

# REISH MILLIN

## *Shorashim*

*Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook*



TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY

Joey Rosenfeld

לרפואה שלימה של  
דוד העניך מרדכי בן פריידא שמחה  
בתוך שאר חולי ישראל

*At the end of Reish Millin, after Rav Kook had revealed the depths of light that exist within each and every letter, he began the project of grafting each letter together with every other. This movement towards new letter permutations is part of the long history of Kabbalah as it has been disclosed to us through the Ruach HaKodesh of the Tzadikim through whom the light of inner Torah has been revealed. While Rav Kook only reached the letter Gimmel, the depth of light contained within each entry is a true example of the “more contained within the less”. Like the Kohen Gadol who beheld the impossible miracle of the spaceless space of the Aron that was “beyond measure”, Rav Kook has expressed idea upon idea, secret upon secret within the precise and calculated words he chose to use. In front of you is a humble attempt to translate and annotate the first part of these “Shorashim” associated with the letter Aleph. Everything written in this small kuntreis is by way of possibility. The author lays no claim of authority over the proper interpretation of these black flames.*

*This project, the learning that went into this project and any kernel of light or insight that emerges from this project is dedicated to the complete and speedy refuah shleimah of Dovid Henschel Mordechai ben Freyde Simcha. My friend and my teacher who lives at the heart of Yerushalayim wherever he is. Our Tzaddikim tell us that the letters of the Aleph-Beis contain within them the light of Mashiach. Stripping away the layers of complication, returning back to the simple building blocks of creation. May these letters form new permutations, and may these new permutations form new words, and may these new words become new songs, and may the songs that emerge from within these letters carry Rav Dovid'l and the entirety of Knesses Yisrael back to the true heart of Yerushalayim.*

*Joey Rosenfeld*

## **Michtav Bracha from Rav Moshe Tzuriel shlit" a**

### **9 Shevat, 5769**

*The prophet declares: "And you shall drink water with joy, from the springs of salvation" (Yeshayahu 12:3). This is explained in the translation attributed to Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel:*

*"And you shall acquire new wisdom with joy, from the choicest of the righteous ones." In other words, thank God there are many righteous people in Israel; but, amongst them there are an elite cadres who are the "choicest of the righteous." And from them we will learn not only "ulpan," standard Torah study, but innovations, which we have not heard from others until now.*

*But this itself is a wonder. After all, what authority does a person have to innovate Torah novellas that are not recognized as Torah that we received directly from Sinai? After all, Hashem delivered the Written Torah and the Oral Law as a singular event at Mount Sinai? But these special and wonderful sages draw forth their innovations from within the inner recesses of the Torah, from the very root of the Torah. They reveal that which is buried deep within the Torah, that which we have not noticed until now. And because they are not only wise but also righteous; and because they are not only righteous but holy; and they are not only holy but also adhere to Godly thoughts with all their 248 limbs – this being a constant state, all of their lives, at every moment, every beat their heart, and with each and every breath – they are able to grasp the inner point, the "heart of the matter," about which our Torah comes to edify and to guide us.*

*We have merited, in this wondrous generation of ours, that God has sent us a faithful emissary, the righteous pillar of the world, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook. Light shines in every corner, and through every word of his Torah writings, which are a treasure-trove of charm and kindness, of deep wisdom.*

*Of all of his books, (and there have already been fifty of his books printed), there exists a crown of depth of Torah in his book "Reish Millin." There the Rabbi strove to find the inner meaning of each letter of our holy language. And he succeeded!*

*But we, commoners, have a hard time deciphering his clues. And now, with special Divine providence, R' Joey Rosenfeld has succeeded – out of his love for the Torah, from the depths of his comprehension, and owing to his remarkable literary aptitude in being able to express ideas such as these in clear English – at presenting us with [a work of] magnificent wisdom, of unparalleled beauty.*

*His translation is adorned with a depth of commentary in the explanation of Rabbi Kook's words. Here too the ideas are lofty, and even had R' Rosenfeld written an independent book of his own, it would have been a wonderful benefit for our generation, all the more so, seeing as he illuminates the light, so that we will understand that these are the self-same deep thoughts of the great sage, Rabbi Kook himself. These are his very meditations!*

*May Hashem bring salvation, and grant R' Rosenfeld that he succeed in finishing his work for the entire book Reish Milin. Praiseworthy is the generation, for we have come thus far.*

*With heartfelt blessings,*

**Moshe Tzuriel**

*(Compiler of the seven volume collection: "Otzarot HaRav Kook")*



**אב.** הנושא המוליד, המחולל את התולדות, מקושר עם שורש אבה, שהוא שורש הרצון. שורש הרצון ביסודו הוא לא הרצון לחיות, להיות, אלא הרצון להחיות, להוות. זהו עומק הנקודה של רצון החיים, של צביון עמדת היש. כשהרצון מתעלה, כשהוא פושט את גשמיותו, את גבולו ואת פרטיותו, נשאר הוא בתכונתו המאירה, המקסמת, בתכונה המלאה עדינות ונעימת קודש, והוא הרצון להוות, לחולל, להרבות חיים וישות. ולהפך במעמק הרצון, בתחתיתו, ברשמי החיים שאינם זזים גם מהגויה המתה, גם מהעצמות, אשר אור החיים היה פעם מקושר עמם, נשאר רק השורש מהרצון היסודי, רצון ההוות, הבלא דגרמי, קיסטא דחיותא, שבעלי האוב מטפלים בהם ע"י ההתייחסות לאותו הקורט של החיים המופשטים מקישור פועל באיזה גויה, אבל מקושרים הם עדיין נצוצי חיים הללו באיזה קישור רפוי, איזה יחש הקפי, שאע"פ שרק השדרה היותר מאופלה של רצון החיים נשאר באותם השרידים של הגוף שהיה חי במלא החיים, בכ"ז השרידים הללו רק ממקור הרצון לחולל ולהרות הם באים, מהאבות, מהאביה, מהתאבה הפנימית המעוררת את יסוד החיים, יסוד האב, שממנו לקוח גם כן השם אוב, שהנשאל בהם נטמא ג"כ בטומאת סיגי הרצון ושרידיו המאופלים, שכל שומר תמימות חייו הוא מתעלה מכל אלה. אל תפנו אל האובות. האב, הוא המקים את הבית, הוא המדריך את התולדות, המאיר את ארחות חייהם בהשפעתו הרוחנית. האותיות אל"ף בי"ת בביטויים שהם בונים את השורש אב, אומרים אלף בית, כלומר למד את הבית, והלימוד המסור מהאב אל הבית, הוא לימוד חינוכי, לימוד מכשיר, שמביא באחריתו ללימוד מקורי, להבנת הלב, המורכבה מלמ"ד בי"ת, כלומר מהלימוד המקורי שבלשון הקודש, והקדמתו הוא הלימוד המתורגם, אלף תרגום של למד.

## **Aleph-Beis**

The subject that gives birth and that generates offspring is connected to the root of willingness (רצון) which is the root of desire. The source of the will in its foundation is not the desire to live or to be, but rather the desire to give life and to create. This is the deepest point within the will of life, the form of existence<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This aligns with R. Kook's conception of existence as well as the soul being the vehicles for the emergence of a perfecting that transcends the primordial perfection that existed prior to the world. As the vehicles through which the potential towards perfection is disclosed, being and existence operate within the dynamic space of perpetual improvement, evolving towards the teleological goal wherein the primordial perfection is amplified through the adornment of becoming more perfect. The point that R. Kook seems to be making here is- in my opinion- the essence of his entire project throughout Reish Millin. Here he is showing us how that which appears to be inessential and secondary is in truth part and parcel of that which is essential and primary. Not only that, but the inessential itself forces the essential to disclose itself in a deeper and more profound way than it could have had the inessential never been revealed. This idea is expressed in R. Kook's famous formulation- based on the Kabbalah of Rabbeinu Azriel of Gerona- that in order for Infinite to be fully perfect, it must contain within itself the capacity and potential to become more perfect than it already is. But if the Infinite is already perfect, how then can the process of becoming-perfect which is predicated on an originary lack that makes things imperfect take shape? It is here that the teachings of our Kabbalistic tradition as expressed in the lights of R. Kook prove most useful. The Infinite remains entirely perfect in all manners of perfection, yet it contains within itself in a paradoxically formless form the potential-of-limitation. So long as this potential-of-limitation is subsumed within the Infinite perfection it remains unidentifiable with no actual existence of its own. It is only when the Infinite decides, so-to-speak, to limit its perfection by way of *tsimtsum* that the potential-of-limitation is disclosed from within perfection itself. Once the always already perfect aspect of the Infinite is concealed through the sustained act of *tsimtsum*, the potential-of-limitation is revealed from its nonexistence moving towards its nascent actualization. Once fully expressed and actualized in and as the order-of-concatenation (*sefer ha-hishtalshlut*) the potential-of-limitation manifests as imperfection that can now become more perfect. Had R. Kook- based on the Kabbalists who preceded him- simply described the mechanism through which the potential-of-limitation was disclosed from within the Infinite perfection in and as existence, then a simple yet fundamental question could have been asked, namely: what purpose does this entire play-of-being serve? If the descent away from Infinite perfection into the limited space of imperfection is so that the imperfect may perfect itself thereby returning to the original perfection from which it came, why go through the process of separating the potential-of-limitation from the unlimited in which it was subsumed? The answer for R. Kook- in line with the Kabbalistic teachings that inform his system- is that the descent and eventual elevation of imperfection back to its source is not simply a return to that which was, but rather it is a process in which the Infinite perfection that remains pure and whole behind the veil of *tsimtsum* undergoes an improvement, so-to-speak, in which the Infinite perfection receives an additional adornment (*tosefet kishut*) that shows the Infinite's ability to manifest within limitation as well without losing its infinitude. When the Infinite perfection is shown to contain the ability to manifest in imperfection without losing its perfect nature, the Infinite shows a deeper level of power in that it no longer needs the parameters of being unlimited to express its ultimate perfection. The catalyst and vehicle towards disclosing this wondrous and paradoxical power

When the will is elevated, when it divests from its physicality, limitation and particularity it remains in its illuminating and charming nature, filled with holy sensitivity and pleasantness. It is the desire to create, to generate, to increase life and existence<sup>2</sup>.

The opposite is also true, in the depths of the will, at its bottom, in the traces of life that remain even within the deadened corpse<sup>3</sup> and the bones where the light of life once stood. Only the root of the foundational will remains, the will-to-create, the *hevla d'garmeit*<sup>4</sup>, the *kusta d'chiyuta* that the necromancers (כַּוֵּן)<sup>5</sup> utilize through their relationship with the grain of life that is removed from any practical connection to the body. These sparks of life, nevertheless, maintain a weak and peripheral connection with the source of the will to generate and to create in spite of the fact that only the darkest link of the will-to-life remains within the body that was once filled with life.

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of the Infinite is the potential-of-limitation that become the imperfect worlds in which becoming more perfect is possible and in this sense the inessential which is synonymous with imperfection and limitation is shown to contain a deeper strength than the original perfection from which it came. See note 111.

<sup>2</sup> While R. Kook is referring to the will of the individual which is the birthplace of desire in its unfathomable root, nevertheless this will that is associated with the *sefirah* of *Keter* finds a counterpart within the unfathomable “will-of-God” so-to-speak, which according to the Zohar and Arizal can only be described as the unfathomable desire of God to create a world wherein the other-than-God can take shape. This is described in the language of the Zohar as “the ordinary awakening of desire to create the world”, *kad salik b'reuta l'mivreh alma* (Zohar, I, 195b).

<sup>3</sup> The association between the letter combination *aleph-beis* which can be read as “father” and the deadened corpse may be the rabbinic conception of “*av ha-tumah*”, the father of impurity as the halachic source of ritual impurity.

<sup>4</sup> The residual light of the spirit that remains embedded within the body even after the soul has departed. While this irreducible remainder is typically associated with the lowest rung of the soul, it nevertheless contains a strength attested to by its perseverance that is not found by any other part of the soul. According to the Arizal (cf. Eitz Chaim, Shaar 42) this remainder represents the interface between spirit and matter. This moment of chiasmic relation discloses the hybridity of the *hevla d'garmeit* in that to bridge two opposites it must already contain within itself aspects of both poles it is coming to connect. The *hevla d'garmeit* is often associated with the *luz* bone that is said to occupy the upper point of the spine where the cerebrospinal connection takes place, again representing the connection between spirit and matter. Furthermore, our sages have written that the *luz* bone receives its sustenance from the *melave malka* meal on *motzei Shabbos*, a time and space that occupies the liminality between Shabbos and the mundanity of the week. Ramchal and R. Moshe Dovid Valle identify the western wall of the Beis HaMikdash, the *Kotel* as the irreducible remainder of holiness that exists in spite of destruction which is directly connected with the *luz*.

<sup>5</sup> See *Shmuel Aleph*, 28:9

They arrive from the fathers (אבות), from willingness (אביה), from the inner hunger (התאבה) that awakens the foundation of life. The name of the necromancer (אוב) is taken from the foundation of the father as well, for all who seek them out are defiled through the impurity<sup>6</sup> of the wills darkened remainder, just as all who protect the completeness of their lives transcend all of these things, *do not turn towards the necromancers*<sup>7</sup>.

The father (אב) arranges the house; he directs the offspring, enlightening the pathways of their lives through his spiritual influence. The expression of the letters *aleph* and *beis* that comprise the root of *av* (אב) say *aleph-bayit* which means teach the house<sup>8</sup>. The teaching that is transmitted from the father to the house is an educational teaching, a preparatory teacher that eventually leads towards an original learning, towards the understanding of the heart (לב)<sup>9</sup> that is comprised of a *lamed* and a *beis*, meaning to say- towards the originality of learning as expressed in the holy language whose introduction is the translational<sup>10</sup> learning as *aleph* is the translation of *lamed*.

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<sup>6</sup> See fn. 3

<sup>7</sup> *Kedoshim* 19:31

<sup>8</sup> See R. Kook's commentary on the letter *aleph* which represents a secondary mode of learning in that *aleph* is always already a translation once removed from the original source which due to its transcendent brightness remains ungraspable until the unknown future. *Beis* for R. Kook represents the original receptacle, the vacant space wherein the infinite potential of the *aleph* which remains infinite in relation to the limited content of the *beis* can settle and take shape within the measure and parameter of limitation.

<sup>9</sup> For R. Kook any teaching that arrives from an external source other than the individual themselves is already considered secondary and derivative and therefore associated with the epistemological mode of translational interpretation. The heart on the other hand, the symbol of subjective experience within the spiritually attuned life, represents an internal sense that is independent of anything other than its own truth. The heart as the seat of subjectivity is seen as the source of personal spiritual insight and therefore it is not subject the same rigorous truth value as an idea or concept that comes from the objective mind, see R. Nachman of Breslov, *Sichot HaRan* 1.

<sup>10</sup> Translation does not simply mean the vehicle through which one language is conveyed in another. For R. Kook- following the teachings of earlier mekubalim and the Arizal in particular- translation represents a hermeneutical mode of interpretation whereby an original idea undergoes a process of minimization so that it may be conveyed to those who cannot grasp the transcendent original. In other words, translation is an ontological process as opposed to simply a linguistic one, see R. Nachman, *Likkutei Moharan*, I:19.

**אד**. ענן, ואד יעלה מן הארץ, משותף עם אד, לישנא דתברא, כי קרוב יום אידם. האד העולה מן הארץ הוא הוא המחשיך את השמים, המאפיל את אור היום, והוא מורה כי כל משבר, כל צרה, הבאה על הכלל או על הפרט, כל החשכה, באה מתוך הפעולות הארציות, כי פועל אדם ישלם לו וכאורח איש ימציאנו. וכשם שהאד המעביב הוא חושך בתחילתו, ואח"כ ממנו הברכה באה, והשקה את פני האדמה, כן כל צרה ומשבר אשר בעולם, הכל עשוי למטרת הטובה הבאה בעקבו, וכל מה דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד.

## **Aleph-Dalet**

A cloud, and mist (אָר) ascended from the earth<sup>11</sup>, connected to calamity (אָר), a word of destruction- *for their day of calamity is approaching*<sup>12</sup>. The mist that ascends from the earth is in and of itself<sup>13</sup> that which darkens the heavens, dimming the light of day. It teaches us that every crisis or trouble, every darkening that arrives for the collective or for the particular comes from with earthly activities<sup>14</sup>, *for He recompenses man for his deed, and according to man's way He causes him to find*<sup>15</sup>. Just as the mist (אָר) that thickens is dark in its beginning with blessings arriving afterwards, *watering the entire surface of the ground*; so too, every crisis or trouble in the world, everything is prepared

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<sup>11</sup> *Bereshit* 2:6

<sup>12</sup> *Ha'azinu* 32:35

<sup>13</sup> "In-and-of-itself" is a translation of R. Kook's double usage of "*hu hu*" which seems to imply simultaneity of roles carried out by a singular concept as opposed to the typical cause and effect process where one thing causes another thing to take place. In other words, instead of viewing the "mist" as something that rises from below thereby triggering a secondary reaction which causes concealment, R. Kook sees the "mist" itself as that which manifests in and as concealment. The ascension of "mist" from the ground prior to the creation of man is identified by various Kabbalists as the necessary stimulation that emerges on its own prior to the appearance of man. This minimal stimulation is referred to as *mayim nukvim*, feminine waters that serve to awaken the *mayim dukhrin* or masculine waters which represent the spiritual influx that arrives from above. It is axiomatic within the system of the Arizal- based on the teachings of the earlier Kabbalists- that there can be no expression of light without a movement from below that inspires it. The fullness that descends from the heights of spirituality must be preceded and awoken by the lack that ascends from the depths. In the absence of human beings, God himself, so to speak, initiated the first movement of *mayim nukvim* so that creation could take shape. Afterwards, the responsibility lies within the human realm of volitional action.

<sup>14</sup> For R. Kook, the realm of spirituality maintains its ideal state in spite of the fact that the material receptacles occlude it from appearing. This is true for the soul of the individual as expressed at the beginning of R. Kook's commentary on the siddur where he describes "the perpetual prayer of the soul" which remains concealed due to the external factors of materiality and human experience. Following the long tradition within Jewish thought that "evil does not descend from above", R. Kook ascribes all concealment to the lower realms of being wherein human behavior and natural consequences prevent the clarity of goodness from being revealed externally.

<sup>15</sup> *Iyov* 34:11. Here R. Kook seems to be touching on one of the main themes of Reish Millin, namely that the entire purpose of creation and all of the necessary concealment and darkness that emerges once the original act of *tsimtsum* takes place is for the sake of *bechirah* wherein the human being can choose between good and evil. In order to affect the necessary ground upon which *bechirah* can grow there needs to be a precise measure of both revelation and concealment so that the person is not compelled either way by the overt manifestation of godliness, or the apparent absence of godliness.

for the purpose of the good that comes afterwards, *and everything that the merciful one has done, He has done for the good*<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> *Brachot 60b*

**א**. מלת הספק, מורה היא בהרכבתה של האל"ף והוי"ו על התחלה וחבור. האל"ף הוא הציון ההתחלי, הוי"ו הציון המחבר. אי אפשר לשום ספק שיבא, כ"א כשיגרמו את הבסיס להוייתו איזה תוכן של התחלה המצטרף עם תוכן של חבור, של צירוף דבר אל דבר, בפועל או בציוור. והספק בעצמו מורה על כח מתחיל, על סבה ראשונה, ולא רק על הוייתה, כ"א על הויית פעלה, שאחרי החידוש הבודד, שהוא התוכן היסודי שמביא להכרת הסבה הראשית, באה הכרת הפעולה, המחדשת צורות, תכונות וצביונות, שתוכנם הוא מיני חבורים שונים בערכים מיוחדים, ונמצא שהספק הוא בעצמו יסוד הודאיות.

## **Aleph-Vav**

The word of doubt<sup>17</sup> in the combination of *aleph* and *vav* represents the beginning and connection<sup>18</sup>. The *aleph* is the sign of the beginning and the *vav* is the sign of the connection. Doubt cannot arrive unless the basis of its existence causes some content of the beginning to attach itself to some content of connection<sup>19</sup>, some combination of one thing to another in actuality or imaginatively<sup>20</sup>. Doubt itself represents the power of a beginning, of a first cause. Not only the existence of a first cause, but rather the emergence of its activity<sup>21</sup>. That after the isolated novelty which is the foundational content that leads to the recognition of a first cause<sup>22</sup>, the recognition of activity arrives, generating new forms, qualities and characteristics whose content is various

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<sup>17</sup> *Aleph* and *vav* comprise the word “*oh*”, translated as “or” as in “this *or* that”. The moment of decision and choice arrives when there are two or more equally possible options in front of a person.

<sup>18</sup> See R. Kook’s commentary on the letter *vav* where the *vav* is associated with connection in the grammatical sense of *vav ha’chibbur*, as well as the structural sense of the hooks that held the different parts of the *mishkan* together, referred to as *vavei ha’ammudim*.

<sup>19</sup> What R. Kook seems to be saying is that once an idea or concept begins, it can seamlessly continue to express itself without any disruption because of its independent nature. However, once the idea or concept has run the natural course allotted to it by its self-sufficient content, it must connect or combine with another idea or concept to ensure its continuity. Then “some content of the beginning” begins to attach itself to “some content of connection”, in other words, the first idea or concept now begins to merge with another idea or concept so that it can continue. This point of merging– where one idea attaches itself to another idea due to the inherent deficiency and dependency of the first idea– this is where doubt emerges. R. Gershon Henoch of Radzyn expresses this concept in numerous places, namely that it is specifically at the point of transition between one thing and another that doubt and confusion emerge.

<sup>20</sup> Doubt arrives after the initial stage ends, thereby propelling a new beginning. Not necessarily the beginning of a fully new entity, but rather a shift from one stage of something towards the next stage within the same thing. This liminal space left open by the transition from the end-of-the-beginning towards the beginning-of-the-end is where doubt can enter.

<sup>21</sup> As the point of transition and connection between one thing and another, or between the beginning stage and the subsequent stage, doubt represents the beginning of something new. The departure away from the clarity of the beginning brings about the doubt that stands at the entrance of something new. R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin expresses this idea when interpreting the rabbinic statement that “all beginnings are difficult”. The commonly held assumption is that the beginning is difficult because it is the start of something new that has not yet been arranged. The truth however– according to R. Tzadok– is that the beginning is difficult because it is always already the end of some previous stage.

<sup>22</sup> Meaning– the first idea or concept that arrives at the limit of what it can convey based solely on its self-sufficient content

forms of different combinations in their particular value<sup>23</sup>. We find then that doubt is in and of itself the foundation of certainty<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> It does not matter what the first idea or concept connects to in order to perpetuate itself; what matters is that it can connect to a variety of other ideas, each forming its own combination or formation.

<sup>24</sup> While R. Kook is speaking about certainty and doubt on an epistemological register, later on by the letter combination of *aleph-mem* we will see how R. Kook connects the certainty that rests at the core of doubt to the ontological space of the *partzufim* that comprise the world of *atzilut*.

אז. מורה על העבר, אבל לא רק בדרך פרזי, סיפור של מאורע שאינו מרותק עם רגשי הנפש והתפעלותיה השיריות, כ"א באורח שירי, ומצב נפשי מרומם. מתרומם האדם למעלה מן הזמן, שסדרו הטבוע הוא שבעת ימי השבוע, מתעלה הוא בזכרו את היסוד הראשי, ההתחלה האלפית, נשמת החיים של כל המאורעות המתגלמות במשך הזמנים. ההתחלה מתעוררתי בצורתה הרוחנית, והרעיון שהמלחמה, המתוארת בצורת הזי"ן ומבטאו, והצורך להזנה וכלכלה רוחנית וחמרית, והתמלאותו של צורך זה באופנים נאותים, משוערים לטובת השכלול האידיאלי, הם הם המטביעים את הצורה השירית של זכרון העבר, והם מובעים בעז במלת אז.

## **Aleph-Zayin**

“Then” represents the past<sup>25</sup>, not simply the prosaic recounting of some past event disconnected from the emotions of the soul or the poetic movement of the self, but rather by way of the poetic path, an elevated state of the mind. A person transcends beyond time whose natural order is the seven days of the week<sup>26</sup>. He conjures the memory of the foundational origin, the beginningness of the *aleph*, the soul of life within the events that materialize in the process of history<sup>27</sup>. The excitement of the beginning in its spiritual form along with the idea of war- described in the form of the *zayin* and its expression- and the need for protection and sustainment both physically and spiritually <sup>28</sup> . The fulfillment of this need in appropriate ways, precisely measured for the sake of

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<sup>25</sup> “Then” may represent the past as in “back then”, or it can represent the future as in “*then they will sing*” (see Rashi, *Beshalach* 15:1). While in this teaching R. Kook focusses primarily on the past and its recollection, there is still a connection with “then” as the future in that for R. Kook one of the unique properties of time is the ability of the present to determine the status of the past retroactively thereby disclosing a new future. This temporal redetermination is part of what R. Kook describes (*Orot haTeshuvah*, 6:5) as *teshuvah* through which the past action is endowed with new meaning. According to R. Kook this is only possible due to the fact that the past action contains within it a residual trace of the original intention. This intentional trace allows the individual to reconnect there mind back towards the action thereby altering the status of the action itself. See the commentary of R. Kook on the letter *vav* where R. Kook describes the ability of the *vav* to transform- grammatically speaking- the past into the future and the future into the past.

<sup>26</sup> R. Kook is utilizing the well-established idea that natural time, history, nature and mundanity are represented by the number seven. As the Vilna Gaon points out, this association goes beyond the temporal breakup of a seven day week, representing nature, geographic location, celestial forces and psychological drives.

<sup>27</sup> R. Kook is not negating the concept of time by ascending to an atemporal plane that rests beyond time. Rather, he is redeeming the concept of time by revealing the ungraspable origin that stands beyond time while simultaneously animating the order of time itself. The process of history described as the “seven days of the week” maintains its particular status, only now it is seen through the lens of the *aleph* that constitutes time, suffusing it with the lights of spirituality that endow the meaninglessness of history with the wondrous meaning of the *aleph/pelah*. This paradoxical maintenance of time that reveals the true essence of time is symbolized by the letter combination of *aleph-zayin* in that the ungraspable source represented by the *aleph* is united with the historical process represented by the *zayin*. The negation of time and its constraints would be represented by the letter *cheit* which symbolizes the order beyond nature as the Maharal has shown in multiple places.

<sup>28</sup> See R. Kook’s commentary on the letter *zayin* where he describes the dual role of protection against destruction and the preservation towards construction that the *zayin* carries out. In order so that the *aleph* can manifest within the *zayin* there is a need for protection against the powers of separation that emerge immediately upon the movement away from unity.

the ideal improvement<sup>29</sup> is in and of itself that which shapes the nature of things. The poetic form of remembering things past expressed within the courageous strength of the word then (יִשׂרָאֵל).

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<sup>29</sup> As we have seen, R. Kook sees the historical process as one of perpetual elevation and evolution, always moving towards the “ideal improvement”.

**אח.** הקרוב ביותר מקורב, המגובל בגבול האחדות, ומתאים בשביל כך מובן אח על אחד, יחיד, אח אל אחד. אם לא היתה בעולם נטיית ההתאחדות, בבריות ובאדם, לא היתה כל צרה מתבלטת, אושר לא היה נמצא, אבל גם שבר וצרה לא היה במציאות. כל המכאובים, כל המשברים, כל הצרות, הנם רק תולדותיהם של השאיפות האחותיות המוכרחות סוף כל סוף לבא בעולם. וכל המניעות המעכבות את התגלמות האחוה, את האיחוי, את ההתאמה, ואת השלום הנדרש והמוכרח, הם הגורמים את המכאובים המתבטאים בקריאת אח. והם הם ג"כ גורמי השמחה, הצהלה, ההתאשרות המטרתית, המראה על הצורה הידועה שבאה לשכלולה בתוספת הה"א אות הידיעה, האח, קריאת השמחה והחדוה.

## **Aleph-Chet**

The closest relative contained within the limits of unity (אהדות)<sup>30</sup>. It is therefore appropriately understood that brother (אה) comes from one (אחד)<sup>31</sup>, from singular (יחיד), brother towards one. If the drive towards unity (התאחדות) were absent in man and creation, there would be no accentuation of troubles and difficulties. Richness and wealth would be absent, but so would brokenness and pain<sup>32</sup>. All suffering and failure are nothing but the symptom of the drive towards sisterly unity (אהותיות) that must nevertheless appear within the world<sup>33</sup>. All of the

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<sup>30</sup> What R. Kook seems to be saying is that once unity is disrupted through the original *tsimtsum* and difference enters into the space of existence, the interconnection between things is no longer absolute and unity is now determined by the relative closeness between two separate entities. What was once precise is now approximate. Things are no longer simply unified without the possibility of distinction; rather closeness and distance are now measured according to the original unity that is now absent. Seen through the lens of familial relationships, the relationship between siblings is the first instantiation of difference within the realm of unity. If the family system is seen as a unified whole comprised of interconnected parts, the relationship between the child and the sibling is the first place where separateness is pronounced. While the child is obviously distinct and apart from the parent, nevertheless the influence- both physically and spiritually- that the parent maintains with the child perpetuates the symbiotic relationship where things are still unified to a certain degree. With a sibling however, the relationship becomes one of difference within sameness. Both children maintain individualized identities while remaining connected through relation. The realm of unity as symbolized by the family unit is now disrupted, making room for “the closest relative” who remains “contained within the limits of unity”.

<sup>31</sup> The word for brother is etymologically connected with the word that represents unity and singularity, see *Yechezkel* 18:10.

<sup>32</sup> What R. Kook seems to be saying is that the inherent drive towards connection and unity is dependent upon the separation and distinction that precedes it. Were it not for the difference that breaks up the original unity, there would be no desire for unity as each particular would be subsumed within the universal, unaware of the distinction between itself and every other thing. Only when unity is disrupted can there be a desire and drive to reclaim the unity that has been lost. The “accentuation of troubles and difficulty” comes about when each particular existent sees itself as separate and apart from everything else and it is specifically there that the attempt to reenter the prior state of undifferentiated unity takes root. This sense of pain that arises when the individual attempts to reenter the space of unity, only to recognize that reentry is barred is felt most acutely when unification is almost reached. When a person reaches the heights of unity where the limit blocking full unity is placed in front of them; that is the birthplace of the holy pain of desire for a *yichud* that cannot yet be realized. That is why R. Kook associates this pain specifically with the sibling relationship, which as we said is the closest one can come to unity while still remaining separate and apart.

<sup>33</sup> Being caught up at the limit of unity, meaning- the highest point of unity possible within a world of differentiation- leads to “pain and suffering” in that the promise of reentering a past unity stands just out of reach. It would be simple enough to give up on the past unity, thereby undoing the pain of the distance and gap, but as R.

preventions that prevent the materialization of fraternal unity (אחווה), unification (איחוי), alignment and the peace that is necessarily sought out; they are in and of themselves the cause of pain that is expressed in the word “uch” (ach, ouch) (אח)<sup>34</sup>. They are also the cause of joy, success and the enrichment of purpose that is expressed in the known form that arrives at its improvement with the addition of the letter *hei* which represents something known, “ha-ha” (i.e. laughter) (האח-האח)<sup>35</sup>.

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Kook has shown so often- the unity of the past “must nevertheless appear within the world”. The persistence of pain that stems from the departure of unity is in and of itself the hope towards its eventual arrival.

<sup>34</sup> *Yechezkel* 6:11. Aside from their acute and particular origin, all expressions of pain, grief, anxiety and suffering are symptomatic of the pain that abides within creation as a result of being created and thereby separate and apart from the creator.

<sup>35</sup> *Yeshaya* 44:16. When the eventual unity arrives at the end of history, the pain and suffering that was accentuated in and by the gap that separated reality from its ideal state will be transformed into instigations of joy and laughter. In line with various kabbalists, R. Kook sees laughter through the lens of incongruity wherein things undergo a reversal from their original status into something hitherto unexpected. This view of laughter aligns with the redemptive hope that all pain and concealment will be flipped into joy and revelation. Then it will be revealed that the irreducible gap between difference and unity was in and of itself that which amplifies and adorns the original unity as described in footnote 1.

**אט.** הוראה להליכה בנחת, וילך אט. מקושרת עם גזרת הטיה, שהאלף היא בה משמשת. כשאין נטיה מדרך הישרה, ילכו הנטיות במרוצתם. ירוץ צדיק ונשגב. כשבאה נטיה לארחות עקלקלות, הטבע האיתן של אומץ החיים נשבר אז, והתיקון יוכל לבא רק מהליכה מלאה זהירות, הליכה איטית.

## **Aleph-Tet**

It represents the act of walking calmly, *and they walked slowly* (אט)<sup>36</sup>. It is connected with the expression of inclination<sup>37</sup> (הטיה) where the *aleph* begins to be felt. When there is no digression (נטיה) away from the straight path, the inclinations (נטיות) arrive quickly, *the righteous run into it and are straightened*<sup>38</sup>. But when the inclinations lean towards a crooked path<sup>39</sup>, the strong nature of courageous life is shattered and restoration can only come by way of walking with great care, a slow and careful (איטית) walking<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> *Malbim* on *Iyov* 18:7

<sup>37</sup> The word for inclination and growth in the vegetative sense are united in that they both represent movements that are directed through the intention with which they are started.

<sup>38</sup> When the inclinations- which are representative of the competing drives within the individual- move along the straight path, they do not encounter preventions or disruptions. They move smoothly along the grooves of the original intention. At that point there is no need for the slow deliberateness that is necessary in places of confusion and digression. The natural movement devoid of disruption is identified with the *tsaddik*, the straightened path that hits the point of essentiality without deviating towards the right or the left. The speed of the *tsaddik* is not simply the condensation of time wherein something moves from point A to point B, but rather the essential quality of hitting the target without delay, almost immediately.

<sup>39</sup> The word for crookedness is associated with the work *Amalek*, as *Amalek* is often identified as the counteracting power that brings about all deviancy and stumbling away from the straight and narrow path.

<sup>40</sup> See R. Kook's commentary on the need for deliberation and care in *Middot HaRaaya, erekh Pachadim*

**א**. יש בה הוראה שלילית, אי אפשר. גם הוראה של שאלה, ואי זה הוא. השאלה תבא ג"כ בצורה שלילית, כלומר כשישנה טענה חזקה, או סתירה, נגד הבירור של המושג הנחקר, או כשישנה תעלומה חוצצת ומעלמת, שיש בה ג"כ תכונת השלילה, יבא אז תוכן השאלה בלשון אי. משלילה זו יבא החיוב המפורט, מתעלומה תצא האורה. ותוכן של הראשית, הקדמות היסודית, אשר אין לנו כל כשרון לעמד בסודו, יגלה ע"י הגורמים השליליים, בתכונת הנקודה, המתחילה להיות נרגשת, ושעומדת בשדרת האותיות בתכונת היו"ד, ובמערכת המספרים, במספר העשרה, המתחיל כבר את מלאכת ההתרבות, ההתגלות וההתבלטות. והרכבה זו נאותה היא לצורת הפתרון של הוראת תיבת אי, בין בצורתה השלילית העמוקה, בין בצורתה השאילתית, שהיא מבוססת על יסוד התוכן השלילי, הבאה כבר לכל חיוב וישות מושגה.

## **Aleph-Yud**

It contains a negative expression, it is impossible (אֵי אִפְשָׁר). It also contains the expression of the question, *and who (אֵי) is it*<sup>41</sup>. The question also arrives in a negative form, meaning to say that when there is a strong claim or contradiction against the clarified concept under discussion, or when there is a concealment that also contains the negative nature which separates and makes hidden, then the content of the question arrives in the language of *which (אֵי)*<sup>42</sup>. From this negation the particularized affirmation emerges, the light comes from within the hiddenness<sup>43</sup>. The content of the beginning, of the fundamental

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<sup>41</sup> *Esther* 7:5

<sup>42</sup> R. Kook is pointing out the conceptual and linguistic association between negativity in the philosophical sense of negation as opposed to affirmation and questioning. Both represent the limit that disrupts the movement of a previous concept. Within the context of ‘negative-theology’, negation represents the limit at which one can no longer speak of positive or graspable traits with regards to the Infinite. Due to the immeasurability of the Infinite, any positive assertion regarding its traits, and to a certain extent even its existence is tantamount to heresy in that to assert positive attributes one is always already applying limit and distinction to that which is unlimited and indistinguishable. The space of negativity therefore is the limit where our ability to ascertain particular facts ends, only leaving space for the ‘negative-characteristics’ where we express what something is not, i.e unlimited, indifferent, atemporal etc. The same is true with regards to questioning. There are two modes of questioning; the first is the question that stimulates an answer, a lack of knowledge that awakens a drive towards that which is knowable in its essence in spite of the fact that it is hitherto unknown. The second type of questioning is the question that arrives after that which is knowable has been fully ascertained. Once a specific concept or piece of information is known, there arrives a question that penetrates to the core of what has been postulated. Not simply a question of detail or fact but rather a question that questions the very possibility of knowledge, a question that reaches beyond the beginning of information back towards the origin upon which the very concept of ‘knowability’ is put into question. This second type of questioning represents the limit of what can be known thereby connecting itself to the very concept of negation as expressed in ‘negative-theology’ that R. Kook will continue to express in the letter combination of *aleph* and *yud*.

<sup>43</sup> For R. Kook– following the path of R. Moshe Cordevaro and the Arizal– concealment and limitation are never simply occlusion but rather they serve in a dialectical fashion as the impulse towards disclosure and revelation. In the words of RaMaK and the Arizal, *ha-he’elam hu ha-gilui, the concealment is in and of itself an act of disclosure*. In the relative system of divine investiture within existence, every stage of expression is both below that which preceded it and above that which proceeds it. As such, the lowest level of the higher stage is considered the highest level of the lowest stage, while the lowest level of the lower stage is considered the highest level of the preceding stage which is even lower than it. Furthermore, every stage in relation to that which is below it is considered as if it were infinite vis-à-vis the finite nature of that which comes after. While the only ‘absolute Infinitude’ is the *Ein-Sof* from which the entire system originates, each ensuing stage can be considered a ‘relative infinitude’ in relation to the stage that follows. Just as the ‘absolute Infinitude’ of *Ein-Sof* and its annihilating light needed to undergo a process on contraction and concealment (*tsimtsum*) so that the other-than-god could be

introductions which stand beyond our ability to discern their secret are disclosed by way of negative causes in the semblance of the point that begins to be felt, the point that stands at the root of the letters in the nature of the *yud*<sup>44</sup>. In the numerical system, the number ten already begins the work of multiplication, disclosure and accentuation<sup>45</sup>. This combination is appropriate in forming the interpretation of the word *aleph-yud* (אס), both in the form of its depth-of-negation as well as its questioning form which is founded upon the foundation of negation that can always already be found within all affirmation and graspable existence.

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disclosed in a measured and limited way, so too the ‘relative infinitude’ of each stage needs to undergo a process of concealment so that the ensuing stage can be disclosed.

<sup>44</sup> The *aleph* like we have seen represents the origin that due to its ineffability can only be grasped by way of translation. Due to the infinite nature of the “essence” that animates the *aleph* we only have access to the hither side, the translational consciousness that limits the infinite thereby disclosing it in a reduced and concealed form by way of negativity. The concealment of the source of the *aleph* which is the ‘unlimited power’ (*koach bilti gevul*) of divinity allows for the disclosure of the ‘limited power’ (*koach ha-gevul*) that becomes the beginning and root of all eventual limitation and measurement. However, as R. Kook explains by the letter *aleph* in Reish Millin, this ‘limited power’ still maintains an aspect of the infinitude it comes to limit thereby manifesting in and as the paradoxical space of a ‘limited power without limit’ (*koach ha-gevul m’bli gevul*), see note 111. For that reason the emergence of limit and measure in and through the ‘limited power without limit’ can only appear as a point, the most minimal form that retains a sense of form. The point as expressed in the letter *yud* represents the infinitesimal dot that contains within itself the potential of the infinite. Pure potential, the beginning of all expression contains so much that it can only be expressed in the self-contained point, the drop of ink (*dayo*, ink shares the same Hebrew letters as the letter *yud*) that is present within all inscription and writing. For R. Kook the letter combination of *aleph* and *yud* represents the dialectical play of concealment and disclosure contained within the *aleph* and the emergence, or instantiation of limit in its unlimited form as contained in the *yud*, see note 4.

<sup>45</sup> As R. Kook explained by the letter *yud* in Reish Millin, the *yud* represents pure quantity (*kamu*) in its ideal state as it remains connected and infused with the pure quality (*eikhut*) that transcends multiplicity and separation. The *yud* stands between nothingness and something, or the inexpressibility and expressibility, and as such it maintains a relationship with both poles it comes to connect.

**אך**. מלת המיעוט, הצערת הנושא ממובנו הקדום, קציצת איזה סעיפים מתכונתו, נרדף הוא עם התוכן של ההכאה הבא בתואר זה, והאל"ף היא בו שימושית. הכח המקצץ וממעט הוא הכח המכה. מראשית המחשבה, שבאה בציון האל"ף לפעולת הכפים, צריכים כחות מתנגדים, בוטשים זה את זה, ומתנגדים זה אל זה, לבא ולהראות. התחברותה של המחשבה עם המפעל באה ע"י התמעטותה של הראשונה, התבצרותה, וקציצת זמורתיה, עד כדי העמדת האפשרות למפעל חוגי לצאת אל הפועל.

## **Aleph-Kaf**

The word of subtraction<sup>46</sup>, the retrieval\* of the subject from its original understanding and the cutting away of particular outgrowths from its content<sup>47</sup>. It follows along with the concept of hitting (ההכא) that is contained within this description, wherein the *aleph* begins to be felt. The strength that cuts off and subtracts is the strength that hits<sup>48</sup>. From within the origin of thought symbolized by the *aleph*, towards the activity of the hands (כפיים) there is a need for oppositional forces colliding with one another, opposing one another so that they may arrive and that they may be seen<sup>49</sup>. The connection

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<sup>46</sup> See Rashi (*Vayikrah* 23:27), “all *achin* (*aleph-kaf*) and *rakin* come to subtract”.

<sup>47</sup> The concept of subtraction arrives after the initial idea has fully manifested itself. Unencumbered by any limitation or precision, the initial idea spreads out in its fullness without any consideration as to the validity and meaningfulness of each of its parts. Once the initial idea has filled the space in which it spread out, the power of subtraction arrives to remove any unnecessary parts of the idea. The subtractive strength comes to arrange the initial idea in an appropriate form, to limit it by cutting away the excess. In this sense, the subtractive gesture is a dialectical response to the positive assertion of an idea where something additional is added to what was previously empty.

<sup>48</sup> R. Kook is working off of the linguistic association between the word *ach* in the sense of subtraction, and the word *ha'kaah* with the letters *kaf* and *aleph* at the center in the sense of hitting. As described in the previous note, subtraction is not simply the removal of something, but rather it is the oppositional force that stands against the emerging idea to insure that it stays within its particular boundaries and measurements. Like the act of hitting- which implies the collision between one force and another- that necessitates two preexisting objects so that a third reactionary power can be disclosed, so too with regards to subtraction. Subtraction is not some secondary act in response to an already situated concept; rather it is part and parcel of the concept formation itself in that each concept is made up of two oppositional forces – that of addition, or *chesed* and that of subtraction, or *gevurah*- whose interrelationship gives birth to a new concept.

<sup>49</sup> As we have seen, the letter *aleph* represents the beginning that stands beyond the order of revealed things due to its transcendent nature. The letter *kaf*- as described in R. Kook's Reish Millin- represents the beginning of activity as things stand at the ready to be revealed in the action of the hands (*kapayim* being rooted in the letter *kaf*). The distance between the transcendent ideal of the *aleph* and the immanent reality of the *kaf* is so great that there must be a bridge connecting between these two poles. For R. Kook- following the teaching of the Arizal- the collision between two opposing forces does not only point towards their overt difference, but also to their covert unity. When discussing the relationship between the lights that descend from above to below (*ohr yashar*) and the lights that ascend from below to above (*ohr chozer*), the Arizal describes a moment of collision (ההכא) in which the two opposing lights collide with one another resulting in the further materialization of light (*orot*) into vessels (*keilim*). These vessels or instruments of containment then minimize the transcendent light that emanates from above to below (*ohr yashar*) so that they may be perceived and engaged from within the perspective of the

between thought and activity comes by way of subtracting from the beginning, its fortification and the cutting away of its branches to ensure the potential of action manifesting in actuality<sup>50</sup>.

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immanent light that ascends from below to above (*ohr chozer*). This may be what R. Kook is referring to when he writes about the “oppositional forces colliding with one another, opposing one another so that they may arrive and that they may be seen”. In order to bridge the unbridgeable gap between the *aleph* and the *kaf* (parenthetically *aleph* is the first letter of the word *orot* while *kaf* is the first letter of the word *keilim*) there needs to be a collision, or a hitting that results in the subtraction needed to insure that graspable content “may arrive and be seen”.

<sup>50</sup> As expressed in note 43, all concealment is for the sake of disclosure. Without the power of subtraction and collision that minimizes the annihilating light of the *aleph*, there could be no transition between the transcendence of the *aleph* and the immanency of the *kaf*. It is only when the overwhelming light is reduced and concealed by way of *tsimtsum* that the light can then manifest within the vessels and limitations that allow it to be disclosed and grasped.

**אל.** הוראה שלילית, יש לה יחש עם אל בצירי, הוראת הכח. הכח מתגלה במה ששולל את מה שהוא נגד אופי מהותו. הכח המתגלה בפעולה, הוא שולל את אי ההיות של אותה הפעולה, הכח המתגלה ביצירה ובהויה בכלל, הוא שולל את אי ההיות של המציאות. השלילה הרוחנית, שהשכל ההגיוני שולל מהמושג היותר עליון, היא המעמידה אותו על אמתתו ומגלה את כחו ואורו. השלילה בתארי האלהות, הוא מקור האמת, שעל ידה הנשמה עומדת על בסיסה המלא אור, חופש, וצהלת עולמים. כשהתחלה השכלית האלפית, שמפני זהרה אי אפשר לבטא את מקוריותה, כ"א את תרגומה, מתחברת עם התוכן הלימודי שירד כבר לירידה ההקצבית, אז הוא מתרומם מהשטחיות של החיובים הרגילים וארחותיהם, ומתעלה עד לידי העוצם של כח השלילה, שעל ידה מתגלה אור היש של החיוב המוחלט, והאלות הפתחית מראה את האומץ האין סופי של האלות הצירויות, והחכמה מאין תמצא.

## **Aleph-Lamed**

The expression of negation<sup>51</sup> maintains a relationship with *el* (לס) with a *tzeirei* which is the expression of strength<sup>52</sup>. Strength is revealed when it negates that which stands against its essential nature. The strength that is disclosed in activity negates the nonbeing of that activity; the strength that is disclosed in creation and being in general negates the nonbeing of existence<sup>53</sup>. The spiritual negation which the contemplative mind negates from the loftiest concepts is

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<sup>51</sup> The letter combination of *aleph-lamed* spells out *al* roughly translated as “don’t” or “no”.

<sup>52</sup> While the name *e-l* is associated with the lovingkindness of God as disclosed in and through the *sefirah* of *chesed*; nevertheless there is a significant amount of discussion amongst the commentators that points towards the notion of strength and force being associated with *e-l* as well.

<sup>53</sup> Here R. Kook is describing the conceptual connection between the concept of negation as expressed in *al* with a *patach* and the concept of strength as expressed in the name *e-l* with a *tzeirei*. When a particular power is disclosed through strength, it is always already the culmination of something that preceded it. There can be no disclosure that is not rooted in an act of concealment that conceals that which was previously there in order to disclose that which is coming into being. The strength that is needed so that a particular power can emerge from within potential is also the negation of the power that preceded it. All emergence and manifestation, all expression and actualization are simply the opposite side of submergence and dematerialization. The strength necessary for the gathering of potential prior to its actualization is the same strength that conceals and negates the already actualized thing that stands in the way of the burgeoning potential. R. Kook makes this point even clearer by giving examples that run against the typical concept of negation and disclosure. Typically something already created is negated so that something not-yet-created can emerge and take its place. In that case presence precedes absence, and the positive assertion of things precedes their negation. Here however R. Kook describes it in the opposite way. “The strength that is disclosed in activity negates the nonbeing of that activity; the strength that is disclosed in creation and being in general negates the nonbeing of existence”. Here the non-being of activity precedes activity just as the nonbeing of existence precedes existence itself. The power of negation which is simultaneously the strength of disclosure conceals the nonbeing of things so that the being of things can be revealed. With this inversion of terms R. Kook takes the act of negation as expressed in the word *al* and he transforms it into a paradoxical movement wherein the negation of nothingness is in and of itself the assertion of somethingness, a concept already alluded to above in note 43 regarding the Arizal’s statement “the concealment is the disclosure”. This concept of concealing “Nothing” in order to reveal “Something” is explained at length in the writings of R. Shlomo Elyashiv, the *Leshem Shevo V’Achlama* in his treatment of *tsimtsum*. As explained by the letter *aleph* in Reish Millin, both R. Elyashiv and R. Kook were deeply influenced by the Kabbalistic system of Rabbeinu Azriel of Gerona who expressed this concept based on the phrase in the *Sefer HaYetzirah*, “*na’aseh eino yeishno*”, *He made his Nothingness into Something*.

what arranges that concept in its truthfulness, disclosing its power and light. The negation with regards to the descriptions of godliness is the source of truth and through it the soul is capable of standing upon its foundation saturated with light, freedom and attainment<sup>54</sup>. When the origin of thought in the form of the *aleph*- which due to its light can only be expressed by way of translation and not by way of its originality<sup>55</sup>- connects with the content of learning (לימודי) that has always already descended in the degradation of limit<sup>56</sup>, only then does it transcend the superficiality of the standard affirmative statements and their pathways, ascending towards the intensity of the power of negation. The light of existence within the affirmative absolute is disclosed through the power of

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<sup>54</sup> Here R. Kook is moving from the ontological categories of concealment and disclosure, or negation and assertion, towards the epistemological register wherein these concepts are applied to the contemplative mind of the Kabbalist. For R. Kook—as expressed clearly in the first volume of Yosef Avivi’s *Kabbalat HaRaaya*- the “childish and immature” manifestation of monotheism is the theological assumption that one may grasp the “essence of god” (*atzmuto*). This impulse arrives as the result of the belief that the positive assertions that we can apply to god and godliness are of a greater status and value than the negative assertions that negate the affirmative qualities from god. In other words, it is the assumption that to say what something is represents a greater expression than saying what something is not. For R. Kook however- like many kabbalists who preceded and informed his thinking- the opposite was true. To say what something is implies a certain grasp with which the subject can hold, name and delimit the object. Once a positive assertion is applied to the object, the object shows itself to have always-already been subject to human understanding and is therefore measured and limited. On the other hand, to say what something is not does not imply the subject’s grasp of the object, but rather it discloses the distance separating the subject from the object to the extent that all one can say is what the object is not. For example, the contemplative kabbalist does not lay claim to grasping the Infinite thereby relegating it to some finite status, rather the kabbalist speaks by way of distance, beholding the impossibly distant object through a “speculum that does not shine”, and through the opacity that marks the finite nature of the human capacity of understanding. The negative assertions applied to the concept of God represent not only a paradoxically loftier level of understanding than the positive assertions in that the “apex of knowing is unknowing”, but it also serves the role of purifying the monotheistic ideal that according to R. Kook had fallen into the abyss of “childish immaturity” when it attempted to lay claim to the “essence of god” (*atzmuto*).

<sup>55</sup> See the teachings of R. Kook on the letter *aleph* in Reish Millin.

<sup>56</sup> See the remarkable comments of R. Kook in *Olot Raaya, Klal, Prat u’Klal* where he describes in explicit terms the secondary and derivative status of learning (*limmud*) and the eventual revelation that within the degraded status of the *lamed* itself there abides the light of the *aleph*. For R. Kook the derivative nature of learning is synonymous with the translational consciousness that is considered the “hither side. (*achorayim*) in relationship to the original language of *lashon ha’kodesh*, as he writes in Reish Millin, *Aleph*, “learning itself is translation”.

negation, and the *al* (לא) with a *patach* shows the limitless courage of the *El* (אל) with a *tzeirei*, and *wisdom comes from Nothingness*<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> *Iyov* 28:12. Here R. Kook does not seem to be using this verse in the way the Kabbalists interpret it- namely that *Chochma* the first *sefirah* in the discernable chain of being emerges from within the unfathomable origin of being rooted in the *sefirah* of *Keter* described in the *Zohar* as “*Ayin*” or Nothingness with a capital N- but rather as a proof-text for the concept of “*chochma*”, or conceptual knowledge arriving by way of “*Ayin*” or Nothingness and negation.

**אם**. מלת הספק, שהיא המדה השניה למעמד השכל, שהוא ביסוד הארתו עומד במעמד הודאי. כאשר יתמעט אורו, יגלה בצורה ממועטת, שבטפוס השכל יצוייר מעמד ההסתפקות, וחותרם השכלית יחוקק אז בהרגש, התכונה הבאה מיסוד הארת השכל בזיקוקו העליון. והננו מוצאים כאן את המאורות הרוחניות במעמד אצילותן, מתחלקים לזכריות ונקביות, הארה שרשית פועלת, והארה ענפית מתפעלת. הודאיות תנתן בהרגש מתוך התוכן העליון שבשכל, מיסוד המוח, שבו משכן נשמתו; ומהודאיות הרגשית, שבאה מתכונת השכל בעליוניותו, יצאו כל התוכנים הברורים, הרוחניים, המושכלים, המדותיים, והמעשיים, ותהיה הארת הרגש בכל חיטוב פרצופיותה אם הבנים בכל מלא עולם הרוח והמפעל. ויקושר בזה התוכן של הוראת הספק שבתיבת אם החירוקית, עם התוכן של הוראת האמהות מתואר אם הצירוית, ושניהם יחד יסתעפו מפעולתה של ההארה הראשית של יסוד ההתחלה האלפית על היסוד המי"מי, שהוא התוכן הממזג, וממיס, בצורה ממוחיה, את כל הנושאים, הצוירים, והמעמדים התבוניים, למזג אחד, עד אשר לא יוכרו הרישומים הפרטיים. ומרוב השטף, תבא תכונת ההסתפקות, שהיא תהיה המדריגה המכריחה להחתים את חותרם הודאיות הגנוז בה בתוכן הרגש, אשר לא יפרד לעולם מהתכונה השכלית הבהירה, ויאירו שניהם יחד באור הודאיות המתעלה בגבהי רום. הודאי שמו, כן תהילתו.

## **Aleph-Mem**

The word for doubt (אָפֿט)⁵⁸, the second level within the arrangement of the mind, which at the foundation of its light stands at the level of certainty⁵⁹. When it contracts its

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⁵⁸ The letter combination *aleph* and *mem* spell out “*im*” which can be translated as “if”. The questioning form of “if” points to the fact that something is still undetermined, “It is not clear *if* they have arrived or not”. This expression of the undetermined “if” can take on two forms. The first is when the indeterminacy is due to a lack of clarity, “it is not clear *if* they have arrived or not” because it has yet to be determined. Here the doubtful nature of “if” can be resolved; the determining factors have simply not yet been clarified. The second form of indeterminacy described in the word “if” is a doubt that is ontologically removed from the possibility of resolution. In other words, the doubt is not due to an absence of evidence or clarification but is rather part and parcel of the thing itself. If the first mode of “if” represents an epistemological and thus contingent doubt, the second mode of “if” represents an ontological and thus essential doubt. As we will show, R. Kook sees the “if” as described in the letter combination *aleph* and *mem* to be the latter type of doubt, the essential doubt which no amount of evidence or clarification can resolve. It is in this sense that R. Kook elevates doubt from a negative experience below the experience of knowledge up towards a positive experience that transcends the parameters of knowledge, embodying the Rabbinic adage that the “apex of knowledge is the unknowing of knowledge”, see the letter combination *aleph-vav* for more on the elevated nature of doubt, where he explains how “doubt becomes the foundation of certainty”. A secondary yet associated interpretation of the word “if” is to view it as a linguistic marker that represents the contingent nature of things, “B will take place *if* A takes place”, the manifestation of B is then contingent on A.

⁵⁹ More so than any other entry, the letter combination of *aleph* and *mem* requires a number of introductions based on the writings of the Arizal to be properly understood. As we will see R. Kook is basing his interpretation on the Arizal’s interpretation of the *Idrah Rabba*, one of the masterpieces of the *Zohar*. The *Idrah Rabba* possibly more than any other place within the *Zohar* goes farthest in describing the Infinite’s relationship with finitude in anthropomorphic terms. Describing the complex and interconnected system that comprises the “Godhead” and the initial phases of its formation, the *Idrah Rabba* describes the “shape of god” (*shiur komah*), so-to-speak, or the “general shape of limitation” as it is described by the *Leshem Shevo V’Achlama* in anatomical terms. In line with the Rabbinic notion that one can come to best understand the upper realms of being from within the lower realms of being, particularly through our bodies and personalities as described in *Iyov* (19:26), “*from my flesh I shall behold god*”, the Arizal sees the various parts of the “divine anatomy” described in the *Idrah Rabba* as the loftiest parts of the order-of-concatenation (*seder ha’hishtalshlut*) that begins with the instantiation of the world-of-emanation (*atzilut*). According to the Arizal, the loftiest point within the order of the worlds is the *partzuf* of *Keter*: Like all other *partzufim* that comprise the world of *atzilut*, *Keter* contains within itself ten *sefirot* whose sum total represents a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The first three *sefirot*, referred to as “*nistarot*” or hidden due to their transcendent nature make up the upper half of *Keter* known as *Atik Yomin* while the seven lower *sefirot*, referred to as “*niglot*” or revealed due to their immanent nature make up the lower half of *Keter* known as *Arikh Anpin*. For R. Kook in this entry, the most significant part of the anatomical depiction of god will be the upper half of *Keter*, or *Atik Yomin* which constitutes the “head” or the “mind” of god so-to-speak. According to the Arizal’s interpretation of the *Zohar*, the “mind” of *Atik Yomin* is comprised of three interconnected parts. The first part of the “mind” is referred to as “*Reisha D’Lo Ityada*” (often abbreviated as *Radl’a*), the unknowable head which

light it is revealed in a minimized form<sup>60</sup> which within the model of the mind creates the state of satisfaction (הסתפקות)<sup>61</sup>. The seal of the mind then engraves with feeling the content that arrives from the foundational light of the mind in its supernal refinement<sup>62</sup>. Here we find the spiritual lights at the level of their noble emanation (אצילות), dividing into masculine and feminine, the active light of the root and the activated light of the branch<sup>63</sup>. Certainty is given over with feeling from within the

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due to its transcendence is removed from any determinant grasp. Below the unknowable head there are two subsequent aspects of the “mind” nested within one another. The first and more encompassing aspect is the “*gulgalta*”, the skull that contains within itself the third aspect of the “mind” known as “*mocha stimaah*” or the concealed mind due to its enclosure within the surrounding light of the “*gulgalta*”. These two strengths of the mind- the “skull” and the “concealed wisdom” that resides within the skull represent the masculine and feminine strengths that constitute the entirety of existence. The “*gulgalta*” as the first discernable expression after the unfathomable “*Reisha D’Lo Ityada*” represents the masculine potency of certainty while the “*mocha stimaah*” represents the feminine potency of doubt that resides within and inferior to the surrounding light of the “*gulgalta*”. For R. Kook, the first strength of the “mind” is the clarity associated with “*gulgalta*” while the second strength of the “mind” is the doubt associated with “*mocha stimaah*”.

<sup>60</sup> At the highest level of the mind, the “*Reisha D’Lo Ityada*” the subsequent strengths of the mind are unified. The doubtful nature associated with the lowest level of the mind is seen as being unified with the clarity that emanates from the higher level of the mind. Doubt is seen to be on par with clarity in that both represent the potent strengths through which the thinking subject can be disclosed. At this level doubt has not yet taken on the negative connotations often associated with lack of knowledge but rather it resides in its supernal form, an essential doubt whose doubtful nature is a feature of itself and not a bug. However, when “it contracts itself” and moves away from certainty, it emerges in the guise of doubt that is below and inferior to the light of certainty.

<sup>61</sup> Doubt and satisfaction share the same root in that doubt is only essential and purposeful once a person has become fully satisfied with the idea they are trying to understand. When there is no more room to engage the idea, no more appetite or hunger to try and understand it in an even clearer way, then doubt arrives in its satisfying form.

<sup>62</sup> The emergence of doubt from within certainty- which for R. Kook based on the Arizal is the emergence of the “concealed mind” of *chochma* from within the “skull” of *keter*- allows for the interrelationship between these two contradictory strengths. The “concealed wisdom” serves as the “seal of the mind” which receives its influx from the “skull” which is the “foundational light of the mind”. As one of the first instantiations of the *hassadim* and *gevurot* binaries that constitutes the entire order-of-being, the relationship between the masculine “skull” and the feminine “concealed wisdom” is paradigmatic in that the masculine light of certainty is “sealed” and “engraved” in and through the feminine light of doubt.

<sup>63</sup> After the shattering of the vessels (*shevirat ha’keilim*) in which the feminine lights of chaos emerged devoid of stability, it arouse within the originary will of the Infinite to create a new light of masculinity that would stabilize and join with the original feminine lights of chaos so that together they could create the world of restoration (*tikkun*). The process of restoration would eventually result in the (re)formation of being where the world-of-chaos becomes the world-of-emanation (*atzilut*). The scattered points of chaos (*nekudot*) emerge as newly formed configurations (*partzufim*) which make up the world-of-emanation. Each of the five *partzufim*- *Atik/Arieh*, *Abba*,

elevated content of the mind, from the foundation of the mind where the soul is rooted<sup>64</sup>. And from the certainty-of-feeling which arrives from the mind in its elevation, all clarified, spiritual, intellectual, emotional and practical content emerges, and the feeling-of-certainty shines throughout the arrangement of the *partzufim*; the mother (מא) of the children in the fullness of the spiritual and active worlds<sup>65</sup>. This connects

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*Imma, Zeir Anpin and Malchut*- are formed in and by the pairing of the original feminine lights of chaos that shattered and fell with the newly emergent masculine lights of restoration. Each individual *partzuf* is comprised in and through the pairing of particular and specific points of feminine and masculine light which join together to create a newly formed configuration. What R. Kook is describing here is the first pairing of lights that comprise the *partzuf* of *Atik Yomin*, the upper form of the general configuration of *Keter*: As the first instantiation of the pairing of lights within the “noble emanation”- a phrase R. Kook uses to describe the world-of-emanation (*atzilut*) - the union between the “masculine” and the “feminine”, or the “active light of the root” and the “activated light of the branch” represents the first pairing of feminine and masculine lights that compose and comprise the *partzufim* that make up the world-of-emanation (*atzilut*). Although R. Kook does not overtly refer to the teaching of the Arizal, it is covertly apparent that he is utilizing the theory of *partzuf* formation that comprises existence. For the Arizal each *partzuf* is formed by a very specific and precise combination of feminine and masculine lights. What is unique about the *partzuf* of *Atik Yomin* is that when recording the teachings of his teacher the Arizal in the *Sefer Eitz Chaim*, R. Chaim Vital writes that it is unclear as to which specific points of feminine and masculine lights went into comprising the *partzuf* of *Atik Yomin*. Because of the lack of clarity surrounding the specificity of the pairings, R. Chaim Vital records multiple possibilities with regards to which lights went where. These various possibilities- all recorded in *Sefer Eitz Chaim*- are referred to as “*sfeikot d’atik*” or “*sfeikot d’Reisha D’Lo Ityada*”, the doubts of *Radl’a*. As R. Kook is showing in this letter combination of *aleph* and *mem* that spells out “*im*”, or “*if*”, the doubtful nature of *Atik Yomin* is not some accidental symptom of the lack of clarity surrounding R. Chaim Vital’s recording of the Arizal, but rather it is an essential aspect of the *Atik Yomin* itself, a level of existence so lofty that it can only be disclosed by way of doubt.

<sup>64</sup> Here R. Kook is referring to the masculine aspect of *Atik Yomin*, namely the “*gulgalta*” that surrounds the feminine aspect of *Atik Yomin*, namely the “*mocha stimaah*”. This part of the mind is the source of clarity and certitude in relation to the secondary part of the mind that which is the source of confusion and doubt. R. Kook refers to the “*gulgalta*” as the “foundation of the mind where the soul is rooted” because relative to it the “*mocha stimaah*” is considered like the body, much like the relationship between expressive masculinity and receptive femininity.

<sup>65</sup> The binary opposition that constitutes the order-of-being takes on many forms in the writings of the Arizal. Just to name a few that we have been dealing with in this particular letter combination. *Hassadim/Gevurot*; *Masculine/Feminine*; *Gulgalta/Mocha Stimaah*; *Restoration/Chaos*; *Soul/Body*; *Certainty/Doubt*. Another common binary is *chochma* and *binah* (wisdom and understanding) often associated with the right and left brain. If *chochma* is representative of the masculine flash of the father then *binah* represents the feminine process of the mother, which is one of the reasons *binah* is referred to in the *Zohar* as “*eim ha’banim smeicha*”. It is clear from the Arizal and his commentators that the doubts that surround the *partzuf* of *Atik Yomin* are primarily rooted in the points of feminine light that go into comprising the *partzuf* itself, thereby associating the nature of doubt primarily with the feminine aspect as R. Kook will continue to show.

the concept of doubt expressed in the word “*im*” (אם) with a *chirik* with the concept of motherhood as expressed in “*eim*” (אם) with a *tzeirei*<sup>66</sup>. Both of them together emerge from within the light of the original movement and the origin of the *aleph* that stands above the foundation of the *mem* which represents the power of brilliant coalescence and unity of all concepts, images and rational states-of-mind into one flow to the extent that their particular impressions are no longer identifiable<sup>67</sup>. And from the strength of their flow the attitude of satisfaction arrives, which is the necessary state for the sealing of the seal-of-certainty concealed within it in a felt-sense, which will never separate itself from the state of shining brilliance<sup>68</sup>. Both of them will shine together in the light of certainty that ascends to the loftiest heights, *His name is certainty and so is His praise*<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Aside from spelling out “*im*” or “*if*” which represents doubt, the combination *aleph-mem* also spells out “*eim*” or “*mother*”, highlighting the conceptual association between doubt and femininity.

<sup>67</sup> As R. Kook describes by the letter *mem* in Reish Millin, the *mem* represents the coalescence of all particularity into a single and unified flow wherein the particular identities of each and every thing are no longer discernable. The *aleph* represents the unified source of things in their origin, a unity that is above multiplicity, a level of certitude that is above the possibility of doubt. The *mem* represents the beginning of the second half of the *aleph-beis* a secondary origin. It represents the attempt to recuperate unity after the emergence of multiplicity from the letters *aleph* through *lamed*. It is a unity that contains within itself all multiplicity, a level of certitude that contains the possibility of doubt within itself.

<sup>68</sup> The emergence of doubt allows for the light of certainty to penetrate and reside within doubt itself. The separation of the “*mocha stimaah*” from within the “*gulgalta*” allows the certainty of the mind to operate even within the doubt of the mind so that even doubt becomes certain. This is not however a simple return of doubt to the level of certainty whereby all doubts would be clarified with everything reverting back to certainty. Rather, doubt remains doubtful, but essentially so. That which is doubtful is shown to be doubtful as a result of its lofty nature which due to its transcendent quality can never be fully resolved. Each time you look at the feminine letter *mem*, the unified whole that contains all multiplicity within it without negating the particularity of each thing, it appears different. Not because we are mistaken with regards to what it is, but because it contains within itself all things. Doubt is not undone but rather redeemed, shown to be an essential part of the richness of experience associated with the lofty level of *Atik Yomin*.

<sup>69</sup> The Name of God, “*shemo*” represents the masculine quality of expression; the praise of God that emerges from within the created worlds of separation and multiplicity, “*tehilato*” represents the feminine quality of receptivity. Both the masculine space of certainty and the feminine space of doubt join together to express the deeper level of certainty that even contains doubt within itself.

**אן.** הוראת השאלה ביחש המקום של איזה מבוקש, שבצורה רוחנית יקושר עם דרישת המטרה התכליתית ממחזה כללי המופיע בהמון פרקים, בתבנית ברקי אורות ונצוצי חיים מבריקים, בצורה זעירה ומעולמת. והשאלה חודרת היא, אן מונחת היא המטרה המרכזית של כל המון בריות הללו שהם בלי תכלית. מתאחדת כאן ההתחלה האלפית עם הנו"ן הפשוטה, תיאור התגלות נצוצי החיים, שכבר הריצה והשיטה, הרצון והחפץ, ניכר בהם, אבל הארתם מסותרה היא, ואין חודר באור פרטיותם פנימה, לדעת את בהיקת המגמה השוכנת בכלל החיים לפרטיהם. והשאלה עומדת בכל אדיריותה, והיא אומרת אן הוא המקום המיוחד הראשי המגמתי, לכל אותו החזיון המרובב בהמון גוניו.

## ***Aleph-Nun***

The expression of a question regarding the place of some particular desire<sup>70</sup>, which in its spiritual form is connected with the search for the purposeful goal that emerges from within the collective vision in all of its parts expressed in the shape of the flashes of light and sparks of life in all of their smallness and hiddenness<sup>71</sup>. It is a penetrating question, where (ןא) does the central purpose of all the myriad and limitless creations rest<sup>72</sup>? The *aleph* of the beginning unites with the outstretched *nun*, the depiction of the disclosure of the sparks of life wherein the running and moving, the desire and will is already recognizable. However, their shine is concealed within them, without penetrating into the light of their particularity enough so as to recognize the brightness of their purpose that rests within the general life of particularity. And the question remains in all of its strength, and it asks- where is the singular and original purpose for this vision suffused with so many colors<sup>73</sup>?

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<sup>70</sup> “An” makes up the word “le’an” as in, “to where?” implying the question with regards to the purposeful direction of something.

<sup>71</sup> For R. Kook the letter *nun* represents the emergence of particularity from within the collective flow of the *mem* wherein all particularity was submerged within the general movement of all things in their unified form. The *nun* is the Aramaic word for fish, the individual lifeforms that live within the unified waters of the *mem* which brings to mind *mayim*, or water. Due to the indivisibility of the water, the emergence of particularity must take place through the darkening of the *klal* for the sake of the emergence of the *prat*. In order for the particular to emerge from within the universal, the universal must undergo a process of contraction which allows for the disclosure of individual particulars. This transition from the *klal* into the *prat* is on a certain level a removal from the light of the general and a descent into the darkness of the particular which is why the *nunei ha-yam*, the fish of the sea must be expressed by way of translation “in all of their smallness and hiddenness”.

<sup>72</sup> Once the myriad particulars begin to emerge from within the indifference of the universal, the space of being becomes saturated with the manifoldness of difference and distinction. The transition from the singular and unified whole into the duplicitous and fragmented parts calls into question the purpose of all of these “myriad and limitless creations”. Where are they all moving towards? Is there a unified purpose at the heart of the multiple? For R. Kook, as we have shown previously, the answer is a resounding yes, for there is a teleological purpose to everything within existence.

<sup>73</sup> In this entry, R. Kook does not answer the question of “what is the purpose of all of these particulars?” He leaves the question in all of its ambiguity. The question of purpose, in and of itself, is the propelling force behind the will towards meaning. The emergence of multiplicity, of distinction and separation forces the contemplative individual to question the purpose of everything, and the secret is that the purpose abides within the heart of questioning itself.

**אף.** מורה כעס ורוגז, מתאים עם הוראת התיבה לדבר נטפל שאינו עומד לעצמו, כ"א הוא מצטרף וטפל לדברים אחרים גדולים ועקרים יותר ממנו. מקרה הרוגז הוה ע"י מה שהענינים הנטפלים קופצים בראש, ונכנסים לחוג העקריות, או שהם מכריעים את העיקר תחתיים, והם נעשים עקרים, ואת הדברים העקרים עושים לטפלה, השפלה הגבה, והגבוה השפל. אבל באמת אין במציאות דבר טפל. השלמות הכללית היא כ"כ איתנה, והמחשבה העליונה היוצרת כל בעזה היא כ"כ מדוייקת, עד שכל החלקים שביש מתאימים יחד. ובמדה ידועה, שהיא ג"כ העליונה שבמדות המעריכות את ההויה, הם שקולים יחד, והנטפל והעיקר באים מצד הכלליות העליונה, מצד התוכן התמים והשלם של ההויה כולה במשקל שוה. והפנים, העיקר שבהוד האדם, גם הוא יתואר באף. ואבר הנשימה והריח, החוטם, שבו עיקר הכרת האופי של הפרצוף, אמנם גם בו יוכר החרון והכעס, יבוטא גם הוא במלת אף. והנטפלים כולם בקיבוצם הם עושים את אוצר השפה, את הקצבת דיבור הפה, הבא מיסוד ההתחמה וההגבלה. וכשהם מתחברים לאותו התוכן שהדיבור נזרח הוא מהכח הפשוט של המהות המילולית, האגודה בתכונת הפ"א הפשוטה, מכנסים הם יחד את כל הנטפלים ואת כל העקרים, והנושא הטפלי, נעשה נושא היותר עליון, אדם של צורה, בעל החוטם, שהארת הנשמה הנהנית מהריח ניכרת בו בשפע רב. והכרת החסד המתעלה מעל כל ערכי הקיצוב המשפטיים, הולכת ומתפלשת, מרום הררי אל, עד מעמקי תהום רבה, ארך אפים לצדיקים ולרשעים, הקצר בזעם ומאריך אף.

## **Aleph-Peh**

*Af* represents anger and rage<sup>74</sup>, which is appropriate for a word that represents something inessential (טפיל) that does not stand on its own but rather is combined and subsidiary to something larger and more essential than it<sup>75</sup>. The experience of anger is when the inessential things jump ahead and enter into the space of the essential. Or, when they force the essential beneath them, thus becoming essential while the essential things are made inessential; the lower is raised and the higher is lowered<sup>76</sup>. But in truth, there is nothing inessential in existence. The general perfection is so strong, and the elevated thought which creates everything in its strength is so precise to the extent that every part (חלק) within existence aligns together<sup>77</sup>. And according to a certain

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<sup>74</sup> As in "*charon af*". As we will see the word for anger is deeply connected to the word for nose (*af*) as anger is often expressed through the image of the fuming face with flaring nostrils.

<sup>75</sup> "*Af*" can also be understood as a discourse marker representing the idea of "even/also" as in "not only this, but *even/also* this". Here R. Kook connects the two apparently separate definitions- anger and the incidental "even/also"- in that anger as we shall see is often the result of a reversal of terms wherein the incidental and inessential aspect of "even/also" takes the place of something essential and fundamental.

<sup>76</sup> The apparent connection between *af* as "anger" and *af* as "even/also" is that when the standard hierarchy of things is disrupted and reversed, the confusion and destabilization leads to chaos. Chaos or the sense of not being in control as one previously was is often the root cause of anger. When confronted with a loss of control, the individual is forced to exaggerate themselves so as to appear in control when in truth control has been lost. When that which was inessential- the terms that need the secondary "even/also" to include them within the context or economy of the statement- ascend and take the place of the essential terms, there is a disruption of order and as such anger is evoked.

<sup>77</sup> What R. Kook seems to be expressing is that while according to the human perspective of hierarchal order the reversal of terms wherein the essential becomes inessential and the inessential becomes essential is cause for chaos and anger; from the divine perspective the apparent differences between the two categories is part and parcel of the totality of Divine expression. In truth, the descriptive terms "essential" and "inessential" lose their efficacy and meaning when one recognizes that everything is fundamentally "essential" in that they emanate from within the essence itself. The simple fact that certain aspects of the essence are disclosed through the appearance of being "inessential" in no way detracts from their "essential" nature. From the Divine perspective that contains everything within it, both the "essential" and "inessential" aspects of creation and being are simply different ways of expressing the quintessence of the Infinite. The abiding difference between the expressed nature of the "essential" and the "inessential" is simply a symptom of the limited nature of the human perspective which is ontologically incapable of grasping the unity that exists within opposites, something that becomes painfully apparent when analyzing all the myriad binary oppositions that constitute this worldliness. This concept of the ontological equivalence between the "essential" and the "inessential" is part of a far reaching discussion in the writings of R. Kook and other Kabbalists regarding the identity between the "part" and the "whole" wherein the "part" is shown to be nothing but a fractalized expression of the "whole" itself.

trait which is also the loftiest amongst the traits that arrange existence, they are indistinguishable<sup>78</sup>. The essential and the inessential arrive from within the perspective of the transcendent universal, from within the wholly perfect content of the entirety of being on an equalized scale<sup>79</sup>. The face, the essential grandeur of the human being is also depicted as *aleph-peh* (אפ). The organ of breath and smell, the nose, which is the main distinguishing factor of the face<sup>80</sup> as well as the place where anger and rage can be seen, is also described with the word *af* (אפ). All of the inessentials combine together creating the storehouse of language, the limit of the mouth's speech which arrives by way of enclosing and limitation<sup>81</sup>. And when they connect to the content of speech when it is enlightened by the simple power of the essence of language that is tied up with the outstretched *peh*, they gather together all essentials and

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<sup>78</sup> Here R. Kook seems to be referencing the "trait" or *partzuf* of *Arikh Anpin*, the configuration and mode of governance associated with the *sefirah* of *Keter*. While a full description of the *partzufim* is far beyond the capacity of this note, suffice it to say that each of the five general *partzufim* that comprise the world of *Atzilut* represent a different manifestation of relationship between the masculine power of expression and the feminine power of constriction. At the loftiest point of the system, the *partzuf* of *Arikh Anpin* (when not counting the *partzuf* of *Atik Yomin* as discussed in the notes to the letter combination *aleph* and *mem*) represents the mode of relationality wherein the masculine and feminine potencies are unified in their value and valence. In other words, the typical distinction between the masculine often associated with that which is "essential", and the feminine which is often associated with that which is "inessential", breakdowns thereby revealing a gendered unity between all aspects. Here at this level of *Arikh Anpin* the "essential" and the "inessential" are revealed to be parts of the same whole. The association between the *partzuf* of *Arikh Anpin* and the letter combination *aleph* and *peh* is clear in the sense that the face, or "*apayim*" shares a root with the word *af* or "anger" or "also/even". R. Kook will continue to show that the anger that is disclosed through the face often manifests with the nose and the nostrils, also referred to in Hebrew as "*af*".

<sup>79</sup> R. Kook is reiterating that from the Divine perspective as it is expressed in and through the *partzuf* of *Arikh Anpin*- the mode of governance wherein difference collapses into unity- the apparent difference between "essential" and "inessential" is shown to be part of parcel of the deep unity that animates existence.

<sup>80</sup> See *Yevamot* 120a

<sup>81</sup> As R. Kook describes by the letter *peh* in Reish Millin, the mouth represents the preparation towards speech wherein the inner content gathers together, forming into what will eventually become words, sentences and language itself. The *peh* however does not represent the activity of speech as it is expressed externally, but rather the potential towards speech wherein all that can be said is held back, contained within the limit of the interior, standing at the ready to be expressed externally. For R. Kook the preparation towards speech is the gathering and coalescence of all that appears to be "inessential", all the darkened particulars that emerged through the letter *nun* from within the general wholeness of the letter *mem*, towards the newfound unity that does not negate particularity but rather embraces it, standing at the ready to be disclosed through speech itself.

inessentials<sup>82</sup>. The inessential subject becomes the loftiest subject<sup>83</sup>, a person of form and the *master of the nose*<sup>84</sup> and the light of the soul which benefits from smell becomes much clearer<sup>85</sup>. The recognition of lovingkindness that ascends beyond the values of limited justice moves and flows from the heights of the mountains of god to the depths of the great abyss. *Longsuffering* (ארך אפים) *towards the righteous and the wicked, short in anger and prolonged in breath* (ארך אפים)<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> When the “inessential” particulars coalesce into a combination that is worthy of expression, the whole that contains the particulars within it reaches the limit and pushes through thereby manifesting in the externalization of language as depicted in the outstretched *peh*.

<sup>83</sup> Speech is the distinguishing factor of the human being. Through it, all that appeared as “inessential” is shown to be the most “essential”. This is yet another symptom of the lofty level of *Arikh Anpin* wherein the transvaluation of meaning endows the “inessential” with the mark of the “essential” thereby disclosing the mutual interdependency of “essential” and “inessential”.

<sup>84</sup> See the Ramak’s *Pardes Rimmonim* (23:8)

<sup>85</sup> According to Chazal, the olfactory sense associated with the nose is considered the sense that brings pleasure to the soul as opposed to the body, see *Brachot* 43b. According to our sages the sense of smell brings comfort and pleasure to the soul due to the fact that during the original transgression of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” all of Adam’s senses were used except for the sense of smell. As a result, the sense of smell did not undergo the same physical and spiritually defilement and degradation that came as a result of the transgression. For this reason, the sense of smell retains a trace of its original status wherein it was capable of traversing the barrier set up between the spiritual and physical realms see for example *Bnei Yissaschar, Maamrei Chodesh Adar*. For this reason, the sense of smell is deeply connected with redemption and the return to that which was before the entry into the fallenness of time, see Rebbe Nachman’s discussion in *Likkutei Moharan, I. 2*.

<sup>86</sup> Here R. Kook continues to describe the mode of governance associated with the lofty *partzuf* of *Arikh Anpin*, the “elongated countenance” in contradistinction to the intermediate mode of governance associated with the *partzuf* of *Zeir Anpin* or the “small countenance”. While this theme is an extensive one in the writings of R. Kook as drawn from the writings of the Ramchal and R. Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, here we will only be touching on the general aspect of these two distinctive modes of Divine governance and interaction with creation. The historical mode of governance that acts in accordance with the behavior and action of human beings is associated with *Zeir Anpin*. Here the binary oppositions of “essential” and “inessential”; masculine and feminine; right and wrong; light and darkness etc. operate in their differences. The good is repaid with merit while the negative is repaid with retribution. This is the mode of governance associated with judgment and discernment. *Arikh Anpin*, on the other hand, can be seen as the transhistorical mode of governance that sees beyond the binary oppositions and distinctions that comprise the history of human behavior. From this perspective there is no difference between the “essential” and the “inessential” or right and wrong. The patience and grace of *Arikh Anpin* allows the light of holiness to erase all difference through the inundating light of unlimited compassion, traversing all areas of existence from the “heights of the mountains of god” down to the “depths of the great abyss”.

**אץ**. מורה מהירות, ומתאים ג"כ לתוכן של לחיצה ודחיפה, ומקושר עם צרות ביחש המקום. מקושרים הם התוארים הללו במושגים. המהירות המחשבית, הרצה ושבה כמראה הבזק, היא דוחפת מחשבה מפני מחשבה, והיצירה הרוחנית הוה. מתכנסים המון מהשבות ע"י כח לוחץ בנקודה מטרית אחת, והם מתאגדים להיות יחד לנושא שלם. מהירות המחשבה, הציור והחפץ, באה ע"י הכוסף הפנימי של העיזוז הרוחני שבמאור הנשמה לבא אל הקושט המוחלט, אל הצדק המופשט, המתעלה מכל כפיפה גבולית. מתאגד הוא האלף יסוד המתחיל, עם הצד"י הפשוטה יסוד אור הצדק במילואיו, ומתוך הרדיפה הדחיפית של הגעת חפץ עליון זה, מתהווה כל לחיצה וכל דחיקה במהלך החיים. מן המצר קראתי יה ענני במרחב יה.

## ***Aleph-Tsadi***

It represents speediness, aligned as well with the concept of pressure and pushing in the context of the narrowness of space<sup>87</sup>. These expressions are connected to these concepts. The quickness of thought in its running and returning like the appearance of the flash<sup>88</sup> pushes one thought away in place of another and spiritual creativity begins to form<sup>89</sup>. Countless thoughts enter through the powerful strength of pressure towards a singular point of purpose, gathering together into a unified whole. The quickness of thought, imagination and desire arrives by way of the spiritual courage of inner yearning within the light of the soul. Moving towards the absolute truth, towards the simple righteousness that transcends all the bentness of limitation<sup>90</sup>. The *aleph* which

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<sup>87</sup> The letter combination *aleph-tsadi* is associated with the word *atz* or *ratz* which represents speed and quickness of movement. It is also associated with the concept of narrowness and constriction as represented in the work *metzar*. The association between speed and narrowness may be understood as follows: when something needs to get from point A to point B in the least amount of time possible, the energy that propels the individual must be gathered from within so as to create an intensification of strength. The faster a person wants to move from point A to point B, the more energy necessary. When the potential energy within a person gathers into a singular point, the actualization of this energy pocket results in the delicate sense of inner pressure wherein the pocket of energy begins to seek out an exit through which it may actualize itself. The inner claustrophobia and the will towards catharsis results in the inner sense of constriction where the space that was originally unoccupied is now saturated with potential energy, showing the inherent connection between the speed and quickness of desire and the constriction of the self internally, see the Rebbe Rashab, *Maamarim Taf-Reish-Nun-Tet, Parshat Va'Yitzeih*.

<sup>88</sup> *Yechezkiel* 1:14

<sup>89</sup> As described in note 88, the buildup of internal pressure results in the intensification of energy. With no way to discharge the energy that has gathered, the inner claustrophobia results in one thing pushing another thing away so as to make room for itself. But because the thing that has been pushed away is still stuck within the self-contained economy of the self there is no relief and the thing that was pushed away will once again try and regain its place within its original space. This back and forth, or "running and returning" within the self creates an internal friction which in turn results in the intensification of the interior eventually leading to the inside exploding out onto the outside resulting in the actualization of activity and expression. This is what the Kabbalists refer to as the *sha'ah'shua*, the internal delight that takes place when the two opposing powers of expression and repression are forced to dance together, see *Leshem Shevo V'Achlama. Hakdamot U'Shearim, Shaar Ha'Poneh Kadim*, ch. 1-5.

<sup>90</sup> Here R. Kook is describing the result of this inner intensification of the self as it relates to the "*tsaddik*" which is deeply associated with the letter *tsadi*. Typically the intensification of energy and thought and the drive towards self-expression does not result in the actualization of something deliberate or precise. For most people the dark drives that animate the inner experience of self-intensification- what the Rebbe Rashab refers to as *hit'gabrut ha-atzmiyut*- do not result in anything other than the expression of the self, devoid of any teleological purpose beyond the natural catharsis of discharging one's inner confinement. For the "*tsaddik*" however, the coalescence,

is the foundation of the beginning connects with the outstretched *tsadi*, the foundation of righteousness in its fullness, and from within the pressured drive to arrive at this elevated goal, all the pressures and drives of life are created. *From the straits I have called out to god, and He has answered me in expansiveness.*

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intensification and emergence of this multiplicity of drives almost always results in a singular and purposeful activity, one that unifies and builds as opposed to one that scatters and destroys. All the disparate and multiple drives unite within the "*tsaddik*" searching out a point-of-exit through which the intense yearning can manifest externally as action. As the singular goal of the "*tsaddik*", "righteousness" is the determinant value that drives the expression. No longer afraid of the "crookedness" of the path which demands a slow and calculated approach as expressed in the letter combination *aleph-tet*; the "*tsaddik*" is capable of moving fast "transcending the bentness of limitation" towards the singular goal of righteous expression.

**א**ר. יש בו הוראת קללה ומארה, הראת אור, הארה וזריחה, הוראת לקיטה ותלישת פירות. מתוך המארה, מתוך המהומה והמבוכה באה האורה, מהקללה באה הברכה. התנובה של כל הצומח במשך הזמנים, בחיי האדם, וחיי כל בריה, בחיי העולם וכל העולמים, אינה נגמרת להיות ראויה להלקט, להאסף הביתה, ולהיות מוכנה ליהנות בה בני אדם וכל צבאות בריות עולם, כ"א ע"י שיעברו על כולם תקופת מארה ותקופת הארה, מחשכים וזריחה. מראשית יסודה של ההתחלה המוקדמה הולך קו נעלם, חודר דרך תקופות עולמים רבות ושונות, ממעל לאין חקר, ומתחת לאין קצה, עד אשר הוא מתגלה בצורה מעולפה, ומתחיל את מעשהו מיסוד התוכן המועתק, הראשית התרגומית, שמצד זעירות האורה לעומת היסוד המקורי, הרי הוא מכון המארה, ומצד התחלת צמיחתו והתעלותו למעלה למעלה, הלוך ועלה, הרי הוא יסוד האורה, ויסוד התגמול, המביא לידי לקיטת פרי האורה, אמרו צדיק כי טוב, כי פרי מעלליהם יאכלו.

## ***Aleph-Reish***

It contains the expression of a curse as well as the expression of light, enlightenment and shine<sup>91</sup>. The expression of the gathering and the plucking of fruit<sup>92</sup>. From within the curse<sup>93</sup>, from within the chaos and confusion the light arrives, from within the curse comes the blessing<sup>94</sup>. The produce of all vegetation- throughout the progression of time in human life and in the life of all creation, in the life of the world and in the life of all worlds- is only complete and prepared to be collected, to be gathered into the home and to give pleasure the human beings and all creatures of creation when it has gone through the

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<sup>91</sup> The letter combination *aleph-reish* spells out the root *ar* which represents the concept of a curse (*arur*) as well as light (*ohr*).

<sup>92</sup> See *Tehilim* 80:13; *Shir Ha-Shirim* 5:1. The word *ariti* implies a plucking or a cutting away for the sake of collection. As we will see the association between the letter combination *aleph-reish* as “light”, “curse” and “plucking” is the simple fact that there is often a necessary stage of difficulty and disconnection prior to the emergence of light and pleasure.

<sup>93</sup> While this “curse” does not necessarily point to a specific one, R. Kook’s comments may be applied to the first instantiation of a “curse” by *Adam* and *Chava* as a result of the transgression of the tree of knowledge. While the “curse” often implies a negative promise that seeks to create disunity and struggle within existence, the reversal of the “curse” and the subsequent “blessing” that emerges from within the heart of the “curse” itself reveals a deeper level of good in that the bad is forced to admit to the good itself. We find a remarkable expression of this in the Torah when *Baalani*’s attempt to curse the Jewish people is not simply negated, but rather reversed into a blessing itself.

<sup>94</sup> The shared root at the heart of “light” and “curse” is the realization that for presence to manifest there is almost always a preceding act of absence. In terms of the Kabbalah of the Arizal this becomes apparent at two particular coordinates within the map of being. Firstly, the infinite light of god that saturated the potential space of existence needed to undergo a process of self-limitation (*tsimtsum*) so that the other-than-god could come into being. Secondly, the instability between the excessive light and the minimal vessels at the outset of creation resulted in the shattering of the vessels (*shevirat ha-keilim*) which comprised the world-of-chaos (*tohu*). Taken as standalone events that remain disconnected from their aftereffects, these two initial acts of creation appear to be negative and destructive, i.e. the negation of the infinite light through the *tsimtsum* and the destruction that emerges from *tohu*. For the Arizal however, these events cannot be viewed in isolation from their aftereffects, nor can they even be said to be causes of some secondary reaction; rather the *tsimtsum* and *tohu* must be seen as taking place simultaneously along with the reactions that emerge thereafter, with any distortion of past and future or before and after being the result of the necessary durational pause. After the *tsimsum* the measured ray of infinite light (*kav*) entered into being, allowing for the new possibility of existence experiencing the quintessence of the infinite light (*ohr-ein-sof*) without being annihilated by its all-encompassing presence. After the *tohu* wherein the shattered vessels resulted in a world devoid of structure and order, the possibility of rectification and restoration (*tikkun*) is revealed thereby disclosing the advancements that take place specifically through what seems to be the opposite.

period of the curse as well as the period of light, darkness and shine<sup>95</sup>. From the foundation of primordial beginning a hidden ray emerges, penetrating the passage of many different periods and worlds above all counting and below all measure, until it is revealed in an obscured form<sup>96</sup>. It begins its activity from the foundation of the replicated content, the translational beginning which due to its diminished form in relation to the original foundation is considered the place of the curse<sup>97</sup>. And from the perspective of the beginning of growth and

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<sup>95</sup> In this context vegetation and fruits does not simply represent the actual accumulation of produce from the ground but rather all expressions of life in its myriad forms, external and internal, nonhuman and human. All things must undergo the difficult process of darkness and light, absence and presence, pain and pleasure in order to fully manifest their potential thereby resulting in the additional blessing of life.

<sup>96</sup> Here R. Kook seems to be referencing the initial act of negation for the sake of affirmation, of concealment for the sake of disclosure, of darkness for the sake of light, of the curse for the sake of the blessing. The *tsimtsum* as the initial act of revelation into time and space is rooted in the “primordial beginning”. Prior to the self-limitation that god, so to speak, imposed upon Himself, the infinite light was so blinding that it could only be referred to as darkness. Similar to the sun where gazing directly at the center without protection induces a certain blindness and lack of vision, so too the infinite light prior to the *tsimtsum* was too potent and ever-present to allow for any sort of grasp. The *tsimtsum* as the original contraction and minimization of the blinding light is then paradoxically that which allows for the infinite light to be grasped as light, because now that it has undergone a certain type of mediation through limitation the light does not overwhelm, in line with what the Ramak and Arizal have described as “*he’elem l’sheim gillui*” or “concealment for the sake of disclosure”. This is what allows the measured ray of infinite light (*kav*) to descend into creation, “the hidden ray that emerges, penetrating the passages” of all difference that exists within the world after the *tsimtsum*. While the ray of infinite light (*kav*) is a secondary stage in the unfolding of existence in that it is disclosed after the original *tsimtsum*, it is the first instantiation of light that can be grasped by creation and therefore it takes on certain parameters of the first act and beginning of all things. For R. Kook, this secondary nature of the origin that can only be revealed in an “obscure form” is represented by the *aleph*. As we have shown throughout the letter combinations, the *Aleph* represents the irreducible paradox of the origin in that it is the first expression of graspable light while simultaneously arriving after the ungraspable origin has concealed itself. As described in Reish Millin, it is a secondary level of Infinitude that is only revealed when the primary level of Infinitude conceals itself; it is the “unlimited power of limitation” (*koach ha-gevul b’bilti gevul*) that is disclosed in and through the concealment of the “unlimited” itself (*bilti gevul*). This is why, according to R. Kook, the *aleph* is expressed as the translation of “*limmud*”, because after the *tsimtsum* there is nothing- not even the beginningness of the *aleph*- that is not a translation of some infinitely distant essence. This may be what R. Kook means when he writes that the beginning of light can only be expressed in an “obscure form” because even the beginning is always already a doubling or a replication of something that has already concealed itself as we will see in the next note regarding the letter *reish*.

<sup>97</sup> Here R. Kook seems to be connecting the *reish* to the *aleph* by showing how on a certain level they both represent the same idea. As we saw in the previous note, the *aleph* is always already a translation of some original language which due to its ancient transcendence does not appear onto the scene of being. As we saw in notes 8 & 10, translation is not simply the transition from one language into another in the linguistic sense, but rather it

its perpetual ascension above it is considered the foundation of light, as well as the foundation of recompense which leads towards the gathering of the fruits of light<sup>98</sup>, *praise the righteous man for he is good, for the fruit of their deeds they shall eat*<sup>99</sup>.

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represents an ontological transition from that which cannot be grasped towards that which can be grasped and as such it is considered a state of slumber (*targum* and *tardeima* share a numerical value) in relation to the wakefulness of the original, and the backside in relationship to the face. The *reish* also represents the idea that the beginning is always already after a more ancient origin that has left its trace in that *reish* is the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew *rosh* which means head or beginning. As R. Kook explained in *Reish Millin*, the letter *reish* represents the duplication of forms once the original expression has fully expressed itself. At the limit of the original, the copy is born. The new beginning initiated at the end of some anterior stage is the doubled beginning which represents the paradoxical sense that to be a beginning does not necessarily imply being an original; rather it occupies the liminal space of an “original copy”. Together the letter combination *aleph* and *reish* represent “light” as well as “curse”. The idea is that for the translated beginning to appear in the form of graspable “light” from within the transcendent darkness that precedes it as expressed in the ray of infinite light (*kav*), it needs to have already undergone a process of diminution so that in relative relation to the blessing of the true-original it is considered as a “curse” or derivation.

<sup>98</sup> While the translational beginning expressed in the letter combination *aleph-reish* is considered a “curse” and derivation in relationship to the true-original whose annihilating light is expressed in the form of impenetrable darkness; nevertheless it contains a certain ascendancy over and above the true-original in that it makes room for something other than itself thereby opening towards the possibility of improvement, amplification and adornment. Without the *tsimtsum*, the infinite could be nothing other than infinite. In concealing the true-original in its infinitude, the translational-original was disclosed. Once this “potential towards limitation” is revealed from within the “unlimited”, the infinite can now show itself within limitation as well, thereby amplifying the power of the infinite and adding an additional adornment to the already perfect perfection of the infinite by showing how it can become more perfect. From the perspective of the static-perfection of the infinite, the true-original remains the fullest expression of Divine perfection; while from the perspective of the dynamic-perfection of the infinite, the translational-beginning remains the fullest expression of Divine perfectibility, or the possibility of the perfect becoming more perfect.

<sup>99</sup> *Yeshaya* 3:10

**אש.** החומר השורף והמכלה, המחמם והמאיר, העושה את הפעולות ההפכיות בתכונתן, הכל לפי ערכם של מקבלי המפעלים, מתואר הוא בביטוי אש. נרדף הוא מעט עם השם איש, כשהוא מתמלא ביו"ד ומתבטא בחיריק. התוכן הממולא בכח המפעל וההשפעה, ששפעותיו עשירות הנה בכל הארחים, לטוב ולרע, לבנין ולסתירה, רק הוא בכללות קיבוץ כל חלקיו, ממלא הוא תוכן של אישיות, צורה ממולא בטפוס שלם, העומד הכן לפעול ולהשפיע, לשכלל ולהשלים. אידיאל הריבוי המבוטא בהיו"ד, משך החיים שבתיאור הויו"ו, עז המלחמה להגן ולהתגבר נגד כל הורס שביסוד הזיו"ן, ששלשתן יחד עושות הן את צורת השי"ן, מושפעות הנה מהיסוד המתחיל מגבורת האל"ף, תוכן הראשיות, והאש מתגלה בכל צבעיה, בורא מאורי האש, נהורי טובא איכא בנורא. וקיבוץ כל המושגים להערכת העולם והחיים, להבחנת הדעת והמוסר, מכוננת את יסוד האמת, המפואר בפארות מטעי תפארתו, תפארת ישראל, תתן אמת ליעקב, והיה בית יעקב אש.

## ***Aleph-Shin***

The material that burns and destroys that warms and makes light<sup>100</sup>, performing activities that are oppositional in their nature each according to the relative value of the receptacle of their activities<sup>101</sup>. All of this is represented in the expression of *aish* (אֵשׁ). It is slightly connected with word *person* (אִישׁ) which is filled with the *yud* and pronounced with a *chirik*. The full content in both action and expression, whose influence is rich in all ways, for good and for bad, for construction and for destruction<sup>102</sup>. However, when it stands in the collective gathering of all of its parts, it is filled with the concept of humanity, the fullness of form in its exemplary state. It stands prepared to act and inspire, to improve and to perfect<sup>103</sup>. The ideal of multiplicity as expressed in

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<sup>100</sup> Together the letter combination *aleph-shin* spells out the word *aish* meaning fire.

<sup>101</sup> Fire can serve as a constructive force in the sense that it provides light, heat and energy; and it can serve as a destructive force in the sense that it burns, consumes and destroys. This duality of roles expressed in fire does not point to a split within the fire itself; rather the role that fire plays is dependent on the “relative value of the receptacle” that receives its activity. When the energy of fire is contained and focused it serves the constructive role of providing warmth and light, but when the fire remains uncontained within boundaries it grows and destroys anything and everything in its path. For R. Kook fire seems to symbolize the influx of energy that descends from on high to below while the receptacle seems to represent the human engagement with that particular influx of energy. The light that descends from on high to below is singular and unified without any predilection towards construction or destruction, it simply exists as itself. It is the lower realm of being- fully expressed in the particular lives of each and every individual- that dictates the mode in which the spiritual influx is disclosed. When the vessels and receptacles are properly arranged and prepared, the light that descends into this world can be utilized for construction and improvement, for the elevation and the rectification of this world. When the vessels and receptacles are not prepared however, the influx of spiritual energy into this world may serve the opposite role of destruction and catastrophe.

<sup>102</sup> Here R. Kook seems to be connecting the *aleph-shin* of fire (*aish*) and the *aleph-yud-shin* of man (*ish*). Just as fire contains within itself the possibility of manifesting for good and for bad, so too the human being contains within themselves the possibility of engaging this world for good and for bad, for construction and for destruction. Not only that, but the nature through which *aish* descends into the world is dependent on the actions and choices of human beings. As the vessels and “receptacles” in and through which spiritual influx manifests in this world, we determine the nature of the fire. When our lives are aligned with the primordial intention of creation the fire remains constructive and enlightening, but when our lives deviate from the primordial intention of creation the fire becomes destructive and dark.

<sup>103</sup> In line with the ontological optimism that animates R. Kook’s spiritual path, the fact that the fiery energy that descends into the world can take on a constructive or destructive path does not negate the idealistic hope that in the end the constructive role will overcome the destructive drive. When all is said and done, and in spite of the indeterminacy of fire’s role, R. Kook is convinced that the “collective gathering of all of its parts” which “is filled

the *yud*, the drawing down of life as expressed in the *vav* and the courageous strength of the *zayin* to wage war and protect against every destroyer; all three together comprise the shape of the *shin*<sup>104</sup>. It is influenced by the foundation of the beginning- from the strength of the *aleph*, the concept of the origin- and the fire is revealed in all of its colors, *creator of the flames of fire*<sup>105</sup>, *there are many flames within a flame*<sup>106</sup>. The gathering of all concepts together for the arrangement of life, the world and for the discernment of knowledge and ethics arranges the foundation the truth, glorified in the beauty of its growth, *the splendor of Israel, give truth to Yaakov, and the house of Yaakov will be fire*<sup>107</sup>.

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with the concept of humanity, the fullness of form in its exemplary state” will stand “prepared to act and inspire, to improve and to perfect”.

<sup>104</sup> As described in Reish Millin, the letter *shin* contains within itself three fundamental modes of expression through which the lights of holiness descend, emerge and manifest within the world. The *yud* of the *shin* represents the concept of quantity in its purity prior to the manifestation into actual multiplicity. At this point, the burgeoning quantity which allows for unity to be expressed in multiple ways wherein difference and distinction cloud the light of unity exists in its purified potentiality as an idea prior to its expression as an actual activity. The *vav* of the *shin* represents the drawing down of light from above to below thereby connecting and unifying the source of life to the receptacle of life. The *zayin* of the *shin* represents the necessity of protection and weaponry against the onslaught of all that stands in opposition to life in all of its lightness. The *zayin* protects against the outside on the one hand, and nourishes the inside on the other. These three strengths together as represented in the three-pronged shape of the *shin* represent the processes through which life and existence undergo the rectification and elevation upwards towards their ideal state. This, as we have seen, is dependent on the volitional actions of human beings and the direction towards which they direct the fire that descends from on high.

<sup>105</sup> From the blessing made over the flame on *Motzaei Shabbos*

<sup>106</sup> *Brachot* 52b. The myriad strengths that are disclosed through the *shin* are influenced by the light of the *aleph* which directs it towards the idealistic improvement of existence. As we saw, the fire that descends can serve a constructive role in creation or a destructive role. The outcome is not dependent on the inflowing light but rather on the situatedness of the “receptacle” itself. While the three-pronged *shin* seems to represent the emergence of multiplicity that is no longer united in a singular source, R. Kook is coming to show how in the end all the manifold forms within the flame itself point to and move towards the ultimate unity where that which appeared to be separate and distinct will be shown to have always been part and parcel of the unity itself.

<sup>107</sup> *Ovadiah* 1:18. Here R. Kook seems to be summarizing the letter combination *aleph-shin* by associating the “fire” of *ish* and the human engagement of *ish* with Yaakov. As the third patriarch, Yaakov represents a sort of synthesis between the two opposing traits of his father Yitzchak and his grandfather Avraham. If Avraham represents the trait of *chesed* and its expression outwards through lovingkindness and flow, then Yitzchak represents the trait of *gevurah* and its repression inwards through potent severity and limitation. As the third that arrives to unify the opposition of the first two, Yaakov represents the trait of *tifferet* and the ideal balance between outside and inside, between expression and withholding. This balance is associated with aesthetic beauty in that the beautiful emerges from within the collision between two opposing forces. When the chaotic surge of

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confusion that arrives by way of combining that which cannot be combined gives way to the ordered presence of calm, beauty is born. It is specifically the manifoldness at the heart of fire that allows for the amplification of beauty and perfection when all the disparate and separate strengths are revealed to be part and parcel of the general light that transcends all particular lights.

**את** מלת הצירוף, הוראת הטפלה, הערכת התוספת, שברום המעלה הרי היא מרובה מן העיקר, שזו היא מדתו של הקב"ה. ובאה התארות הכלי היסודי לעבודת האדמה להוציא מחיה מן הארץ בתואר את, שתציין ברכת השלום כשיכות החרב לאת, והטפלויות תשא ראש שכל אדם יהיה בעיניו כשירים נגד אדם רעהו, וק"ו נגד הכלל כולו. השקפה טהורה זו תבא ע"י התאחדותה של ראשית המחשבה בסופה, של התקבצות האולפן עד למעמקי רשמי תוויו, והסימנים הטהורים יורו את האיכות הטהורה המתאדרת בקרב הנשמה פנימה, נשמת הפרט, ונשמת הכלל. והארת הרעיון מראש ועד סוף, ברכת הענוה, וברכת השלום, המכורכת באהבת העבודה המבורכת, תביא את ההצטרפות המוחלטה של כל היש, שיעשו כולם אגודה אחת לעשות רצון צדיקו של עולם, מחולל ומוליד, אדון כל המעשים, ברוך הוא.

## **Aleph-Tau**

The word of connection and the expression of the inessential (טפלה)<sup>108</sup>, the value of the addition which in the heights of its elevation is greater than the essential (עיקר) as this is the trait of the holy one<sup>109</sup>, blessed be He<sup>110</sup>. The description of

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<sup>108</sup> The letter combination *aleph-tav* spells out the word *es*, which as a discourse marker represents the connection between two postulates within a sentence as in “*es ha’shamayim v’es ha-aretz*”. It also symbolizes that which is inessential in that when a concept is learned out from the word *es*, it means that originally it was not included within the essential concept itself. This is what *Chazal* mean (*Pesachim* 22b) when they say that *es* is always coming to add something that had previously been left out.

<sup>109</sup> *Bereshis Rabbah* 61:4. This concise phrase contains within it the kernel of what will be described in the next note.

<sup>110</sup> The point that R. Kook seems to be making here is– in my opinion– the essence of his entire project throughout *Reish Millin*. Here he is showing us how that which appears to be inessential and secondary is in truth part and parcel of that which is essential and primary. Not only that, but the inessential itself forces the essential to disclose itself in a deeper and more profound way than it could have had the inessential never been revealed. This idea is expressed in R. Kook’s famous formulation– based on the Kabbalah of Rabbeinu Azriel of Gerona– that in order for Infinite to be fully perfect, it must contain within itself the capacity and potential to become more perfect than it already is. But if the Infinite is already perfect, how then can the process of becoming–perfect which is predicated on an originary lack that makes things imperfect take shape? It is here that the teachings of our Kabbalistic tradition as expressed in the lights of R. Kook prove most useful. The Infinite remains entirely perfect in all manners of perfection, yet it contains within itself in a paradoxically formless form the potential–of–limitation. So long as this potential–of–limitation is subsumed within the Infinite perfection it remains unidentifiable with no actual existence of its own. It is only when the Infinite decides, so–to–speak, to limit its perfection by way of *tsimtsum* that the potential–of–limitation is disclosed from within perfection itself. Once the always already perfect aspect of the Infinite is concealed through the sustained act of *tsimtsum*, the potential–of–limitation is revealed from its nonexistence moving towards its nascent actualization. Once fully expressed and actualized in and as the order–of–concatenation (*sefer ha-hishtalshlut*) the potential–of–limitation manifests as imperfection that can now become more perfect. Had R. Kook– based on the Kabbalists who preceded him– simply described the mechanism through which the potential–of–limitation was disclosed from within the Infinite perfection in and as existence, then a simple yet fundamental question could have been asked, namely: what purpose does this entire play–of–being serve? If the descent away from Infinite perfection into the limited space of imperfection is so that the imperfect may perfect itself thereby returning to the original perfection from which it came, why go through the process of separating the potential–of–limitation from the unlimited in which it was subsumed? The answer for R. Kook– in line with the Kabbalistic teachings that inform his system– is that the descent and eventual elevation of imperfection back to its source is not simply a return to that which was, but rather it is a process in which the Infinite perfection that remains pure and whole behind the veil of *tsimtsum* undergoes an improvement, so–to–speak, in which the Infinite perfection receives an additional adornment (*tosefet kishuf*) that shows the Infinite’s ability to manifest within limitation as well without losing its infinitude. When the Infinite perfection is shown to contain the ability to manifest in imperfection without losing its perfect nature, the Infinite

the essential tool for working and cultivating the land arrives in the expression of the plowshare (תא), symbolizing the blessing of peace when *the sword will be pounded into a plowshare*<sup>111</sup>. When the inessential rises to the top as every person will consider themselves as leftovers in relation to the other person, all the more so in relation to the collective<sup>112</sup>. This purified outlook arrives by way of the unity between the beginning of thought and its end, the coalescence of the *aleph* down to the depths of its impression and marks (תויו)<sup>113</sup>. The purified signs represent the purified quality that strengthens within the interiority of the soul, the soul of the particular and the soul of the collective. The light of the mind from the beginning to the end, the blessing of humility and the blessing of peace that is recognizable within the love of the work that is blessed brings about the absolute connection of all existence so that they combine into a singular grouping to fulfill the will of the Righteous one of the world, *giving birth and generating, Master of all activity, blessed be He*.

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shows a deeper level of power in that it no longer needs the parameters of being unlimited to express its ultimate perfection. The catalyst and vehicle towards disclosing this wondrous and paradoxical power of the Infinite is the potential-of-limitation that become the imperfect worlds in which becoming more perfect is possible and in this sense the inessential which is synonymous with imperfection and limitation is shown to contain a deeper strength than the original perfection from which it came. See note 1.

<sup>111</sup> When the eventual elevation of the inessential above the essential as expressed in the Kabbalistic interpretation of “a woman of valor is the crown of her husband” (*Mislei* 12:4) is revealed in the future (or tasted in the present), the tools of mundanity and toil that constitute the imperfection of this world will be shown to have been the very vessels that brought about a deeper level of unity, the blessing of peace that contains within itself the impossible paradox of faith.

<sup>112</sup> For R. Kook, the idealistic secrets of Torah could not be separated from the realistic demands of social and ethical reality. Therefore the blessing of peace that arrives when the inessential as represented by the *tav*, the last of the letters, ascends above the essential as represented by the *aleph*, the first of the letters, will also be felt in the interpersonal realm when each individual views themselves as inessential in relation to the other, thereby welcoming a new stage of social relation in which each and every person makes room for the other.

<sup>113</sup> As described by the letter *tav* in Reish Millin, *tav* spells out the word *tiv* which means mark or impression. As the last letter in the *aleph-beis* the *tav* represents the externalization that takes place at the end of the process of disclosure. Starting within the recesses of the Infinite and moving through the stages of internal limitation until finally arriving unto the scene of being in the guise of an external impression that engraves itself within the curvatures of existence. It is only through the externalized mark and engraving that we have any access whatsoever to the light that abides within the interior of the worlds, or in the words of the Kabbalist R. Shlomo Alkabetz, “*sof maaseh b’maachshava techila*”.

