

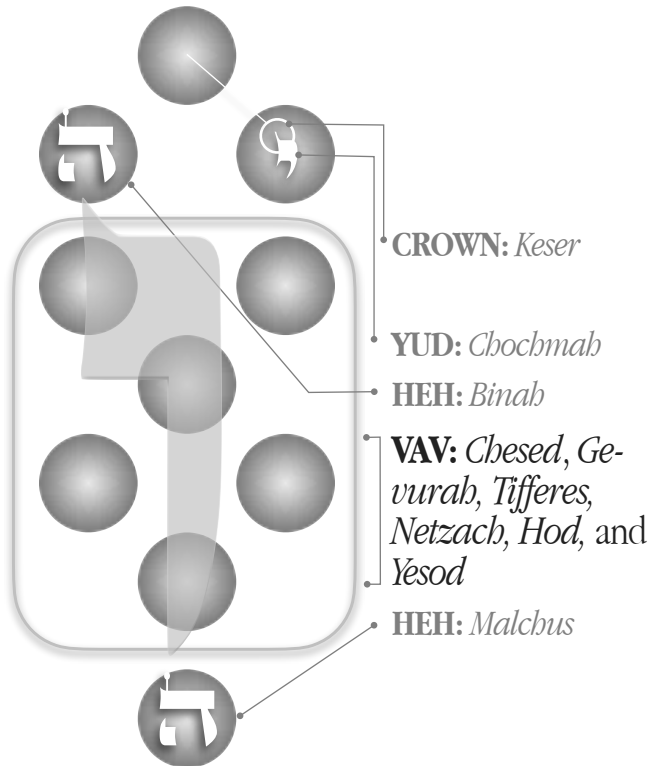


The *Vav* is the star of this show, contributing no less than six (*Vav*) letters to the *six* words of the verse.

As mentioned previously, the *Vav* is the third letter of the *Shem Hovayab* which is spelled *Yud-Heb-Vav-Heb*, and not pronounced the way it is written (*Hovayab* is the same letters but in a different, non-holy order). *Kabbalistically*, the *Shem Hovayab* was the first Name used with respect to God from which all other Names are said to branch out.

The *Shem Hovayab* corresponds to the ten *sefiros* as well, which make up the entirety of the created world. The crown of the *Yud* corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Keser*, the *Yud* itself to the *sefirah* of *Chochmah*, the first *Heb* of the Name to *Binah*, the *Vav* to the six *sefiros* of *Chesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tifferes*, *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*, and the final *Heb* to

the *Malchus*, as per the diagram:



*Kabbalistically*, the *sefiros* of *Chochmah* and *Binah* are too high up to be affected by evil, and therefore they are called *Chaim*—Life (evil is called “death”). *Malchus* always represents the level of *aretz*—land, to which the *Vav* connects the *Chochmah* and *Binah* like a tree connects its branches and leaves to the land below it.

Therefore, the *Vav* together with the *Chochmah* and

*Binab* is called the *Aitz HaChaim*, the *Tree of Life*. This is because like the trunk, the channel through which nutrients make their way up to the rest of the tree, the *Vav* is also the channel for the “nutrients” of *Chochmah* and *Binab* to make their way to the lower worlds.

That spiritual nutrient is called *Da’as*. Just as *Tifferes* (Beauty) is considered to be the balance between two opposite lights, *Chesed* (Kindness) and *Gevurah* (Strength), *Da’as* (Knowledge) is considered to be the balance between *Chochmah* (Wisdom) and *Binab* (Understanding). *Da’as* is to *Zebr Anpin* (the six *sefiros* of *Chesed* through *Yesod*) what a soul is to the body, its inner life force.

Practically speaking, *Chochmah* is abstract truth, *Binab* is the understanding of it, and *Da’as* is the result of the integration and realization of it. On the level of *Chochmah*, a person can know truth and yet remain unaffected by it. *Binab* will make the truth more tangible, but not necessarily inspire a person to live by it. On the level of *Da’as*, a person feels the reality of the truth until the violation of it feels like self-violation.

A person is the sum total of the truths that they have integrated. Some people cower when their principles are threatened, whereas others may fight to the death to preserve them. Some people only do the right thing when others are watching while others do it whether they are or not.

We’re not born with moral backbone. It is something that we develop by getting *Da’as* and integrating it. The

*Vav*, which looks like a fully extended spinal cord reminds us of this point, to pursue and integrate *Da'as*. And not just any *Da'as*, but the kind referred to here:

*If you want it as you do silver, and search after it like buried treasures, then you will understand fear of God, [and] Da'as Elokim you will find. (Mishlei 2:4)*

As we learn at the beginning of history from the *Aitz Ha'Da'as*, there is *da'as tov*—good *da'as*—and *da'as ra*—*bad da'as*. *Da'as tov* reveals the reality of God in Creation whereas *da'as ra* does the opposite. It may be fascinating and make life easier, but if it is knowledge that makes a person doubt God's existence, then it is considered to be the latter.

It is not always so easy to make the distinction, evident from the first failure of mankind during our first test. History bears witness to how mankind has struggled with this until this very day. Indeed, this generation may be the most tested of all since the first one.

This is why we ask God for help regarding *Da'as* early in the *Shemonah Esrai*:

You graciously give knowledge to man and teach people understanding. Graciously bestow on us from Your *dayah*, *binah*, *v'haskel*—knowledge, understanding, and discernment.

*Dayah* refers to the abstract level of *Chochmah*. *Binah* enlightens us and gives us important insight into the ideas themselves. But it is only when knowledge becomes *baskel*, part of our way of thinking and living that it is true *Da'as*. . . and our ticket to a good life in *this* world and an eternal life in the *next* one.