The Ten Sefirot
These are little children, youngsters, as is written: Make two cherubim of gold (Exodus 25:18).  


To which site? The site toward which all eyes gaze. Which is that? Opening of the eyes. There you will discover that the concealed ancient one, susceptible to questioning, created these. Who is that? Who. The one called End of Heaven above, whose domain extends over everything. Since it can be questioned, yet remains concealed and unrevealed, it is called Who. Beyond, there is no question.

25. Make two cherubim... In BT Sukkah 5b, Rabbi Abbahu interprets the word קצרים (kerov), “cherub,” as בקראי (be-rayy), “like a child.” The plump childlike angels of Christian art derive either from this tradition or from the Greco-Roman Erotes, “loves.” Here Rabbi Shim’on relates the golden cherubim to the golden wreaths of the Song of Songs, concluding that both images allude to children.

26. Opening of the eyes פתח עיניים (Petah einayim). The phrase originates in Genesis 38:14, where it means “the entrance to Einayim,” a village where Tamar seduced her father-in-law, Judah. The midrash on Genesis (Bereshit Rabbah 85:7) discovers a deeper meaning: “Rabbi [Yehudah the Prince] said, ‘We have searched through the entire Bible and have not found a place called Petah Einayim. What is Petah Einayim?’ This indicates that she [Tamar] gazed at the opening toward which all eyes gaze and said, ‘May it be the divine will that I not leave this house empty.’” In the Zohar, this opening is identified with Shekinah, gateway to the divine. See 3:7b–72a.

27. Who היא (H). Binah, the Divine Mother, is called Who. A spiritual seeker may inquire about Her, but such questions do not yield ordinary answers. The identity of the divine is discovered only in a realm beyond words. The mystical name Who becomes a focus of meditation, as question turns into quest. See Shim’on Lavi, KP, 1:91a: “Concerning everything that cannot be grasped, its question constitutes its answer.”

See Zohar 1:29b–30a, 45b, 85b–86a, 237b; 2126b–2127a, 138a, 139b, 226a, 231b.

28. End of Heaven above See Deuteronomy 4:32: For ask now of primal days, which were before you: from the day that God created humankind on earth, and from one end of heaven to the other. In BT Hagigah 11b, this verse is interpreted as imposing a limit on cosmological speculation: “You may inquire concerning from one end of heaven to the other, but you may not inquire concerning what is above, what is below, what came before, what will come after.” See M Hagigah 2b; Bereshit Rabbah 1:10.

These restrictions on cosmological speculation recall the Gnostic striving after “the knowledge of who we were, what we have become, what we were, where we have been thrown, where we hasten, from what we are redeemed, what birth is and what rebirth.” (Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus 78:2). See Zohar 1:30a; Moses de León, Sheqel ha-Qodesh, 31; idem, Sefer ha-Rimmon, 20, 375; idem, Seid Eser Sefirot Be-limah, 371.

29. Beyond... The realms beyond Binah, namely, Hokhmah, Keter, and Ein Sof, are so unknowable that no question concerning them can even be formulated.
"This end of heaven is called Who. There is another below, called What." 30 What distinguishes the two? The first, concealed one—called Who—can be questioned. Once a human being questions and searches, 31 contemplating and knowing rung after rung to the very last rung—one once reaches there: What? What do you know? What have you contemplated? For what have you searched? All is concealed, as before.

"Concerning this mystery it is written: What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?" (Lamentations 2:13). When the holy Temple was destroyed, a voice cried out: ‘What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?’ I take What as a witness to you. Every single day I have called witnesses against you, since days of old, as is written: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day (Deuteronomy 30:19). 32 I compare you to What, precisely! 33 I crowned you with holy crowns, gave you dominion over the world, as is written: Is this the city that was called perfect crown of beauty, joy of all the earth? (Lamentations 2:15). I called you Jerusalem built up, a city bound together (Psalms 122:3). Now, What can I liken to you, [to console you]? (Lamentations, ibid., 13). 34 Just as you sit desolate, so it is above, as it were. Just as now, the holy people do not enter you in holy array, so I swear to you that I Myself will not enter above until your inhabitants enter you below. 35 This is your consolation: I compare this rung to you completely. 36 But now that you are here, your ruin is vast as the ocean (ibid.). 37 Yet if you say you cannot endure or be healed, then Who will heal you (ibid.), really! That concealed, high rung in which all exists will heal you and raise you up.

30. What הוה (Mah), a name for Shekhinah; last of the ten sefirot, daughter of Binah. See Zohar 2:127a. Binah and Shekhinah comprise the two ends of heaven, above and below Til’eret, who is called Heaven.

31. and searches שומש, Umphashpesh. Cr reads here: שומש, u-mitpashbet, “and expands.” See Bahir 134 (194); and Azriel of Gerona, Perush ha-Aggadot, 39: “Thought expands (הוספתי, mitpashbetet) and ascends to its source. When it reaches there, it is stopped and can ascend no further.”

32. I call heaven and earth... Earth symbolizes Shekhinah.

33. I compare you to What, precisely! Israel resembles Shekhinah perfectly.

34. What can I liken... Again, Israel and Shekhinah (What) are compared.

35. I Myself will not enter... The blessed Holy One promises not to enter the heavenly Jerusalem, Shekhinah, until the earthly Jerusalem is restored. See Tanhuma, Pequdei 1: “There is a Jerusalem above aligned with Jerusalem below. Out of His love for the one below, He fashioned another above... He has sworn that His presence will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until the earthly Jerusalem is rebuilt.” See Revelation 21:2; Targum Yonatan, Psalms 122:3; BT Ta'anit 5a; Zohar 3:80b (ST), 123b, 183b, 231a; 3:35b, 68b, 147b.

36. this rung... Shekhinah.

37. But now that you are here, your ruin is vast... Now that Israel has fallen to the low state of exile, her ruin is vast as the ocean, another name for Shekhinah, who shares Israel’s exile.
“Who is End of Heaven above; What is End of Heaven below. Jacob inherited this, running from end to end (Exodus 26:28),38 from first end, Who, to last end, What, for he stands in the middle. So, Who created these.”

Rabbi Shim’on said, “El’azar, my son, cease your words,39 so that the concealed mystery on high, unknown to any human, may be revealed.”

Rabbi El’azar was silent.

Rabbi Shim’on wept and paused for a moment. Then he said, “El’azar, what is these?40 If you answer, ‘Stars and constellations,’ they are always visible there and were created by What, as is said: By the word of YHWH the heavens were made (Psalms 33:6).42 As for things concealed, such would not be referred to as these, for that word indicates something revealed. This mystery was only revealed one day when I was at the seashore. Elijah43 came and asked me, ‘Rabbi, do you know the meaning of Who created these?’ I answered, ‘These are the heavens and their array, the work of the blessed Holy One. Human beings should contemplate them and bless Him, as is written: When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, ... YHWH our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth! (Psalms 8:4, 10).

38. running from end to end A description of the central wooden beam of the Tabernacle in the desert. The Zohar applies this description to Til’eret, the central se’irah, symbolized by Jacob, who spans the sefirot from Binah (Who) to Shekhinah (What). See Zohar 1:148b (ST).

39. cease your words תִּהְמוּ וּסְמָע. Pesqah melbakh. The phrase could also be translated: “utter your words.” See BT Hagigah 15a–b: הַרְקִיקָה וְסֶמֶךְ, pesqah b pesaqekha, “Recite for me your verse”; cf. Zohar 1:238b. “Cease” fits the context of our passage, but the ambiguity may be intentional, in which case a better rendering would be: “Complete your words,” or “Cut your words.”

40. these In the verse from Isaiah 40:26: Lift up your eyes and see: Who created these? Now that the mystical meaning of Who has been established, Rabbi Shim’on explores the meaning of these.

41. they are always visible there So why would the verse say, Lift up your eyes and see, implying that there is something new to see?

42. By the word of YHWH... The word of YHWH symbolizes Shekhinah, who conveys the divine essence. Thus the heavens were made by Her (also known as What), not by Binah (Who).

See Zohar 1:115b; 3:191a, 193b.

43. Elijah According to the Bible (2 Kings 11:12), the prophet Elijah did not die a normal death but was carried off to heaven in a chariot of fire. He became associated with the Messianic age (Malachi 3:23–24) and in rabbinic tradition is described as “still existing” (BT Bava Batra 121b) and revealing divine secrets to righteous humans (BT Bava Metz’a 59b).

In Kabbalah mystical experiences are known as revelations of Elijah. See Scholem, On the Kabbalah, 19–21; Zohar 1:151a; 3:221a, 231a; ZIH 59d. In Zohar 3:241b Elijah turns to Rabbi Shim’on for instruction! Elsewhere (ZIH 6yd, 7od, 73c [ShS]) Elijah encourages him to reveal the secrets and says (62c), “My words will be written by you.”
"Elijah said to me, 'Rabbi, the word was concealed with the blessed Holy One, and He revealed it in the Academy on High." Here it is:

When Conceived of all Concealed\(^{45}\) verged on being revealed, it produced at first a single point,\(^{46}\) which ascended to become thought. Within, it drew all drawings, graved all engravings,\(^{47}\) carving within the concealed holy lamp\(^{48}\) a graving of one hidden design, holy of holies, a deep structure emerging from thought, called מלא (Mi), Who, origin of structure.\(^{49}\) Existent and non-existent, deep and hidden, called by no name but Who.

Seeking to be revealed, to be named, it garbed itself in a splendid, radiant garment and created לבנה (elleh), these.\(^{50}\) מלא (Elleh) attained the name: these letters joined with those, culminating in the name אלהים (Elohim).\(^{51}\) Until it created לבנה (elleh), it did not attain the name אלהים (Elohim).\(^{52}\) Based on this mystery, those who sinned with the Golden Calf said "לבנה (Elleh), These, are your gods, O Israel!" (Exodus 32:8).\(^{53}\) Just as מלא (mi) is combined with מלא (elleh), so the name אלהים (Elohim) is constantly polysemous.\(^{54}\) Through this mystery, the universe exists.

"Then Elijah flew off; I did not see him. From him I discovered the word, whose mysterious secret I have demonstrated."

Rabbi Elazar and all the Companions came and bowed down in front of him. Weeping, they said, 'If we have come into the world only to hear this, it is enough."\(^{55}\)

---

44. Academy on High The Heavenly Academy, where souls of the righteous study Torah with God.
45. Concealed of all Concealed Ein Sof or Keter, the most hidden recesses of divinity.
46. single point The primordial point of Hokhmah ("Wisdom"), the first emanation.
47. it drew all drawings... The sefirot were prefigured within divine thought before they emerged in the process of emanation.
48. concealed holy lamp Hokhmah.
49. graving of one hidden design... Binah, the origin of the structure of the seven lower sefirot.
50. created לבנה (elleh), these Binah emanated the seven lower sefirot, which are less hidden than Binah and therefore referred to as these.
51. these letters joined... יהוה (Elohim) The letters יהוה (elleh) (these) joined with the letters יהוה (Mi) (who) to form the divine name אלהים (Elohim). See Zohar 2:105a.
52. Until it created... Binah was not called אלהים (Elohim) until She emanated the seven lower sefirot.
53. "לבנה (Elleh), These, are your gods..." Their sin was that they separated the lower, more concrete sefirot (לבנה [elleh], these) from their mysterious source, Binah (יהוה [Mi], Who), and worshiped these alone.
54. constantly polysemous The name Elohim refers not only to Binah, but also to Gevarah and Shekinah, as well as to angels and human judges. See Moses de León, Sefer ha-Mishqal, 42–43.
55. "If we have come..." Similar exclamations appear in rabbinic literature and often in the Zohar. See Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana 13; Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah on 3:11; Qohelet Rabbah on 6:2; Qohelet Zuta 5:17; BT Berakhot 16a, 24b; Shabbat 41a; Zohar 1:148b, 164b, 240a; 2:99a, 121b, 122a, 193b; 3:26a; KP 1:20d.
Time was granted to him. He emerged trembling, his eyes streaming with tears. Quivering, he cried, "Happy is the share of the righteous in that world! Happy is the share of the son of Yohai who has attained this! Of him is written: So that I may endow those who love Me with substance and fill their treasures (Proverbs 8:21)."  

Rabbi Shim'on opened, "I have put רָאָשִׁית (Be-reshit), In the beginning. My words in your mouth (Isaiah 51:16). How vital it is for a human being to engage in Torah day and night! For the blessed Holy One listens to the voice of those who occupy themselves with Torah, and every word innovated in Torah by one engaged in Torah fashions one heaven.

"We have learned: The moment a new word of Torah originates from the mouth of a human being, that word ascends and presents herself before the blessed Holy One, who lifts that word, kisses her, and adorns her with seventy crowns—engraved and inscribed. But an innovated word of wisdom ascends and settles on the head of יְשֵׁי (Tsaddiq), Righteous One—Vitality of the Worlds. From there, it flies and soars through 70,000 worlds, ascending to the Ancient of Days. All the words of the Ancient

Yitshak when it was decreed that he was to die.

The theme of a holy person remaining on earth appears in a contemporary thirteenth-century Spanish hagiography, Vida de Santa Oria, composed by Gonzola de Berceo. There St. Orea ascends to heaven and sees her reward as a throne but is told that for now she must return to earth and continue her spiritual practice. See Wineman, Mystic Tales from the Zohar, 28–29.

172. So that I may endow those who love Me with substance... According to rabbinc tradition, this verse describes the reward of the righteous in the afterlife. See M Arot 5:19, Uqtsin 3:12; Pesiqa de-Rav Kahana, nis-paḥim, Vezot Haberakhah, 451; BT Sanhedrin 100a; Zohar 1:135a, 206a, 242b; 2:166b.

173. the blessed Holy One Til'yeveit.

174. seventy crowns... The number seventy appears in the context of revelation in BT Shabbat 88b: "Rabbi Yoḥanan said, ‘...Every utterance emerging from the mouth of Power branched into seventy languages.’” See Beridbar Rabbah 13:16, where Torah is compared to wine: “Just as יין (yayin), wine, is numerically equivalent to seventy, so Torah assumes seventy faces.”

See Sefer Hanokh (Beit ha-Midrash, 2116); Ibn Ezra, introduction to Commentary on the Torah; Zohar x 26a (Tz), 47b, 54a.

175. innovated word of wisdom A new mystical insight, which rises higher than other new interpretations. Cf. OK: “One is able to innovate in Torah matters that Moses himself was not permitted to reveal.”

176. יְשֵׁי (Tsaddiq), Righteous One—Vitality of the Worlds Yesod, who channels the flow of emanation to Shekhinah and the worlds below.

On various senses of the title “Vitality of the Worlds,” see Daniel 12:7; Mekhilta, Pshat 16; Bereshit Rabbah 1:5; Schäfer, Synopsis zur Hekhalot-Literatur, § 275; Zohar 1:132a, 135b, 167b.

177. 70,000 worlds Corresponding to the seven lower sefirot.

178. Ancient of Days יְשֵׁי (Yeshi), אֲדֻתָּם (Adotam). See Daniel 7:9: The Ancient of Days sits, the hair on His head like clean fleece. His
of Days are words of wisdom, conveying supernal, concealed mysteries. When that secret word of wisdom, innovated here, ascends, it joins those words of the Ancient of Days. Along with them, it ascends and descends, entering eighteen hidden worlds, which no eye has seen, O God, but You (Isaiah 64:3). Emerging from there, they roam until they arrive, full and complete, presenting themselves before the Ancient of Days. At that moment, the Ancient of Days inhales the aroma of that word and it pleases Him more than anything. Lifting that word, He adorns her with 370,000 crowns. The word flies, ascending and descending, and is transformed into a heaven. So each and every word of wisdom is transformed into a heaven, existing enduringly in the presence of the Ancient of Days. He calls them new heavens, newly created heavens, hidden mysteries of supernal wisdom. As for all other innovated words of Torah, they stand before [5a] the blessed Holy One, then ascend and are transformed into earths of the living (Psalms 116:9). Then they descend, crowning themselves upon one earth, which is renewed and transformed into a new earth through that renewed word of Torah. Concerning this is written: As the new heavens and the new earth that I am making endure before Me... (Isaiah 66:22). The verse does not read I have made, but rather I am making, for He makes them continually out of those innovations and mysteries.

throne—flames of fire. In the Zohar this name designates the primordial selirah of Keter.

179. words of the Ancient of Days... In BT Pesahim 119a, secrets of Torah are referred to as "things hidden by the Ancient of Days." See the rabbinic blessing in BT Berakhot 17a: "May your steps run to hear words of the Ancient of Days."

See BT Bava Batra 91b; Zohar 1:92; 2:168a; 3:105b, 136b (IR), 232b; and 3:202: "Rabbi Yose said to Rabbi Ḥiyya, Let us engage in words of Torah, in words of the Ancient of Days."

180. eighteen hidden worlds... Recalling the phrase above, רבシリーズ כותב (be'ar alin), "vitality of the worlds," describing Yosed; the word רב (be'ar) has a numerical value of eighteen. See BT Avodah Zarah 3b: "Rabbi Abba said to Rabbi Nahman son of Yitsḥak, ‘. . . What does [God] do at night? . . . He rides his light cherub and sails through 18,000 worlds.’"

See BT Berakhot 1:4b: "Rabbi Ḥiyya son of Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan, ‘All the prophets prophesied only concerning the days of the Messiah, but as for the world that is coming, No eye has seen, O God, but You, [what You will do for one who awaits You]... All the prophets prophesied only concerning masters of return [those who succeed in turning back to God], but as for the completely righteous, No eye has seen, O God, but You.’"

181. 370,000 . . . An allusion to the three higher selırot (3 × 100,000) and seven lower selırot (7 × 10,000). See Zohar 1:4b; 2:14a–b (Mhn); 3:128b (IR).

182. all other innovated words of Torah Nonmystical insights.

183. earths of the living... one earth Shekhira is the singular "earth of the living," who is adorned and renewed by human insights of Torah, which have been transformed into planetoids, miniature earths of the living orbiting Her.

184. The verse does not read I have made In the past tense, referring to the original creation of heaven and earth.
of Torah. Of this is written: I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth (Isaiah 51:16). The verse does not read the heavens, but rather heavens.”

Rabbi El’azar asked, “What is the meaning of: I have covered you with the shadow of My hand?”

He replied, “When Torah was transmitted to Moses, myriads of celestial angels came to scorch him with flames from their mouths, but the blessed Holy One sheltered him. Now when this word ascends, is aroused, and stands before the blessed Holy One, He shelters that word and covers that person so that he will not be discovered by them—arousing their jealousy—before that word is transformed into new heavens and a new earth, as is written: I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth. From this we learn that every word concealed from the eyes attains supernal value, as is written: I have covered you with the shadow of My hand. Why was it covered and hidden from view? For the sake of supernal value, as is written: to plant heavens and establish earth, as already explained.

“To say to Zion: You are righteous (ammi), My people!” (ibid.). To say to those gates, those distinguished words, these above those: You are righteous (ammi).”

185. The verse does not read the heavens… The reference is not to the existing heavens, but to new heavens. See BT Sanhedrin 99b: “Rav said, ‘[Concerning one who studies Torah for her own sake,] it is as though he built heavenly and earthly palaces, as is written: I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth.’” Rabbi Shim’on amplifies this teaching and radicalizes it; note how the phrase “it is as though” has disappeared.

186. angels came to scorch him… Jealous that a mere mortal dared to enter the celestial realm. See Pesiqta Rabbati 20: “When Moses ascended on high…a band of angels of destruction…sought to scorch him with the breath of their mouths. What did the blessed Holy One do? He spread over him some of His splendor.”

See Ma’ayan Hokmah (Beit ha-Midrash, 1:58–60); and BT Shabbat 88b: “Rabbi Yehoshu’a son of Levi said, ‘When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels said before the blessed Holy One, “Master of the Universe! What is one born of woman doing here among us?” He answered, “He has come to receive Torah.” They said, “That precious treasure hidden by You for 974 generations before the world was created, You desire to give to flesh and blood! What is a human that You are mindful of him, a human being that You take note of him?” (Psalms 8:5). “Answer them,” said the blessed Holy One to Moses. “Master of the Universe,” he replied. “I fear they could scorch me with the breath of their mouths.” He said, “Grasp My throne of Glory, and answer them…”.”

187. every word concealed… See BT Ta’anit 8b: “Blessing is not found in anything weighed, measured, or counted, but only in that which is hidden from the eye.” Cf. Zohar 1:64b, 20a.

188. Zion… gates… distinguished words In BT Berakhot 8a, the phrase gates of Zion (티יסון, Zion (Psalms 87:2) is interpreted in the name of Rav Hisda as “gates of the house (משתעפרים), distinguished, by halakhah.” Based on this passage, Rabbi Shim’on iden-
Do not read ‘You are יָם (ammi), My people,’ but rather ‘You are יָם (immi), with Me, becoming My partner! Just as I made heaven and earth by speaking, as is said: By the word of יְהוָה, the heavens were made (Psalms 33:6), so do you.’ Happy are those engaged in Torah!

“Now if you say that the word of any ignorant person has the same effect, come and see: One who is unaccustomed to the mysteries of Torah and innovates words he does not fully understand—when that word ascends, a man of perversity, tongue of falsehood (Proverbs 16:28; 6:17) bursts forth from the chasm of the immense abyss, leaping 500 parasangs to obtain that word. Grabbing her, he takes that word back to his chasm and transmogrifies her into a distorted heaven called ‘chaos.’ The man of perversity flies through that heaven—6,000 parasangs in one glide. As soon as the distorted heaven is established, a woman of whoredom (Hosea 1:1) emerges, clinging to it, joining with it. From there she sets out, killing thousands, myriads. For as long as she endures in that heaven, she is empowered to swoop through the entire world in a single moment. Concerning this is written: Woe unto them who haul iniquity with cords of falsehood, and sin as with a cart rope (Isaiah 5:18). Iniquity is the male. Who is sin? The female. He hauls the one called iniquity with those cords of falsehood, and then sin as with a cart rope, that female called sin, who is empowered there to fly and kill human beings. So, Many are those she has struck dead (Proverbs 7:26). Who has struck them dead? This sin who slays human beings. Who causes this? A disciple unqualified to teach who teaches. May the Compassionate One save us!”

ifies original interpretations of Torah as Zion.

89. man of perversity... Samael, the male demon who schemes and accuses falsely.

90. chasm of the immense abyss The abode of demons.

91. parasangs The Greek parasang equals about 3.5 miles.

92. in one glide The distorted heaven empowers Samael, providing him a fast celestial highway.

93. woman of whoredom Lilith, the female demon, wife of Samael. Together they comprise שֵּׁרֶה אֲבֵהּ, “the Other Side.” See Zohar 1:148a (ST); 2:245a; Schokem, Kabbalah, 356-61.

94. in a single moment See BT Berakhot 4b: “A tanna taught: Michael [reaches his destination] in one [glide], Gabriel in two, Elijah in four, and the Angel of Death in eight—in time of plague, however, in one.”

95. Woe unto them... See BT Sukkah 52a: “Rabbi Assi said, ‘The evil impulse at first resembles the thread of a spider but ultimately it resembles cart ropes, as is said: Woe unto them who haul iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as with a cart rope.’” Cf. Zohar 1:57a.

96. He The sinner or the distorted heaven.

97. A disciple unqualified... See BT Sotah 22a: “Rav said, ‘What is the meaning of the verse Many are those she has struck dead, numerous are her slain? Many are those she has struck dead—this refers to a disciple unqualified to teach [to decide questions of law] who teaches. Numerous are her slain—this refers to a disciple qualified to teach who does not.’”
Rabbi Shim'on said to the Companions, "I beg of you not to utter a word of Torah that you do not know and have not heard properly from a lofty tree, lest you enable sin to slay multitudes without cause."

They all opened, saying, "May the Compassionate One save us! May the Compassionate One save us!"

"Come and see: With Torah the blessed Holy One created the world. This has been established, as is written: I was with Him as a nursing, I was a daily delight (Proverbs 8:30). He gazed upon her once, twice, three and four times, then spoke, creating through her. To teach human beings not to err in her, as is written: Then He saw and declared her, arranged her and probed her. He told humanity (Job 28:27). The blessed Holy One created what He created corresponding to those four times: He saw and declared her, arranged her and probed her. Before generating His work, He introduced four words: ארבעת ארצות אלהים יא (Be-reshit bara Elohim et), In the beginning God created. First, these four; then, השמים (ha-shaym), the heavens. These correspond to the four times that the blessed Holy One contemplated Torah before actualizing His work of art."

198. from a lofty tree From a recognized authority. See the similar expression: "from high tamarisks" (BT Beisah 27a). One of the five things that the imprisoned Rabbi Akiva taught Rabbi Shim'on (BT Pesahim 112a) was: "If you want to be strangled, then be hanged on a large tree," which according to Rashi (ad loc.) means: If you must depend on an authority, see that it is a great one.

See Kallah Rabbati, 1; Zohar 2:87a; 3:19a–b; and BT Berakhot 25b: "Rabbi Eli'ezer says, 'One who says something that he has not heard from his teacher causes Shekhinah to depart from Israel.'"

The conservative attitude here contrasts with the preceding encouragement to innovate. See Of and KP.

199. slay multitudes without cause Righteous and sinful die together in the plagues and disease brought by Lilith.

200. With Torah...This has been established. According to M Avot 3:14, Torah is the "precious instrument by which the world was created." See Bereshit Rabbah 13: "Rabbi Osha'yahu opened, 'I was with Him as an artisan. Torah says, "I was the artistic tool of the blessed Holy One."... The blessed Holy One gazed into Torah and created the world.'"

See Zohar 1:47a, 134a-b; 2:16a-b; 3:35b; Wallin, Pshot, 1:234–45.

201. then spoke... Only after perusing Torah did God proclaim her words, thereby creating the world.

202. not to err... But rather to imitate God and study Torah thoroughly. Cf. BT Eruv 54b: "Rabbi Eli'ezer said, 'One must teach his student four times.'"

203. Then He saw... declared... arranged... probed... See Bereshit Rabbah 24:5. The four verbs correspond to the four times that God gazed into Torah, perhaps also to the four methods of interpretation: literal, allegorical, midrashic, and mystical. After creating the world, God told humanity to imitate Him by studying Torah intensively.

204. corresponding to those four times... Apparently a reference to the four worlds, containing respectively the sefirot, the Chariot, the angels, and the physical world.
Parashat Be-Reshit

"IN THE BEGINNING" (GENESIS 1:1–6:8)

At the head of potency of the King, He engraved engravings in luster on high. A spark of impenetrable darkness flashed within the concealed of the con-

1. potency of the King
2. engraved engravings
3. luster on high
4. spark of impenetrable darkness

The phrase "authority [or: decree] of the king," which appears in BT Berakhot 58b, Gittin 57b, Bava Metzi' a 83b–84a, Hullin 57b. See Zohar 176b, 97a, 108a, 109b (all ST), 147a (Tos); 71a, ZH 67c (ShS), 121d. Here the King is Ein Sof, arousing itself to manifest through the process of emanation.


The spark is so potently brilliant that it overwhelms comprehension. Many mystics convey similar paradoxical images: “a ray of divine darkness” (Dionysius, Mystical Theology 1:1); “the luminous darkness” (Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Moses 2:163); “the black light” (Iranian Sufism; see Corbin, The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism, 99–120). Prior to the Zohar, Azriel of Gerona and the author of Ma'ayan ha-Hokmah mention “the light darkened from shining.” See Verman, The Books of Contemplation, 59–60, 158–59; Scholom, Origins of the Kabbalah, 336. Cf. Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed 1:59: “We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden

[135a]
cealed, from the head of Infinity—a cluster of vapor forming in formlessness, thrust in a ring, not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all. As a cord surveyed, it yielded radiant colors. Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below, concealed within the concealed of the mystery of Ein Sof. It split and did not split its aura, was not known at all, until under the from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes too weak to apprehend it."

Here the blinding spark is the first impulse of emanation flashing from Ein Sof through Keter and proceeding to delineate the various se'irot. (On the connection between qarduna and measurement, see Liebes, Peragim, 146–49, 162–63.) The goal of meditation is to attain this spark and participate in the primal flow of being. See ZI 57d–58a (QHM); cf. Zohar 1:7b, 2:33b, 177a, 233a, 254b, 260a; 3:48b–49a, 135b, 139a (IR), 292b, 295b–b (IZ).

Other renderings of the phrase include: נ试验区 (menorah hashakhah), "a dark lamp" (Galante); נ试验区 (ritsots hazaq), "powerful spark" (DE); נ试验区 של שלושה (ner shel ḥoshekh), "a lamp of darkness" (Elijah of Vilna, Yahel Or); "a dark flame" (Scholem, Zohar, 27); "a very powerful light" (Scholem, Kabbalah, 228); "a lamp of scintillation [or: darkness, measurement]" (Sperling and Simon, The Zohar); "a blinding spark" (Matt, Zohar, 49); une flamme obscure (Mopsik, Le Zohar); "the hardened spark" (Wolfson, Woman—The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah, 178–82). On the phallic connotations of the phrase, see Wolfson’s discussion there and in his Circle in the Square, 60–62, and index, s.v. “hardened spark”; Liebes, “Zohar ve-Eros,” 73–80.

5. concealed of the concealed The latter on high, the first and most hidden se'irah, Keter.

6. Infinity Hebrew, אינסוף (Ein Sof), “there is no end,” the ultimate divine reality. On the evolution of this term, see Scholem, Kabbalah, 88–89.

7. cluster of vapor forming in formlessness... שבעת רוחות (Qotra be-qotra). Qotra means both “knot” and “smoke” in the Zohar. See 1:72a, and 30a, 33b, 94b, 106a, 161b; 2:80a, 124a; 3:45b, 51a–b, 107a, 286b, 295b (IZ).

Some commentators (Galante, OY, Sullivan) suggest translating qotra as “form.” Cf. a ור (qetura) in Vayaira Rabbah 23:12; Arukh, s.v. qotra. The phrase would then mean: “a form in formlessness,” which resonates with “a spark of darkness.” The ring is Keter, the “Crown.”

8. not white, not black... These four colors are associated with four se’irot: Hesed, Shekinah, gevurah, and ti’eret, none of which appears until a later stage of emanation. See ZI 57a (QHM); Liebes, Studies in Jewish Myth, 84.

9. As a cord surveyed The spark that is a vapor is also a cord (אשש [meshiḥa]), referred to elsewhere in the Zohar as יד ור (yad ve-qotra), “the line of measure,” based on Jeremiah 31:38.

See Azriel de Gerona, Pardesh ha-Aggadot, 89–90; Jacob ben Sheshet, Meseh Devarim Nekhozim, 113; Zohar 1:8b, 2:233a–b, 258a; ZI 56d–58d (QHM); TZ 18, 37b.

The cord, or measuring line, maps out the paths and stages of emanation, the spectrum of divine colors, each with its own wavelength.

10. concealed within the concealed... The flow of emanation has just begun; everything is still hidden within the mystery of Ein Sof.

11. It split and did not split... כחוש לא Became (Beqa ve-la beqa). The flow somehow broke through, but the nature of the breakthrough is impossible to describe, so the act is stated and immediately denied. See Scholem’s remarks on expressions of this kind in Major Trends, 166–67.

The aura (אאיר [avira], “air, space, ether, aura”) is Keter. See Zohar 1:6b; 3:35b (IR); Altmann, Studies, 174; Scholem, “Iqivotav shel
impact of splitting, a single, concealed, supernal point shone. Beyond that point, nothing is known, so it is called רָשָׁת (Reshit), Beginning,12 first command of all.13

The enlightened14 will shine like the רָז (zohar), radiance,15 of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:3).

This point.16 Then this beginning expanded, building itself a palace worthy of


See Sefer Yetzirah 2:8: “Out of chaos He formed substance, making what is not into what is. He hewed enormous pillars out of ether that cannot be grasped.”

See Solomon ibn Gabirol, Keter Malkhut 9:101: “He called to יד (yit), nothingness, ושָׁת (ve-shaṭ), and it was split, to שַׁי (yesh), something, and it was thrust.” On the parallel between the Zohar’s description and the Orphic myth of the hatching of the cosmic egg, see Liebes, Studies in Jewish Myth, 79–84.

12. a single, concealed, supernal point… Beginning The flow of emanation manifests as a point of light. This is the second selirah: Hokhmah (“Wisdom”), which is called Beginning because it is the first ray of divine light to appear outside of Keter, the first aspect of God that can be known.

The identification of רָשָׁת (reshit), beginning with Wisdom appears widely. See Targum Yerushalmi (frag.), Genesis 1:1; Wolfson, Philo, 1:242–45, 266–69; Bereshit Rabbah 13; Azriel of Gerona, Peirush ha-Aggadot, 81; Nahmanides on Genesis 1:1; Zohar 22a, 3b, 16b, 20a, 145b; Moses de León, Sheqel ha-Qodesh, 21–22 (25–26); Scholem, Major Trends, 391, n. 80.

13. first command of all According to M Avot 5:3, “The world was created through ten commands.” Only nine explicit commands appear in Genesis 1, but the decade is completed by counting the phrase In the beginning.

See BT Rosh ha-Shanah 32a, Megillah 21b; Ezra of Gerona, Peirush Shir ha-Shirim, 506; Zohar 1:16b, 30a; TZ 32, 76a. In Kabbalah the ten commands symbolize the ten se’ilot, the first of which establishes the basis for the other nine.

14. The enlightened הָמסְכָּלִים (Ha-maskilim). Both philosophers and kabbalists described themselves by this term, which originally may have designated the community of those who shared Daniel’s vision. See Scholem, Origins of the Kabbalah, 224. On the following pages of the Zohar (15b–16a), the term is applied to the letters and vowels, as well as to the se’ilot. The Zohar on Exodus opens with the same verse and applies it to the kabbalists: “The enlightened are those who contemplate the secret of wisdom” (2:22).

See Bahir 95 (139); Zohar 2:23a; ZḤ 58c (QṭM), 93d–94b (Ṭq); Wolfson, Through a Speculum That Shines, 383–84; Liebes, “Zohar ve-Eros,” 73–75.

15. רָז (zohar), radiance The word designates the hidden power of emanation and provides the title of the book. See below, and Zohar 1:100a (ST); 3:124b, 153b (RM); Liebes, “Zohar ve-Eros,” 73–86.

16. רָז (zohar), Radiance! … this point The spark of emanation flashes again, and Keter, the aura, subtly transmits the impulse to Hokhmah, the point of Wisdom. See Zohar 1:16b, 65a; 2:26a.
glorious praise. There it sowed seed to give birth, availing worlds.\textsuperscript{17} The secret is: \textit{Her stock is seed of holiness} (Isaiah 6:13).\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{זוהר} (Zohar), \textit{Radiance}. Sowing seed for its glory, like the seed of fine purple silk wrapping itself within, weaving itself a palace,\textsuperscript{19} constituting its praise, availing all.

With this beginning, the unknown concealed one\textsuperscript{20} created the palace. This palace is called \textit{בראשית bara Elohim} (Bereshit bara Elohim), \textit{With beginning, created God} (Genesis 1:1).\textsuperscript{21} \textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{17} palace worthy of glorious praise... sowed seed... The purpose of emanation is to display the glory of the hidden God, which is achieved through a rhythm of revelation and concealment: only by concealing itself can the overwhelming light be revealed. The point expands into a circle, a palace—the third seiriha: \textit{Binah} (“Understanding”). She is the divine womb, where the seed of \textit{Hokhmah}, the divine father, is sown. \textit{Binah} gives birth to the seven lower seiriot, which engender the rest of creation. See Zohar 2:68b (ToS). The idea that the sperm originates in the brain is based on the theory of the second-century Greek physician Galen, common in medieval literature.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Her stock is seed of holiness} The prophet Isaiah refers to one-tenth of the people of Israel, who will be saved. The Zohar cites the verse as an allusion either to \textit{Binah} or \textit{Shchinnah}, the mystical Assembly of Israel, the tenth seiriha, whose origin is the seed of \textit{Hokhmah} (known as “Holiness”) sown in \textit{Binah}. See Azriel of Gerona, \textit{Parush ha-Aggadot}, 20; Zohar 2:121a.

\textsuperscript{19} fine purple silk wrapping itself within... As the silkworm spins a cocoon out of its own substance, so \textit{Hokhmah}, the point of beginning, expands into the palace of \textit{Binah}. (The silk industry was extensive in Andalusia, south of Castile, where the Zohar emerged.)


\textsuperscript{20} the unknown concealed one The hidden source of emanation, \textit{Ein Sof or Keter}.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{בראשית} (Elohim), God Here the name signifies \textit{Binah}, the Divine Mother who gives birth to the seven lower seiriot. See Zohar 1:3b, 13b.

\textsuperscript{22} The secret is... The Zohar offers its mystical reading of the opening words of Genesis. It translates the first word, \textit{בראשית} (Be-reshit), as \textit{With beginning} rather than \textit{In the beginning}, relying on an alternative meaning of the preposition \textit{ב}. See \textit{Targum Yerushalmi} (frag.) and Nahmanides, ad loc.; Bereshit Rabbah 111; Azriel of Gerona, \textit{Parush ha-Aggadot}, 81.

The subject of the verse, \textit{בראשית} (Elohim), God, follows the verb \textit{בראש} (bara), created. In its typical hyperliteral fashion, the author(s) of the Zohar insists on reading the words in the exact order in which they appear, thereby transforming God into the object! This means that the subject is now unnamed, but that is perfectly appropriate because the true subject of emanation is unnameable. The opening words of the Bible no longer mean: \textit{In the beginning God created}, but rather: \textit{With beginning} [by means of the point of \textit{Hokhmah}], the ineffable source \textit{created Elohim} [the palace of \textit{Binah}].

The rabbis of the Talmud were aware of the danger of misinterpreting \textit{Elohim} as the object of the sentence, which could promote Gnostic dualism (see BT Megillah 9a; Rashi and Tosaftot, ad loc.). Various early kabbalists also adopt such a reading. See Kiryat Sefer 6 (1929–30): 455; Verman, \textit{The Books of Contemplation}, 139–41; Isaac ibn Latif, \textit{Sha’ar ha-Shamayim} 2:10; Ma’arekhet ha-Elohit, 82b–
(Zohar), Radiance! From here all commands were created through the mysterious expansion of this point of concealed radiance. If *created* is written here, no wonder it is written: God created the human being in His image (Genesis 1:27).²³

(Zohar), Radiance! Mystery! In the beginning, first of all, אדוה (Ehyeh), I will be (Exodus 3:14), a sacred name engraved in its sides;²⁴ אלוהים (Elohim), God, engraved in the crown.²⁵ אשה (Asher), Who (ibid.)—a hidden, treasured palace, beginning of the mystery of ראשות (Reshit).²⁶ אדר (Asher)—رأس (Rosh), head, emerging from ראשות (Reshit).²⁷ When [15b] afterward point and palace were arrayed as one, then ראשות (Reshit) comprised supernal ראשות (Reshit) in wisdom.²⁸ Afterward the color of the palace transformed and it was called בית (Bayit), house, while the supernal point was called ראש (Rosh), merging in one another in the mystery of ראשות (Reshit), when all was as one in one entirety, before the house was inhabited.²⁹

23. If *created*... no wonder... The verb בָּרָא (Bara), *created*, thought to be reserved for creation ex nihilo, refers in the opening verse of Genesis to an act of emanation, the emanation of בינה (Elohim) from the primordial point of חכמה (Reshit). See below, page 113: "Bara—concealed mystery, from which all expands." If so, no wonder the same verb is employed to describe the creation of Adam and Eve, a further stage of divine unfolding.

For alternative interpretations, see Scholem; KP; OY; Galante; MM; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1310. Liebes ("Zohar ve-Eros," 75) suggests: If, by means of רוח (Zohar), radiance, God created heaven and earth, no wonder that it is written: God created the human being in His image, a verse that perplexed those medieval interpreters who denied anthropomorphism. The verse is not comparing the human and divine forms, but rather the creative power called zohar, common to both God and humans. In creating the human being, God emanated and imparted this creative potential.

24. אדוה (Ehyeh), I will be... A name of Keter. At the burning bush, God reveals His name to Moses: אדוה א昀 א昀 אדוה (Ehyeh asher ehyeh), I will be who I will be [or: I am who I am]. Here the first two of the three Hebrew words are applied to Keter and בינה respectively. See Zohar 3:11a, 65a-b.

25. אלוהים (Elohim), God... As noted above, this name applies to בינה, but it also alludes to שכינה, known as Keter (Atarah), "crown."

26. אשה (Asher), Who... Referring to בינה, the palace, the first seerah to emanate from חכמה, known as ראשות (Reshit), beginning. On Asher as a name of בינה, see Zohar 1:58a, 246a.

27. ראש (Asher)—ראש (Rosh), head... ראש (Asher), signifying בינה, is an anagram of ראש (Rosh), the initial letters of ראשות (Reshit), signifying חכמה. בינה emerges from חכמה.

28. then ראשות (Reshit) ...in wisdom

The opening word of the Torah indicates both the primordial point of חכמה (Reshit) and the palace of בינה (be).

29. the color... transformed... בינה develops further and is no longer called by the single letter ב (Bet) (i.e., the preposition be, "in" or "with"), but by the word בית (Bayit), "house," though it is still joined with
ate (ibid., 6)—receiving it willingly—and also gave to her husband beside her, for now she aroused desirously toward him, offering passionate love. This shows human beings how the act corresponds above.  

Rabbi El'azar said, "If so, how can we demonstrate the evil impulse above, seizing the female?"

He replied, "We have already aroused our awareness of the mystery of left and right, corresponding to the good impulse and the evil impulse—good impulse on the right, evil impulse on the left—these above and those below. The left above grasps the body to join with Her as one, as is said: His left hand beneath my head... (Song of Songs 2:6). So until here words are interpretable above and below. From here on, words with a residue of tar, interpretable by tiny children. By this the Companions have already been aroused."

Rabbi Shim'on was traveling to Tiberias, accompanied by Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Yehudah, and Rabbi Hiyya. On the way they saw Rabbi Pinhas approaching. Upon joining as one, they dismounted and sat beneath the trees of the hillside.

Rabbi Pinhas said, "Now that we are sitting, I am eager to hear some of those sublime words you convey every day!"

Rabbi Shim'on opened, saying, "He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bet-El (Genesis 13:3). He went on his journeys. The verse should read: his journey. Why his journeys? Because there are two journeys: one, his; one, of..."

---

1282. receiving it willingly Seduced by the evil impulse, Eve indulged in physical desire.

1283. how the act corresponds above In the realm of the sefira, male and female interact similarly.

1284. how can we demonstrate the evil impulse above... How can an evil component appear in the realm of the sefirot?

1285. the mystery of left and right... The good and evil impulses derive, respectively, from the sefirot of Hesed on the right and Gevurah on the left.

See BT Berakhot 61a; Zohar 1:14b, 155b, 165b, 174b; 2:263b.

1286. His left hand beneath my head The verse continues: his right embracing me. In the divine romance, the left hand (Gevurah) arouses the body of Shekinah, then the right hand (Hesed) completes the embrace, uniting Her with Tiferet. See above, page 270.

1287. So until here... Perhaps meaning: until this point in Genesis (3:6), the verses apply both on the earthly plane and the sefirotic plane. From here on, they apply primarily on the corporeal level (as indicated by "a residue of tar") and their interpretation requires no profound insight.

See KP; Be'er ha-Millim ha-Zarot, 176–77; Scholem; Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, 3:1390.

1288. I am eager to hear some of those sublime words... The expression derives from the Talmud and appears often in the Zohar. See BT Berakhot 8a; Ta'anit 20b; Haggah 14a; Zohar 1:87a, 96b, 197b; 2:31a; 3:148a, 209b, 231a.

1289. He went on his journeys... Describing the journeys of Abraham on his way back to Canaan from Egypt. See Bereishit Rabbah 40:3 (on Genesis 13:3); Zohar 1:83b.
Shekinah. For every human being should manifest as male and female to fortify faith; then Shekinah never separates from him.\textsuperscript{1290}

“You might say: If one sets out on the road and is no longer male and female, Shekinah separates from him.”\textsuperscript{1291} Come and see: Whoever sets out on the road should offer his prayer to the blessed Holy One to draw upon himself Shekinah of his Lord before he leaves, while still male and female.\textsuperscript{1292} Once he has offered his prayer and Shekinah rests upon him, he can leave, for Shekinah has coupled with him so that he will be male and female: male and female in town, male and female in the countryside,\textsuperscript{1293} as is written: Righteousness goes before him, and he sets out on his way (Psalms 85:14).\textsuperscript{1294} “Come and see: As [50a] long as one lingers on the way, he must guard his conduct, so that supernal coupling will not separate from him, leaving him defective, lacking male and female.”\textsuperscript{1295} In town he must, when his female is

\textsuperscript{1290} every human being should manifest as male and female... When a human couple unites, they stimulate the union of Shekinah and Her partner, Tiferet, thereby strengthening the entirety of the sefirot, the realm of faith. A married man is constantly accompanied by Shekinah (Zohar 1:228b).

See BT Sota 17a: “Rabbi Akiva expounded: יש והמה (Ish ve-ishshah), Man and woman: If they are worthy, Shekinah abides between them; if not, fire consumes them.” As indicated by Rashi (ad loc.), the two Hebrew words יש והמה (ish ve-ishshah), “man and woman,” share the letters מ (alef) and ש (shin), which spell שמה (esh), “fire”; in addition each contains one of the two letters of the divine name יה (Yah). Without divinity between them, only fire remains.

\textsuperscript{1291} no longer male and female... If he travels without his wife, Shekinah would apparently desert him.

\textsuperscript{1292} should offer his prayer...before he leaves... Before setting out on a journey, one should pray, including (or specifically) telillat ha-derekh (“the prayer for the way”). See BT Berakhot 29b: “Elijah said to Rav Yehudah the brother of Rabbi Sala the Ha-sid, ‘Do not let your anger boil and you will not sin; do not get drunk and you will not sin; and when you set out on the way, consult your Creator and then set out.’ What is meant by ‘consult your Creator and then set out?’ Rabbi Ya’akov said in the name of Rav Hisda, ‘This is telillat ha-derekh.’”

By praying before leaving home and while still with his wife, the husband ensures that Shekinah will abide with him throughout his journey.

See BT Berakhot 14a (cited in the note after next), 30a; Zohar 1:58b, 121a (Mhn), 178a, 230a–b, 240b; 2:130b; Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 110:7; David ben Samuel ha-Levi, Turei Zahav, ad loc.; Issachar Ber Eilenburg, Be’er Sheva, 45; Mordechai Shpielman, Tiferet Tsevi, 1:351–53.

\textsuperscript{1293} in town... in the countryside In town with his wife, in the countryside with Shekinah.

\textsuperscript{1294} Righteousness... See BT Berakhot 14a: “Rav Idi son of Avin said in the name of Rabbi Yitshak son of Ishyan, ‘Whoever prays and then sets out on the way, the blessed Holy One fulfills his desires, as is said: Righteousness goes before him, and he sets out on his way.”

In this Talmudic passage, righteousness (or: justice) implies justification by prayer, which guarantees a successful journey. Here in the Zohar, Righteousness is a name of Shekinah, who symbolizes divine justice. By praying, one secures Her accompanying presence. See Zohar 1:49a, 58b.

\textsuperscript{1295} supernal coupling... Shekinah, his partner on the road.
with him; how much more so here, for supernal coupling is linked with him! Further, this coupling protects him on the way, not parting from him until he returns home.

“Upon entering his house he should delight the lady of his house, for she engendered that supernal coupling.\(^{1296}\) As soon as he reaches her he should delight her anew, for two nuances. First, because the joy of this coupling is joy of mitzvah, and joy of mitzvah is joy of Shekhinah.\(^{1297}\) Further, he increases peace below,\(^{1298}\) as is written: You will know that your tent is at peace, attend to your abode and not sin (Job 5:24). Is it a sin if one does not attend to his wife? Certainly so, for he diminishes the splendor of supernal coupling coupled with him, engendered by the lady of his house.\(^{1299}\) Second, if his wife conceives, supernal coupling pours into it a holy soul,\(^{1300}\) for this covenant is called Covenant of the blessed Holy One.\(^{1301}\) So one should focus on this joy as on the joy of Sabbath, coupling of the wise.\(^{1302}\) So, You will know that your tent is

296. he should delight the lady of his house. . . Upon returning home, he should unite with his wife, thanks to whom Shekhinah accompanied him. See the question posed by King David to Uriah in 2 Samuel 11:10: You just returned from a journey; why didn’t you go down to your house?

See BT Yevamot 62b: “Rabbi Yehoshua’s son of Levi said: ‘A man must attend to his wife when he is about to set out on the road, as is said: You will know that your tent is at peace. . . [you will attend to your abode and not sin.]’”

297. the joy of this coupling is joy of mitzvah . . . Uniting with one’s wife upon returning from a journey is a religious obligation and stimulates the union of Shekhinah with Her partner, Tiferet. See BT Shabbat 30b: “Shekhinah abides neither through gloom nor laziness nor frivolity norlevity nor talk nor idle chatter [or: vain pursuits], but only through the joy of mitzvah.”

298. he increases peace below He guarantees peace and harmony in his house. See BT Shabbat 152a, where Rabbi Shim’on son of Ḥalafta refers to the phallic as “peace-maker of the home.”

299. he diminishes the splendor . . . If on returning home, the husband fails to unite with his wife, he dishonors Shekhinah, who united with him because of his wife, and he hinders Her union with Tiferet.

300. supernal coupling pours into it . . . Shekhinah emanates to the fetus a holy soul generated from Her union with Tiferet (through Yesod).

301. this covenant is called Covenant of the blessed Holy One The human phallus, inscribed with the covenant of circumcision, symbolizes the seﬁrah of Yesod, the divine phallus. Human sexual union stimulates the divine union of Yesod and Shekhinah, which generates the soul.

302. the joy of Sabbath, coupling of the wise The Mishnah (Ketubbot 5:6) discusses how often husbands of various professions are required to fulfill the commandment of ḥinukh (onah), “conjugal rights,” i.e., to satisfy their wives sexually. According to Rabbi Eli’ezer, “The onah mentioned in the Torah [applies as follows]: Those who are unoccupied, every day; laborers, twice a week; donkey-drivers, once a week; camel-drivers, once every thirty days; sailors, once every six months.”

The Talmud (BT Ketubbot 62b) adds: “When is the onah of the disciples of the wise? [i.e., What is the proper interval between two successive times of fulfilling this mitzvah?] Rav Yehudah said in the name of
at peace, for Shekhinah accompanies you and dwells in your house; therefore, you will attend to your abode and not sin. What is the meaning of not sin? Not fail to perform the joy of mitsvah in the presence of Shekhinah.  

“Similarly, when disciples of the wise part from their wives all days of the week to engage in Torah, supernal coupling couples with them, not parting from them, so that they be male and female. Once Sabbath enters, disciples of the wise should delight their wives anew for the sake of the splendor of supernal coupling, focusing their hearts on the will of their Lord, as has been explained.

“Similarly, when a man’s wife undergoes days of impurity and he waits for her fittingly, supernal coupling couples with him all those days, so he is male and female. Once his wife is purified, he should delight her anew—joy of mitsvah, supernal joy!

“All the reasons we have offered rise to a single rung. The gist of the word: All scions of faith should focus their heart and will on this.

“Now you might say, ‘If so, it is more admirable for a person to set out on the road than to stay at home because of supernal coupling who couples with him.’ Come and see: When a man is at home, the essence of the home is his wife, for on account of her, Shekhinah does not leave the house. So we have learned: Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah (Genesis 24:67), for the lamp was kindled. Why? Because Shekhinah entered the home.

Shemu’el, ‘From one Sabbath eve to the next.’

See Zohar 211a (MhN); 2:63b, 89a–b; 3:49b, 78a.

1303. What is the meaning of not sin? Not fail… The Hebrew verb לֶאֶסֶן (lt”) means both “to sin” and “to fail, miss.”

1304. when disciples of the wise part from their wives… See above, note 1302. All week long Shekhinah joins the solitary male devotees of Torah.

1305. undergoes days of impurity… During and immediately following menstruation, when the husband must avoid contact with her.

1306. All the reasons we have offered rise to a single rung The reasons for delighting one’s wife upon returning from a journey apply as well to sexual union on Sabbath eve and following the wife’s purification. All pertain to Shekhinah.

1307. All scions of faith… Those who believe in the reality of the sefirotic realm are called בני מעות (beni nebirim), “children of faith.”

1308. the lamp was kindled… See Bereshit Rabbah 60:16: “Isaac brought her [Rebekah] into the tent of his mother Sarah… As long as Sarah existed… the lamp would burn in her tent from one Sabbath eve until the next. As soon as she died, it went out. As soon as Rebekah arrived, it returned.”

Rabbi Shim’on alludes to this midrash to demonstrate that the presence of the light of Shekhinah in the home depends upon the presence of the essence of the home (the wife): first Sarah, and upon her death, Rebekah. See Zohar 1:133a.

On the phrase “essence of the home,” see Psalms 113:9; Bereshit Rabbah 71:2; Penina de-Rav Kahana 20:2; Tanhumah (Bubet), Vayetse 15; Bemidbar Rabbah 14:8; Zohar 1:29a–b, 149b, 154a, 157b.
"Mystery of the matter: Supernal Mother appears with the male only when the house is arrayed, when male and female join. She then pours blessings upon them.\textsuperscript{1309} Similarly, Lower Mother appears with the male only when the house is arrayed, when the male approaches his female and they join as one. She then pours blessings upon them.\textsuperscript{1310} So a man at home is adorned with two females, as above.\textsuperscript{1311} This corresponds to the mystery written: \textit{until the desire of hills of eternity} (ibid. 49:26). \textit{The desire of hills of eternity extends to this until:} supernal female, to array, adorn, and bless Him; lower female, to unite with Him, be nourished by Him.\textsuperscript{1312}

"Similarly below, when a male is married, \textit{the desire of hills of eternity} verges toward him, and he is adorned with two females, one above and one below: the upper to pour blessings upon him, the lower to be nourished by him, unite with him.\textsuperscript{1313} A man at home is the focus of \textit{the desire of hills of eternity}, with whom he is adorned. Not so when he sets out on the road: Supernal Mother unites with him, while the lower is left behind.\textsuperscript{1314} Upon returning home he should adorn himself with two females, as we have said."

Rabbi Pinḥas said, "Even in a skein of scales and fins,\textsuperscript{1315} no one \textit{[50b]} dares challenge you."

Rabbi Shim'on said, "Similarly Torah stands between two houses, as is written: \textit{for the two houses of Israel} (Isaiah 8:14), one concealed on high, the

\textsuperscript{1309} Supernal Mother appears... Binah, the Divine Mother, manifests only when Tiferet and Shekhinah join.

\textsuperscript{1310} Lower Mother appears... Shekhina manifests only when husband and wife establish a home and join together.

\textsuperscript{1311} adorned with two females, as above

Adorned with both his wife and Shekhinah, as in the sefirotic realm Tiferet is adorned both with His partner, Shekhinah, and the Divine Mother, Binah. See Zohar 1:66b, 153b.

\textsuperscript{1312} The desire of hills of eternity extends to this until... Binah and Shekhinah are the hills of eternity, towering, respectively, over the lower sefirot and the lower worlds. See BT Bosh ha-Shanah 11a; Targum Yerushalmi, Genesis 49:26; Pirque de-Rabbi Eli'ezer 48, and David Luria, ad loc., n. 20; Zohar 2:112b.

Both of these female divine entities desire the male divine potency (Tiferet or Yesod), who is known as \textit{ע} (ad), until. See Zohar 1:30b, 247b; 2:22a.

\textsuperscript{1313} he is adorned with two females...
The human husband is adorned by both Shekhinah and his wife.

\textsuperscript{1314} Supernal Mother unites... On the road, Shekhinah joins him, while his wife remains at home.

\textsuperscript{1315} in a skein of scales and fins...

\textit{בקולו של מנהיג ממלכת ים נפשיה בלט אפיפיון (Be-ulpej senappiue qitra). According to Leviticus 11:9 (see Targum Ongekos, ad loc.), fins and scales are the distinguishing features of kosher seafood. Perhaps Rabbi Pinḥas’s point is that in all realms, ranging from mystical truth to the fine points of dietary law, Rabbi Shim'on’s wisdom is unchallenged. More likely, the phrase is metaphorical: Rabbi Shim'on has mastered not only the holy but also the demonic realm. See Pirque de-Rabbi Eli'ezer 9, where it is said of the monstrous Leviathan: “Between his fins stands the axis of Earth.”

Cf. Seder Rabbah di-Vrashit, 17 (Batei Midrashot, 1:28): “The entire world stands
other more revealed. The concealed one on high is the mighty voice, as is written: a mighty voice unceasing (Deuteronomy 5:19). This voice is inward, inaudible, and unrevealed, as the larynx well, whispering (ה), flowing incessantly, tenuous, internal, eternally unheard.

"From here emerges Torah, voice of Jacob, audible issuing from inaudible. Afterward speech merges in it, resounding from its potency. The voice of Jacob, Torah, is embraced by two females: this inner, inaudible one, and this outer one, audible.

"Two are inaudible, two audible. Of the two inaudible, this is supernal, concealed Wisdom abiding in Thought, unrevealed, unheard. Afterward it emerges, revealing itself slightly in a whisper unheard, called mighty voice, tenuous whispering.

"Two who are audible issue from here: voice of Jacob and speech merging in it. The mighty voice in a whisper unheard is הבית (bayit), a house, for supernal Wisdom—every female is called 'house'—while final speech is a house for the voice of Jacob, mystery of Torah. Therefore Torah begins with הבית (bet): ב‫א‫ר‫ש‫ה (Bet reshit), Two-house beginning (Genesis 1:1)."

He opened, saying, "ראשה (Be-reshit), In the beginning, created אלהים (Elohim), God (Genesis 1:1), corresponding to what is written: יHVH Elohim fashion

on one fin of Leviathan." See Midrash Komen (Beit ha-Midrash, 2:26); Zohar 234b, 108b; 3:279a (RM).

1316. Torah stands between two houses... Torah symbolizes Til’eret Yisra’el, the core of the sefirot, God’s self-revelation. Til’eret is situated between Binah and Shekhinah, the two feminine houses.

1317. The mighty voice... Binah is mighty, powerful in Her silence. Through Her, the divine voice begins to emerge as the whispered letter (he), the second letter of the name יHVH. This (he) expands from the primordial point of Wisdom, the initial letter "yod".

See Zohar 2:226b; 3:261a; Moses de León, Shaqel ha-Qodesh, 89 (133).

1318. Torah, voice of Jacob... See Genesis 27:22. Til’eret, identified with the third patriarch, Jacob, harmonizes the qualities of Hesed and Gevurah, symbolized by Abraham and Isaac. With the emergence of Til’eret, silent revelation becomes audible.

See Zohar 1:16b, 74a, 97b–98a, 14b; 2:226b. Cf. BT Berakhot 15b: “The womb, which takes in silently, gives forth loudly.”

1319. Speech merges in it... Shekhinah, symbolized by speech, resounds from the power of the voice.

1320. Two females... Binah and Shekhinah.

1321. Two are inaudible... Hokhmah and Binah.

1322. Every female is called 'house'... As indicated in BT Shabbat 118b: Yoma 2a; Sotah 44a; cf. 2 Samuel 11:10. In the sefirotic realm, Binah houses Hokhmah, while Shekhinah houses Til’eret.

1323. Therefore Torah begins with הבית (Bet)… The initial letter of the Torah, the ב (bet) of ב‫א‫ר‫ש‫ה (Be-reshit), In the beginning, is numerically equivalent to two and suggests the word הבית (bayit), "house." Thus the Torah opens with an allusion to two houses: Binah and Shekhinah. The word ראשית (reshit), beginning, signifies the pri-
footstool, not permanently. But then You will never depart from there, as is written: For you shall burst forth right and left (Isaiah 54:3), all becoming one.1339

"Come and see: את שמים (Et ha-shamayim), Heaven (Genesis 11) is upper Shekhinah; ואת הארץ (ve-et ha-aretz), and earth (ibid.) is lower Shekhinah, in a merging of male and female as one.1340 This has been explained, as discussed arousingly by the Companions."

They rose and were about to leave, when Rabbi Shim’on said, “A word lingers here with us.”

He opened, saying, “Two verses are written: יִהְיֶה your God is a devouring fire (Deuteronomy 4:24), and You, cleaving to יִהְיֶה your God, are alive every one of you today (ibid., 4). We have established these verses in various places, and the Companions have been aroused by them.1341

"Come and see: For יִהְיֶה your God is a devouring fire. The word has been discussed among the Companions: There is a fire devouring fire, devouring and consuming it, for there is fire fiercer than fire, as they have established.1342 But come and see: Whoever desires to penetrate the wisdom of

1339. But then… When the world is perfected and renewed.

1340. את שמים (Et ha-shamayim), Heaven… ואת הארץ (ve-et ha-aretz), and earth… On the word ואת (et), see above, note 1325. Here, apparently, ואת (et) refers not to a specific selihah, but to the flow of emanation from אתה (et) to אתה (et). את שמים (Et ha-shamayim), Heaven, refers to Binah (upper Shekhinah), from whom emanation flows to ת’יראת (heaven). The following words, ואת הארץ (ve-et ha-aretz), and earth, refer to Shekhinah (lower Shekhinah), known as earth, who, by uniting with ת’יראת, receives the flow. The letter ה (vav) in the word ואת (ve-et), whose numerical value is six, may symbolize ת’יראת together with the five selirot surrounding Him (Hesed through Yesod).

1341. We have established these verses… The apparent contradiction between the two verses is discussed in BT Ketubbot 11b: “Rabbi El’azar said, . . . ‘You, cleaving to יִהְיֶה your God, are alive every one of you today. Now is it possible to cleave to Shekhinah, of whom is written: יִהְיֶה your God is a devouring fire? Rather the meaning is: Whoever marries his daughter to a disciple of the wise, conducts business on their behalf, or benefits them from his assets is regarded by Scripture as if he cleaves to Shekhinah.”

In BT Sotah 14a, Rabbi Hama son of Hanina explains that one can approach and withstand the consuming fire of Shekhinah by imitating the divine, e.g., by clothing the naked, visiting the sick, comforting mourners, and burying the dead. See the discussion by Heschel, Torah min ha-Shamayim, 1:153–55.

A mystical response to this dilemma is offered by Gikatilla, Sha’arei Orah, 166: ‘As to what the rabbis have said: ‘Now is it possible for one to cleave to Shekhinah?’—it certainly is!”

1342. There is a fire devouring fire… See BT Yoma 21b, where the fire of Shekhinah is identified as “a fire devouring fire,” i.e., consuming the fiery angels.

 Cf. Zohar 3:27b; Moses de León, Sefer ha-Mishqal, 63–65.
holy unification should contemplate the flame ascending from a glowing ember or a burning candle. For flame ascends only [51a] when grasped by coarse substance.

"Come and see! In a flame ascending are two lights: one, a white light, radiant; the other, a light tinged with black or blue. The white light is above, ascending unswervingly, while beneath it is the blue or black light, a throne for the white, which rests upon it, each embracing the other, becoming one. This black light colored blue, below, is a throne of glory for the white—here lies the mystery of the thread of blue. This blue-black throne is grasped by another substance below, so it can flame, arousing it to embrace the white light. Sometimes this blue-black turns red, while the white light above never wavers, constantly white. This blue one, though, changes color: sometimes blue or black, sometimes red. This is grasped in two directions: above, by that white light; below, by what lies beneath, by which it is fueled, primed to glow. This constantly consumes and devours what is placed beneath it, for the blue light consumes anything cleaving below, anything it rests upon, since by nature it consumes and devours. On it depends destruction and death of all.

"So it consumes anything cleaving below, while that white light hovering over it never devours or consumes, nor does its light waver. Therefore Moses said, 'For YHWH your God is a devouring fire—that devouring, devouring and

1343. candle נרות (Betsire), "Lamp," employed by Targum Onkelos (e.g., Exodus 27:20; 30:7–8) to render the Hebrew word נצ (net), "lamp" and later "candle."

Wax candles are discussed in a thirteenth-century treatise commissioned by Alfonso X of Castile (1252–1284); see Libro del saber de astrología (University of Madrid MS 215), fol. 194r. See Bereshit Rabbah 85:4; Tosafot, Shabbat 20b, s.v. ad kan; Zohar 1:83b.

1344. a white light...a light tinged with black or blue Symbolizing, respectively, Til'eret and Shekhinah. The last sefirah has no light of Her own but reflects the light of the other sefirot.

See Zohar 1:22a, 77b, 83b. On Shekhinah and the color blue, see the next note; Zohar 2:139b, 152a–b.

1345. the mystery of the thread of blue The blue thread woven into the tassels of one's garment, according to Numbers 15:38. See Sifrei, Numbers 115: "Rabbi Me'ir says, ‘...Whoever fulfills the mitzvah of tisit (the "tassel") is considered to have greeted the face of Shekhinah, as it were; for blue resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the Throne of Glory."

1346. another substance below... The flame of the candle (or lamp) feeds on the wick and wax (or oil). Similarly, Shekhinah feeds on the realms beneath Her and is thereby enabled to flame and unite with Til'eret.

1347. Sometimes this blue-black turns red When Shekhinah is influenced by Gevura, the attribute of strict judgment, She is tinged with its color: red.

1348. destruction and death of all Shekhinah is identified with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which—according to Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah 5—is called the Tree of Death, because when Adam and Eve ate its fruit, death ensued. See Genesis 2:17; Zohar 1:35b.
consuming anything found below. That is why he said your God, not our God, for Moses inhabited that white light above, which does not consume or devour.\footnote{1349}

"Come and see: The only arousal kindling this blue light, to be grasped by the white light, is Israel cleaving below.\footnote{1350}

"Come and see: Although by nature this blue-black light consumes anything cleaving below, Israel cleaves below and abides enduringly, as is written: You, cleaving to YHVH your God, are alive. To YHVH your God, not our God; to YHVH your God, to that blue-black light devouring, consuming whatever cleaves below—yet you cleave and endure, as is written: alive every one of you today.

"Above the white light hovers a concealed light, encompassing it.\footnote{1351} Here abides a supreme mystery. You will discover all in the ascending flame, wisoms of the highest."\footnote{1352}

Rabbi Pinhas approached and kissed him, saying, "Blessed be the Compassionate One, that we happened to meet here."

They escorted Rabbi Pinhas for three miles.\footnote{1353} When Rabbi Shim'on and the Companions returned, he said, "What we have discussed is a mystery of wisdom concerning holy unification, for the final ה (he) of the holy name is blue-black light, grasped by יהוה (yod, he, vav), radiant white light.\footnote{1354}

\footnote{1349} your God, not our God… Moses specified your God, indicating the seirah pertaining to Israel, namely, Shekinah, who devours and consumes. Moses, himself, attained the rung of Ter'et, the white light, who does not consume.

See Zohar 279b; Moses de León, Sefer ha-Mishqal, 67.

\footnote{1350} Israel cleaving below Their devotion fuels the passion of the divine couple.

\footnote{1351} Above the white light hovers a concealed light… The encompassing light of Binah, the Divine Mother.

\footnote{1352} You will discover all in the ascending flame… See the remark of the nineteenth-century physicist Michael Faraday at the beginning of his Chemical History of a Candle: "There is not a law under which any part of this universe is governed which does not come into play and is touched upon in these phenomena. There is no better, there is no more open door by which you can enter into the study of natural philosophy, than by considering the physical phenomena of a candle."

\footnote{1353} for three miles According to Rav Sheshet (BT Sota 46b), one should escort his teacher a distance of a parasang. A distinguished teacher, however, is to be escorted for three parasangs. (The Greek parasang equals about 3.5 miles.)

See Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana 18:3; Bereshit Rabba 32:10; Zohar 1:87a, 96b, 150b; 2:14a, 164a, 187a; 3:8b.

\footnote{1354} the final ה (he) of the holy name… The name יהוה (YHVH) represents the entirety of the seiref: יה (yod) symbolizing the primordial point of Hokhmah; the feminine marker ה (he) symbolizing Binah, the Divine Mother; ו (vav), whose numerical value is six, symbolizing Ter'et and the five seiref surrounding Him (from יסוד to יסוד); and the final י (he) symbolizing Shekinah. Here Rabbi Shim'on focuses on the final ה (he),
been said. At that moment the erect stature of Adam diminished by one hundred cubits. Separation ensued, Adam was arraigned, earth was cursed, as we have established."

**He drove out** תָּמַעְתָּמַעְתָּמַע (et ha-adam), Adam (ibid., 24). Who drove out אַדָּם (et)—precisely.

Rabbi El’azar said, “We do not know who divorced whom: if the blessed Holy One divorced Adam, or not.

But the word is transposed: **He drove out** אַדָּם. Adam. Adam actually drove

1433. **fig leaves... they discovered every kind of sorcery...** According to Rabbi Nehemiah (BT Berakhot 40b), Adam and Eve sinned by eating from the fruit of a fig tree. The leaves of this Tree of Knowledge convey the knowledge of magic. See Zohar 1:36a, 63b, and 36b: “Once they knew of this world and clung to it, they saw that this world is conducted by those leaves of the tree. So they built themselves a stronghold, fortifying themselves with them in this world, discovering every kind of magic. They sought to gird themselves with the weapons of those leaves of the tree for protection.” Cf. BT Bava Metz’ta 114b.

“The one below” apparently refers to the demonic realm, though perhaps to Shekhinah, identified with the Tree of Knowledge and split off from the other sefirot by Adam’s sinful act. See Zohar 1:35b–36a, 52a, and below.

1434. the erect stature of Adam diminished... See BT Haggah 12a: “Rabbi El’azar said, ‘Adam extended from earth to heaven... As soon as he sinned, the blessed Holy One placed His hands upon him and diminished him...’” Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, ‘Adam extended from one end of the world to the other... As soon as he sinned, the blessed Holy One placed His hand upon him and diminished him.’”

See Bereshit Rabbah 12:6: “Rabbi Aivu said, ‘His stature was reduced to one hundred cubits... Rabbi Shim’on said, [His stature was originally] two hundred cubits.’” Cf. Sifra, Behuqagit 33, 11b; BT Bava Batra 75a; Sanhedrin 100a; Arahim 6 (Otsar Midrashim 1:70–71); Zohar 1:142b; and Rashbam, Bava Batra 75a, who suggests, matching the view here, that his original stature was two hundred cubits and was reduced by half.

For Iranian and Gnostic parallels, see Altmann, “The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends”; Urbach, The Sages, 227–32.

1435. **He drove out** תָּמַעְתָּמַע (et ha-adam), Adam. Literally, **He drove out the human.** The preceding verse reads similarly: WHH Elohim expelled him from the Garden of Eden. The apparent redundancy simulates the following mystical midrash.

1436. We do not know who divorced whom... Several midrashim interpret the biblical word שָׁפָרָה (vagavesh), **He drove out**, in the sense of פָּרָה (geirushin), “divorce.” See Bereshit Rabbah 21:8; Midrash Akkir, in Yalqut Shim’on, Genesis, 34; and Seder Eliyahu Rabbah 1: “He drove out Adam. This teaches that the blessed Holy One divorced him like a wife.” Cf. Ziqqun de-Nura, ad loc.; and Midrash ha-Gadol on this verse: “This teaches that he was divorced like a wife divorced from her husband because of some indecency.”

Adam’s harmonious and intimate relationship with God is ruined by sin. Rabbi El’azar adopts this midrashic view but reassigns the roles.

1437. **מָנוֹ (et)—precisely!** Grammatically, the accusative particle מָנו (et) has no ascertainable independent sense, but Naḥum of Gimzo and his disciple Rabbi Akiva taught that when et appears in a biblical...
out Et!\[1438\] Consequently it is written: "YHVH Elohim expelled him from the Garden of Eden (ibid., 23). Why did He expel him? Because Adam drove out Et, as we have explained.\[1439\]

"He placed [. . . the cherubim] (ibid., 24).\[1440\] He installed them in this site; he was the cause, closing pathways, inflicting punishment on the world, extending curses from that day on.\[1441\]

verse, it amplifies the original meaning. See BT Pesahim 22b; Hagigah 22a.

Here, as often in the Zohar, נק (et) becomes a name of Shekhinah, who comprises the totality of divine speech, the entire alphabet from ק (alef) to ת (tav). See Zohar 1:29b, 247a; 290a, 135b; and the Christian parallel in Revelation 18: "I am alpha and omega."

1438. Adam actually drove out Et! By dividing the biblical sentence, He drove out נק (et) Adam, into two units, Rabbi El'azar transforms its meaning. The first unit consists of: He drove out נק (et). The second unit identifies the subject of the sentence, which is shockingly not God, but Adam. His sin consists in divorcing Shekhinah.

In the Zohar, the exact nature of Adam's sin is a tightly guarded secret; the biblical account of the Garden story is seen as hiding the true meaning. See ZI 194 (MhsN), where Rabbi Shim'on recounts a conversation he had with Adam while selecting his future site in Paradise: "Adam . . . was sitting next to me, speaking with me, and he asked that his sin not be revealed to the whole world beyond what the Torah had recounted. It is concealed in that tree in the Garden of Eden," The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolizes Shekhinah. Adam's sin was that he worshiped and partook of Shekhinah alone, splitting Her off from the other sefirah and divorcing Her from Her husband, Tiferet, the Tree of Life. See Zohar 1:21b, 35b–36a, 221a–b; Scholem, Major Trends, 231–32, 236, 404–5, n. 105; Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, 1:373–76.


By his midrashic transposition, Rabbi El'azar teaches that Adam divorced Shekhinah, divorcing Her from Tiferet and consequently also from himself. See above, page 294: "When Adam sinned by eating from the tree . . . he caused a defect, separating the Woman from Her Husband." Cf. Isaiah 50:1: Because of your transgressions your mother was divorced. See Bereshit Rabbah 19:7: "Rabbi Abba son of Kahana said, 'The essence of Shekhinah was in the lower realms. As soon as Adam sinned, it withdrew from the first heaven.'" Cf. Nahmanides on Genesis 3:8; Gikatilla, Sha'arei Orah, 15–17.

Adam's sin has driven Shekhinah from the Garden and dissolved Her union with Tiferet, so She finds Herself abandoned in a woman's-land. Meanwhile, as a result of his sin, Adam is banished from the Garden. Wandering outside, he finds Shekhinah, and together they go into exile. See Zohar 3:119a–115b, and 1:337a: "Come and see the secret of the word: Adam was caught in his own sin, inflicting death upon himself and the whole world, causing that tree with which he sinned to be divorced, driven away with him, driven away with his children forever, as is written: He drove out נק (et) Adam."

1439. Consequently it is written . . . The apparent redundancy is eliminated. Adam was expelled because he divorced Shekhinah.

1440. He placed . . . The verse continues: east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and a blazing, ever-turning sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

1441. He installed them . . . As in the beginning of the verse, the subject is not God