

# Origins of the Universe

Introduction to Kabbalah

June 9, 2020

What is Kabbalah?

# Mishnah

## Hagigah 2:1

1 אין דורשין בעריות בשלשה. ולא במעשה בראשית בשנים. ולא במרכבה ביחיד, אלא •  
אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו. כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים, ראוי לו כאלו לא בא  
לעולם, מה למעלה, מה למטה, מה לפניו, ומה לאחור. וכל שלא חס על כבוד קונו,  
ראוי לו שלא בא לעולם:

They may not expound upon the subject of forbidden relations in the presence of three.  
Nor the work of creation in the presence of two. Nor [the work of] the chariot in the  
presence of one, unless he is a sage and understands of his own knowledge. Whoever  
speculates upon four things, it would have been better had he not come into the world:  
what is above, what is beneath, what came before, and what came after. And whoever takes  
no thought for the honor of his creator, it would have been better had he not come into  
the world.

# Genesis 1

- <sup>26</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמּוּתֵנוּ וַיְרִדּוּ בְדִגְתַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבַבְּהֵמָה  
וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ וּבְכָל־הָרֶמֶשׂ הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.”

- <sup>27</sup> וַיְבָרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

## Exodus 33

- <sup>17</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה גַּם אֶת־הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֲעֲשֶׂה כִּי־מָצָאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינַי וְאֶדְעָךָ:  
בְּשֵׁם:

And the LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name.”

- <sup>18</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרֹאֲנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ:  
He said, “Oh, let me behold Your Presence!”
- <sup>19</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעְבֹּר כָּל־טוֹבִי עַל־פְּנֶיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְחִנַּתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן  
וְרַחֲמֵתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם:

And He answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show.

- <sup>20</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאות אֶת־פָּנַי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאֶנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי:  
But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live.”
- <sup>21</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי וּנִצַּבְתָּ עַל־הַצּוּר:

And the LORD said, “See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock

- <sup>22</sup> וְהָיָה בַּעֲבֹר כְּבוֹדִי וְשֹׁמְתִיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר וְשָׁכַתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד־עֲבָרִי:  
and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by.
- <sup>23</sup> וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת־כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אַחֲרַי וּפָנַי לֹא יֵרָאוּ: (ס)  
Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen.”

## Exodus 34

- 6 וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה | עַל־פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה | יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת |

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed: “The LORD! the LORD! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness,

- 7 נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים נֹשָׂא עוֹן וּפֹשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה פֶקֶד | עוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים:

extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

# Isaiah 6

- 1 בְּשָׁנַת־מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ עֻזִּיָּהוּ וַאֲרָאָה אֶת־אֲדֹנָי יֵשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשָּׂא וְשׁוּלָיו מְלֵאִים  
אֶת־הַהִיכָל:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple.

- 2 שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים | מִמַּעַל לוֹ שֵׁשׁ כַּנְפִּים שֵׁשׁ כַּנְפִּים לְאֶחָד בְּשֵׁתֵימָם | יְכִסֶּה פָנָיו וּבְשֵׁתֵימָם  
יְכִסֶּה רַגְלָיו וּבְשֵׁתֵימָם יַעֲוֹפֶה:

Seraphs stood in attendance on Him. Each of them had six wings; with two he covered his face, with two he covered his legs, and with two he would fly.

- 3 וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וַאֲמַר קְדוֹשׁ | קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:

And one would call to the other, “Holy, holy, holy! The LORD of Hosts! His presence fills all the earth!”

# Ezekiel 1

- 26 וּמִמֶּעַל לָרָקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשָׁם כְּמֵרְאָה אֲבֹן־סַפִּיר דְמוֹת כֶּסֶף וְעַל דְמוֹת הַכֶּסֶף דְמוֹת  
כְּמֵרְאָה אָדָם עָלָיו מִלְמַעְלָה:

Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form.

- 27 וְאָרָא | כְּעֵין חֹשֶׁמֶל כְּמֵרְאָה־אֵשׁ בֵּית־לֶּה סָבִיב מִמֵּרְאָה מִתְנִי וּלְמַעְלָה וּמִמֵּרְאָה  
מִתְנִי וּלְמַטָּה רָאִיתִי כְּמֵרְאָה־אֵשׁ וְנִגָּה לוֹ סָבִיב:

From what appeared as his loins up, I saw a gleam as of amber—what looked like a fire encased in a frame; and from what appeared as his loins down, I saw what looked like fire. There was a radiance all about him.

- 28 כְּמֵרְאָה הַקֶּשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּעָנָן בַּיּוֹם הַגָּשָׁם כֵּן מֵרְאָה הַנִּגָּה סָבִיב הוּא מֵרְאָה דְמוֹת  
כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה וְאָרָא וְאֶפֶל עַל־פְּנֵי וְאֶשְׁמַע קוֹל מִדְּבָר: (ס)

Like the appearance of the bow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. That was the appearance of the semblance of the Presence of the LORD. When I beheld it, I flung myself down on my face. And I heard the voice of someone speaking.



# Daniel 7

- 9 חֲזָה הָיִית עַד דֵּי כְּרִסּוֹן רִמְיוּ וְעַתִּיק יוֹמִין יִתֵּב לְבוּשָׁה | כְּתֹלַג חֲזֹר וּשְׁעָר רֹאשָׁה פַּעֲמָר •  
נִקָּא כְּרִסְיָהּ שְׂבִיבִין דִּי־נֹר גְּלָגְלוּהִי נֹר דִּלְק:

As I looked on, Thrones were set in place, And the Ancient of Days took His seat. His garment was like white snow, And the hair of His head was like lamb's wool. His throne was tongues of flame; Its wheels were blazing fire.

- 10 נְהַר דִּי־נֹר נָגַד וְנִפְקַל מִן־קְדָמוֹהִי אֱלֹף אֲלָפִים [אֲלָפִין] יִשְׁמְשׁוּנָהּ וְרַבּוֹ רַבּוֹן [רַבָּבֹן]  
קְדָמוֹהִי יְקוּמוּן דִּינָא יִתֵּב וְסִפְרִין פְּתִיחוּ:

A river of fire streamed forth before Him; Thousands upon thousands served Him;  
Myriads upon myriads attended Him; The court sat and the books were opened.

## Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 7a

- תנא, אמר רבי ישמעאל בן אלישע: פעם אחת, נכנסתי להקטיר קטורת לפני ולפנים, וראיתי אכטריאל יה ה' צבאות, שהוא יושב על כסא רם ונשא, ואמר לי: "ישמעאל בני, ברכני!" אמרתי לו: "יהי רצון מלפניך, שיכבשו רחמיך את כעסך, ויגולו רחמיך על מדותיך, ותתנהג עם בניך במדת הרחמים, ותכנס להם לפנים משורת הדין". ונענע לי בראשו. וקמ שמע לו, שלא תהא ברכת הדיוט קלה בעיניך.

Similarly, **it was taught** in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha**, the High Priest, said: **Once**, on Yom Kippur, **I entered the innermost sanctum**, the Holy of Holies, **to offer incense**, and in a vision **I saw Akatriel Ya**, the Lord of Hosts, one of the names of God expressing His ultimate authority, **seated upon a high and exalted throne** (see **Isaiah 6**).

**And He said to me: Yishmael, My son, bless Me.**

**I said to Him** the prayer that God prays: **"May it be Your will that Your mercy overcome Your anger,**  
**and may Your mercy prevail over Your other attributes,**  
**and may You act toward Your children with the attribute of mercy,**  
**and may You enter before them beyond the letter of the law."**

The Holy One, Blessed be He, **nodded His head** and accepted the blessing. This event **teaches us that you should not take the blessing of an ordinary person lightly**. If God asked for and accepted a man's blessing, all the more so that a man must value the blessing of another man.

# Babylonian Talmud

## Hagigah 14b

---

- ת"ר מעשה ברבן יוחנן בן זכאי שהיה רוכב על החמור והיה מהלך בדרך ור' אלעזר בן ערך מחמר אחריו אמר לו רבי שנה לי פרק אחד במעשה מרכבה אמר לו לא כך שניתי לכם ולא במרכבה ביחיד אלא א"כ היה חכם מבין מדעתו אמר לו רבי תרשיני לומר לפניך דבר אחד שלמדתני אמר לו אמור

§ The Gemara returns to the topic of the Design of the Divine Chariot. **The Sages taught:** An incident occurred involving Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, who was riding on a donkey and was traveling along the way, and his student, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, was riding a donkey behind him. Rabbi Elazar said to him: My teacher, teach me one chapter in the Design of the Divine Chariot. He said to him: Have I not taught you: And one may not expound the Design of the Divine Chariot to an individual, unless he is a Sage who understands on his own accord? Rabbi Elazar said to him: My teacher, allow me to say before you one thing that you taught me. In other words, he humbly requested to recite before him his own understanding of this issue. **He said to him: Speak.**

- מיד ירד רבן יוחנן בן זכאי מעל החמור ונתעטף וישב על האבן תחת הזית אמר לו רבי מפני מה ירדת מעל החמור אמר אפשר אתה דורש במעשה מרכבה ושכינה עמנו ומלאכי השרת מלוין אותנו ואני ארכב על החמור מיד פתח ר"א בן ערך במעשה המרכבה ודרש וירדה אש מן השמים וסיבבה כל האילנות שבשדה פתחו כולו ואמרו שירה

---

Immediately, Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai alighted from the donkey, and wrapped his head in his cloak in a manner of reverence, and sat on a stone under an olive tree. Rabbi Elazar said to him: My teacher, for what reason did you alight from the donkey? He said: Is it possible that while you are expounding the Design of the Divine Chariot, and the Divine Presence is with us, and the ministering angels are accompanying us, that I should ride on a donkey? Immediately, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh began to discuss the Design of the Divine Chariot and expounded, and fire descended from heaven and encircled all the trees in the field, and all the trees began reciting song.

# Babylonian Talmud

## Hagigah 14b

continued

- מה שירה אמרו (תהלים קמח, ז) הללו את ה' מן הארץ תנינים וכל תהומות עץ פרי וכל ארזים הללויה נענה מלאך מן האש ואמר הן הן מעשה המרכבה עמד רבן יוחנן ב"ז ונשקו על ראשו ואמר ברוך ה' אלהי ישראל שנתן בן לאברהם אבינו שידע להבין ולחקור ולדרוש במעשה מרכבה יש נאה דורש ואין נאה מקיים נאה מקיים ואין נאה דורש אתה נאה דורש ונאה מקיים אשריך אברהם אבינו שאלעזר בן ערך יצא מחלציד

What song did they recite? “Praise the Lord from the earth, sea monsters and all depths...fruit trees and all cedars...praise the Lord” (Psalms 148:7–14). An angel responded from the fire, saying: This is the very Design of the Divine Chariot, just as you expounded. Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai stood and kissed Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh on his head, and said: Blessed be God, Lord of Israel, who gave our father Abraham a son like you, who knows how to understand, investigate, and expound the Design of the Divine Chariot. There are some who expound the Torah’s verses well but do not fulfill its imperatives well, and there are some who fulfill its imperatives well but do not expound its verses well, whereas you expound its verses well and fulfill its imperatives well. Happy are you, our father Abraham, that Elazar ben Arakh came from your loins.

# Babylonian Talmud

## Hagigah 14b

continued

ת"ר ארבעה נכנסו בפרדס ואלו הן בן עזאי ובן זומא אחר ורבי עקיבא אמר להם ר"ע •  
כשאתם מגיעין אצל אבני שיש טהור אל תאמרו מים מים משום שנאמר (תהלים קא,  
ז) דובר שקרים לא יכון לנגד עיני

§ **The Sages taught:** Four entered the orchard [*pardes*], i.e., dealt with the loftiest secrets of Torah, **and they are as follows:** Ben Azzai; and ben Zoma; *Aher*, the other, a name for Elisha ben Avuya; **and Rabbi Akiva.** Rabbi Akiva, the senior among them, **said to them:** **When**, upon your arrival in the upper worlds, **you reach pure marble stones, do not say:** **Water, water**, although they appear to be water, **because it is stated:** “He who speaks falsehood shall not be established before My eyes” (Psalms 101:7).

# Maimonides

## Mishnah Torah

### Foundations of Torah

#### Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצוי ראשון. והוא ממציא כל נמצא. וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו:

The foundation of foundations and firmest pillar of all wisdom is, To know that there is a First Being, that He caused all beings to be, and that all beings from heaven and earth, and from between them, could not be save for the truth of His Own Being.

# Maimonides

## Mishnah Torah

### Foundations of Torah

#### Chapter 1

- <sup>9</sup> אם כן מהו זה שכתוב בתורה "ותחת רגליו". (שמות לא יח) "כתובים באצבע אלהים".  
"יד ה'". "עיני ה'". "אזני ה'". וכיוצא בדברים האלו. הכל לפי דעתן של בני אדם הוא  
שאינן מכירין אלא (הגופות) [הגופות] ודברה תורה כלשון בני אדם. והכל כנויים הן.  
שנאמר (דברים לב מא) "אם שנותי ברק חרבי". וכי חרב יש לו ובהרב הוא הורג אלא  
משל והכל משל. ראיה לדבר שנביא אחד אומר שראה הקדוש ברוך הוא (דניאל ז ט)

If so, wherefore is it written in the Torah, "And there was under his feet" (Ex. 24,10),  
"Written with the finger of God" (Ex. 31,18), "The hand of the Lord" (Ex. 9,3), "The eyes  
of the Lord" (Deut. 11, 12), "The ears of the Lord" (Num. 11,18) and more like  
expressions? All such terminology is in accordance with the conception of sons of man  
who cannot recognize aught but corporeal things, and the words of the Torah is like  
human speech, but they are all attributes; for example, it is said: "If I whet My glittering  
sword," (Deut. 32. 41.); Hath He a sword, or doth He slay with a sword? But it is a  
metaphor, so is all metaphorical. As testimony thereto, one prophet says that he saw the

# Maimonides

## Guide for the Perplexed

### Part I Section 54

THE wisest man, our Teacher Moses, asked two things of God, and received a reply respecting both. The one thing he asked was, that God should let him know His true essence: the other, which in fact he asked first, that God should let him know His attributes. In answer to both these petitions God promised that He would let him know all His attributes, and that these were nothing but His actions. He also told him that His true essence could not be perceived, and pointed out a method by which he could obtain the utmost knowledge of God possible for man to acquire. The knowledge obtained by Moses has not been possessed by any human being before him or after him. His petition to know the attributes of God is contained in the following words: "Show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight" (Exod. 33:13). Consider how many excellent ideas found expression in the words, "Show me thy way, that I may know thee." We learn from them that God is known by His attributes, for Moses believed that he knew Him, when he was shown the way of God. The words "That I may find grace in thy sight," imply that he who knows God finds grace in His eyes. Not only is he acceptable and welcome to God who fasts and prays, but everyone who knows Him. He who has no knowledge of God is the object of His wrath and displeasure. The pleasure and the displeasure of God, the approach to Him and the withdrawal from Him are proportional to the amount of man's knowledge or ignorance concerning the Creator. We have already gone too far away from our subject, let us now return to it.

1 דע - כי אדון החכמים 'משה רבינו' ע"ה ביקש שתי בקשות ובאתהו התשובה על שתי הבקשות. הבקשה האחת היא בקשו ממנו ית' שיודיעהו עצמו ואמיתתו; והבקשה השנית - והיא אשר ביקש תחלה - שיודיעהו תארי. והשיבו ית' על שתי השאלות בשיעד לו בהודיעו אותו תארי כולם ושהם - פעולותיו; והודיעו כי עצמו לא יושג לפי מה שהוא אלא שהוא העירו על מקום עיון ישיגו ממנו תכלית מה שאפשר לאדם שישגיגהו; ואשר השיגו הוא ע"ה לא השיגו אדם לפניו ולא לאחריו: אמנם בקשו ידיעת תארי הוא אמרו "הודיעני נא את דרכיך ואדעך וגו'". - והסתכל מה שנכנס תחת זה המאמר מענינים נפלאים. אמרו 'הודיעני נא את דרכיך ואדעך' - מורה על היותו ית' נודע בתארי כי כשידע 'הדרכים' - ידעהו. ואמרו "למען אמצא חן בעינים" - מורה על שמי שידע האלוה הוא אשר ימצא חן בעיניו' לא מי שיצום ויתפלל לבד; אבל כל מי שידעהו הוא הנרצה המקורב ומי שסכלו הוא הנקצף בו המרוחק; וכפי שיעור החכמה והסכלות יהיה הרצון והקצ. והקורב והריחוק. - וכבר יצאנו מכונת הפרק ואשוב אל הענין:



# Moses Cordovero

## Or Ne'erav

translation by Robinson, pp. 51-52

An impoverished person thinks that God is an old man with white hair, sitting on a wondrous throne of fire that glitters with countless sparks, as it is written: “And the Ancient of Days took His seat. His garment was like white snow, And the hair of His head was like lamb’s wool. His throne was tongues of flame” (Daniel 7:9). Imagining this and similar fantasies, the fool corporealizes God. He falls into one of the traps that destroys faith. His awe of God is limited by his imagination.

But if you are enlightened, you know God’s oneness. You know that the divine is devoid of bodily categories—these can never be applied to God.

Then you wonder, astonished, Who am I? I am a mustard seed in the middle of the sphere of the moon, which itself is a mustard seed within the next sphere. So it is with that sphere and all it contains in relation to the next sphere. So it is with all the spheres—one inside the other—and all of them are a mustard seed within the further expanses. And all of these are a mustard seed within further expanses.

Your awe is invigorated, the love in your soul expands.

# THE TEN SEFIROT

