸⁰ As in Idel’s paper of that name; see there for numerous examples.

⁸¹ That is, that which is customarily referred to in Kabbalistic research (following Scholem’s definition) by the name “theurgy” refers here to the relation between man and the world of angels instead of to that between man and God.

⁸² For a general discussion of this pattern, both in Wisdom Literature and in other parts of the Bible, see Zakovitch, *Al sheloshah ve-al Arba’ah*; Roth, “Numerical Sayings.”

⁸³ Roth, *ibid.*, esp. 2, 52-59, 88-100.

⁸⁴ See Rofé, *Mavo*, 435-437.

⁸⁵ For examples, see, e.g., Roth, *op. cit.*, 55-58, 90-93.

⁸⁶ *m. Abot* 1.2; for many additional examples, see the above-mentioned studies of Zakovitch and of Roth.

⁸⁷ On the formal nature of this pattern, see Roth, *ibid.*, 5-7.

⁸⁸ Roth, *ibid.*, 94-95 and Zakovitch, *‘Al Sheloshah*, throughout the book.

⁸⁹ One should also relate this to the claim that these numerical sayings have characteristics of oral literature (Zakovitch, *Sheloshah*, 3-7; Roth, *Numerical Sayings*, 1), and this may be indicative of the background of our account.

⁹⁰ Roth, *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹¹ See, e.g., Scholem, “Jewish Gnosis,” esp. 23-26.

⁹² Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 2.

⁹³ See the last paragraphs, and especially near n. 10 above.

⁹⁴ Rofé, *Mavo*, 435. The reference is to *j. Sheqalim* 5.1 (Sussman ed., col. 618) and he continues by suggesting that this term may already be found in the Bible; see Ps 71:15.

⁹⁵ As has already been noted by, e.g., Alloni, “Zunz,” 55.

⁹⁶ See above, n. 20.

⁹⁷ On the possible nexus of the Muslim “Science of Balance” (8th to 10th centuries) see Wasserstrom, “Further Thoughts,” 216–217.

⁹⁸ *b. Yoma* 54b, and compare with the other two accounts; for discussion, see near nn. 29 and 56.

⁹⁹ See above, near n. 62.

¹⁰⁰ See Hayman’s remarks on §46.

¹⁰¹ The chest is connected to air and to speech and as such is connected to the covenant of the tongue, with its balancing aspect.

¹⁰² This reading is taken from Source A (long version); and cf. n. 7 above.

¹⁰³ Brought according to the version of Source S (short version), and see n. 7 above.

- 104 This text is taken from Source A (long version) and see n. 7 above.
- 105 For an allusion to the possibility of some loss, see below, after the text of n. 127.
- 106 See n. 33 above and near it.
- 107 1 Sam 12:28.
- 108 Cohen, *Shiur Qomah*, 15–16, 43 ff.
- 109 Cf. the very interesting analyses of this passage in Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Part 4; idem., *Het'o shel Elisha*, 102-104.
- 110 Hayman's edition reads here: סודו (His secret). But in *Yezirah*, ed. Levin-Epstein, יסודו — that is, the basis of the letters.
- 111 משכן כמים — in the source: משכן באש כמים, “he draw them out of the fire like water.”
- 112 i.e., seven stars.
- 113 It should be emphasized that the seven stars and twelve constellations are mentioned explicitly only in the Sealing Account. They are alluded to in the Depths Account, but not explicitly. Note also that ten verbs describe Abraham's actions and ten others – God's actions.
- 114 This contradiction may be explained by an alternative explanation—that this reduction only appears in one isolated sentence (§12; 1.6). It may therefore simply be a later gloss. See also in n. 29.
- 115 See the discussion above, near n. 60.
- 116 It is worth emphasizing that we discuss here only the relative chronology of the different accounts in relation to one another, and not their actual date.
- 117 As opposed to a dualistic approach, which emphasizes the tensions between God and the additional entity. On this concept see Segal, *Two powers*; Hurtado, *One God*.
- 118 Segal, *Two powers*, esp. 3-158; Hurtado, *One God*, esp. 1-40.
- 119 See esp. Segal, *Two powers*, 182-205; Fossum, *The Name of God*.
- 120 Numerous studies have been written on this subject; see, e.g., the following works, which in turn contain extensive bibliography: Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, see index under “ditheism”; idem., *Ascensions*, 85; Fossum, “Kyrios Jesus”; idem., “The Angel of the Lord”; idem., “The Magharians”; Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, 19, 333; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 167–206; idem., “Sahrastani on the Magariyya”
- 121 The sectarian aspect also emerged from the text itself; see above, near nn. 72–73.
- 122 See n. 1 above.
- 123 Dan, “Anpiel.”
- 124 Schäfer, *Synopse*, §26; 245.
- 125 Schäfer, *Synopse*, §873. May this be an allusion to the Pythagorean idea of the connection between the heavenly spheres and music? R. Joseph Ashkenazi continued this line of thought at the beginning of his commentary on *Sefer Yezirah*, found in the Levin-Epstein edition. For a discussion of the devolution of this line of thought in the late Middle Ages, see Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, Ch. 17.
- 126 Schäfer, *ibid.*, §9; 26, 245-247.
- 127 One ought to note that the term קצה, *qazeh* (“edge”), that appears in the Sealing Account in connection with the concept of the seal (§15; 1.13) also appears in the Covenant Account (§38; 5.3) and may therefore strengthen this conjecture.

- 128 See for example Gaster, “Das Shiur Komah”; Idel, “The World of Angels”; Scholem, “Shiur Komah”; idem., *Major Trends*, 65.
- 129 Cohen, *Shiur Qomah*, 43, 52, etc.
- 130 See, e.g., Cohen, *ibid.*, 27 — מידת הקומה, *middat ha-qomah*, “the size of the body”.
- 131 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 28.
- 132 Cohen, *ibid.*, 36, 51, and many more.

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