

Moses Cordovero. Pardes Rimmonim (The Orchard of Pomegranates)

Provisional working translation by Stephan Claassen, 2024

Gate 1. Chapter 1.

The First Gate which is called “Ten and not nine”.

It is well-known and eminent that all those who engage in this hidden wisdom unanimously consent that the number of the Sefirot is ten, and there is no disagreement at all in this matter.

And see, this is one of the matters on which a covenant was made with the wisdom of the Sefirot, and see, among is is the Book of Formation (Sefer Yetzirah) which is attributed to Abraham our father, peace be upon him. But there are some who attribute it to Rabbi Akiva, yet this is not agreed upon.

And see, the words of this book are profound and lofty, and they are hidden from the eyes of the intellect, [from] the glance of those who look carefully. And even if there are many different interpretations of it, we still, in all of its parts, need those who explain. And nevertheless we will explain its matters with all that is within the possibility of the limitations of our meagre intellect.

And this is what it says: *“Ten Sefirot without what-ness, the number of ten fingers, five opposite five, and the single covenant corresponding in the middle, in the word of the tongue and in the circumcision of the genitals.”* [Sefer Yetzirah 1:3] Until here the citation.

It came up in our mind not to explain this verse, because its depths and its secrets are hidden from us, as they are certainly above our intellect, and there is no person who can descend to the depth of its language except Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, peace be upon him, and Rabbi Akiva, peace be upon him, “whose abode is not among the mortals” [Daniel 2:11]. But because of the obligation that is upon us we will interpret it with strenght of hand. And what should be examined more closely?

The first is that it says “Ten Sefirot without what(-ness), the number”, which in truth is superfluous, because it would be proper to say: “Ten Sefirot without what(-ness) corresponding to fingers”; why [does it then add] “number”? Secondly: it says “five”, why should it read thus [that is: making the transition from talking about the Sefirot to that of numbers]? The third is: according to its matters there are eleven of them, since they are “five against five” plus the covenant in the middle, which makes [a total of] eleven. The fourth is that its saying “with the word of the tongue and with the covenant of the genitals” seems to show that there are two harmonizers, but why two? The fifth is: what is its intention to elucidate to us whether they correspond to the fingers, because this seems to be unrelated to the topic at hand. The sixth: the moment that it descends to explain by means of [bodily] limbs, it would have been proper to explain all the limbs to which the Sefirot allude, as we will explain in the Gate of the Soul (XXXI), chapter 4, with help of HaShem.

And it is said that the author of this book intended to conceal in this chapter the entire wisdom of the Sefirot and to compel it. And he says that they are “Ten Sefirot”, and because of his saying that they are ten [a number], he will draw out a little on the topic of limitation and corporeality.

After they have been divided into number he says that they are “without what(-ness) [BeliMah]”, the explanation is [that BeliMah consists of] two words: without [Beli] what(-ness) [Mah], and the intention is: without quiddity/essence. Because although the sentence of our mouth has not abstained from saying [that the Sefirot are] ten, the true believe is that they are Beli Mah, without quiddity/essence. And the intention [is] that they do not have an essence that is comprehensible to human beings, because they are are not limited and grasped, as they are without limit or corporeality. And that which does not have corporeality is not grasped except with the heart of the wise among the people of Israel by way of vision as in prophecy. And the reason for the number ten , at the same time them being without what(-ness) will be explained in the Gates that follow, with help of HaShem.

And he says “ *the number of ten*” etc. so that we will not come to say under great pressure, due to the limitedness of our knowledge, that in reality there is nothing but the simple One, therefore he says that they are of the reality of number.

And the expression for the Sefirot is an expression of number, as number governs them even if they are without what-ness. And the evidence for this is that their name, “SeFiRot” (ספירות) has the meaning of number (miSPaR, מספר), as we have explained. And to establish that they are number and that their number is ten, he says: “*the number of ten fingers*”. And Scripture says: “*When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers*” (Psalm 8:4).

And see, from scripture it is established that the creation of the heavens and their forces is through the fingers, which are other names for the Sefirot of the Supernal King.

And see, there are 10 fingers. And if this is so, the conclusion is that the Sefirot, with whom the world was created, they [are] 10.

“Five opposite five”. There is a difficulty to it that Scripture says: “*Further, My hand founded the earth, and My right hand measured out the heavens*”(Isaiah 48:13). See, we find that the heavens are the work of the hand of G-d [as probably an abbreviation was used in the original manuscript, it would also be possible to read אחד, “the work of *one* hand”] which are five fingers, and they are only five Sefirot and not ten. To this he says: “Five opposite five”, because if the heavens are the work of a hand of G-d [or: of one hand], and the earth is the work of a hand of G-d [or: of one hand], we see that for sure the two of them together are ten [fingers], and this is “five opposite five”, five from the right hand and five from the left hand, the right hand for making the heavens, the left hand for making the earth.

“and the single covenant corresponding in the middle”. There is a problem to it, as from this topic there is no necessity, because we could say that they [= the fingers] are five or that they are twenty. And factually there are twenty fingers, ten on the hands and ten on the feet, their sum [being] twenty. [And thus we could say about the Sefirot also]. What you could say [is] that the ten “fingers” that are on the feet, they are shadow and resemblance of the ten that are on the hands, but there are always only ten Sefirot, but that the allusion is that the ten Sefirot in [the world of] Beriah are shadow and clothing for the ten Sefirot that are in [the world of] Atsilut, as we will explain in the Gate of Atsilut, Beriah, Yetsirah, Asiya [Gate XVI], with help of HaShem.

If thus, we might say that they are always only five, and the five left ones are shadow for the five right ones, and the Sefirot they are always only five, or the conclusion is drawn again and we might say that they are twenty. To this [= to avoid these interpretations] it is necessary that the two of them are in one house, in his saying “and a single covenant” etc.

And the general principle of the matters is, as we have found unity and a unifying covenant between five and five, that we will find that the five right ones and the five left ones are one matter and one subject, that their sum is ten Sefirot. Which we did not find between the ten [fingers] of the hand and the ten on the feet, since we have seen that they are two [different] arrangements, each one [an arrangement] of ten, one shadow and clothing of the other. And the harmonizers between five and five are: the tongue - harmonizing between the fingers-, and: the covenant of the genitals - between the ten that are on the feet -.

And on the Sefirot, on the subject that they are “five opposite five”; in this matter the commentators have given two explanations. The first [explanation] is that the Sefirot are arranged in two arrangements. The first arrangement is: Keter, Chochmah, Binah, Gedolah, Gevurah, these are five, and they say that they serve to direct the upper ones. And Tif’eret, Netsach, Hod, Yesod and Malchut, this is the second arrangement, to direct the lower ones. And although there is no subject telling [us] that they serve to direct the upper ones nor the lower ones, this is [nevertheless] accepted among us. Nevertheless on the subject of the division of the Sefirot, they [= the commentators] have aimed rightly, because this is the opinion of Rashbi of blessed memory in some places, especially on the subject of the Tefilin, because the four portions [texts in the bayit] of the head are Chochmah and Binah, Gedolah and Gevurah, and [of the bayit] on the hand they are Tif’eret, Netsach, Hod and Yesod, thus its explanation in the Zohar (Parashat Vaetchanan, III.264a). And if these matters involve intense meditation, because it is written that the four portions are the four letters [of the Tetragram; see Tikkunei haZohar (Haqdamot) 3a] , if this is so, it [then] follows for us that the Sefirot are divided into two arrangements according to the words of the commentators.

And thus on the subject of the chariots in the Sefirot, its explanation in the Tikkunim (Tikkunei haZohar, Haqdamot 3; Tikkunei Zohar Hadash 111) [is] that the face of Adam on the throne is Chochmah (חכמה) [also spelt as] כח מה, power of What (מה), as the numerical value of Adam (אדם) [מה and אדם both have the numerical value of 45], the eagle [is] Binah, the lion Chesed and the bull Gevurah; this is the chariot up high. And below it is a second chariot , [where] the face of Adam [is] Tif’eret, and Netsach, Hod and Yesod [are] lion, bull and eagle [respectively] this is the second chariot. And upper Keter complements everything above, and Malkut complements everything below. See, this divides the Sefirot in two arrangements as we have mentioned. And besides these there are many [other] indispensable things [to mention], but we will not make it long [here] so as not to stray from what we intend.

And see, along the line of this explanation we will [now further] explain this Mishna [from Sefer Yetsirah]. Which is that Tif’eret is “a single covenant” which rises very high with the mystery of Da’at, and is connecting the upper ones to the lower ones by means of its going upwards in the three first Sefirot and its harmonizing the arms, and emanating in the Netsachs [= Netsach and Hod] and in Yesod and Malkut. See that there is “*the single covenant ... in the word of the tongue and in the circumcision of the genitals*” “*...corresponding in the middle...*”, [its] explanation: in the middle of

the ten upper fingers, the harmonizer is Tif'eret who is called "the word of the tongue" as I will explain.

And he says: "a single covenant" because the subject of the covenant is the subject of divorcing and cutting, and by means of the cutting of this matter the knot of the covenant is made, and this is the subject of the covenant.

And some read יחוד "union" where some read יחיד "single", and all amount to the same thing, although best chosen is יחוד "union", because by means of the covenant it is the union, which is the knot of the matter, its force and its union. And some want to connect "the word of the tongue" to Binah, but according to our method it will be explained [to refer to] Tif'eret, although "tongue" is [also] another name for Binah, though not for Tif'eret. This being so, he does not say "tongue" but "word of the tongue", which is the Sound and the Voice that goes out from the tongue, meaning to say: by means of the tongue. And see, the Sound is the sum of water, Fire and Air, as is well-known, and these are the three aspects of Tif'eret, as Air is the harmonizer between the Water and Fire of Chesed and Gevurah [respectively]. And see, he does not aim at the actual limb which is the tongue, since then it would become problematic as they [the Sefirot] would be eleven with the harmonizer, but the harmonizer is the Voice which is Tif'eret, in the mystery of its ascent to Binah, which is the tongue which is the Shofar, as from there the Voice goes out, the sum of Water, Fire and Air, and this is the aspect of Tif'eret that rises upwards between the three first ones [Keter, Chochmah and Binah] and harmonizes between Gedolah and Gevurah, indicating the connection of the five upper ones with the five lower ones, and as we will explain in the Gate of the Arrangements of the Special Names [Gate XXI] with help of HaShem.

"And the circumcision of the מעור (genitals)", this is the covenant of the circumscision, and the explanation of מעור just as [in] "as the embracement (מער) of a man and his companion" (1 Kings 7:36), as our Sages, may their memory be a blessing, have explained: "as the embracement (מער), as the union of a man with his wife" [Talmud Bavli, Yoma 54a/b], who is the woman. And the intention is the unity that exists between the ten fingers of the feet by means of the genitals that are unifying them. And this explanation is necessary, as "the word of the tongue" is the one unifying the ten fingers of the hands, and "the circumcision of the genitals" unifies the ten fingers of the feet, from what he explains in the sixth chapter [of Sefer Yetzirah], and this is what it says: "He cut for him the covenant between the ten fingers of his feet, and between the fingers of his hands, and this is the covenant of the tongue.", end of citation. And see, this mishna has [now] been explained in the manner of the explanation which the commentators gave on the subject of "five opposite five".