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THE JEWISH  
SPIRITUAL  
PATH

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THE WAY OF THE NAME

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The Jewish Spiritual Path:  
The Way of the Name  
by Joshua Golding

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## OPENING THE DOOR TO THE WAY OF THE NAME

THE TORAH TEACHES THAT the essential or proper name of God is the Tetragrammaton, or four-lettered name, ה-ו-ה-י. Jews regard this name with such reverence that they do not even attempt to pronounce it, but instead often use the word *Hashem*, which means, *the Name*. A central teaching in the Kabbalah, or Jewish mystical tradition, is that a proper understanding of the Name is the key to living a rich and meaningful spiritual life. The four-lettered name signifies the ways in which the infinite essence of God is manifest in reality, and, in order to “walk in the way of God,” we must understand and implement the meaning of the Name. For the Kabbalist, this understanding illuminates and energizes our fulfillment of the commandments, or *mitzvot*, and especially our practice of *tefillah*, that is, prayer and meditation. Indeed, the Jewish spiritual path may be neatly summarized in one simple phrase: *Derech Hashem*, or the Way of the Name.<sup>1</sup>

The leading idea of this book is that the Jewish spiritual path has four major stages, which correspond to the four letters of the Name. The structure of this book follows this four-fold pattern. In doing so, this book combines a theoretical presentation of some of the basic elements of Kabbalah, with the practical aim of offering a guide that can be used in “real time” to energize and enrich one’s spiritual life. We shall find that the four-fold Way of the Name is closely linked with the daily Morning Service, or *Shacharit*. Those who are familiar with *Shacharit* will find that their service will be energized by studying and following the Way

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1. *Derech Hashem* is also the name of a work by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal). Much of the present book is inspired by and based on that classic. See below, note 21.

of the Name. Those who are not familiar with *Shacharit* may be encouraged to adopt it or something similar as a regular morning practice. The appendix to this book provides sample exercises for meditation; all of them center on the Name.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Kabbalah. Many people have discovered some of the powerful spiritual ideas and teachings in this part of the Jewish tradition. Yet, even many Jews are woefully unaware of the rich treasures taught in Kabbalah regarding the Way of the Name.<sup>2</sup> This is unfortunate, because those who succeed in studying and following the Way of the Name are aware of its intellectual depth and the tremendous power it brings to their spiritual lives. In fact, the Kabbalists teach that the study and application of the Kabbalah will help bring about the Messianic age of world peace, harmony, and unity between man and man, and between man and God. Hence the present book, which utilizes basic teachings from Kabbalah, to illuminate the spiritual path. To apply the insights of the Kabbalah is not to engage in superstitious practices, but rather to employ the insights of Kabbalah as a way of structuring one's moral, intellectual and spiritual development, and as a way of infusing it with cosmic significance.

This book aims to articulate the Way of the Name in a rational and systematic manner. Some people have the misconception that Kabbalah is anti-rational, and that it is filled with anthropomorphisms and downright weird views about God. In fact, Kabbalah is a complex theoretical structure that meets a high degree of intellectual rigor, and indeed the Kabbalists were quite anxious to dispel literal readings of their highly metaphorical language used to describe God. The classic sources of Kabbalah place a high premium on wisdom and understanding. As we shall see in this book, there is a logical flow to the four stages of spiritual growth. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Kabbalah also teaches

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2. Some religious Jews are hesitant to study Kabbalah at all, based on the belief that study of Kabbalah is suitable only for rare individuals. The modern day Kabbalist R. Yaakov Moshe Hillel discusses this issue at length in his book, *Petach Sha'ar Hashamayim* (see especially page 69). His relevant conclusions are as follows. While intensive study of Kabbalah is suitable only for certain individuals, some study of the basics of Kabbalah is appropriate for any religious Jew, if it is grounded in halachic observance and geared toward the purpose of improving one's relationship with God. Anyone is permitted to study books such as *Derech Hashem*, *Tanya* and *Nefesh Hachayim*, which utilize Kabbalistic teachings to illuminate the spiritual path. The present book, which relies heavily on such classics, is an attempt to contribute toward this same genre, with the goal of reaching a contemporary audience.

that there is an aspect of God and our commitment to God that goes beyond, or “transcends” reason. One of the goals of this book is to clarify the extent to which Kabbalah – and indeed Judaism itself – is rational, and to what extent it involves a non-rational or “trans-rational” element. We shall also try to clarify to what extent Kabbalistic doctrines are based on ordinary experience, and to what extent they are teachings based on the *mesorah*, or Jewish tradition.

This book adopts what may be called a Kabbalistic approach on how to understand the very idea of God. Many people think of God as *a being* or *an entity*, that is, a very special, non-physical being, but an entity nonetheless. This entity is conceived as having certain divine attributes or qualities, such as power, justice, providence, mercy, and so forth. On this conception, to believe in God is to believe that there exists such an entity (and, to disbelieve in God is to believe that such an entity does not exist.) If this being exists, it stands “over and against” the world or reality, and so, to have a good spiritual life is to have a good relationship with this entity. This is what might be called the *pashut*, or widespread, common conception of God.

However, based on Kabbalistic sources, this book proposes that we may think of God’s essence as *Being*, and we may think of the divine attributes of God as the *ways in which Being is manifest in our world*. To say that this view is Kabbalistically based is not to imply that *every* Kabbalist would endorse it. Still, such a conception seems more prevalent among those who are known as “mystics.” On this conception, God’s essence is not *a* being; rather, God’s essence *is* Being. All beings that exist have something in common, namely, that they express or manifest Being. Thus, all things that exist are expressions or manifestations of God’s essence. On this conception, to have a good spiritual life is not to develop a relationship with some entity that is *outside* of oneself, but rather to become continually more aware of and in tune with the ways in which Being is manifest in the world. The Torah, as filtered through the lens of Kabbalah, teaches us what are those “ways” in which God is manifest, and what path we must follow to achieve a good relationship with God. The Name itself is the key to that path.

At first glance, it may seem that this way of thinking of God is not compatible with the Biblical conception of God. It may seem that if God’s essence is identified with Being itself, then God cannot be *a person*, that is, a rational agent. In turn, this seems to imply that God does not guide the world with intentional providence (*hashgachah*). However, in the course of this introduction and throughout this book, we shall see how Kabbalah provides a framework for understanding how this conception

of God is entirely compatible with Biblically based, halachic<sup>3</sup> Judaism. It is also entirely compatible with the belief in divine personhood and divine providence. Moreover, we shall find that this way of thinking about God opens wide the door to the spiritual path, that is, the Way of the Name.

This book also addresses the question of to what extent is the Way of the Name available to those do *not* believe in divine providence or other traditional or “masoretic” teachings of Judaism, such as God’s special relationship with Israel, the claim that the Torah is God’s revealed way, and so on. It seems that some people are under the impression that one could be a Kabbalist or make use of Kabbalistic insights without accepting the major doctrines of Judaism. Indeed, we shall find that there are *some* lessons of the Jewish spiritual path that are available to those who do not accept the traditional doctrines of Judaism. Yet, equally importantly, this book will show that, especially in its more advanced stages, the Jewish spiritual path is integrally connected with certain traditional Jewish doctrines. In fact, we shall find that the Jewish spiritual path is *itself* a way to attain knowledge of the God of Israel, that is, a God who is providential and has the character that is taught by the traditional doctrines of Judaism.

Much of the material in this book is based on classic texts of Kabbalah, *Chassidut*, Jewish Philosophy, and *Mussar*.<sup>4</sup> Through reading this book, those who wish to learn about Kabbalah without ever implementing its rich treasures in their spiritual life will at the very least gain a better understanding of Kabbalah. Yet, the main thrust of this book is to serve as a practical guide. An alternative title for this book might have been, *How*

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3. Halachic Judaism upholds the doctrine that there is a divinely ordained law, as interpreted and filtered through the rabbinic tradition to the present day. Halachic Judaism is based on the Talmud and subsequent rabbinic literature including the classic “codes” of practical everyday law, such as Rabbi Moses Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, Rabbi Yosef Karo’s *Shulchan Aruch*, and subsequent commentaries.

4. Kabbalistic sources of this book include the *Zohar*, the *Shaarei Orah* of Rabbi Yosef Gikatillia, the works of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (known as Ramak), Rabbi Isaac Luria (the Ari), Ramchal, and Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin’s *Nefesh Hachayim*. Chassidic works include the *Tanya* of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe) and more recent works such as *Netivot Shalom* of Rabbi Sholom Noach Berzovsky (the late Slonimer Rav). Philosophical works include Moses Maimonides’ *Guide to the Perplexed* and the works of the Maharal of Prague. The word *mussar* means discipline. Briefly, *mussar* refers to a body of Jewish literature that concentrates on the ethical and spiritual values or virtues of Judaism. Such works often contain practical advice and strategies for improving one’s character. Classics are Bahya Ibn Pakuda’s *Chovot Halevavot*, and Ramchal’s *Mesilat Yesharim*.

*to Energize Your Spiritual Life in Four (not so) Easy Steps.* The parenthetical phrase is meant to indicate that the four steps are in some respect easy, but yet in another way, not easy. In some way, the four stages are relatively simple, both in theory, and practice. On a deeper level, the four stages require a great deal of devotion and effort. So, this book may be useful to two different groups of readers in two different ways. For those readers who wish to expand their spiritual life by adapting certain general aspects of the Way of the Name, the four-fold path may be relatively easy. But, for those readers who wish to follow closely the Way of the Name, especially in a rigorously traditional Jewish manner, the path requires a good deal of effort and devotion. The “easy” way is perhaps somewhat superficial, but still worthwhile. The “not so easy” way is more demanding, but in the end, it is deeper and far more rewarding. Of course, it is up to the reader to make use of the Way of the Name in whatever way he or she sees fit.

The prospective audience of this book includes anyone who is interested in spirituality, and especially those who are interested in the spiritual path taught by Judaism and Kabbalah. This includes Jews and non-Jews; both those who are devout or not devout. This includes beginners as well as those who are already deeply committed to some spiritual tradition. This includes people who are already knowledgeable about Kabbalah to some extent, as well as those who are not knowledgeable about Kabbalah. No prior knowledge is assumed. References and technical points will be relegated to footnotes. It is hoped that even the scholar of Judaism and Kabbalah will find something novel in this book. But this book does not speak exclusively to scholars. With some patient reading, any serious spiritual seeker will be able to learn and grow from this book.

Our first step is to reflect on the Name itself. Although the main purpose of this book is to serve as a spiritual guide, it is necessary first to lay the groundwork by describing the basic elements of the Kabbalistic understanding of the Name. This understanding is not merely a prelude— it is part of the Way. Judaism teaches that the spiritual journey involves not only one’s actions and emotions, but also the mind or the intellect. While some of the material in this introduction may seem abstract and difficult to grasp, many things will become clearer as the book goes on. The very reading of this book is itself part of the Jewish spiritual path. I invite the reader to embark on the journey.

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## THE NAME יהוה-י AND THE MYSTERY OF BEING

WHO, OR WHAT, IS GOD? We can learn something profound about God by reflecting on the proper Name of God. In the Torah, God has many names. For example, God is referred to as *elohim* and *adon*. These “epithets” or descriptive names mean Judge and Lord. But the only proper name of God is the Tetragrammaton or יהוה-י . While on occasion angels and even human beings are referred to as *elohim* or *adon*,<sup>5</sup> there is not a single occasion when a human or angel is referred to as יהוה-י. This name is uniquely used to refer to God alone.

Somewhat paradoxically, a great mystery surrounds this name. Surely, the single most important name in the Torah is God’s proper name. Although the Torah often takes a verse or two to explain the derivation of an important name (as in the case of Adam, Chavah, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and Moshe) the Torah avoids any explicit explanation of the meaning of the Name. Moreover, according to Jewish tradition, the proper pronunciation of the Name was kept hidden; at the present stage in history, it seems no one knows definitively how to pronounce the Name. The commonly used pronunciation *Ye-ho-v-ah* is quite dubious and almost certainly incorrect. The mystery of the Name calls out to us as a riddle to be pondered.

Despite the mystery, within the Jewish tradition it is almost universally accepted that the Name, יהוה-י, has something to do with *Being*.<sup>6</sup>

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5. Genesis 6:4, 32:5; Exodus 22:8.

6. Rabbi Yosef Karo writes that when we say blessings or pray, we should have in mind that the plain meaning of the Name is that *God was, is, and will be*. See *Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim* (hereafter, SA:OC) 5:1. See also *Tanya, Shaar Hayichud*, chapter 7. See also Exodus 3:13ff., where Moshe asks God, what is his name. At first,

This approach is both linguistically and conceptually plausible. It is linguistically plausible because the Hebrew words for “was, is, and will be” are, respectively היה, הוה, and יהיה. No other Hebrew words are so similar to the Name. In fact, some Jews use the word *Havayah* (Hebrew: ה-ו-י-ה) in place of the more common *Hashem* (the name) when speaking of God. The word *Havayah* means Being. Moreover, since the Torah teaches that God is eternal and that God is the source of all things that exist, it is conceptually plausible to think that the essential name of God must have something to do with the very idea of Being itself. We tend to think of God as the most basic or fundamental being or reality. Now, what could be more basic or more fundamental than Being itself? When we think about things or beings in the world – planets, trees, animals, and humans – we are thinking about specific or particular things or beings. And, when we think about Being in general we are thinking of that which is most basic and fundamental. We can conceive of a universe without trees, planets, animals, or humans. Yet, can we conceive of a world without Being? In a way, the most obvious thing about reality is . . . that there is Being! Hence, it stands to reason that the Name of God would have something do with Being.

There is something puzzling and mysterious about the idea of Being. In thinking about Being itself, we are implicitly thinking about an endless or infinite number of all possible beings or things. For there are an infinite number of possible beings which one can think of, and all of these possibilities are in some way inherent in the very idea of Being. Yet, at the same time, the mind draws a blank when contemplating Being itself. Precisely because it is so fundamental and general, there is nothing specific that the mind thinks of when it thinks of Being. Thus, the verbal mystery of the Name points to another, deeper, metaphysical mystery: the mystery of Being. The mystery of being is that it is at once so familiar yet so elusive.

Let it be emphasized that the suggestion here is only that the Name יהוה-י has *something to do* with Being, and not that the Name should be *translated* as “Being.” In the following section, based on Kabbalistic teachings, we shall make progress on how to understand better the relationship between יהוה-י and the notion of Being.

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God responds by saying that his name is *Ehyeh asher ehyeh* (“I will be what I will be”). Shortly thereafter, God refers to himself simply as *Ehyeh* (*I will be*). Subsequently, God tells Moshe that his name is יהוה-י. This intimates that the Tetragrammaton is linked to the name *Ehyeh*, which clearly stems from the Hebrew word for *being*.

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## ה-ו-ה-י AND THE HUMAN BEING: MASCULINE AND FEMININE ASPECTS

THE TORAH (*GENESIS 1:27*) teaches that God “created the human being in his own image, masculine and feminine he created them.” This indicates that God is in some way similar to the human being, or rather perhaps that the human being is in some special way a reflection of God, and that God has both masculine and feminine aspects. Kabbalah offers a detailed interpretation of what this means. We have already said that the *sefirot* are the general ways in which God’s essence is expressed or made manifest. Kabbalah teaches that the ten *sefirot* are paralleled or mimicked by ten aspects of the human being.<sup>16</sup> Each of the ten *sefirot* corresponds to a certain specific part of the human being, as indicated by the diagram on the next page.

The basic idea is that the *sefirot* correspond to certain aspects of the human being. This is what the Torah means when it says that God created the human being “in the divine image” (*betzelem elokim*). In addition, Kabbalah teaches that in virtue of the *sefirot*, God has certain characteristics which are designated as masculine and others as feminine. This does not mean that God has a body or that God literally has male and female anatomy. Rather, there is a parallelism between certain ways in which God’s essence is manifest in the world, and certain aspects of the human being, including the masculine and feminine aspects of the human. We shall find this theme recurring throughout this book. A brief discussion of this topic is in place here.

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16. See the section from *Tikkunei Zohar* 17a known as *Patach Eliahu*. This is printed at the beginning of some *siddurim* (prayer books).

## **THE HUMAN BODY AND THE *SEFIROT***

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**Head: Will, Wisdom, Intelligence**

**Left Arm: Justice**

**Right Arm: Benevolence**

**Chest: Compassion**

**Left Thigh: Majesty**

**Right Thigh: Victory**

**Sexual Organ: Foundation**

**Feet: Presence**

First, note that certain *sefirot* are on the right side, others are on the left, and still others are central. This positioning is not accidental. Kabbalah teaches that the *sefirot* on the right side designate aspects of God that are “positive” or “expansive” whereas the *sefirot* on the left side designate aspects of God that are “negative” or “restrictive.” For example, God’s benevolence is on the right side whereas God’s justice is on the left side. There is a certain tension between the left side and the right side; they are in a sense opposites. The central *sefirot* represent a balance or harmony between the two sides. For example, as explained later in this book, compassion is regarded as a balance between benevolence and justice. Periodically, we shall return to this theme in the ensuing chapters.

The Name is made up of two *hehs*, a *vav* and a *yod*. Kabbalah teaches that the *hehs* in God’s name represent feminine aspects, whereas the *vav*

and *yod* represent masculine aspects. The feminine aspects have to do with *receptive aspects* of reality, and the masculine aspects have to do with *active aspects* of reality.<sup>17</sup> When we look around the world, we find certain features that are receptive, and certain features that are active. Using the approach adopted in this book, we may say that Being is manifest or expressed in certain ways that are receptive, and in certain other ways that are active. In one way or another, all things in this world are *receptive* in the sense that they are *affected by things that happen to them*. On the other hand, all things in the world have certain *active* properties in that *they can have effects on other things*. For example, the soil of the earth is receptive, in that it can take in seeds and water; but it also has an active aspect in that it brings forth grass and vegetation. Water has an active aspect in that it can serve as a catalyst to make things grow; but it also has a receptive aspect in that it can easily change composition depending on whether it is boiled or frozen.

In certain cases, the receptive nature of one being or thing may be more notable, especially when compared to another being or thing. In contrasting a woman with a man, a woman is in certain ways more of a receiver whereas a man is more of an actor. A woman is a creature who receives seed from a man, and in that sense a woman is a receiver whereas a man is an actor or an agent who gives the seed. It has also been said that women tend to be more psychologically “receptive” whereas men tend to be “active” or aggressive or “headstrong.” Perhaps this is a stereotype; certainly there are aggressive women and receptive men. Nevertheless, Kabbalah uses the term “feminine” to designate those characteristics that are receptive, and “masculine” to designate those that are active.

The Kabbalistic teaching that the feminine aspects of the Name are symbolized by the two *hehs* and the masculine aspects are symbolized by the *vav* and the *yod* dovetails with certain features of Hebrew grammar. In Hebrew, the feminine ending for verbs and for indicating feminine possession for nouns is a *heh*. On the other hand, the ending for masculine third person singular is a *vav*, and the masculine indicator for future verbs is a *yod*. The Kabbalists take this a step further, by teaching that the very shape of the letters hints at these aspects.<sup>18</sup> The *heh* (ה) is

17. A similar notion is found in other traditions; for example, consider the Chinese concept of Yin and Yang.

18. The notion that the appearance and sound of the Hebrew letters correspond to aspects of divinity is expressed succinctly in *Tanya, Shaar Hayichud ve-ha'emunah*, chapter 12 in the *hagaah* (note).

an “open” letter, both on the bottom, and on the top. The openness of the letter symbolizes *receptive* features of reality. As we shall see later, the *two* openings of the *heh* – one on the bottom and one toward the top – symbolize two different kinds of receptivity, both of which apply to the human and to God. One is a more physical type of receptivity; the other is more of an intellectual or psychological type of receptivity. On the other hand, the *yod* (י) and the *vav* (ו) are not “open” letters. The *vav* may be looked at as an extended version of a *yod*. The *yod* represents the potential for action, and the *vav* represents the actualization of that potential. The *vav* is viewed as symbolic of a pipeline through which energy or activity is transmitted. The *vav* is not round or open, it is rather closed and focused, like a pencil or writing instrument. This symbolizes the active aspect of reality.<sup>19</sup>

We have seen that there are certain features or aspects of reality that are receptive and certain others that are active. A guiding notion of this book is that we may think of God’s essence as Being itself. Now, the essence of God is neither masculine nor feminine; it transcends this distinction. Yet, insofar as God or Being is manifest in the world, there are certain aspects of reality as we know it that are masculine and certain that are feminine. To say that God has a “masculine” character is simply to say that certain aspects of being or reality are active and to say that God has a “feminine” character is to say that certain aspects of reality are receptive. Similarly, there are certain aspects of the human being that are receptive and others that are active. In the course of this book, we shall find that the Jewish spiritual path involves the cultivation of certain virtues that involve *receptivity*, and certain others that involve *activity*, and still certain other qualities that harmonize those two. Both receptive and active virtues are necessary for developing a rich and wholesome Jewish spiritual life. Both involve ways of “engaging” with God or Ultimate Being.

Another Kabbalistic teaching which plays a role in this book is that the human soul has five parts or aspects. Certain aspects of the soul are “lower” and certain aspects are “higher.” Each part of the soul is associated with a certain sphere of human life. From lower to higher, the

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19. The *vav* may be viewed as a phallic symbol. The *yod* represents the male organ in a state of dormancy, whereas the *vav* represents the male organ in a state of activity. Incidentally, whereas the *yod* and the *vav* are similar but different, the two *hehs* look identical. Although there are two kinds of receptivity, there isn’t the same dynamic as we find in the transition from potential to actual, as represented by the difference between the *vav* and the *yod*.

five aspects are *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *chayah*, and *yechidah*. The five aspects of the soul correspond to the four letters of the Name and the ten *sefirot* in the following way:

- י *Keter: yechidah*  
*Chochmah: chayah*
- ה *Binah: neshamah*
- ו *Chessed, Din, Rachamim, Netzach, Hod, Yesod: ruach*
- ה *Shekhinah: nefesh*

*Nefesh* is the aspect of the soul that is most closely associated with the body, and it is sometimes referred to as “the animal soul.” *Ruach* is associated with the spirit, that is, the emotional aspect of the human. It is also associated with the capacity for speech. *Neshamah* is associated with the mind, that is, the power of intelligence or understanding. *Chayah* is associated with the capacity for wisdom, and *yechidah* is associated with the will or capacity for choice. *Chayah* and *yechidah* are closely related; they are sometimes regarded as one. They are both associated with the *yod*, but *yechidah* is associated with the upper tip, or *kotz*, of the *yod*, which represents the fact that *yechidah* is the very highest aspect of the soul. It is also important to note that *nefesh* and *neshamah* have a feminine character; *ruach*, *chayah*, and *yechidah* have a masculine character. The significance of this doctrine for the Jewish spiritual path will emerge in the coming chapters.

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## THE JEWISH SPIRITUAL PATH: THE WAY OF THE NAME

JUDAISM TEACHES THAT THE TORAH is God's revelation to mankind, particularly to the children of Israel, but with consequences for all humanity. The word *Torah* is often mistranslated as *Law*. Although the Torah includes a teaching about a system of law for the people of Israel, the term Torah itself does not mean *law* but rather *teaching*, or *way*. Thus, the Torah itself may be referred to as the *Derech Hashem*, or the Way of God. What then is the spiritual journey according to Judaism? Stated simply, the Jewish spiritual journey is nothing other than the path toward *devekut*, which means "bonding" with God.<sup>20</sup> Yet, if God is not a physical being, what can it mean to bond with God?

In this book, our approach is to understand God's essence as Being itself, and the *sefirot* as the ways in which Being is manifest. On this approach, the spiritual journey involves an ever increasing appreciation and sensitivity and knowledge of Being, together with the process of becoming more "in tune" with Being, by living in accord with the *sefirot* or divine ways. The journey is *practical*, in that it involves physical or bodily actions; it is *emotional*, in that it involves the cultivation of certain feelings or passions; it is *intellectual*, in that it involves understanding certain teachings about God and about the Way. It should be emphasized that the Jewish spiritual path involves the body just as much as it involves the soul. Toward the culmination of this book, we shall

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20. A classic formulation of this notion is in Ramchal, *Mesilat Yesharim: Beveur Chovat Ha-adam Beolamo*. The notion that *devekut* is the goal of Torah is prominent in Chassidic literature. See *Netivot Shalom* Volume 1: Essay 5; Vol. 2, p. 14. Every *mitzvah* is another way of reaching *devekut* with God. We shall have more to say about *devekut* in the final chapter of this book.

find that the spiritual path also involves a level of the human being that transcends action, emotion, and the intellect.

Kabbalah describes the Jewish spiritual path as a growth or maturity from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood. There are certain character traits and modes of thinking which are infantile and certain others that are mature. Using Kabbalistic terms, the spiritual journey involves growing from *katnut* (childhood) to *gadlut* (adulthood). In general, we shall find that the move toward maturity involves a move away from a narrow focus on oneself, toward a more objective or universal perspective. The more one can step outside of oneself, so to speak, and see oneself as part of a greater whole, the more one has matured or grown along the Jewish spiritual path. Naturally, this process is related to an increasing awareness of God or Being itself. The more one becomes aware of Being itself, the more one realizes that particular things or beings – including oneself – are only part of a much greater whole.

Using more common traditional terms, the Jewish spiritual path involves the cultivation of certain *middot*. This term requires explanation. Again, the *sefirot* are the ways in which God's essence is manifest or expressed in the world. The *sefirot* refer to divine qualities. In both Kabbalistic and non-Kabbalistic Jewish literature the term *middot* (singular: *middah*) is often used to refer to the character traits of a human being. The Jewish spiritual path involves the cultivation of good *middot*, or virtues, and the avoidance of bad *middot*, or vices. The four-lettered Name serves as a “roadmap” for the spiritual path. The lowest stage of spiritual growth is symbolized by the *last* letter of the Name, and the highest stage is symbolized by the *first* letter of the Name. Each stage involves the cultivation of certain good *middot*, or virtues, that correspond to the divine *sefirot* associated with each of the four letters of God's Name. Hence, the Jewish spiritual path – and the subtitle of this book – is *The Way of the Name*.<sup>21</sup>

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21. As mentioned earlier, *Derech Hashem* (usually translated *The Way of God*) is the name of a classic work by Ramchal. That book is mainly a theological work, but it also addresses the Jewish spiritual path, especially toward the end. Ramchal does not explicitly connect the title of his book to the four aspects of the Name as taught by Kabbalah. However, perhaps it is no accident that Ramchal divided his book into four parts, which may be seen as corresponding to the four letters of the Name. See below, Chapter 4, footnote 59.

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## THE FOUR-FOLD STRUCTURE OF THE MORNING SERVICE (*SHACHARIT*)

THE WAY OF THE NAME infuses all Jewish spiritual practice. However, there is a particularly strong connection between the Way of the Name and the Morning Service, or *Shacharit*.<sup>22</sup> Anyone who is familiar with *Shacharit* will probably know that it has four main parts, which are, the Morning Blessings (*Birchot Hashachar* and *Korbanot*), Verses of Praise (*Pesukei D'Zimrah*), the reading of the *Shema* and its Blessings (*Kriyat Shema u-virchoteha*), and the Standing Prayer (*Amidah*). What is less widely known is that Kabbalah teaches that these four parts of the *Shacharit* correspond to the four letters of the Name, in the following way:

- י The Standing Prayer (*Amidah*)
- ן Reading of the *Shema* and its Blessings (*Kriyat Shema u-virchoteha*)
- ו Verses of Praise (*Pesukei D'Zimra*)
- ח Morning Blessings and the Sacrifices (*Birchot Hashachar, Korbanot*)

The proper way to read the above chart is *from the bottom toward the top*. A person who goes through *Shacharit* starts at the lowest stage

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22. See *Derech Hashem*, toward the end. Ramchal writes that *Shacharit* has four parts, and that there is a correspondence between the letters of the Name and the sections of the *Shacharit*. He also says that there are four *olamot*, or realms, and that they correspond to the parts of the prayer. He alludes to the notion of prayer as a ladder, with the *Amidah* as the highest point. The material after the *Amidah*, including *Tachanun*, *Ashrei*, *U-va Letzion*, and *Alenu*, are supplementary prayers and do not constitute an additional part. To some degree, they represent a descent from the ladder of the spiritual encounter, back to the reality of everyday life. We shall touch upon some aspects of these prayers in the final chapter of this book.

and works one's way up to the highest stage. Accordingly, the *Shacharit* has been called a "divine ladder" by which a person may ascend toward higher spiritual levels.<sup>23</sup> The ladder has four rungs; each rung is one stage of *Shacharit*. Indeed, we shall find that to some extent there is a progression within each stage as well.

In this book, we shall have much to say about both the structure and content of *Shacharit*. Our purpose is to illuminate how the Morning Service, in form, content, and style, helps us cultivate the *middot*. Here and there we will note certain halachic points about the liturgy that help us cultivate the *middot*. Many things that seem arbitrary about *Shacharit* take on deep significance if understood in light of the Way of the Name. Just to take one example, at certain places one is supposed to sit and at others, one is supposed to stand. Another example has to do with the frequency of certain words or terms in certain sections rather than others. For example, *kedushah* is mentioned in *Yishtabach* but not once in *Baruch She'amar*. Such matters will be explained in this book. If a person goes through *Shacharit* with an appreciation of the four-fold structure, and with an understanding of the *middot* that are related to each stage of the service, the *Shacharit* is transformed from a routine ritual into a powerful vehicle for spiritual growth.

A clarification is necessary. In saying that there is a correspondence between the four stages of *Shacharit* and the four levels of spiritual growth, we do not mean that each stage of *Shacharit* exclusively relates to *one level only*. Rather, each stage of *Shacharit* focuses on certain *middot* – but not to the utter exclusion of the other *middot*. (Recall the point made earlier regarding the *sefirot*. Each letter is associated with specific *sefirot*, but all of the *sefirot* are interconnected.) A related point is that a person who follows the Jewish spiritual path repeatedly goes through the four stages. There is a constant cycle of advance from lower to higher levels, then refinement of the lower levels, and then advance again. We shall revisit this theme toward the end of the book.

Each of the following chapters is devoted to one letter of the Name, starting with the last or "lowest" letter and advancing to the first or "highest" letter. Hence, the structure of this book itself mimics the pattern of the Name. Each chapter has three major goals: first, to explain the divine *sefirah* or *sefirot* associated with that letter; second, to explain

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23. *Zohar* (1:149b) refers to prayer as a ladder. Maimonides (*Guide to the Perplexed* II:10) quotes a *midrash* which says that the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream (Genesis 28:12) had four rungs.

the corresponding *middot*, or virtues, associated with that letter; third, to explain how the relevant section of *Shacharit* helps cultivate those *middot*. To study and reflect on these matters is to study the Way of the Name. More importantly, to implement these lessons in one's life is to follow or walk along the Way of the Name.