

# MEDITATION AND KABBALAH

Containing Relevant Texts from  
*The Greater Hekhalot*, Textbook of the Merkava School  
 The works of Abraham Abulafia  
 Joseph Gikatalia's *Gates of Light*  
*The Gates of Holiness*  
*Gate of the Holy Spirit*, Textbook of the Lurianic School  
 Hasidic Classics

BY

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## THE GREATER HEKHALOT

### Chapter 1

Rabbi Ishmael said: What is the meaning of the hymns that one must chant when he desires to gaze into a vision of the *Merkava*, to descend in peace and to ascend in peace?

When one is on a higher level, he can enter, and is brought in and led to the heavenly Chambers, where he is allowed to stand before the Throne of Glory. He then knows what will happen in the future, who will be raised and who will be lowered, who will be made strong and

One should not add to these 112 times, nor should he subtract from them. For if one adds or subtracts, his blood is on his head. But his mouth should utter the names, and with his fingers, he should count up to 112. He then immediately descends and has authority over the *Merkava*.<sup>57</sup>

### Chapter 17

Rabbi Ishmael said, this is the teaching of Rabbi Nehunia ben HaKana:

TUTRSYAY (טוטרסיאי), the Lord, God of Israel sits in seven chambers, one within the other. At the door of each chamber are eight gatekeepers, four to the right of the lintel, and four to the left.

These are the names of the watchers at the door of the First Chamber: Dahaviel, Kashriel, Gahuriel, Buthiel, Tofhiel, Dahariel, Mathkiel, and Shaviel (and some substitute Shiviel).

These are the names of the watchers at the door of the Second Chamber: Tagriel, Mathpiel, Sarchiel, Arpiel, Shaharariel, Satriel, Ragaiel, and Sahiviel.

These are the names of the watchers at the door of the Third Chamber: Shaburiel, Ratzutziel, Shalmiel, Sabliel, Zachzachiel, Hadariel, and Bazriel.

These are the names of the watchers at the door of the Fourth Chamber: Pachadiel, Geburathiel, Cazviel, Shekhinyael, Shathakiel, Araviel, Capiel, and Anpiel.

These are the names of the watchers at the door of the Fifth Chamber: Techiel, Uziel, Gatiel, Gatchiel, Saafriel, Garfiel, Gariel, Dariel, and Paltriel.

These are the names of the watchers at the door of the Sixth Chamber: Dumiel, Katzpiel, Gahgahiel, Arsbarsabiel, Agromiel, Partziel, Machakiel, and Tofriel.

And at the door of the Seventh Chamber erectly stand all the mighty ones, terrifying, powerful, fearsome. . . . Sharp swords are in their hands, flashing lightning shoots from their eyes, streams of fire come from their nostrils, and burning coals from their mouths. They are garbed with helmet and armor, with spears and lances hanging at their sides.

### Chapter 18

Their horses are horses of darkness, horses of deathly shadow,

horses of gloom, horses of fire, horses of blood, horses of hail, horses of iron, horses of cloud. . . .

This is a description of the guardians at the door of the Seventh Chamber, and the horses at the door of each chamber.

All the masters who would descend into the *Merkava* would also ascend again and not be harmed, even though they saw everything in this Chamber. They would descend in peace and return, and would stand and bear witness to the fearsome, confounding visions of things not found in the palace of any mortal king. Then they would bless, praise, sing out . . . and give glory to TUTROSYAY, the Lord, God of Israel, who rejoices in those who descend to the *Merkava*. . . .

### Chapter 19

Rabbi Ishmael said: When you come and stand at the door of the First Chamber, take two seals in your hand, one of TUTROSYAY, the Lord, and one of Surayah, Prince of the Face.<sup>58</sup> That of TUTROSYAY show to those standing to the right, and that of Surayah, show to those standing to the left.

Dehaviel, the angel who is the chief guardian of the door of the First Chamber, and overseer of the First Chamber, who stands at the right of the lintel, and Tofhiel, the angel who stands at the left of the lintel with him, will immediately grasp you. They will give you over to Tagriel, the angel who is chief guardian of the door of the Second Chamber, who stands to the right of the lintel, and to Mathpiel, the angel who stands with him to the left of the lintel.

Show them two seals, one of ADRYHRON (אדריהרון), the Lord, and one of Ohazyya, the Prince of the Face. That of ADRYHRON show to those who stand at the right, and of Ohazyya, Prince of the Face, show to those who stand at the left.

Immediately they will grasp you, one to the right and one to the left. Perfecting and illuminating you, they will bring you and give you over to Shaburiel, the angel who is the chief guardian of the Third Chamber, who stands to the right of the lintel, and to Ratzutziel, the angel who stands with him to the left.

Show them two seals, one of TzURTK (צורטק) the Lord, and one of Dahavyoron, the Prince of the Face. That of TzURTK, the Lord, show to those who stand to the right, and that of Dahavyoron, Prince of the Face, show to those who stand to the left.

Immediately they will grasp you, one to your right, and one to your left, and two angels will precede you and two will follow you.

Perfecting and illuminating you, they will bring you to Pachdiel, the chief guardian of the door of the Fourth Chamber, standing at the right of the lintel, and to Geburathiel, the angel who stands to the left of the lintel with him.

Show them two seals, one of ZVUDIEL (זבדיאל), the Lord, and one of Margiviel, Prince of the Face. That of ZVUDIEL, show to those who stand to the right, and that of Margiviel, Prince of the Face, show to those who stand to the left.

Immediately, they will grasp you, one to the right and one to the left. Perfecting and illuminating you, they will bring you and give you over to Techiel, the angel who is head of the Fifth Chamber, who stands to the right of the lintel, and to Uziel, the angel who stands to the left of the lintel with him.

Show them two seals, one of TUTRBYAL (טטרביאל), the Lord, and one of Zachapniryai, Prince of the Face. That of TUTRBYAL show to those standing at the right, and that of Zachapniryai, Prince of the Face, show to those standing to the left. Immediately [six] angels will grasp you, three from in front, and three from behind.

The guardians of the Sixth Chamber will attack those who descend into the *Merkava* but do not descend into the *Merkava*, [attempting this] without authority. They throng around such individuals, striking at them and burning them, and then they send others in their place who do the same. They have no compunction, nor do they ever stop to think and ask, "Why are we burning them? What enjoyment do we have when we attack those individuals who descend to the *Merkava* but do not descend, without authority?" This is still the trait of the guardians at the door of the Sixth Chamber.

### Chapter 20

Rabbi Ishmael said: The entire company said to me, "Son of the haughty, you rule with the light of the Torah, just like Rabbi Nehunia ben Hakana. See if you can bring him back from his gazing perception. Let him sit with us and tell us the meaning of those who 'descend to the *Merkava* but do not descend.' Why are they attacked by the guardians of the Sixth Chamber? Why do they not touch those who [actually] descend into the *Merkava* at all? What is the difference between the two?"

Rabbi Ishmael said: I immediately took a cloth of feathery down and gave it to Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Akiba gave it to our servant, telling him to take this cloth and touch it to a woman who had immersed in the

The passage above incorporates the familiar language of “cleaving” or *devekut* that we encountered in the previous chapter. This makes sense in light of the fact that, as I have shown above, the term implies mystical union or self-annihilation with implications for cosmic annihilation and renewal thereby. In the following passage we are presented with a discussion of prayer that is very explicit about how worship is a ritualized form of religious practice designed to enable *devekut*. This text comes immediately after the Zohar’s declaration that beyond the realm of the heavens “there is no wise one who can know or cleave with his wisdom at all, only one small light with no existence, to dwell in it.” This would seem to preclude the possibility of any sort of meaningful *devekut* with this very recondite aspect of the divine being. However, the text continues:

Meritorious is the lot of one who has entered and exited, and knows how to gaze into the mysteries of his master and to cleave to Him. With these mysteries a man can cleave to his master and know the entirety of Wisdom in the upper mystery. When he worships his Master in prayer and desire and intention of the heart, his desire cleaves like a flame to a coal, to unite the lower firmaments of the side of holiness, to crown them in one lower name, and from there and beyond to unite the upper, inner firmaments so that everything will be one in that upper firmament that stands upon it. And while his mouth and lips whisper, his heart intends and his desire ascends above, above, to unite

everything in the mystery of mysteries, for there come to rest all desires and thoughts in the mystery that exists in *ein sof*, and to intend in this in each and every prayer, each and every day, to crown all of his days in the mystery of the supernal days. At night, he should pour forth his desire, and he will pass from this world, and his soul will leave him and return to the master of all.<sup>36</sup>

Revisiting the now familiar image of the flame and the coal, the intentions and desires of prayer causes a state of union of the lower firmaments with the upper firmaments, that is, between the lower and upper *sefirot*, though the cleaving of the soul to its Master. This union of the lower and upper firmaments through mystical experience with God causes all of the *sefirot* to “be one in that upper firmament that stands upon it,” referring to *ein sof*. Through this act of inner contemplation that occurs during prayer “while his mouth and lips whisper” raises everything to the “mystery of mysteries,” the furthest reaches of the divine infinity, the place where thoughts and desires properly belong in the mystery of *ein sof*.

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<sup>36</sup> Zohar 2:213b. See also, Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 998. It is interesting to compare this passage from the Zohar with the following comment about prayer by Moses de Leon, “Because man is encompassed by all spiritual things, and there is within him the image of all worlds and things revealed and concealed, thus, because it is from the root of thought that is in man that all things emanate forth as a chain and they go forth in their order in a supernal fashion, when he reaches the secret of the concealed and hidden things, it is important to look into and have intention in them, in his heart and spirit, in the bond of his soul and thoughts, like a flame bound to a coal.” *The Book of the Pomegranate*, p. 171.

With reference to our material intellect's desire ab initio to cleave to God—the material intellect being called Solomon in this book, as we said above—the material intellect said, expressing its desire, “Would that God would *kiss me with the kisses of His mouth!*” that is, that it cleave to Him so far as possible, for “kissing” indicates cleaving and coming close, and thus the sages said of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam that they “died by a kiss,” that is, that at the time of their deaths they cleaved to God.<sup>55</sup>

He said *Let him kiss me* and not “I will kiss him” because in truth God is the Actor in this matter, for what we know is an emanation emanating upon us from God, through the intermediation of the Active Intellect.<sup>56</sup>

He said *with the kisses of his mouth* because a kiss on the mouth indicates a cleaving of great strength, since it is like a spiritual attachment, that is, that they kiss each other with their mouths indicates that it were as if they were attached by their breath, which they inhale one from the other.<sup>57</sup>

His saying *for thy love is better than wine* means that the intellect reckoned ab initio that love of God is more desirable and worthier than physical pleasures. He mentioned wine because it is the best known of all physical pleasures and most delectable to the masses, and the one which brings one to be drawn after the other pleasures, such as intercourse and gluttony. Thus he mentioned wine alone,<sup>58</sup> as when in Ecclesiastes he used wine to indicate the physical pleasures, as he said, *to pamper my flesh with wine* (2:3).

Thine oils have a goodly fragrance  
Thy name is as oil poured forth  
Therefore do the maidens love thee (1:3)

He said, giving a reason for our natural desire to cognize and know God so far as possible, that even with our weak apprehension ab initio of the order and equilibrium of existent beings and the manner of the wisdom manifest in them, we see very clearly the greatness of God's degree.<sup>59</sup> And therefore *do the maidens love him*—these maidens being the young girls who had not been with a man,<sup>60</sup> that is, the rational souls before their dispositions have been actualized—for one's natural desire is for worthy things, and the worthier the object of desire, the greater the desire.

With respect to his saying *thine oils have a goodly fragrance*, you know already how the sages and prophets compared knowledge to liquids, as it says, *Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye for water* (Isa. 55:1), *And drink*

the fact that what has been emanated from it was emanated in so perfect a fashion.

Therefore *do the maidens love him*, they being the young girls who have not known men,<sup>68</sup> that is, the rational souls before their dispositions have been actualized; they desire to apprehend thee and something of the goodness of the order and equilibrium of the existence of these existent beings as they are. This desire is the reason we strive to achieve our perfection.

Draw me, we will run after thee;  
The king hath brought me into his chambers  
We will be glad and rejoice in thee  
We will find thy love more fragrant than wine!  
Sincerely do they love thee (1:4)

This verse is addressed to God, in order to indicate the passionate desire and many motivating factors which directs it<sup>69</sup> to him and which draws it so much that it runs after him, it and the other faculties of the soul. This will occur when the other faculties of the soul are subordinated<sup>70</sup> to the service<sup>71</sup> of the intellect.<sup>72</sup>

Or, by *we will run after*, he and others like him—that is, other rational beings—may be meant, in that this desire is naturally found in all men; this interpretation makes more sense.<sup>73</sup>

Either way he attributed the activity in this to God because man cannot achieve his perfection without that which is emanated upon him from God. Further, because of the multitude of impediments, one needs divine assistance in order to be drawn to him.<sup>74</sup>

With respect to this desire he said that if we reach this end, that is, that God bring us *into his chambers*, this will constitute the ultimate pleasure and joy. This is true, because there is so much rejoicing and joy in this that physical joys cannot be compared to it;<sup>75</sup> perfect pleasure and joy occur when a worthy thing is apprehended correctly, as has been made clear in the appropriate places.<sup>76</sup> Thus David said, *In thy presence is fullness of joy* (Ps. 16:11), and the sages said, “in whose abode is happiness,”<sup>77</sup> meaning that the ultimate joy is found at God's degree.<sup>78</sup> By this they meant that the end intended for us is that we long after him with a wonderful longing; this is among those things which direct us to achieve the end, as was explained above.<sup>79</sup>

It further said that the strength of the rejoicing and joy of one who

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Within this sphere the mind may freely associate. The "jumping" unites, therefore, elements of free and guided association and is said to assure quite extraordinary results as far as the "widening of the consciousness" of the initiate is concerned. The "jumping" brings to light hidden processes of the mind, "it liberates us from the prison of the natural sphere and leads us to the boundaries of the divine sphere." All the other, more simple, methods of meditation serve only as a preparation for this highest grade which contains and supersedes all the others.<sup>68</sup>

Abulafia describes in several places the preparations for meditation and ecstasy, as well as what happens to the adept at the height of rapture. The report of one of his disciples which I quote below, confirms his statements. Abulafia himself says in one place<sup>69</sup>:

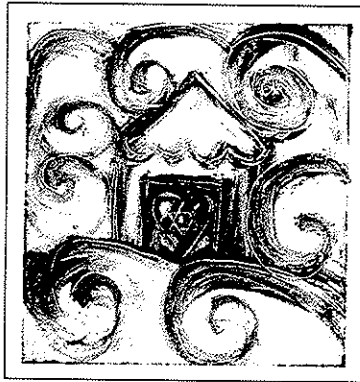
"Be prepared for thy God, oh Israelite! Make thyself ready to direct thy heart to God alone. Cleanse the body and choose a lonely house where none shall hear thy voice. Sit there in thy closet and do not reveal thy secret to any man. If thou canst, do it by day in the house, but it is best if thou completest it during the night. In the hour when thou preparest thyself to speak with the Creator and thou wishest Him to reveal His might to thee, then be careful to abstract all thy thought from the vanities of this world. Cover thyself with thy prayer shawl and put *Tefillin* on thy head and hands that thou mayest be filled with awe of the Shekhinah which is near thee. Cleanse thy clothes, and, if possible, let all thy garments be white, for all this is helpful in leading the heart towards the fear of God and the love of God. If it be night, kindle many lights, until all be bright. Then take ink, pen and a table to thy hand and remember that thou art about to serve God in joy of the gladness of heart. Now begin to combine a few or many letters, to permute and to combine them until thy heart be warm. Then be mindful of their movements and of what thou canst bring forth by moving them. And when thou feelest that thy heart is already warm and when thou seest that by combinations of letters thou canst grasp new things which by human tradition or by thyself thou wouldst not be able to know and when thou art thus prepared to receive the influx of divine power which flows into thee, then turn all thy true thought to imagine the Name and His exalted angels in thy heart as if they were human beings sitting or standing about thee. And feel thyself like an envoy whom the king and his ministers are

to send on a mission, and he is waiting to hear something about his mission from their lips, be it from the king himself, be it from his servants. Having imagined this very vividly, turn thy whole mind to understand with thy thoughts the many things which will come into thy heart through the letters imagined. Ponder them as a whole and in all their detail, like one to whom a parable or a dream is being related, or who meditates on a deep problem in a scientific book, and try thus to interpret what thou shalt hear that it may as far as possible accord with thy reason . . . And all this will happen to thee after having flung away tablet and quill or after they will have dropped from thee because of the intensity of thy thought. And know, the stronger the intellectual influx within thee, the weaker will become thy outer and thy inner parts. Thy whole body will be seized by an extremely strong trembling, so that thou wilt think that surely thou art about to die, because thy soul, overjoyed with its knowledge, will leave thy body. And be thou ready at this moment consciously to choose death, and then thou shalt know that thou hast come far enough to receive the influx. And then wishing to honor the glorious Name by serving it with the life of body and soul, veil thy face and be afraid to look at God. Then return to the matters of the body, rise and eat and drink a little, or refresh thyself with a pleasant odor, and restore thy spirit to its sheath until another time, and rejoice at thy lot and know that God loveth thee!"

By training itself to turn its back upon all natural objects and to live in the pure contemplation of the divine Name, the mind is gradually prepared for the final transformation. The seals, which keep it locked up in its normal state and shut off the divine light, are relaxed, and the mystic finally dispenses with them altogether. The hidden spring of divine life is released. But now that the mind has been prepared for it, this irruption of the divine influx does not overwhelm it and throw it into a state of confusion and self-abandonment. On the contrary, having climbed the seventh and last step of the mystical ladder,<sup>69</sup> and reached the summit, the mystic consciously perceives and becomes part of the world of divine light, whose radiance illuminates his thoughts and heals his heart. This is the stage of prophetic vision, in which the ineffable mysteries of the divine Name and the whole glory of its realm reveal themselves to

# YOUR WORD IS FIRE

## The Hasidic Masters on Contemplative Prayer



Edited and Translated with a New Introduction by  
Arthur Green & Barry W. Holtz

A JEWISH LIGHTS  
Classic Reprint



In prayer seek to make yourself into a vessel  
for God's Presence.

God, however, is without limit;  
"Endless" is His name.

How can any finite vessel hope to contain  
the endless God?

Therefore, see yourself as nothing:  
only one who is nothing  
can contain the fulness  
of the Presence.

58 Maggid Devaraw Le-Ya'aqov 69a. "Endless" here is  
used to translate *Eyn Sof*, the Kabbalistic term for the  
hidden Godhead. It literally means "without end".

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyadi, Tanya, Part II, excerpts from chs. 2 & 3

Chapter 2: ... surely with the withdrawal of the power of the Creator from the thing created, G-d forbid, the created being would revert to naught and utter non-existence. Rather, the activating force of the Creator must continuously be present in the thing created to give it life and existence. ...

Chapter 3: ... Now, following these words of truth every discerning person will understand clearly that every creature and being is in reality considered to be absolute naught and nothingness in relation to the activating force and the “breath of His mouth” which is within it, continuously calling it into existence and bringing it from absolute non-being into being. The reason that all things created and activated appear to us as existing and tangible is that we do not comprehend nor see with our physical eyes the power of G-d and the “breath of His mouth” which is in the created thing. If, however, the eye were permitted to see and to comprehend the life-force and spirituality which is in every created thing, ... then the physicality, materiality and tangibility of the creature would not be seen by our eyes at all, for it is completely nullified in relation to the life-force and the spirituality which is within it ... — that alone continuously brings it forth from naught and nullity into being, and gives it existence. Hence, there is truly nothing besides Him.

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List of Texts:

1. Hekhalot, from *Meditation and Kabbalah*, trans. / ed. A. Kaplan, Samuel Weiser, 1985.
2. Zohar on Prayer, from “Paradox and mystical union in the Zohar,” doctoral dissertation by H. Lachter, New York University, 2004.
3. *Commentary on Song of Songs*, Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides), trans. / ed. M. Kellner, Yale University Press, 1998.
4. “Abulafia” from *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, G. Scholem, Schocken Books, 1956.
5. *Tanya* Pt. II, Rabbi S. Z. of Lyadi, from <<http://www.chabad.org/>>.
6. *Your Word is Fire*, eds. / trans. Green, A. & B. W. Holtz, Jewish Lights Press (reprint) 1993.