

Mysteries of the Hebrew Letters

From the Sages

BT *Menaḥot* 29b: “These are the generations of heaven and earth בהבראם (be-hibbare'am), when they were created (Genesis 2:4). Do not read בהבראם (be-hibbare'am), when they were created, but rather בה' בראם (be-he bera'am), with ה (he) He created them.”

Bereshit Rabbah 12:10: “כי ביה יהוה צור עולמים (Ki be-Yah YHVH tsur olamim), For by Yah YHVH, an eternal rock (Isaiah 26:4)—with these two letters the blessed Holy One created His world [thus interpreting the verse as For ביה (be-Yah), by (the letters) י ה (yod, he), YHVH צור עולמים (tsar olamim), formed worlds]. ... ‘This world’ was created by ה (he)... and ‘the world that is coming’ was created by י (yod).”

Sefer Yestriah 1

Yah, the Lord of hosts, the living God, King of the Universe, Omnipotent, All-Kind and Merciful, Supreme and Extolled, who is Eternal, Sublime and Most-Holy, ordained (formed) and created the Universe in thirty-two mysterious paths of wisdom by three Sepharim, namely: 1) S'for 2 ; ספּר; Sippur ספּור; and 3) Sapher ספּר which are in Him one and the same. Numerals of nothingness and twenty-two fundamental letters....

He formed, weighed, transmuted, composed, and created with these twenty-two letters every living being, and every soul yet uncreated.

Midrash ha-Ne'lam

[2d] We have learned: By ten utterances was the world created.¹

Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Natan say, “By a single utterance was it created. Which is it? As is written: *By the word of YHVH the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6).”²

Rabbi Abba said, “As is written: *For He spoke and it was, He commanded and it endured* (ibid. 33:9)—one utterance only.”³

Rabbi El’azar said, “Neither this nor that! Rather, by a single letter was the world created—without speech.”⁴

As it has been taught: Rabbi Eli’ezer said, “The blessed Holy One took one letter from His Name, and with that letter it was created.”⁵

This accords with what Rabbi El’azar said: “What is the significance of the verse *Who is כמכה (khamokhah), like You, among אלים (elim), the gods, O YHVH* (Exodus 15:11)? That He is able to create the world.”⁶

Now this implies that by ה (he) the world was created, with one letter—literally!

¹ **By ten utterances...** According to M *Avot* 5:1, “The world was created through ten utterances.” See BT *Rosh ha-Shanah* 32a and *Megillah* 21b: “The ten utterances by which the world was created. What are these? The expressions *And [God] said* in the first chapter of Genesis. But there are only nine! The words *In the beginning* are also an utterance, since it is written: *By the word of YHVH the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6).” See also *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eli’ezer* 3; *Zohar* 1:15a, 16b, 30a; 2:14b (*MhN*).

² **By a single utterance...** As the verse from Psalms indicates a single utterance was sufficient to create the heavens. See *Zohar* 1:117a (*MhN*).

Cf. *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eli’ezer* 7, “The blessed Holy One spoke one word and the heavens were created as the residence of His Throne of Glory, as is said: *By the word of YHVH the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6).”

Cf. John 1:1-3: “In the beginning was the word....Through him all things were made.”

The syntax of this passage is not entirely clear. The question “Which is it?” may be part of Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Natan’s statement, in which case they are asking: “Which verse teaches this idea?” This locution, however, is unusual as one would expect the more common expression “How do we know?” which usually precedes a proof-text. Alternatively, the question “Which is it?” is being posed by the “anonymous narrator” of the passage, who is asking: “Which is it? Was the world created by ten utterances or by one?” This question is then followed by two different proofs for creation by one utterance. This reading is supported by Rabbi El’azar’s response below, “Neither this nor that!” Namely, the world was not created by either ten utterances or one.

³ **one utterance only** Rabbi Abba also advocates creation by one utterance, though he offers a different textual proof. See *Alfa Beita de-Rabbi Aqiva*, Version 2, (*Battei Midrashot* 2:412): “The entire world was created by the utterance of the blessed Holy One, as is said: *For He spoke and it was* (Psalms 33:9).” Cf. ibid., Version 1 (*Battei Midrashot* 2:391).

⁴ **by a single letter...** The letter ה (he). See BT *Menaḥot* 29b: “*These are the generations of heaven and earth בהבראם (be-hibbare’am), when they were created* (Genesis 2:4). Do not read בהבראם (be-hibbare’am), when they were created, but rather ברה' בה' (be-he bera'am), with ה (he) He created them.” See *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:10; JT *Hagigah* 2:1, 77c; *Alfa Beita de-Rabbi Aqiva*, Version 1 (*Battei Midrashot*, 2:363); *Zohar* 1:46b, 91b; *ZH* 3a, 3d, 17a, 25a, 26a (all *MhN*).

⁵ **took one letter from His Name...** Namely, the final ה (he) from the tetragrammaton, YHVH.

The argument about whether the world was created by divine speech or by a letter of the divine name is not merely midrashic quibbling. At stake is the relationship between God and creation. Is the world the product of divine speech or more intrinsically connected to the divine substance?

⁶ **Who is כמכה (khamokhah), like You, O YHVH...** In this verse, the word כמכה (*khamokhah*), *like You*, is twice spelled with an additional ה (he), i.e., כמכה rather than the more usual כמך. The *Zohar* reads this curious spelling as suggesting that it is through the power of ה (he) that God is able to create the world. See *ZH* 3a, 3d, 17c (all *MhN*).

Zohar

בראשית (*Be-Reshit*), *In the beginning*.

Rav Hamnuna Sava said, “We find the letters backwards:⁷ ב (*Bet*) first, followed by ו (*vav*): בראשית (*Be-Reshit*), *In the beginning*, followed by ברא (*bara*), *created*. Then א (*alef*) first, followed by א (*alef*): אלהים (*Elohim*), followed by את (*et*).

“The reason is: When the blessed Holy One wished to fashion the world, all the letters were hidden away.⁸ For two thousand years before creating the world,⁹ the blessed Holy One contemplated them and played with them. As He verged on creating the world, all the letters presented themselves before Him, from last to first.¹⁰

“The letter ת (*tav*) entered first of all. She said, ‘Master of the worlds, may it please You to create the world by me, for I complete Your seal: אמת (*Emet*), “truth,”¹¹ and You are called Truth.¹² It is fitting for the King of Truth to begin with a letter of truth and to create the world by me.’

“The blessed Holy One replied, ‘You are seemly and worthy, but not deserving to initiate Creation, since you are destined to be marked on the foreheads of the faithful who fulfilled the Torah from א (*alef*) to ת (*tav*), and by your mark they will die.¹³ Furthermore you are the seal of מות

⁷ **We find the letters backwards...** The first two words of the Torah begin with the second letter of the alphabet, ב (*bet*); the next two words of the Torah begin with the first letter, א (*alef*).

⁸ **hidden away** Before Creation, the letters were concealed within the divine mind and arranged in reverse order.

⁹ **For two thousand years...** See *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:2: “Rabbi Shim’on son of Lakish said, ‘The Torah preceded the creation of the world by two thousand years.’”

¹⁰ **all the letters presented themselves before Him...** A similar story appears in *Alfa Beita de-Rabbi Aqiva*, Version 2 (*Battei Midrashot* 2:396-404); *Midrash Aseret ha-Dibberot (Beit ha-Midrash, 1:62-63)*; *Midrash Shir ha-Shirim* (ed. L. Greenhut) 5:11; *Zohar* 1:205b; *ZH* 88c-d (*MhN, Rut*); *TZ, Haqdamah*, 16a. The *Zohar* draws primarily on *Alfa Beita de-Rabbi Aqiva*. See Michal Oron, in *Mehqerei Yerushalayim be-Mahashevet Yisra’el* 3:1-2 (1984): 97-109.

¹¹ **Your seal: אמת (Emet), “truth”** According to Rabbi Hanina (*BT, Shabbat* 55a), God’s seal is אמת (*emet*), “truth,” the final letter of which is ת (*tav*).

¹² **You are called Truth** See Jeremiah 10:10: יהוה (*YHVH*) is the God of truth.

¹³ **destined to be marked...** See Ezekiel 9:3-4: He [יהוה (*YHVH*)] called to the man dressed in linen with the scribe’s kit at his waist, and יהוה (*YHVH*) said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark [תו (*tav*)] on the foreheads of those who moan and groan over all the abominations being committed in it.” See Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 177. In the old Hebrew script, the ת (*tav*) was shaped like an X, the simplest mark. Its

(*mavef*), “death.”¹⁴ So you do not deserve to serve as the instrument of Creation.’ She immediately departed.

“The letter *ש* (*shin*) came before Him. She said, ‘Master of the worlds, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are named *שדי* (*Shaddai*), and it is fitting to create the world by a holy name.’

“He replied, ‘You are seemly, you are good, and you are true, but since letters of deceit take you as their accomplice, I do not wish to create the world by you. For a lie cannot exist unless *ק"ר* (*qof-reish*) take you.’¹⁵ So whoever wants to tell a lie will first lay a foundation of truth and then construct the lie.¹⁶ For *ש* (*shin*) is a letter of truth, a true letter of the patriarchs, who were united in it;¹⁷ *ק"ר* (*qof-reish*) are letters that appear on the evil side.¹⁸ In order to survive, they entangle the letter *ש* (*shin*), forming *קשר* (*qesher*), ‘conspiracy.’ Seeing this, she left His presence.

“The letter *צ* (*tsadi*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for *צדיקים* (*tsaddiqim*), “the righteous,” are sealed by me, and You, who are called *צדיק* (*Tsaddiq*), “Righteous,” are signified by me, as is written: *For יהוה (YHVH) is צדיק (tsaddiq), loving righteousness (Psalms 11:7)*. It is fitting to create the world by me!’

“He replied, ‘*צ* (*Tsadi*), you are *צדיק* (*tsaddiq*), but you should remain hidden--not so revealed--so as not to provide the world a pretext.’ How so? She is *נ* (*nun*). *י* (*Yod*) from the name of the holy covenant comes and rides on her, is united with her.¹⁹ This is the mystery: When the blessed

purpose in Ezekiel was to distinguish the righteous from the rest of the population, but according to Rabbi Aḥa son of Rabbi Hanina (*BT, Shabbat* 55a), even those marked were killed, since their silence in the face of the wicked implicated them.

¹⁴ **the seal of מות (*mavef*), “death”** The word *מות* (*mavef*) ends with the letter *ת* (*tav*).

¹⁵ **letters of deceit... ק"ר (*qof-reish*)...** The word *שקר* (*sheqer*), “lie,” begins with *ש* (*shin*) and continues: *קר* (*qof, reish*). See *BT, Shabbat* 104a; Judah ben Barzillai, *Peirush Sefer Yetsirah*, 146.

¹⁶ **whoever wants to tell a lie...** See Rashi on Numbers 13:27, who paraphrases *BT, Sotah* 35a; *Zohar* 2:215b, 264a; 3:161a.

¹⁷ ***ש* (*shin*) is a letter of truth...** The three prongs of the *ש* (*shin*) stand for the three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who symbolize the triad of *sefirot*: *Hesed*, *Gevurah* and *Tif'eret*. See *Zohar* 1:25b (TZ); 2:204a.

¹⁸ **appear on the evil side** Perhaps because they stand for *קליפה* (*qelippah*), “husk,” and *רע* (*ra*), “evil.” See *Zohar* 2:180b; *ZH* 8c (SO).

¹⁹ **She is נ (*nun*)...** The letter *צ* (*tsadi*) consists of a *נ* (*nun*) and a *י* (*yod*). See *Bahir* 42 (61); *Sefer ha-Temunah*, 2, 21a. The *נ* (*nun*) symbolizes *Shekhinah*, the feminine (*תְּשֵׁבַח* [*teshevah*]). The *י* (*yod*) symbolizes *Yesod*, the divine phallus, who is called “covenant.” The mark of the covenant of circumcision is pictured as the

Holy One created Adam, He created him with two faces.²⁰ So the י (yod) faces backward, like this:
 [picture of צ (tsadi) with the י (yod) facing backward].²¹ They were not turned face to face, like this:
 [צ (tsadi) with י (yod) and top of נ (nun) facing each other].²² It looked upward like this: [צ (tsadi)
 with י (yod) facing upwards]. It looked downward like this: [צ (tsadi) with י (yod) facing downward].
²³ The blessed Holy One said to her, ‘Turn back, for I intend to split you and transfigure you face to
 face, but you will arise elsewhere.’²⁴ She left His presence and departed.

“The letter פ (pe) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create
 the world by me, for I signify פורקנא (purqena), the “redemption,” that You will someday bring to
 the world, also called פדות (pedut), “deliverance.” It is fitting to create the world by me!’

“He replied, ‘You are seemly, but you signify hidden transgression, like a serpent striking,
 then tucking its head into its body:²⁵ so one who sins bows his head, stretching out his hands.’

“Similarly ע (ayin) stands for עון (avon), ‘iniquity.’ Although she said, ‘I imply ענוה
 (anavah), “humility,”’ the blessed Holy One replied, ‘I will not create the world by you.’ She left His
 presence.

smallest of the Hebrew letters. In *Tanḥuma*, *Tsav* 14, *Shemini* 8, this mark is identified with the י (yod) of the
 divine name שדי (Shaddai). A German Hasidic tradition identifies the mark with the yod of יהוה (YHVH).
 See *Zohar* 1:13a, 56a, 95a-b; 2:36a, 216b; 3:142a (IR), 215b, 220a, 256a (RM); Wolfson, in *JQR* 78 (1987):
 77-112; idem, *Circle in the Square*, 29-48. Liebes (*Studies*, 154-58) suggests that the צ (tsadi) alludes to Jesus.
²⁰ **with two faces** Aramaic, דו פרצופין (du partsufin). See *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:1: “Rabbi Yirmeyah son of El’azar
 said, ‘When the blessed Holy One created Adam, He created him androgynous, as is said: *Male and female He
 created them* (Genesis 1:27).’ Rabbi Shemu’el son of Nahman said, ‘When the blessed Holy One created Adam,
 He created him with two faces. Then He sawed him and gave him two backs, one on this side and one on that.’
 See *BT*, *Berakhot* 61a; *Eruvin* 18a; Plato, *Symposium* 189d-191d; *Zohar* 1:13b, 47a; 2:55a; 3:5a, 44b; Matt,
Zohar, 217.

²¹ **the י (yod) faces backward...** This reflects the Sephardic practice of writing the צ (tsadi). See Scholem, *Sefer
 ha-Zohar*; A. L. Friedman, *Tsidqat ha-Tsaddiq*, 41-55; M. M. Meshi-Zahav, *Qovets Sifrei Setam*, intro, 36; 8,
 149-52, 239-40; S. Z. Havlin, in *Alei Sefer* 12 (1986): 13-19; Ta-Shma, *Ha-Nigleh she-ba-Nistar*, 65, 139,
 nn163-66.

²² **not turned face to face...** Initially, the union between the masculine and feminine aspects of God was
 back-to-back and thus incomplete. See *Zohar* 2:176b (SdTs); 3:292b (IZ); *BT*, *Bava Batra* 99a. This incomplete
 union is symbolized by the configuration of the צ (tsadi). The צ (tsadi) must remain hidden so that this secret
 will not become widely known and “provide the world a pretext” to impugn the divine union.

²³ **It looked upward... downward...** Trying to face its partner. See Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2:564.

²⁴ **you will arise elsewhere** The י (yod) and the נ (nun) will face one another not here but in another letter: ו
 (vet). See *KP*.

²⁵ **hidden transgression...** The form of the letter פ (pe) resembles someone trying to hide his head. See *Zohar*
 3:119b.

“The letter **ו** (*samekh*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of [3a] the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me **סמיכא** (*semikha*), “support,” exists for those who fall, as is written: **סומך יהוה** (*Somekh YHVH*), *YHVH supports all who fall* (Psalms 145:14).’

“He replied, ‘So you are needed where you are; do not move! If you leave, what would happen to the fallen, who depend on you?’ She immediately left His presence.

“The letter **נ** (*nun*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are called **נורא** (*Nora*), *Awesome in praises* (Exodus 15:11). By me, the praise of the righteous is called **נאוה** (*na'vach*), *comely* (Psalms 33:1).’

“He replied, ‘**נ** (*Nun*), return to your place, for because of you **ו** (*samekh*) returned to her place.²⁶ Depend on her.’ She returned immediately, leaving His presence.

“The letter **מ** (*mem*) entered. She said to him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are called **מלך** (*Melekh*), “King.”’

“He replied, ‘Certainly so, but I will not create the world by you, since the world needs a king. Return to your place, you along with **ל** (*lamed*) and **ך** (*khaf*),²⁷ for the world should not be without a king.’

“At that moment the letter **כ** (*kaf*) descended from His throne of glory.²⁸ Trembling, she said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for I am Your **כבוד** (*Kavod*), “glory.”’

“When **כ** (*kaf*) descended from the throne of glory, 200,000 worlds trembled, the throne trembled and all the worlds verged on collapse. The blessed Holy One said to her, ‘**כ, כ** (*Kaf, kaf*), what are you doing here? I will not create the world by you. Return to your place, for you imply **כליה**

²⁶ **because of you...** **נ** (*Nun*) stands for **נופלים** (*nofelim*), the “fallen.”

²⁷ **ל** (*lamed*) and **ך** (*khaf*) The other two letters in the word **מלך** (*melekh*), “king,” which precede the letter **מ** (*mem*) in the alphabet.

²⁸ **the letter כ** (*kaf*) **descended...** The final **ך** (*khaf*) in the word **מלך** (*melekh*) was eliminated, but now the regular **כ** (*kaf*) approaches God.

(*kelayah*), “destruction,” a *decree of destruction* (Isaiah 10:23). Return to your throne and stay there.’ She thereupon left His presence and returned to her place.

“The letter י (*yod*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for I am the beginning of the holy Name.²⁹ It is fitting for You to create the world by me!’

“He replied, ‘It is enough for you to be engraved in Me, inscribed in Me. I desire you entirely. Ascend! You should not be uprooted from My name.’

“The letter ט (*tet*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are called טוב וישׁר (*tov ve-yashar*), *good and upright* (Psalms 25:8).’

“He replied, ‘I will not create the world by you, for your goodness is concealed and hidden within you,³⁰ as is written: *How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those in awe of You* (Psalms 31:20). Since it is hidden within you, it plays no part in this world that I am about to create, but rather in the world to come.³¹ Furthermore, because your goodness is hidden within you, the gates of the Temple will sink, as is written: *Her gates טבעו* (*tave’u*), *have sunk into the earth* (Lamentations 2:9). Further, facing you is נ (*het*),³² and when you join together you spell חטא

²⁹ **the beginning...** The first letter of יהוה (*YHVH*).

³⁰ **hidden within you** The point at the upper right of the ט (*tet*) is turned inward. See *Zohar* 1:30b.

³¹ **rather in the world to come** The primordial light of the first day of Creation (the divine *goodness*) was hidden away and reserved for the righteous in the hereafter. See *BT, Hagigah* 12a: “Rabbi El’azar said, ‘With the light created by the blessed Holy One on the first day, Adam could gaze and see from one end of the universe to the other. When the blessed Holy One God foresaw the corrupt deeds of the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion [the generation of the Tower of Babel], He immediately hid the light from them, as is written: *The light of the wicked is withheld* (Job 38:15). For whom did He hide it? For the righteous in the time to come.’”

See *Bereshit Rabbah* 3:6; 41:3; *Shemot Rabbah* 35:1; *Tanḥuma, Shemini* 9; *Bahir* 97-98 (147); *Zohar* 1:31b-32a, 45b-46a, 47a; 2:127a, 148b-149a, 220a-b; 3:88a, 173b.

³² **facing you is n (*het*)** The letter preceding ט (*tet*) in the alphabet.

(*het*), “sin.”³³ So these two letters are not inscribed in the holy tribes.³⁴ She immediately left His presence.

“The letter *tau* (*zayin*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me Your children observe the Sabbath, as is written: זָכוֹר (*Zakhor*), *Remember the Sabbath day, to hallow it* (Exodus 20:8).’

“He replied, ‘I will not create the world by you, for you imply war, a sharp sword and a spear for battle, like a *lamed* (*nun*).³⁵ She immediately left His presence.

“The letter *vav* (*vav*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for I am a letter of Your name.’³⁶

“He replied, ‘*vav* (*vav*), it is enough for you and *he* (*he*) to be letters of My name, included in the mystery of My name, engraved and carved in My name. I will not create the world by either of you.’

“The letters *dalet* (*dalet*) and *gimel* (*gimel*) entered and made the same request. He replied to them as well, ‘It is enough for you to be with each other, since the poor will never cease from the world³⁷ and need to be treated kindly. *Dalet* (*Dalet*) is poor; *gimel* (*gimel*) גומל (*gomel*), “renders” goodness to her.³⁸ Do not separate from one another! It is enough for one of you to sustain the other.’

³³ **טט (het), “sin”** Which ends with a quiescent *alef*. See *Zohar* 1:204a.

³⁴ **these letters are not inscribed...** The letters *het* (*het*) and *tet* (*tet*) do not appear in the names of the twelve tribes, which were engraved on the jewels of the breastplate worn by the high priest. See *BT, Yoma* 73b; *JT, Yoma* 7:7, 44c; *Zohar* 2:152a, 230a; 3:188b.

³⁵ **like a lamed (nun)** Like the straight line of a *lamed* (final *nun*). The word *zayin* (*zayin*) means “weapon.”

³⁶ **a letter of Your name** The third letter of the name יהוה (*YHVH*).

³⁷ **the poor will never cease...** See Deuteronomy 15:11.

³⁸ **Dalet (Dalet) is poor...** The letter *dalet* (*dalet*) signifies דל (*dal*), “poor.” See *BT, Shabbat* 104a: “גימל דל”ת - גמול” (Gimel dalet: *gemol dallim*), ‘Render kindness to the poor.’”

“The letter ב (*bet*) entered. She said to Him, ‘Master of the world, may it please You to create the world by me, for by me You are blessed above and below.’³⁹

“The blessed Holy One replied, ‘Indeed, by you I will create the world. You will be the beginning of Creation.’

“The letter א (*alef*) stood and did not enter. The blessed Holy One said to her, ‘א ,א (*Alef, alef*), why do you not enter My presence like all the other letters?’

“She replied, ‘Master of the world! Because I saw all the letters leaving Your presence fruitlessly. What could I do there? Furthermore, look, [3b] You have given this enormous gift to the letter ב (*bet*), and it is not fitting for the exalted King to take back a gift He has given to his servant and give it to another.’

“The blessed Holy One said, ‘א ,א (*Alef, alef*)! Although I will create the world with the letter ב (*bet*), you will be the first of all the letters. Only through you do I become one.⁴⁰ With you all counting begins and every deed in the world. No union is actualized except by א (*alef*).’

“The blessed Holy One fashioned high, large letters and low, small letters.⁴¹ So, ב ,ב (*Bet, bet*): בראשית ברא (*Be-Reshit bara*); א ,א (*Alef, alef*): אלהים את (*Elohim et*). Letters above and letters below. They were all as one, from the upper world and the lower world.

³⁹ **By me, You are blessed...** ב (*Bet*) stands for ברכה (*berakhah*), “blessing.” See *JT, Hagigah* 2:1, 77c; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:10; *Midrash ha-Gadol*, Genesis 1:1, 10.

⁴⁰ **Only through you do I become one...** The א (*alef*) stands for the number one and also for *Keter*, the first *sefirah*. The word אחד (*ehad*), “one,” begins with א (*alef*).

⁴¹ **high, large letters and low, small letters** The initial letters of the first four words of the Torah are ב ,ב (*bet, bet*), then א ,א (*alef, alef*). Although the first word, בראשית (*be-reshit*), does open with a large ב (*bet*), the emphasis here is not on the size of the letters but rather their origin. The first of each pair derives from *Binah*, the higher world, the second of each from *Shekhinah*, the lower world. See *Zohar* 1:159b; 2:132a, 174a, 180b; 3:2a, 220a; *ZH* 66c (*ShS*), 74c (*ShS*).