

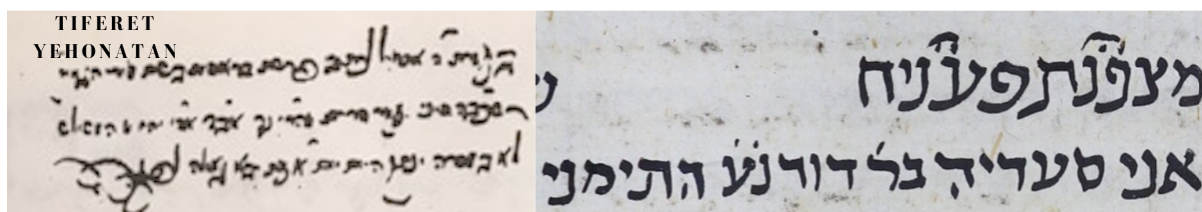
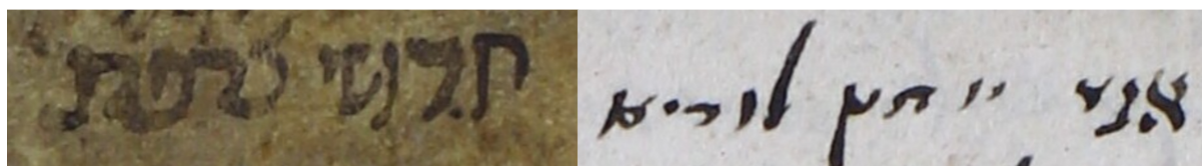
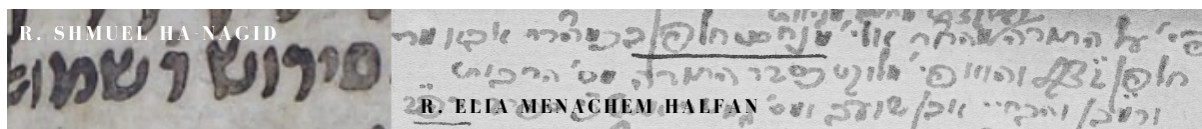
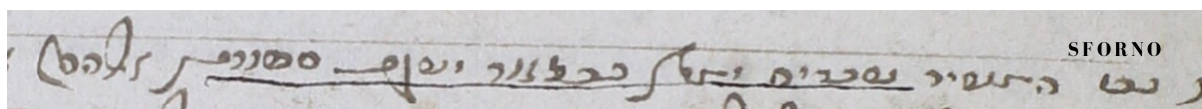
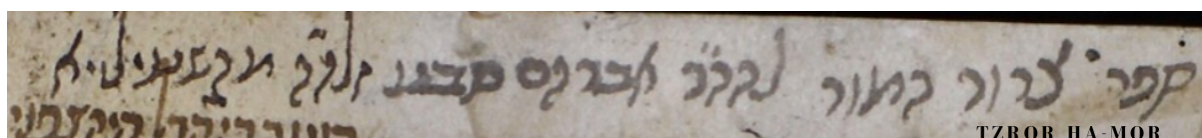
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# COMMENTARY ON THE TORAH

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GENESIS



RABBI ELI BRACKMAN

## **BEREISHIT**

### **Chapter 1:1**

בְּרֵאשִׁית<sup>1</sup> בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> בְּרֵאשִׁית, the reason why the Torah did not commence with the letter א but with the letter ב, is that the universe, i.e. earth, resembles that letter, i.e. it is enclosed from three sides as in the letter ב only the left side being open, i.e. the north side. [I presume that what the author means is that when we read the Torah, and the reader in the synagogue is facing east, as is customary in the synagogues in the northern hemisphere, the open side of that letter is on his left, i.e. north. Ed.] According to tradition, the letter א complained to G-d that it had not been allowed for the Torah to commence with it. What did G-d do? He recompensed that letter by commencing the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai with the letter א, where we read:

(Exodus 20,2) וגו' 'אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, "I am the lord your G-d, etc." The word בְּרֵאשִׁית consists of 6 letters, symbolising the six days of creation; The first verse of the Torah has seven words, symbolising the numbers of days in a week. It contains 28 letters, symbolising the 28 days of the month. [Perhaps the fact that the first letter is in a much bigger font compensates for the slight inaccuracy of the author stating the month has 28 days and not 29. Ed.] We also find the letter א six times in that verse, symbolising the six thousand years this earth [after the creation of man, Ed.] is supposed to exist in the format as we know it. The meaning of the word aleph in Hebrew is "one thousand." The second verse in the Torah, commencing with the word: וְהָאָרֶץ, immediately after the word אֶרֶץ, "earth" at the end of the preceding verse, symbolises that the period known as the period of Moshiach, is to last 2000 years. (Talmud, Sanhedrin folio 97) [the last two millennia preceding the arrival of the messianic age. Ed.] In Exodus 13,9 the Torah writes: בְּפִיךָ, "in order that the Torah of Hashem be in your mouth;" in that verse the letter א occurs twice to serve as a hint that two thousand of the 6000 years that the earth will function as we know it, will already be years in which G-d's Torah will be studied by many people. [Seeing that the Jewish people began its existence with the birth of the first Jew who was a Jew at birth, Yitzchok, which occurred 400 years before the Exodus, and it is the Jewish people's task to study and spread the Torah, and Yitzchok's birth coincided almost exactly with the beginning of the third millennium, this may be why the author of this commentary chose that verse and the two letters א in it, as another example of the letter א being utilised as a symbol of Torah study. (Da-at Zekeinim)]

<sup>2</sup> Because the matter of creation is very lofty, as the sages said (*Mishnah Chagigah* 2:1): 'one may not expound the act of creation before two people,' it is not appropriate to elaborate, but in a general way we may derive two ideas: 1. The ability of G-d and His greatness, This is known from the act of creation, when each day, it states: 'And G-d said,' teaching that G-d

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does not grow faint or weary, but rather with His words, He created everything, as a king who sits on his throne and from there decrees, and everything is performed according to his word. This is the meaning of Genesis 1:1: 'In the beginning of G-d's creation of the heavens and the earth,' which refers to the throne of the king, as it states (Isaiah 66:1) 'The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.' For this reason, it states in Isaiah 40:28: 'Creator of the earth from end to end, never grows faint or weary,' and then continues that despite the lack of effort, it does reflect a lack of wisdom in creation, but rather: 'His wisdom cannot be fathomed.' 2. The greatness of Israel, that the entire world was created only for their sake, as it states (Jeremiah 2:3): 'Israel was holy to G-d' - its holiness consisting of the fact that they are 'the first fruits of G-d's harvest.' Similarly, the midrash (Gen. Rabbah 1:6) interprets Genesis 1:1: 'In the *beginning* G-d created' - 'for the sake of Israel, who are called: 'the *first* of His grain' (Jeremiah. 2:3). Similarly, it says: 'the thought of Israel precedes the world.' This is the meaning of the saying: 'first in thought, end in action.' 'First in thought' refers to: "in the beginning G-d created;" 'end in action' refers to" 'These are the generation of the heavens and the earth when He created them (*be-hi-bar-am*). The word *be-hi-bar-am* (when He created them) has the same letters as '*be-Avraham*.' Likewise, it states: 'The sixth day,' referring to the sixth day of Sivan, when Israel received the Torah. For this reason, we find in all the six days of creation a hint to Israel. On the first day it states: 'In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth.' This refers to Israel, as it states (Deuteronomy 32:1): 'Give ear, O heavens, let me speak; Let the earth hear the words I utter.' They are called heaven and earth because they have souls created from the throne of His glory, not done for any other nations. This is the meaning of the statement in the midrash (Leviticus *rabbah* 4:5): 'G-d will call to the heavens above to bring the soul and to the earth to bring the body.' Also, the Sages said: 'But the earth remains the same forever' (Ecclesiastes 1:4) – this refers to Israel, as it states (Malachi 3:12): 'for you shall be the most desired of lands.' Genesis 1:2 states: 'the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water.' This refers to the wicked, for it states (I Samuel 2:9): 'But the wicked perish in darkness,' and Isaiah 60:2: 'Behold! Darkness shall cover the earth.' The continuation of the verse: 'But upon you G-d will shine' refers to Israel, for it states (Genesis 1:3): 'And G-d said, let there be light.' 'And G-d saw the light that it was good' (Genesis 1:4) – this refers to Israel, for it states (Isaiah 3:10): 'Happy is the righteous, for they shall fare well (*tov*).' Therefore: 'G-d separated the light from the darkness' (Genesis 1:4) – He reserved them for Himself, for it states (Deuteronomy 4:20): 'And G-d took you.'

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We therefore bless on the outgoing of Shabbat (*Mishnah Berachot* 8:5): ‘Who creates the lights of fire,’ corresponding to: ‘And G-d saw the light that it was good,’ which refers to all of Israel. ‘He who separates between the holy and the mundane’ corresponds to ‘G-d separated the light from the darkness,’ which refers to Canaanites. It therefore states on this day: ‘day one’ (*yom e-chad*), not ‘first day’ (*yom rishon*), corresponding to Israel, who is called (II Samuel 7:22): ‘unique (*e-chad*) nation on earth,’ and corresponding to G-d, who is called (Deuteronomy 6:4) ‘G-d is one.’ We therefore find that this day is the most complete and unique of all the days. It therefore says: ‘day one,’ since it is enduring without change, whereas all the other days had changed from what G-d commanded, as taught by the Sages. Therefore, on the second day, begins change, and it does not say ‘that it was good,’ because on that day argument was created, for it states (Genesis 1:6): ‘that it may separate water from water.’ Within the ‘separation’ there lies argument, and where there is argument, there is not good, to the degree that the Sages said: just as there is argument that sustains the word, there is similarly argument that destroys the world. This can be derived a fortiori from the fact that ‘may separate water from water’ which sustains the world is nevertheless deemed such that it does not state: ‘that it was good.’ This is the concept of the argument of Korach and his congregation, for it states (Numbers 16:9): ‘Is it not enough for you that the G-d of Israel has set you apart.’ Korach denied in the act of creation, as it explains in the Zohar and we will explain further on. Also, they said: it does not say: ‘it was good’ because *gehinom* was created on that day, as it states (Isaiah 30:33): ‘The Topheth has long (yesterday) been ready for him.’ This refers to the second day, because on the first day, the world was created, and there not yet the existence of two days prior. Similarly, the Zohar gives the true reason why it does not say ‘that it was good’ on the second day, because there is no good other than on day one,’ which refers to G-d, as it states (Job 23:19): ‘He is one; who can dissuade Him.’ This is the meaning of the verse (Proverbs 24”21): ‘Fear the L-rd, my son, and the king, And do not mix with dissenters,’ because ‘good’ refers only to the one G-d. This is the meaning of ‘one day, not ‘first day.’ From the second day and onwards there is no day that does not contain a curse. Regarding the second day, we already explain this idea. On the fifth day, one of the female Leviathan was killed and is reserved for the righteous. On the sixth day, man was created and transgressed. Therefore, it does not say ‘that it was good’ regarding creation of man, as it does regarding other creations, but rather includes it in the general stamen: G-d saw all that He had made and it was very good.’ (*Tzror hamor*)

In<sup>3</sup> the<sup>4</sup> beginning<sup>5</sup> of<sup>6</sup> G-d's creation<sup>7</sup> of the heavens<sup>8</sup> and the earth.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In the beginning G-d created. Rabbi Yitzchak said: The Torah, which is the book of laws, should have begun with the verse, *This month shall be unto you the first of the months*, which is the first commandment given to Israel. What then is the reason that it begins with the creation? Should the nations of the world say to Israel, "You are robbers because you took unto yourselves the lands of the seven nations of Canaan," they [Israel] may reply to them, "The whole world belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He gave it to whom He pleased, and according to His Will, He took it [the land] from them and gave it to us."

This is a homiletic exposition as quoted by Rabbi Shlomo [Rashi] in his commentaries.

One may object that it was indeed very necessary to begin the Torah with the chapter of *In the beginning G-d created* for this is the root of faith, and he who does not believe in this and thinks the world was eternal denies the essential principle of the [Judaic] religion and has no Torah at all.

The answer is that the process of creation is a deep mystery not to be understood from the verses, and it cannot truly be known except through the tradition going back to Moses our teacher who received it from the mouth of the Almighty, and those who know it are obligated to conceal it. It is for this reason that Rabbi Yitzchak said that it was not necessary for the Torah to begin with the chapter of *In the beginning G-d created* and the narration of what was created on the first day, what was done on the second and other days, as well as a prolonged account of the creation of Adam and Eve, their sin and punishment, and the story of the Garden of Eden and the expulsion of Adam from it, because all this cannot be understood completely from the verses. It is all the more unnecessary for the story of the generations of the flood and of the dispersion to be written in the Torah for there is no great need of these narratives, and, for people who believe in the Torah, it would suffice without these verses. They would believe in the general statement mentioned to them in the Ten Commandments: *For in six days the Eternal made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day*, and the knowledge of the process of creation would remain with individuals as a tradition from Moses who received the law on Sinai together with the Oral Torah.

Rabbi Yitzchak then gave a reason for it. The Torah began with the chapter of *In the beginning G-d created* and recounted the whole subject of creation until the making of man, how He [G-d] granted him dominion over the works of His hands, and that He put all things under his feet; and how the Garden of Eden, which is the choicest of places created in this

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world, was made the place of his abode until his sin caused his expulsion therefrom; and how the people of the generation of the flood were completely expelled from the world on account of their sin, and the only righteous one among them — he [Noah] and his children — were saved; and how the sin of their descendants caused them to be scattered to various places and dispersed to different countries, and how subsequently they seized unto themselves places *after their families, in their nations*, as chance permitted. If so, it is proper that when a people continues to sin it should lose its place and another people should come to inherit its land, for such has been the rule of G-d in the world from the beginning. This is true all the more regarding that which is related in Scripture, namely that Canaan was cursed and sold as a servant forever. It would therefore not be proper that he inherit the choicest of places of the civilized world. Rather, the servants of G-d — the seed of His beloved one, Abraham — should inherit it, even as it is written, *And He gave them the lands of the nations, and they took the labor of the peoples in possession; that they might keep His statutes, and observe His laws*. That is to say, He expelled those who rebelled against Him, and settled therein those who served Him so that they know by serving Him they will inherit it, whereas if they sin against Him, the land will vomit them out, just as it vomited out the nation before them. Elucidating the explanation I have written are the words of the Sages in Bereshith Rabbah, wherein they say as follows: “Rabbi Yehoshua, of the city of Siknin, in the name of Rabbi Levi opened [his discourse on this chapter of Creation with the verse]: *He hath declared to His people the power of His works*. Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, reveal to Israel what was created on the first day and what was created on the second day? It is on account of the seven nations who inhabited the land of Canaan, so that they should not taunt Israel and say to them: ‘Are you not a nation of robbers?’ Israel could then reply to them: ‘And you, is it not booty in your hands? *Have not the Caphtorim that came forth from Caphtor destroyed them and dwelt in their stead?*’ The world and the fullness thereof belong to the Holy One, blessed be He. When He willed it, He gave it to you, and when He willed it, He took it from you and gave it to us.’ It is this which Scripture says, *To give them the heritage of the nations. He hath declared to His people the power of His works* in order to give them the heritage of the nations. Hence He told them the account of creation.”

There is yet another source for the subject I have mentioned: the mysteries in the process of creation. It is what our Rabbis of blessed memory have said: “*He hath declared to His people the power of His works*. To declare the power of the process of creation to a mortal being is

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impossible. Therefore, Scripture closed the matter: *In the beginning G-d created.*” Thus is elucidated what we have said on this subject. (Nachmanides)

<sup>4</sup> בראשית. The reason why G-d commenced the Torah with the letter ב, the second letter in the alphabet, instead of with letter א the first letter in the alphabet, is to draw our attention to the fact that the letter ב is surrounded from three sides, i.e. from east, west, and south, whereas the fourth side is left open, a warning that evil winds may blow from the north unimpeded by a barrier. We have a tradition dating back to Jeremiah, that disaster threatening the Jewish people has a habit of commencing from the North (Jeremiah 1.14) . [This editor always found this puzzling as the meaning of the word צפון, “north,” is “hidden,” i.e. not easy of access, and here the letter ב being open in a northerly directions would appear to invite disaster. Ed.] We also find that the name of G-d when spelled אדני appears in the Torah 134 times, corresponding to the combination of the first and last letter of each of the letters in the words for “east,” i.e. מזרח, “south,” i.e. דרום, and “west,” i.e. מערב, i.e. 42. The “north” is not hinted at, and is left open until there is a need, i.e. to counter it with a different name of the Lord. The number 134 is equivalent to the numerical value of the word (Aramaic) קלד, “to lock up, insert a key.” When disaster faces the Jewish people, G-d’s people, the Creator will be called upon to seal the fourth side of this first letter in the Torah by using His “name” as the key. The answer to the question, why He had left it open in the first place, seeing He sealed all the other directions to prevent attacks upon His people, is in order to present a challenge to the blasphemers when the time of the redemption comes to close this side if they are able to. If you will count each letter of the alphabet and add it up according to their values as numbers, i.e. 2= א=1 +ב plus 3 = ג, you will get a total of 1500, i.e. 500 for each of the three other directions, corresponding to the number 500, the years of travel on foot travel on foot required to cross the surface of the globe in each direction. (based on Shir hashirim rabbah 6.14) (Chizkuni)

<sup>5</sup> In the beginning. Our wise men taught that the letter *bet* (of *bereshit*, in the beginning) is superfluous. They compare it to the *bet* in the word *ba-rishonah* (at the first) (Genesis 13:4). We know the *bet* in *ba-rishonah* to be superfluous for we find *they shall set forth first* (rishonah) (Numbers 2:9). However, if this were so the *bet* (of *bereshit*) would be vocalized with a long *kamatz*. Other scholars maintain that the word *bereshit* is always in the construct and its meaning in our verse is: “In the beginning of the evening, or of the night, or of the darkness.” However, they have overlooked *And he chose a first part (reshit) for himself* (Deuteronomy 33:21). Others say that the *bet* of *bereshit* is a preposition. They explain that



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Scripture intends to preclude the thought that heaven and earth were preexisting. Hence it states, *In the beginning*. I believe that *bereshit* is in the construct, as in *In the beginning of (bereshit) the reign of Jehoiakim* (Jeremiah 26:1). Don't ask, how can a word in the construct be connected to a verb in the perfect. This presents no problem, for we find that very case in the verse *When the Lord spoke at first with Hosea* (Hosea 1:2), and in the verse *the city where David encamped* (Isaiah 29:1). The meaning of *bereshit* will be explained in our comments on the next verse. (Ibn Ezra)

<sup>6</sup> In the beginning: Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah *which is the Law book of Israel* should have commenced with the verse (Exodus 12:2) "This month shall be unto you the first of the months" which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation? Because of the thought expressed in the text (Psalms 111:6) "He declared to His people the strength of His works (i.e. He gave an account of the work of Creation), in order that He might give them the heritage of the nations." For should the peoples of the world say to Israel, "You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan", Israel may reply to them, "All the earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us" (Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 187). (Rashi)

<sup>7</sup> at the beginning of time; this is the first moment which is indivisible into shorter periods. There had not been a concept "time" previous to this, i.e. there had only been unbroken continuity. (Sforno)

<sup>8</sup> Even though all the stories in the Torah, even the verse (Genesis 36:22): 'Lotan's sister was Timnah,' are necessary, as the *Talmud* states in *Sanhedrin* (99b, *Chelek*), nevertheless the main purpose of the Torah is only for its *mitzvot*. (R. Elijah Mizrahi)

<sup>9</sup> "He blew in his nostrils a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). You should know that the nose is an instrument of the soul. The soul enters man by way of his nose and it leaves him by the same route. This is why the sages in Yuma 85 have stated that if someone takes a fall that one has to examine him including his nose. This is based on Genesis 7,22 כל אשר נשמת חיים באפיו מתו.... "all who had the spirit of a living soul in their nose...died." It is one of the wondrous phenomena of the creation of man that you find the letter ן associated with this instrument (organ) [the fact that the nose is divided makes it appear like a letter ן.] This is an allusion to the name of G-d שדי which in this manner is engraved on the body of every human being who has been circumcised. This is the mystical meaning of Job 32,8 ונשמת שדי תבינם "the breath of

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Shaddai that gives them understanding.”

We know that the nose is the organ by means of which we smell and that the soul derives pleasure from certain fragrances. This is the reason the Talmud *Berachot* 51 prohibits us from even smelling incense or other fragrances intended for idolatrous purposes. The smell of any fragrance leaves behind a memory. We have it on the authority of the Torah in connection with the sacrificial offerings Leviticus 6,8 that smell acts as a reminder. *ריח ניחוח אזכרתה לה*, “its pleasant fragrance is a memorial (portion) unto G-d.”

You should so be aware that the scientists are divided in their views about the nature of the soul. They have written innumerable volumes about this subject. Some of them [Maimonides in his introduction to *Pirke Avot*, chapter 1] claim that the soul is a single force which however has three sub-categories. 1) the category which houses our desires, something we have in common with all the animals. 2) the source of growth, something possessed both by animals and all manner of plants. 3) the ability to think coherently, the soul of wisdom. All these functions are part of a single soul. Other scientists-philosophers [Avraham Ibn Ezra in his commentary on *Kohelet* 7,3] claim that there are three distinct souls operating within man all of which are distinct from one another. The intelligent soul is an entity of its own, the potential to grow is an independent force. The animal kind of soul, which is the seat of all desires, i.e. the desire to eat, drink, procreate or simply indulge in sex, as well as the desire to sleep, are all part of the animalistic soul in man and constitute a separate soul. They are a part of what man has in common with the animal kingdom. The seat of that particular soul is the liver. This “soul” is called on occasion *נפש*, and on occasion *רוח*. Its seat is in the liver. In Deut. 12,20 it is called *נפש* when the Torah writes *כי תאווה נפשך לאכול בשר*, “when your “soul” desires to eat meat, etc.” On the other hand, we find that Solomon writes in *Kohelet* 7,9 *אל תבהל ברוחך לכעוס*, “do not let your spirit be eager to become angry.” He also wrote in *Proverbs* 29,11 *כל רוחו יוציא כסיל*, “a fool vents all his feelings.”

The *נפש הצומחת* is the force that enables man to grow physically. He shares such a force with all the trees, etc. Just as trees possess such built-in powers, man too possesses such a growth potential. As distinct from the seat of all desire which is presumed to be in the liver, this force does not have a specific location but is present in all parts of man’s body. It remains active until a certain point in his life. The soul of intelligence is something exclusive to man, something he shares with beings in the higher worlds, beings which live forever in their sacred domains. The seat of this soul is in man’s brain, and it is generally referred to as *נשמה*. This is what the Torah described in our verse as the *נשמת חיים* which G-d “blew” into Adam’s

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nostrils. We also have a verse in Isaiah 42,5 נִוְתַן נִשְׁמָה לָעָם עָלֶיהָ, “He gives a soul to the people on it (earth).” There are numerous similar verses throughout the Bible.

According to the view of the philosophers who believe that each person has three separate souls, we find support for our sages in Sanhedrin 65 who report that the famous teacher Rava created a human being. When he brought this creature before Rabbi Zeyra, Rabbi Zeyra spoke to him whereas the creature could not answer back. Thereupon Rabbi Zeyra said to that creature (Golem): “you are man-made; go back to the dust you have been made of.” This passage in the Talmud is proof that man has three distinct souls. Rava, who was familiar with Kabbalah, and had studied the *Sefer Yetzirah*, had infused this creature with the “soul” which governs motion. He was unable, however, to provide his creature with the power of speech. The power of speech stems from the soul called חַכְמָה. (Midrashic commentary on the Torah by R. Elijah Menachem Chalfan ben R. Abba Mari)

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25. Be'er Mayim Chaim al Pirush Rashi, R. Chaim b. Bezalel, MS. Opp. 195 & 196
26. Tzror haMor, R. Abraham Saba, MS. Opp. Add. 4to 11
27. Meichal Mayim
28. *Sefer Akedat Yitzhak* by Isaac Arama, owned by Richard Braurne (1519-1565), who studied at Lincoln College and was appointed in 1548 Regius Professor of Hebrew