

Zohar I, 2b-3b

When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to make the world, all of the letters were sealed, and for two thousand years before He created the world, the Holy One, blessed be He, contemplated and took delight in them. When He came to create the world, all the letters entered and stood before Him, from the end to the beginning.

The letter **Tav** ט entered first and began, saying, Master of Worlds, may it please You to create the world with me, for I am Truth [*emeth*, **AM"Th**], the engraving of Your seal,¹ and You are called Truth.² It is fitting for the King to begin with Truth and to create the world with me.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her, You are fitting, and you are worthy, but you are not proper for creating the world because you are destined to be a mark upon the foreheads of the faithful ones who have kept the Law from **Alef** to **Tav**, for without the mark they would die.³ Also, you are the seal of death [*maveth*, **MV"Th**], and because you are so, you are not the proper one with which to create the world. Immediately she departed.

The letter **Shin** ש came before Him, saying, Master of Worlds, may it please You to create the world with me, for with me, Your Name is called Almighty [*Shaddai*, **ShD"Y**], and it is fitting to create the world with this Holy Name.

He said to her, You are fitting, and you are good, and you are true, but also, it has befallen you to be with the letters of falseness. I am not asking to create the world with you, because deceit [*sheqer*, **ShQ"R**] cannot exist unless the **Qof** ק and **Resh** ר travel with you. Thus it is that the one who comes to speak a lie brings an element of truth in the beginning, and afterwards, he sustains the lie. For the letter **Shin** is a letter of truth, a letter of truth by which the Fathers are being unified;⁴ **Qof** and **Resh**, these are letters that cling to the evil side,⁵ and in order to subsist, they take the **Shin** with them, and there will be a conspiracy [*qesher*, **QSh"R**]. When she saw

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1. Shabbat 55a.
 2. Jeremiah 10:10.
 3. Ezekiel 9:4.
 4. The three branches of the letter Shin represent the three Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 5. Qof begins the word Kelippah, the evil husks, and Resh begins the word Ra', "evil."

this, she departed from before Him.

The letter **Tzaddi** ז came before Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for with me the Righteous Ones [*Tzaddikim*] are sealed, and You, Who are called Righteous [*Tzadik*, **TzDY"Q**], by me You are signified, as it is written, "For the L-RD is righteous, He loves righteousness,"⁶ so with me it is fitting to create the world.

He said to her, **Tzaddi**, you are **Tzaddi**, and you are righteous, but you must be concealed; you must not be revealed so much in order to not give a point of attack to the world. What is the reason? You are the **Nun** herself upon whom the **Yod** of the Name of the Holy Covenant came and mounted, and with whom he united.

This is the mystery: When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the First Man, He created him with two faces.⁷ Because of this, the **Yod** adorns the back of the **Nun**, like this ז, and they are not being crowned face to face, whether [the **Yod**] is gazing up or gazing down.⁸

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her further, I am prepared to divide you and to make you face to face, but you will ascend in another place. She went out from before Him and left.

The letter **Peh** פ came before Him, saying, Master of Worlds, may it please You to create the world with me, for the redemption [*purqana*] that you are prepared to bring into the world is signified by me, and it is deliverance [*peduth*, **PDV"Th**], so with me it is fitting to create the world.

He said to her, You are fitting, but concealed sin [*pesha'*, **PSh"A'**] is signified by you, like that serpent who destroys, whose head is wound around his body like one who is guilty, his head bowed, yet his hand extended.

And so the **Ayin** ע is iniquity [*a'von*, **A'V"N**], and even though she said, Through me comes humility [*anavah*, **A'NV"H**], the Holy One, blessed be He, said to her, I will not

6. Psalms 11:7.

7. "Do partzufin" – two faces, or countenances, male and female combined back to back; see Midrash Tehillim 139 and Berakoth 61a.

8. The original Aramaic text shows four examples of the tips of the Yod and Nun facing different directions as they form the Tzaddi.

create the world with you. She departed from before Him.

The letter **Samekh** ס came before Him, saying, Master of Worlds, may it please You to create the world with me, for through me comes support [*semikha*, **SMYKh**"A] for the fallen, as it is written, "The L-RD is a support for all those who fall."⁹

He said to her, Regarding this, you must [remain in] your place and not leave it; if you were to depart from your place, what would happen to those who fall, since they are supported by you? Immediately she departed from before Him.

The letter **Nun** נ came before Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for through me it is written, "Awesome [*nora*, **NVR**"A] in splendor,"¹⁰ and the praise of the righteous ones, "it is beautiful [*naavah*, **NAV**"H] to praise Him."¹¹

He said to her, **Nun**, return to your place, for it is because of you that the **Samekh** has returned to her place.¹² Abide with her support. Immediately the **Nun** returned to her place and departed from before Him.

The letter **Mem** מ came before Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for through me are You called King [*Melekh*, **ML**"K].

He said to her, It is certainly so, but I cannot create the world with you because the world needs a King. Return to your place, you and the **Lamed** ל and the **Kaf** כ, since it is not fitting for the world to exist without a King.¹³

At that moment, the letter **Kaf**, frightened, descended from His glorious Throne [*Kisse*, **KS**"A], saying before Him, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for I am Your Glory [*Kevodakh*]. But when the **Kaf** descended from His glorious Throne, two hundred thousand worlds shook, and the Throne trembled, and all the worlds were frightened and about to fall.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her, **Kaf, Kaf**, what are you doing now? I will

9. Psalms 145:14.

10. Exodus 15:11.

11. Psalms 33:1.

12. Nun is also the first letter of the word *nofelim*, "those who fall."

13. *Melekh*, "King," is spelled with the letters Mem, Lamed, Kaf.

not create the world with you. Return to your place, for through you comes destruction [*kelayah*, **KLY" H**]: "a decree of destruction"¹⁴ will be heard. Return to your throne and abide there. At that moment she departed from before Him and returned to her place.

The letter **Yod ך** came before Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, since I am the beginning of Your Holy Name [**YHV" H**], and it is fitting for You to create the world with me.

He said to her, It is sufficient for you that you are engraved in Me, and you are inscribed in Me, and all of My Will is through you. It is not fitting for you to be removed from My Name.

The letter **Teth ך** came before Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for through me are You called "Good [*Tov*, **TV" B**] and Upright."¹⁵

He said to her, I will not create the world with you, because your goodness is concealed within you and stored away within you, as it is written, "How abundant is Your goodness which You have stored up for those that fear You."¹⁶ Since it is hidden away within you, it has no portion in the world that I wish to create, but only in the World to Come. Also, regarding your goodness hidden away within you, the gates of the Temple will sink, as it is written, "Her gates have sunk [*tovu'*, **TBA" V**] into the ground."¹⁷ Also, the **Cheth ך** receives you, and when you are joined together, this is sin [*chet*, **Ch" T**]. Regarding this, these letters are not inscribed in the holy tribes.¹⁸ Immediately she departed from before Him.

The letter **Zayin ך** came to Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for through me Your children observe the Sabbath, as it is written, "Remember [*zakhor*, **ZKV" R**] the day of the Sabbath, to keep it holy."¹⁹

He said to her, I will not create the world with you, for through you comes war, and

14. Isaiah 10:23.

15. Psalms 25:8.

16. Psalms 31:20.

17. Lamentations 2:9.

18. The letters Cheth and Teth are not found in the names of the sons of Jacob.

19. Exodus 20:8.

the sharp-pointed sword, and the spear of war, like the [shape of the final] **Nun**. Immediately she departed from before Him.

The letter **Vav** ם came before Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for I am a letter from Your Name [YHV"H].

He said to her, **Vav**, you and the **Heh** ה, it is sufficient for you to be established as letters of My Name [YHV"H], that you exist in the mystery of My Name, and are engraved and carved in My Name, so I will not create the world with you.

The letter **Daleth** ד and the letter **Gimel** ג came also in this manner. He said to them as well, It is sufficient to be established one with another, since the poor will never cease to be in the world,²⁰ and they will need to have charity with them. The **Daleth** is poverty [*dalluth*, DLV"Th], the **Gimel** is charity [*gomel*, GVM"L]. Do not separate one from the other; it is sufficient to be established to nourish one another.

The letter **Beth** ב came to Him, saying, Master of the World, may it please You to create the world with me, for through me do You receive blessings [*berakoth*, BRKV"Th] above and below.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her, This is certainly so. I will create the world with you, and you will be the beginning [*bereshith*, BRASHY"Th] of the world's creation.

The letter **Alef** א stayed, not entering. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her, **Alef**, **Alef**, why do you not come before Me like all the other letters?

She said to Him, Master of the World, because I saw all the other letters depart from before You without any success. What could I do there? Also, You have given the letter **Beth** this great gift, and it is not fitting for the Supernal King to take away the gift that He has made for His servant and to give it to another.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to her, **Alef**, **Alef**, even though I will create the world with the letter **Beth**, you will be first of all the letters. I will not be unified except through you. Through you will be directed all calculations and all functions of

20. Compare Deuteronomy 15:11.

the world, and every unification will exist only through the letter **Alef**.²¹

21. Echad, "One," as in the Shema Yisrael prayer, begins with the letter Alef.