

SYMBOLOLOGY OF THE HEBREW LETTERS

PARTS 1 AND 2

**AO 1st Order
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PART I - The First Pentad

It has been well said that every Hebrew word is a poem and that every letter a revelation or formula. Only a very elementary attempt is here made to show how some of the mystical meanings can be extracted from the first 5 letters wherein is the key to the rest of the Alphabet. These are the letters from a to h, which contain the symbology of the creation of living things. For a symbolises the Eternal undifferentiated unity of God and h is the symbol of breath, the breath of life, the aspirate as set forth in the 0°=0° Grade.

Let us consider these two letters.

First the numerical value of a . It is One, the first of Numbers, the initial of the Hebrew word *dca* Achad, which is used for the oneness of God. Concerning this the mathematician Theon of Smyrna said, "It is the principle or element of numbers, which, while multitude can be lessened by subtraction, is itself devoid of every number and remains stable and firm". It is indivisible: It remains ever, immutable. Photius says that the Pythagoreans used it to symbolise God himself, also on the earth sphere the Lingam, the upright pillar on which everything rested.

Consider now the form of a. It is composed of three letters, viz v placed transversely, and on either side d and y (a). Now add the numbers of these together. v = 6: d = 4: y = 10 – Total 20, which by the usual Qabalistic method, is the same as 2.

Therefore the unit when manifested becomes the duad. So God the Eternal Unity, in order to manifest, divided His Essence and became two; and from the 2 proceeded the Holy Spirit.

The names of the Hebrew letters were, it is said, derived from Egypt in the time of Moses. At all events the word Aleph, which means a bull, dates from the time when the Bull was all over the world the glyph of the Supreme God, whose characteristic most particularly recognised and insisted upon was strength. The form, however, was not that now commonly known.

In the older alphabet, called the Samaritan¹, Aleph was an upright figure like the later v, and probably symbolised the number one, and also the upright pillar, or the Lingam. The present square or Aramean characters came into use about the fifth century B.C. and probably the union of the three letters v, d, and y to form a sort of rough representation of an Ox's head were adopted also as a glyph to enshrine the teaching of the generation of the Duad from the monad.

¹ The Samaritan alphabet is a direct descendant of the paleo-Hebrew variety of the Phoenician alphabet, the more commonly known Hebrew alphabet having been adapted from the Aramaic alphabet under the Persian Empire. Large parts of the Hebrew Bible were originally penned in this script. Among the Jews it saw a short revival during the Hasmonean Kingdom. The Tetragrammaton was often still written in this script for some time after the current Hebrew alphabet was adopted among the Jews

All Hebrew letters are consonants, the vowels being indicated by points below, or in one case above; the letters which they follow.

a is an absolutely mute consonant. It has no sound of its own but takes the sound of any vowel that is written below it or following it. If there is no vowel, or only a Shiva, (which is the sign of no vowel), the a is simply not pronounced at all.

Now all vowel sounds are infinite, that is to say you can go on saying a vowel for any given time. There is no reason why the sound of O, for example, should not be prolonged to infinity: but a consonant gives a definite beginning or ending to the sound. Limits it, that is; so gives it definite form.

In this way also then a is an appropriate symbol of the nature of God as the root and beginning of things. Supporting every sound, yet limiting none. For this reason also the Element of Air is applied to a. There is no limitation, there is no form about the air. All things are in the air and the air is in all things. Hence also among the Trumps or Keys of the Tarot “Le Mat” or “The Fool” is specially attributed to a, and this card represents a force too subtle, too dreamy for earth. A fool on the material plane only, always trying to bound upward into the Astral or Spiritual regions. “Le Mat” has been described as “God’s Fool”. In the design the dog, symbolic of the elemental forces, is biting at his skirts endeavouring to hold him down. Thus then the attraction of the earth holds the air, but cannot limit its capacity of expansion.

Now consider the other extremity of the Pentad, the letter h. We find the word yh (Hay) means an animal, a living being; literally, a breather. One that breathes, breathing being the characteristic of animated beings. This is an Onomatopoeia, imitating the sound heard in forcibly emitting the breath. It is the same as the first syllable Ha of the Eastern word HAMSA, or the great bird, symbolic of the Day and Night of Parabrahm. The great out-breathing and in-breathing. The hahaha-manvantara and the maha-pralaya.

So then we have these five letters the progress from the Eternal unmanifest God, first manifesting Himself by the production of the Duad from the Monad, to the creation of living and breathing creatures.

Now the essential characteristic of living and breathing creatures is that each is an individual personality, a definite unit.

Therefore this letter h expresses the definite article. Placed before a noun it defines and separates it from all others as “Thou art the man”. wyah hta.

Consider now the form of the letter h. It consists of Daleth and a Yod (h). Now d = 4 and y = 10, or in total numeration 10+4=14, or adding the digits = 5, the number of the Pentagram, which is the glyph of humanity, the head of God’s present creation of living things on this earth, his form being a head and four members on the material plane, or the Spirit ruling the Four Elements. So from the air, which we have taken for a symbol of the

Infinity of God, we have proceeded to that which uses and exists by the air. “In Him we live and move and have our being”, and this by virtue of the limitation of the air in the first creation of man. “God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”

h represents the number 5, whereof we are told in the “Nicomachean Extracts” that it is eminently a spherical and circular number because on every multiplication it restores itself and is found terminating the number. It is change of quality, because it changes what has three dimensions into the sameness of a sphere by moving circularly and producing Light; and hence “Light” is referred to the number 5. Thus the living creatures, having as we have seen, emanated from God, contain within themselves that principle which brings them back after a full circle to God again.

This analysis of the first and last letters of the first Pentad leads to the conclusion that the intermediate letters symbolise the steps of creation from the first will of God the Unmanifest Himself to the creation of living beings; and following this clue we look at the next, the second letter b.

The meaning of the word Beth tyb, is a house, an enclosed space; or in other words the first limitation in three dimensions. The foundation of a Temple – “Know ye not that your bodies are the Temples of the Holy Spirit?” “God formed man out of the dust of the Earth.” Dust is formless. The first manifestation of hulaprakriti, or world stuff. Out of this was formed a house or Temple for the worship of God, and as the container of the Breath of God to be breathed into it.

The form of the letter is said to be a representation in section of the simplest type of house, namely a “lean-to” shed, such as primitive man might erect from any casual materials, against the face of a rock or any other shelter. It is the first idea of a covered place. And it is always in a covered place that the manifestation of life takes place. The seed of vegetable life must be placed in the earth and covered. The seed of animal and human life must be covered and hidden in the womb. The seed of Spiritual life must, by the common consent of mankind, be matured in some form of Temple, or building, and this symbolisation the Ancient Egyptians, through the Gnostics, bequeathed to the Freemasons.

Consider now the symbology of this letter b. In the symbology of the Aramean type of letters the horizontal line at the base denotes the Earth, or material plane; the horizontal line at the top denotes the Spiritual or Astral Plane. The letter b is formed of the letter r joined with the basal horizontal line. Resh, r, represents the Sun, the source of life and light; therefore the spiritual and divine part of man resting on the material plane, “The seasonable soul and human flesh”.

Again b represents the number 2, the manifestation of the Duad which is concealed in Aleph. r, Resh, is 200, which by the ordinary Qabalistic method is the same as 2, and rests on the material or earth plane. Here then we have symbolically the first creation of man as an immortal, infinite, spiritual being, united to a material, finite, mortal envelope.

Not man only, but the whole of the manifest creation, is formed in the same way, by the formulation of a covered place and the placing therein the divine spirit, by the operation of the Word (symbolised by Resh) on the material plane. As it is said, "In the beginning was the Word All things were made by Him." Beth, then, fixes the first manifestation.

Consider now the letter Gimel, g, and first of its numerical value. It is 3, the number of the ever-blessed Trinity and the number which essentially represents all material things. For to everything there must be three dimensions, length and breadth and height; to everything there must be past, present and future. Three notes make the common chord; three primary colours in the spectrum. Two contending forces and one which eternally unites them.

The meaning of Gimel is a camel, a bearer of burdens and this is the lot and purpose of every material created thing. The form of the letter is said to be a conventionalised glyph, or representation of a camel, formed by the letters v and y! Now in this is another number concealed as in the case of Aleph. For $v = 6$ and $y = 10$; that is $6+10 = 16$, or adding the digits, 7. Now this 7 being composed of $3+4$ is said to symbolise the triangle set over the square, or the divine spirit ruling the material body.

Consider now the letter Daleth, d. In numeration it is 4, the number of the square, the material, the earth element.

But in this also was involved and hidden the divine; the tetragrammaton or unpronounceable name hvhy.

Almost all the great mystical religions had a 4-lettered name for the Deity. But in the case of the most mystic and spiritual, one letter was repeated, making actually 3 only. Thus the Hebrew IHVH, Assyrian ADUD, Egyptian AMAN and TAUT, Arabian ALLA². These mysteries, however, are beyond the very elementary considerations of this paper.

The letter Daleth is composed of an upright line, a pillar or lingam, sign of material life, joined to a horizontal line at the top, symbolic of the Spiritual plane and indicating how reproduction on the earth plane brings down the spiritual life.

Considering now the meaning of the name of the letter. Daleth is a door.

Reproduction on the earth plane is in fact the door by which the life which is divine enters into and permeates all living things, thereby perpetuating life on the earth. Appropriately therefore is this letter attributed to the planet Venus. The Aramean shape of the letter is said to be that of a door into an enclosed place, in section.

² The latter having only two - maybe the author meant ALAH.

These letters therefore give us in symbol the steps leading from the final manifestation of the Divine to the creation of living creatures.

Thus a - The eternal unity of God wherein (concealed as yet) is involved the Duad.

b - The manifestation of the Duad. The formation of limits as in an enclosed space, wherein is unfolded the Spirit or Breath of God.

g - The bearing of burdens, which is the purpose of the creation of living creatures.

d - The door of Reproduction; whereby the life so given was to be perpetuated on the earth, and therewith the Spirit of Love which was to be the supreme gift of God to the creation of living things.

h - So we come to the creation of living things symbolised by the Pentagram.

c means a window; the shape of the letter is said to be that of a window in an enclosed space in section. We have therefore a completely enclosed space through which the Spirit enclosed therein can look, but cannot emerge, till it be the will of God.

At the time of the formation of the Aramean letters, Strength was the great characteristic of living creatures. By physical strength they lived and the ultimate appeal in all matters was necessarily to physical force.

Appropriately therefore was this letter h attributed to the sign of Taurus @, which at that time was the Sign of the Sun in the Vernal Equinox. Yet by reason of the precession of the Equinoxes, this shall not always be the case.

This elementary view of the symbology is confirmed and amplified by the Tarot Cards attributed to the letters and by the planets and signs belonging thereto; all of which prove that this knowledge was possessed by these ancient Peoples who formulated those symbols and left them for the instruction of the illuminated who had the wisdom to profit thereby.

PART II – The Second Pentad

In the Second Pentad from *v* to *y* is developed the mystical meaning whose initiation we have traced in the first 5 letters.

Appropriately *v* signifies the hook or symbol of joining and *y* is a hand, the member wherewith all material work is done. Considering man as the microcosm, the hand is that which especially differentiates him from the rest of sentient and breathing creation. In the macrocosm, then, *y* must signify the instrument of the Spirit of God.

How then are we to symbolise this? In the great secret name of God, Yod, He, Vau, He, hwhy, we find the letters which conclude and, as it were, sum up the First and Second Pentads and the letter of union.

Now the Qabalists refer these letters to the Four Elements or four states of matter, and of these they attribute *y* to fire and *v* to air.

Here then we get the first clue to the form of *y* which is that of pure fire, i.e. the tongue of fire, torn off and floating free, not united to any material thing. Fire then is the hand of God and *v* is a *y* with the perpendicular line which, as we have seen, connects it with the earth plane, but not with a horizontal base line. It is not fixed to the earth as in Beth *b* a house, but moves free.

The first Pentad ends with the breather, the living animal; the second commences with that which it breathes. The union between God and Man is the air, or breath breathed into his nostrils at the beginning, the breath of Life.

The numerical value of *v* is six, of which Nicomachus says “It is the form of form, the only number adapted to the soul, the distinct union of the parts of the universe, the fabricator of the Soul, also Harmony and it is properly Venus herself.” It is also attributed to marriage because it is formed by multiplication of the first even and the first odd numbers. When multiplied into itself it reproduces itself, for the number 6 always appears in the unit place – thus 6, 36, 216, 1296, 7776 and so on. Freemasons may notice the six jewels, three of which are immovable and three transferable from one brother to another.

In the Sepher Yetzirah the Hexad is spoken of as N.S.E.W. Height, Depth and in the midst of all the Holy Temple.

Compare the signet Star of the Hexagram, symbolising the six Planets with the Sun of Tiphareth in the centre. The Hexagram also in Christian symbology represents the double Triangle symbolising the union of the Divine and human natures in the person of Christ.

From all these we can infer that the number 6 conveys the idea of union and to these we may add that the double triangle fitly symbolises the union of the hot and moist natures or the moist heat of generation thus being an appropriate symbol of marriage. Very properly then is the letter whose number is 6 represented by the hook of uniting, whose glyph is formed by y with a perpendicular line. It unites God and Man in the creation, hence appropriately stands in the midst of the great secret name of God, hvhy, and it still more closely unites them in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of the Father, and stands in the midst of his mystic Name of hwwhy, Yeheshua.

In Hebrew it serves as a conjunction, meaning not merely the English word “and” but practically may be used for every English conjunction.

The three intervening letters, z Zain, c Kheth, and e Teth, continue to develop the symbology.

Zain z the second letter of the Second Pentad. The name signifies a sword or a weapon, or any instrument for cutting or hewing. It is equivalent to the English Z and its Hebrew form, as in most of the ancient alphabets, is a glyph of this idea.

Thus is the alphabet of the Hermesians, given by Hammar in his translation of the Arabic manuscript of Ahmed-bin-Abu-bekr as the most ancient of the 4 forms of the Shim Shim Alphabet said to have been given by Divine inspiration and taught by God to Adam, the form is given thus: ♣ and the name is Zayam. Thus it is a cutting tool in the hand (y) of God.

Why then a cutting tool? If we refer to the first chapter of Genesis we find that the word used for creating is arb and this word also Qabalistically represents the 3 Persons of the Ever Blessed Trinity.

Thus, b for Ben, the Son; r for Ruach cvr the Spirit; and a for Ab ba the Father: and the root arb gives the idea of cutting – paring away.

Thus a sculptor having an idea of a beautiful form, but before him a rough block of marble, knows that the beautiful form is hidden therein, so he pares and chips away the portions of marble that hide it and his idea is revealed. Thus did God pare away from “The All” what hid or veiled his concept of the Heaven and the Earth and so manifested his creation. His hand wrought it and the cutting tool was his implement. Hence we have y a hand and z; and the form of z is a sword. It is not formed of any other letters but is a pure glyph of itself.

Numerically z Zain is 7; this is mystically the Triangle resting on the square or the Divine dominating the material. This state when perfectly reached is a condition of rest for it is the upraising of the material that brings all trouble and unrest into the world. The reversal of the Pentagram.

Hence again in Hebrew 7 is called hi bw Shibau, this is “satisfied”.

So far then the Hand of God uniting with the earth plane (as in the letter v) and being androgynous, male-female, as shown by the interlaced triangles of fire and water, causing the moist heat of generation, takes its cutting tool to create the manifestation of God's Idea (or as the ancient mystics put it, "His thought of Himself"). What then was the first production?

Consider the form of the next letter c. It is clearly related to both d and h, but it is neither door nor window. It is an enclosed space limited in all directions, but having no base line it does not rest on earth.

It is the general limitation which produces form. Hence it is form on the material plane. And creation is now advanced another step. God has now formed man of the dust of the earth. And the image of the sculptor using his chisel to produce that which before was hidden in the shapeless mass of marble, the $\nu\beta\nu$ $\nu\eta\tau$ Touhu vau Bouhu of Genesis becomes apparent. The sound of the letter c Heth, or rather Kheth, is that of a strong guttural aspirate, that is to say the breath of life materialised. Numerically it is 8, the double 4, therefore very material.

Camerius in his Nichomachus Arithmetic says, "It is the first cube of energy, the only evenly even number." So 8 souls were saved in the Ark, whence the Free Masons have several degrees wherein the number 8 is specially symbolic, as the Knights of the Royal Axe, or Prince of Libanus, the Noachites and the Royal Ark Masons, which is a subsidiary degree of the Mark Masons. Free Masons will recognise these.

Consider now the form of the next letter Teth e.

Its name is said by the Qabalists to mean a snake and its form a glyph of a cobra about to strike. It has a distinctly dual meaning.

Among the Hebrews the snake was the tempter of the Garden of Eden and was cursed by God; but in Egypt the snake was the Royal emblem of Pharaoh.

In form the letter is composed of these elements; the Vau v and the D lunar crescent, both united with the horizontal base line of the earth. Now both these symbols have a dual meaning. The Vau v as we have seen symbolises the union of God and Man and especially applies to the Incarnation and typifies the air we breathe. But in Ephesians II the Devil is called the "Prince of Air" and such was his ancient designate. And the Moon, as receiving and transmitting the light of the Sun, is an image of the Priests and Prophets of the Most High who received the Word of God and passed it on; and also of Christ Himself. "All things which I have heard of the Father I have made known unto you." And again it is one of the symbols Our Lady who received from the Holy Spirit the Divine Life which she gave to the world in the Person of Christ. But again the Moon is Hecate, the ruler of evil enchantments and of necromancy and the type of all that is unstable: and so we have the serpent of the temptation and the serpent of wisdom who

was the type of Christ – “For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

Referring³ to the word ארב, we find that when it is so pointed as to have an intensive meaning, in what is called Piel voice, it means to hew, to cut out intensely or inordinately. That is, not to carve as a sculptor, but recklessly, rashly, to cut all to pieces, to destroy. In this sense it is used in Joshua 17 v.15 for cutting down a wood and in Ezekiel 23 v.47 for slaying with the sword.

Immediately after the creation of man appeared the snake. Immediately after the revelation to Moses appeared the fiery serpents and the brazen serpent of healing. After the revelation by Christ [at] the Crucifixion when the Saviour of mankind was lifted up as a serpent of healing.

Numerically Teth e is 9, the triple 3, the square of the Triad and the completion of the units. For the Qabalists allowed no further number. After 9 was reached the next unit must be tenfold and so the series began again. In this sense 9 was accounted the most spiritual of numbers as 8 being the double 4 was counted the most material.

Therefore the Qabalists hold that in the pure sphere of mathematics there is no relation to material things, but simply pure numbers are considered: there is no duality but all is purely good, or, as was said by an Arab philosopher, “In God good and evil are one. There is no good nor evil, for all is good.”

So we come again to Yod y the Hand of God, and here according to the Qabalists a fresh series begins; and in the translation of symbology the number 10 which is attributed to y indicates a new beginning, a fresh start. For every fresh start, every new beginning or initiative must be from the Hand of God. Every initiative that man can take must be the work of man’s hand. Further the initiative of man may be either good or evil and appropriately therefore it follows e the serpent, even as the human life of the children of Adam followed on the fall and the influence of the Serpent and the life of the Christian Church followed the lifting up of Christ as Moses lifted up the Serpent.

But in the Infinite Divine, only to be conceived as pure number, every new beginning must be purely spiritual and good.

³ In the original document, the word “Recurring” appears here. However, this would seem to have been an error.