

Exploring the Torah

תורה



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Topics of Discussion

- Mechanics of Torah Study
- Examples of Torah Study
 - ▶ The "Window" of the Ark
 - ▶ Qabalah and the Names of God

Mechanics of Torah Study

The Problem of Translation
The Chumash as Study Tool
The Oral Torah
Talmud
Qabalah

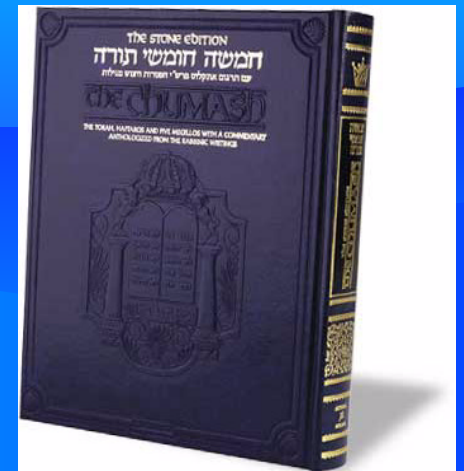


Problems of Translation

- English is "Objective"
- Hebrew is "Subjective"
 - Atah geboor I-**olam** Adonai. -- Thou are great **forever** Lord.
 - Malek Ha-**olam**. -- King of the **universe**.
 - **Olam** ha-yichud. -- The **world** of unification.
- "Olam" is here translated as "World", "Universe" and "Forever".
- All Hebrew words represent concepts over physical objects.

The Chumash

- Includes
 - Hebrew text of the Bible
 - English Translation of the same text
 - Rabbinic commentary in Hebrew
 - Rashi commentary in Aramaic
 - Compiled commentary in English
- Primary study tool



PARASHAS NOACH

9 These are the offspring of Noah — Noah was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noah walked with God. — **10** Noah had begotten three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11 Now the earth had become corrupt before God; and the earth had become filled with robbery.

12 And God saw the earth and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.

13 God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth. **14** Make for yourself an Ark of gopher wood; make the Ark with compartments, and cover it inside and out with pitch.

15 This is how you should make it — three hundred cubits the length of the Ark; fifty cubits its width; and thirty cubits its height. **16** A window shall you make for the Ark, and to a cubit finish it from above. Put the entrance of the Ark in its side; make it with bottom, second, and third decks.

Ibn Ezra and B'chor Shor render תולדת as the history, so that the primary subject of the chapter is not his family, but his life story as it relates to the flood and its aftermath.

In his generations. There are different interpretations of the phrase in his generations: Some Sages maintain that it is in his praise: Noah was righteous even in his corrupt generation; how much more righteous would he have been had he lived in a truly righteous generation — if he had had the companionship and inspiration of Abraham! According to others, however, it is critical of him — only in his generations, by comparison with his extremely wicked contemporaries, did Noah stand out as a righteous man; but had he lived in the time of Abraham he would have been insignificant (*Rashi*). Accordingly, the righteous of each generation must be judged in terms of their own time (*Sefer HaParshiyos*).

It is true that Noah was not nearly as great as Abraham, but it is fair to say that he would have been far greater had he not been surrounded by corrupt and immoral people.

With God. He feared only God, and was not enticed by astrology, and surely not by idolatry. He walked in the path God showed him, for he was a prophet (*Ramban*).

Three sons. They are not named in the order of their birth. Japheth was the eldest, but Shem is mentioned first because Scripture enumerates them according to wisdom, not age (*Sanhedrin* 69b). Once the Torah mentions Shem, it names Ham who was next in line; otherwise all three would be listed out of order (*Ramban*). Though they had been named above (5:32), the Torah mentions them after telling of Noah's righteousness to indicate that he inculcated such behavior into his children, as well (*Radak*).

The behavior of people deteriorated. At first they were corrupt — being guilty of immorality and idolatry — and they sinned covertly, before God. Later, the earth had become filled with robbery — which was obvious to all. Then the entire earth was corrupted, because man is the essence of the world, and his corruption infects all of Creation (*Zohar*). Such is the progression of sin. It begins in private, when people still have a sense of right and wrong. But once people develop the habit of sinning, they gradually lose their shame, and immoral behavior becomes the accepted —

even the required — norm. In Noah's time, the immoral sexual conduct of the people extended to animals, as well, until they too cohabited with other species.

The Midrash teaches that they stole from one another in petty ways that were not subject to the authority of the courts. Though this is not the gravest kind of sin, it is morally damaging in the extreme, because thievery within the letter of the law weakens the conscience and corrupts the social fabric (*R' Hirsch*).

13-22. The decree. God decreed that a generation that behaved so immorally had forfeited its right to exist, but even then, He extended mercy to them. God could have saved Noah in many ways. Why then did He burden him with the task of constructing an Ark for, as the Sages teach, one hundred twenty years? So that when the curious would see him cutting down lumber and working on the Ark for so long, they would ask him why. He would answer, "God is about to bring a Flood on the world because of your sins," and they would thus be inspired to repent... But instead of seizing the opportunity, Noah's contemporaries scoffed at him (*Rashi*).

Make for yourself. Noah was to build the Ark himself (*Abarbanel*). Homiletically, he was told, "Make an Ark to symbolize your own behavior. You remained aloof from your compatriots, instead of chastising them and trying to save them by improving their conduct. Now, you will isolate yourself in an Ark with beasts and animals" (*Alshich*). Noah's failure to try and influence his generation is why the Flood is called נח *waters of Noah* (*Isaiah* 54:9), implying that he was responsible for the Flood (*Zohar*).

Even according to the smallest estimate of 18 inches per cubit, the dimensions of the Ark were 450 x 75 x 45 feet = 1,518,750 cubic feet. Each of its three stories had 33,750 sq. feet of floor space for a total of 101,250 square feet.

A window. Some say it was a skylight — according to most commentators, it was the window Noah opened after the Flood (8:6) — and some say it was a precious stone [that refracted the outside light to illuminate the interior (*Chizkuni*)] (*Rashi*).

And to a cubit. The Ark's roof sloped upward to a cubit so that the rain would run off.

אונקלוס

אלון תולדת נח נח גבר וקאי שלים
הנה בדרויה בנחלתא ניי הליך נח:
ואוליד נח תלתא בניו ית שם ית חם
ות יפת: א ואחפלת ארעא קדם יי
ואתמליאת ארעא חטופין: יינחוא יי ית
ארעא ונח אתתקבלת ארי חבילו קל
בסרא אנט את ארעה על ארעא:
ייאמר יי לנח קצא דכל בסרא עלת
לקמי ארי אתמליאת ארעא חטופין
מן קדם עובריהון בישיא ונח אנט
מחפלהון עם ארעא: יי עבר לך תבותא
דאעין דקדרום קדורין מעבר ית
תבותא ותחפי: יתה מנו ומבא בקפרא:
יינרו דמעבר יתה תלת מאה אמיין
ארעא דתבותא חמשין אמיין פתיה
ותלתין אמיין רוקה: יי נהור תעבר
לתבותא ולאמחא תשכלנה מלעלא
ותרעא דתבותא בטסרה תשיי מדורין
ארעין תנינו ותלימאן תמברנה:

פרשת נח

אלה תולדת נח נח איש צדיק תמים הנה בדרותיו
את האלהים התהלך נח: ויולד נח שלשה בנים
את שם את חם ואת יפת: ותשחת הארץ לפני
האלהים ותמלא הארץ חמס: וירא אלהים את הארץ
והנה נשחתה כיהשחית כל בשר את דרכו על
הארץ:
ויאמר אלהים לנח קץ כל בשר
בא לפני כיהמלאה הארץ חמס מפניהם והנני
משחיתם את הארץ: עשה לך תבת עצי גפר קנים
תעשה את התבה וכפרת אתה מבית ומחוץ בכפר:
וזה אשר תעשה אתה שלש מאות אמה ארך התבה
חמשים אמה רחבה ושלשים אמה קומתה: צהר ו
תעשה לתבה ואל אמה תכלנה מלמעלה ופתח
התבה בצדה תשים תחתים שנים ושלשים תעשה:

אלה תולדת נח נח איש צדיק. הואל והכירו ספר בשחו, שנאמר וזכר לניח
לברכה (משלי יז: טס"ד יב (מ.)). ר"ח, ללמדך שיעקר ויולדותיהם של דרקים מעשים
טובים (תנחומא ב: כ"ד לז): בדרותיו. יש מרבותיו חרשים אותו לשבח, כל שכן
שאלו היה בדרום דרקים היה לדיק יותר. יש שדורשים אותו לגלוי, לפי דורו היה לדיק.
ואלו היה בדורו של אברהם לא היה נחשב לנחש (תנחומא ה: כ"ב טו): את
האלהים התהלך נח. ובאברהם הוא אומר התהלך לפני (והלך ויחל). נח היה לדיק
סדר לתומכו, אבל אברהם היה מתחיל (וההלך) בלדורו מאליו (טו וס): ואתה לך.
לפון עבר. הוא עשוי על אל (ס"א ה') (כל כדן) משמחה להבא ולשעבר כלפון אחר.
קום התהלך (והלך ויחל) להבא, שההלך נח לשעבר. התפלל בעד ענדיך (ששאל א
יביט) להבא. ונח התפלל אל הבית היה (מלכים א' תמצ) לפון עבר, אלא שהי'ו
שכחשו הפכו להבא: (ויא) ותשחת. לפון ערובה וע"ו, כמו פן תשיחון ודברים
דעון: כי השחית כל בשר ונח' (פסוק יב) סנהדרין ג: ותמלא הארץ חמס. נח
(שנאמר ונח השחית את כל בשר) (ויב) כי השחית כל בשר. אפילו
במה היה ושוף נוקדן (לפניו מין נ"ר כח: תנחומא יב: סנהדרין קח: (וג) קץ
כל בשר. כל מקום שאתה מולא וטח, אולדלמוסא נחא לעולם והרנג טובים
ועשים נ"ר טה: תנחומא רחא ג: נח מלאה הארץ חמס. לא תחם נח דרם

PARASHAS NOACH

9-10. Noah. The ten generations from Adam to Noah had ended in failure; mankind had stumbled into a downward spiral until God resolved that all the inhabitants of the earth would be wiped out, with the exception of Noah and his family, and enough animals to replenish the earth after the destruction. Like Adam, the father of the entire human race, Noah would become the father of mankind after the Flood. Therefore, although the Torah had listed him previously as the last link in the genealogy of his predecessors, it mentions him again now, since he and his children were to become the new ancestors of mankind (*Abarbanel*).

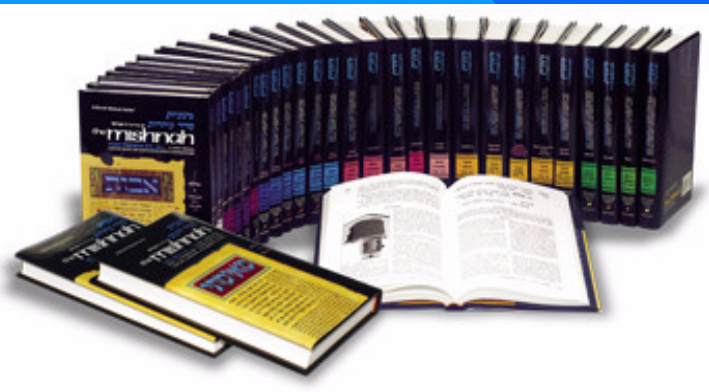
9. Noah was a righteous man. The verse began to introduce the list of Noah's offspring, but once he was

mentioned, Scripture praised him as a righteous man. According to the Midrash, the Torah means to teach that the primary "offspring" of the righteous are their good deeds, for the worthwhile things that a person does are his primary legacy (*Rashi*).

R' Moshe Feinstein comments homiletically on why the Torah likens a person's good deeds to his offspring. A person should love good deeds, the way he loves his own children, and he should perform them out of love, not just duty. A person should never disparage a good deed as being insignificant, just as he does not fail to love a child who lacks outstanding ability. And a person should work hard to perfect his deeds, just as he spares no effort to help his children.

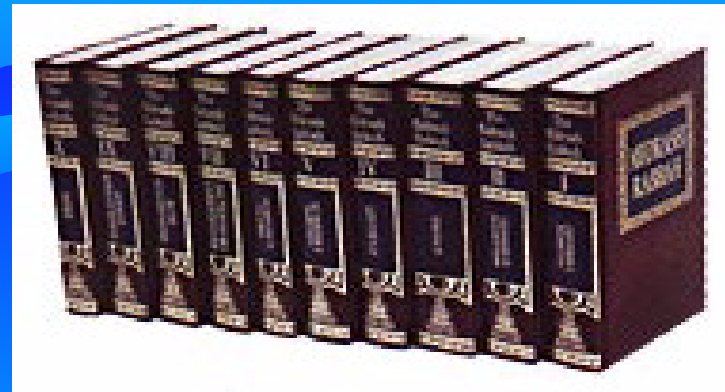
The Oral Torah

- The Written Torah (Bible) is only one part of the true Torah
- The Oral tradition is very rich. Attempts to put it to paper have resulted in hundreds of volumes.
- The main collections of Oral Torah are The Mishnah and the Midrash.



Mishnah

Two Examples
of
Oral Torah



Midrash Rabbah

Sources of Oral Torah

- Mishnah
- Midrash Rabbah
- Beit Midrash
- Haggadah
- Halachah
- Gemara Bava Metzia
- Genesis Rabbah
- And many, many others...

Compare Mishnah and Midrash

Mishnah

- Rabbinic teachings formulated independantly of Scripture
- Interprets ways of living and spirituality
- Detailed discussions

Midrash

- Rabbinic teachings associated with the text of Scripture.
- Extends and interprets Torah
- Short discussions and examinations

The Talmud



- A series of commentaries and discussions on Torah
- Uses statements or questions and then draws on multiple sources to create an argument
- Compiled over a period of 300 years
- Offers detailed and expanded discussions of various subjects from the Mishnah, and Scripture. (Oral and Written Torah)

Otz Chiim The Tree of Life

Qabalah

- The spiritual / mystical tradition of Torah
- Is the Fruit of the Tree of Life
- No single work can be said to "encapsualte" Qabalah
- A living, growing and evolving system. One does not change it, one adds to it.
- The Qabalah forms the basis of all Western Mystery traditions
- Is often called "The Tree of Life"
- Composed of Sephiroth, (emanations or lights) of G-d and represent Him in all of His aspects as well as those of the Angels and Archangels



Example 1

Noach's "Window"

Seeking the Meaning



The Problem of The "Window"

- Genesis 6:16 discussing the making of the Ark
- Problems of Translation
- Chumash
- Midrash
- Talmud
- Qabalah
- What can we learn? How can we interpret.

Genesis 6:16

King James Version

A **window** shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

Original Hebrew Text

זָהָר תַּעֲשֶׂה לַתֶּבֶה וְאֶל-אַמָּה
תִּבְלָנָה מִלְמַעְלָה וּפֶתַח
הַתֶּבֶה בְּצִדָּהּ תָּשִׂים תַּחְתִּיִּם
שְׁנַיִם וּשְׁלֹשִׁים תַּעֲשֶׂה:

The word Zohar (זָהָר) is usually translated as "Brilliance" or "Radiance". *Sepher Zohar* is called the *Book of Radiance* or *Book of Splendour*. Why, then, is it here translated as Window? What other translations exist?

Translations of "Zohar"

- JPS 1962: "Make an **opening for daylight** in the ark..."
- NIV: Make **a roof** for it..."
- American Standard: "**A light** shall thou make to the ark..."
- New American Standard: You shall make **a window** for the ark..."
- The Message: "Build **a roof** for it..."
- Jewish Publication Society: "**A light** shalt thou make to the ark..."
- Young's Literal: "**a window** dost thou make for the ark..."
- Darby Translation: "**A light** shalt thou make to the ark..."
- Contemporary English: "Build **a roof** on the boat..."
- New Life: "Make **a window** for the boat..."
- New Living: "Construct **an opening** all the way around the boat..."

Why "Zohar"?

- Out of 17 different translations the word Zohar is interpreted as a "light" 3 times, a "Window" 7 times, a "roof" 5 times, and an "opening" twice.
- Hebrew words
 - ▶ Window -- heh -- הָה
 - ▶ Roof -- gag -- גַּג
 - ▶ Opening -- peytach -- פֶּתַח
- Why use "zohar" זֹהָר if Torah meant a window or a roof?

Check the Chumash...

rām -- *A window*. Some say it was a skylight -- according to most commentators, it was the window Noah opened after the Flood (8:6) -- and some say it was a precious stone [that refracted the outside light to illuminate the interior (*Chizkuni*)] (*Rashi*).

[Stone Chumash]

Check the Midrash...

XXXI: 11 — A light (Zohar) shalt thou make to the ark (VI:16)

R. Hunia and R. Phinehas, R. Hanan and R. Hoshaia could not explain [the meaning of ZOHAR]; R. Abba b. Kahana and R. Levi did explain it. R. Abba b. Kahana said: It means a skylight; R. Levi said: A precious stone. [Which provided light from itself.]

R. Phinehas said in R. Levi's name: During the whole twelve months that Noah was in the Ark he did not require the light of the sun by day or the light of the moon by night, but he had a polished gem which he hung up: **when it was dim he knew that it was day, and when it shone he knew that it was night.** [Cf. Sanh. 108b.]

R. Huna said: Once we were taking refuge from [Roman] troops in the caves of Tiberias. We had lamps with us: when they were dim we knew that it was day, and when they shone brightly we knew that it was night.

[Midrash Rabbah]

Check the Midrash...

THE HOLY BOOK

Great wisdom was needed for building the ark, which was to have space for all beings on earth, even the spirits. Only the fishes did not have to be provided for. Noah acquired the necessary wisdom from the book given to Adam by the angel Raziel, in which all celestial and all earthly knowledge is recorded.

...

The book, which was made of **sapphires**, he took with him into the ark, having first enclosed it in a golden casket. All the time he spent in the ark it served him as a **time-piece, to distinguish night from day.**

[Ginzberg *Legends of the Jews*]

Check the Talmud...

"A window (Zohar) shalt thou make to the ark" (Gen. VI:16).
R. Johanan said: The Holy One, blessed be He, instructed Noah, '**Set therein precious stones and jewels, so that they may give thee light, bright as the noon**' (zoharayim).

What can we find in Qabalah...

"..but as early as the *Sepher ha-Bahir* it [the Sepheroth] is related to the Hebrew sappir ("**Sapphire**"), for it is the **radiance** of God which is like a **sapphire**."

[Scholem, Gershom *Kabbalah*]

{Here we can tie zohar to the sephiroth; the light to the emanations.}

Making Connections

- Noach placed a "light" in the ark.
- This light also acted as a time piece.
- The light was a precious stone.
- The stone may have been a book made of sapphire.
- The book of sapphire acted as a time piece.
- They both are said to have radiated (emanated?) light in order to tell time.
- This served as a form of guidance for Noach so that he knew when it was day and when it was night.
- The light coming from the sapphire can be the emanations (sephiroth) of the divine radiance (zohar).
- The sephiroth make up the Tree of Life, the Qabalah.
- A book of sephiroth would then be the Qabalah.

Making Connections (*continued*)

- During the darkest days and surrounded by Chaos the Qabalah (Tradition, Mysticism, Wisdom) guided Noach.
- If the story is didactic then perhaps we can put this light in our own "ark"; our own selves.
- This inner light acts as a guide for us through darkness.
- The Qabalah helps us to discover and reveal that inner light to ourselves and others.
- We are assured (by the story of the Flood and the Ark) that by relying on this light to guide us we will always make our way safely through the darkness and find a safe place to land when it is over.
- The light within is a gift from God (as the book was given to Noach) and it shines the brightest when we need it most.

Example 2

What's in a Name?

Aspects of God



Qabalah As A Way Towards Understand God

- God is everywhere, everything, eternal and infinite.
- ∴ God is beyond human comprehension.
- This wholeness of God is called Ain Soph (Boundless Light).
- Everyone has various personalities and various roles and names associated with those personalities:
 - ▶ Mother, Sister, Daughter, Wife, Lover, Co-worker, Teacher, Friend...
 - ▶ Father, Brother, Son, Husband, Lover, Co-worker, Teacher, Friend...
- You'd probably feel wierd if your co-workers started caling you "Mommy" or "Honey".
- Each Sphere or Sephiroth contains a personality and "Name" of God.
- Which name of God is used in scripture tells us something about what aspect of God is active or being discussed at the time.

Names of God

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Eh-hey-eh | Literally "I Am" or "I Live" |
| יהוה | Tetragrammaton called "HaShem" or "The Name". Merciful, powerful, projective, Masculine, Father. |
| Elohim | God. (Elohim is the God of Genesis I and II.) Severe, creative, formative, Feminine, Mother. |
| EI | God. Associated with Mercy. |
| Elohim Gibor | God of Strength. Associated with Severity. Justice. |
| יהוה Eloah | יהוה Eloah va-Daath (All Knowing God) |
| Va-Daath | Yeheshuah (Pentagrammaton -- Messiah) |
| יהוה Tzabaoth | Hosts of Hashem |
| Elohim Tzabaoth | God of Hosts |
| Shaddai El Chai | Ever Living God |
| Adonai Malekh | Lord King. |

Tree of Life from the Hermetic Qabalah

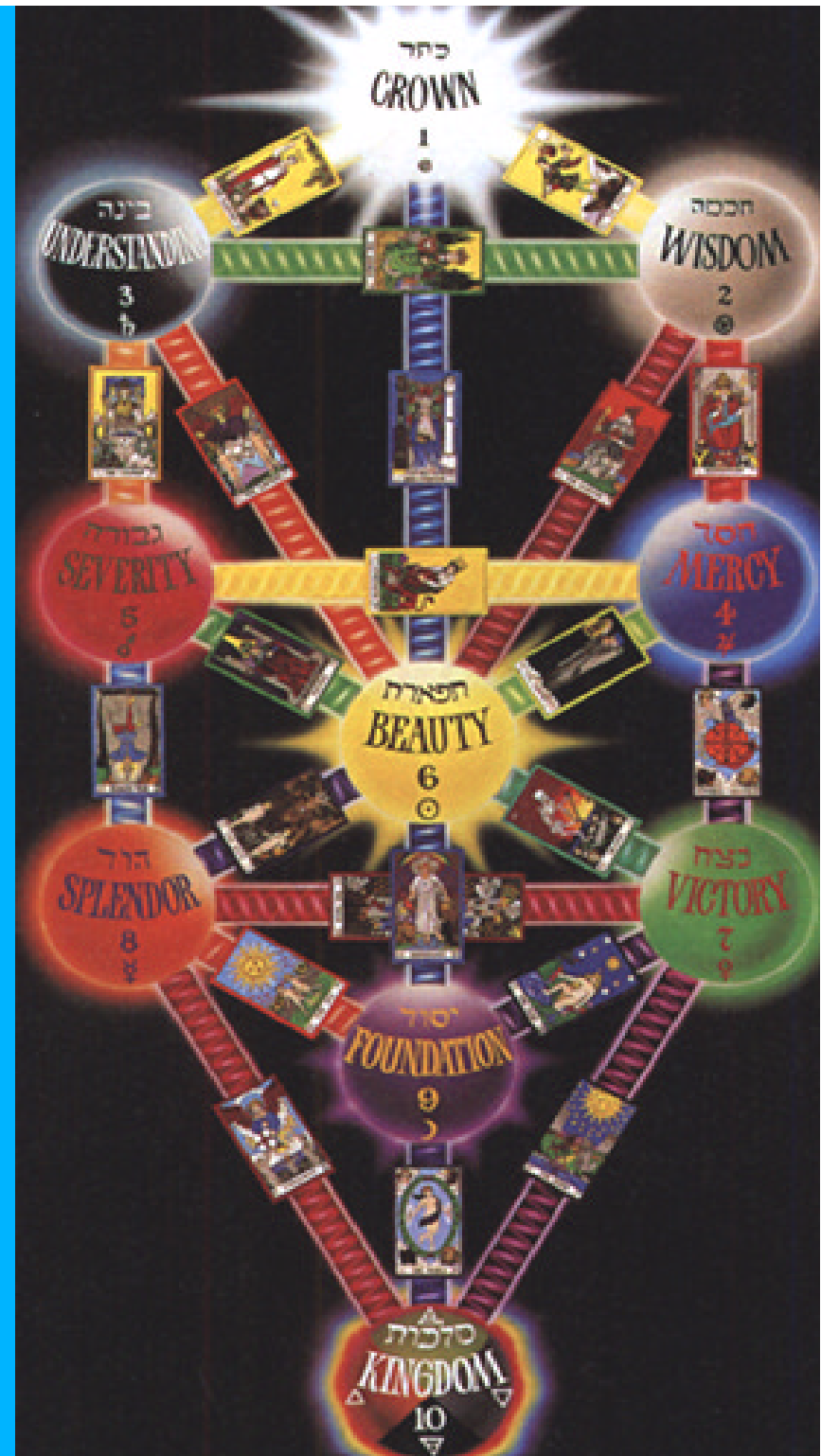
Shows

Sephiroth

Paths

Aspects

Correspondances



The Coming of the Flood

- Now we return to Noach and the Flood.
- **Elohim** said to Noach, *"the end of all flesh is come before Me, the Earth is filled with violence (**hamas**)"* (Gen.VI:13).
- Then **Hashem** said to Noah, *"Come to the Ark, you and all your household, for it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation: (Gen VII:1)*
- **Hammas**, according to the Midrash, includes such things as murder, incest, robbery and Idolotry. All forms of violence against others. Some sources include rape.
- **Elohim** is the name associated with the Sphere of Understanding which stands at the top of the Pillar of Severity. Thus it is that this is the Name which dispenses Justice.
- **Hashem** is the Name associated with Wisdom which stands at the top of the Pillar of Mercy and grants mercies upon Humanity.

Why Use Different Names?

- Everything in Torah can be seen as a lesson.
- Justice must be tempered by Mercy.
- Mercy must be tempered by Justice.
- Excessive Mercy would have allowed Hamas to reign upon the Earth. This would have, essentially, condoned the evil.
- Excessive Justice would have destroyed absolutely everything leaving nothing in its wake.
- Elohim, who decided upon the flood is tempered by Hashem who arranges to save Noah's family as well as all of the animals.
- Hashem is the Merciful Left Hand of God who sees a future for the world. Elohim is the Right Hand of God who is willing to wipe out everything It created.
- Think of them as the Sword Arm and the Shield Arm. One protects, the other destroys.

The Lesson put Succinctly

In the Initiatory tradition of Qabalah this lesson is given to the new initiate in the following way:

"Study well that Great Arcanum, the proper equilibrium of mercy and severity, for either unbalanced is not good; unbalanced severity is cruelty and oppression; unbalanced mercy is but weakness and would permit evil to exist unchecked, thus making itself as it were the accomplice of evil."

Conclusion

What have we learned

What have we learned

- Bible study and interpretation is a very complex and difficult road.
- It is a sort of detective story seeking out clues and secrets hidden within the text.
- English translations already include someone else's interpretations. It is important to know and to look at various translations before making up one's mind about a particular passage.
- The Torah has been studied and commented on for thousands of years. There is a huge body of wisdom associated with this study.
- Qabalah, Talmud and Midrash are all valuable tools for exploring the Tanakh.
- These tools are still available today.

My Goals

- Introduce you to new concepts involving Torah Study.
- Give you tools to explore in the future.
- Impart a sense of the "exploration" involved in Torah Study.
- Created an interest in the various commentaries and discourses on the Bible.
- Introduce the idea of the Qabalah, the mystical tradition behind all Western religion.
- Begin a dialogue between yourselves, your faith and Scripture.

I hope that I have been interesting, entertaining and, most importantly, thought provoking and wish you all the best for the future.