



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Levi Morrow



I am going to *fly*. I don't know how yet, but I'm working on it. To this end, I am learning *Sefer Yetzirah* (The Book of Formation), a kabalistic *sefer* generally considered to have been written by *Avraham Avinu*, as translated and explained by Aryeh Kaplan, z"l. Mind you, his introduction clearly states that (at least in this translation) it is mostly a meditative guide (and in this capacity it has helped my davening immensely), not a magical one. I am choosing to ignore this.

So far the *Sefer Yetzirah* has focused mostly on *Spherot* (often referred to as "God's Attributes"), dovetailing rather nicely with what I have been learning in Rav Aaron's Philosophy and Mysticism class, as well as in my recent forays into *Tanya* with Rav Sam and my esteemed *chavruta*, Josh Feigenbaum. In all of these, the two *Spherot* that I have most focused on are *Chochma* (Wisdom) and *Bina* (Understanding), for two reasons:

- 1) I have always prized the Intellect, and of all the *Spherot* these most represent the intellectual side of G-d and Judaism's Mystical tradition.
- 2) They are considered the *Emahot* (Mothers) of the other *Spherot*, and thus are focused on a lot more, regardless.

Anyway, while I have yet to even begin to breach the surface of *Chochma* and *Bina*, I do feel I have something to share that's worth hearing.

(As a side note, I have found that singing a nigun before learning really helps elevate the level of my learning, and I recommend that you try it.)

Sefer Yetzirah begins by saying that G-d created the world with "32 Paths of Wisdom." Without going into the deeper meanings of this phrase (they make my brain ache), it is clear that, mystically speaking, everything was created from *Chochma*. And near the beginning of *Likutei Amarim*, the *Ba'al Ha'Tanya* states in no uncertain terms that we were all created from G-d's "*Chochma Ila'ah*" (Supernal Wisdom). Even with almost a year of Orayta under my belt, this is a daunting idea. To say that we are all made of Wisdom is a hard concept to stomach. Or it was, until I factored in what Rav Aaron taught us

about *Chochma*. To say that *Chochma* is Wisdom is the best the English language can do, but it doesn't really do *Chochma* justice. Don't get me wrong, *Chochma* is Wisdom, but it is also specific, unprocessed, Will. Now, at least to me, the idea that everything is created from G-d's Will makes a lot of sense. I imagine that if G-d's Will was that everything be created, then everything couldn't *not* be created. And to say that we could do something that isn't G-d's Will does not fit into the concept of a god I could believe in.

However, you may have noticed that I referred to *Chochma* as "unprocessed" Will. It has a goal, a vision, but it lacks method. That's where *Bina* comes in. The *Sefer Yetzirah* teaches that *Bina* interacts with *Chochma* in a very specific and interesting way. It teaches that *Bina* is the intellectual power to delineate things, to turn vision into method. *Bina* is what made Pure, Undifferentiated, Will into "32 Paths of Wisdom." The Tanya says that *Bina* is how you evolve a concept and truly grasp it, and you can thus "bind yourself into G-d". How is that?? Once again, Rav Aaron to the rescue. He says that if *Chochma* is Visionary Thinking, then *Bina* is Strategic thinking. The man should wear a cape.

Bina is how we turn our Will into a plan of action. If the *Chochma* of a kid playing basketball says, "Score points," then the *Bina* of said kid would say, "Dribble. Put Ball A through Hoop B." Similarly (imagining one could compare a person and G-d), if G-d's *Chochma* was to create the world, the His *Bina* would say something along the lines of: "Let There Be Light."

This past week my older brother, Zach Morrow, had his *Tekes Ha'Shba'ah* (swearing-in-ceremony) in the Israeli army, and standing there in the crowd, hearing him yell, "I Declare! I Declare! I Declare!" I have never been prouder. I mention this here because I think that ceremony was emblematic of a climactic realization of *Chochma* and *Bina*; Zach's specifically. Last year, his *Chochma* was that he had an obligation and a duty to join the Israeli army; with help from friends and rabbis he discovered his *Bina*; and in its execution fulfilled his *Chochma*, thus emulating G-d, to what degree we can. In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, Aryeh Kaplan briefly mentions a very interesting concept. In the Spiritual Realms, there is a concept of distance, but there is no physical distance. So then what is distance in the spiritual realms? Spiritual Distance is the same as Spiritual Difference. Therefore, Spiritual Closeness is Spiritual Sameness. So in emulating G-d, to what degree we can, we become closer to G-d, "binding ourselves into G-d", as it were.

We have hit the point in the year: two weeks before the end of our *Shana Alef* year in Israel, and while the rabbis at Orayta have made it abundantly clear what they believe our *Bina* for next year should be, we need to make sure it matches up to our *Chochma*. And it seems that for a surprising amount of students it may. But I have also noticed another phenomena; one that many of us fall into on a daily basis: those who find it difficult to ascertain what their *Chochma* is, whether it's regarding what they should do next year, or whether it really matters that we're wearing dirty clothes instead of spending 25 shekel on laundry. So for all of us out there who don't always know what we want to do, try and get in touch with whom you are and what you really want. The Tanya says contemplate and evolve your concept of G-d, and the rest of your self will flow from there. Use *Chochma*, use *Bina*, and bind yourself to G-d.