

THE AQUARIAN MINYAN

Fall-Winter, 1992-3

Hallelu-Yah

Stav-Khoref, 5753

October
November
December
January

הללו-יה

Tishray
Kheshvan
Kislav
Tayvet

Quickening God's Heartbeat

The word יה, *Yah*, is used as an abbreviation of the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God. *Yah* is easily recognized in the word הללויה *Halleluyah*—Praise God! All occurrences of the word *Halleluyah* are to be found in the book of Psalms, the *Tehillim*. The word *Halleluyah* is sometimes written as one word and sometimes hyphenated (Hallelu-Yah) as if it were a compound word (Psalms 135:3). The first place we find a form of the word *Hallel* is in Genesis—*Vayehallelu otah el Pharaoh*—*ויהללו אותה אל פרעה*—"They sang her (Sarah's) praise to the Pharaoh." Judging from Pharaoh's response, they must have said some exciting things about her, kindling his interest.

Hassidic teachings relate the word *Hallel* to a similar word, בהלוי *B'hilo*—which means to light up or set afire (Job 29:3). Thus, *Hallelu-Yah* means to ignite, or "set God aflame". This understanding of God that suggests that we affect God is known as theurgy. Hassidic thinking is theurgic. God is in intimate response to our activities, drawing closer and away, nodding, going into exile, getting lost, returning from a long trip, and so on. We urge God (Theos-urgic) to emerge in passion through acting on that which sets our own soul aflame.

The four-letter name of God, יהוה *Yod Hay Vav Hay* (often translated as "The Eternal") is said to be an impossible-to-pronounce abridgment of the words *haya, hoveh, yih'yeh*, היה היה היה was, is, and will be, the past, present and future forms of the Hebrew verb, *lih'yot*, להיות to be. In English, the parallel would be to condense the words "was, is and will be" into a single word, "wisilbe."

Yah is the first two letters of the *Yod Hay Vav Hay*, and is a God name on its own merit. *Yah* is a term used in reference to God in the Bible (*עזי וזמרת יה*) *Azi V'zimrat Yah*—"My song and strength is God"—Exodus 15:2) and Talmud (*La-Yah Anakhnu Modim*—*ליה אנחנו מודים*)—"To God we give thanks"—Sukkot 51b). The Jastrow dictionary of the Talmud also lists "*Yah*" as an exclamation of distress. Perhaps it is natural in all languages to call out "Oh God!" when we

feel alarm.

This summer at the new Jewish retreat and healing center in Woodstock, New York, we experimented using *Yah* as a substitute for the four-letter name. *Yah* seemed friendlier than *Adonai*, and has a softer sound.

The *Siddur* introduced by the *Ari* (Rabbi Isaac Luria, chief of the kabbalists of Sefat in the 16th century) uses the first two letters "*Yod Hay*" as a *Shaym*, "name" or logical subsection of the Divine four-letter name which needs unification with the third and fourth letters "*Vav Hay*". We find this in the prayer, *Lishaym Yikhud Kud'shah Brikh Hu U'Shekhin'tay Lyakhadah Shaym Yud Hay b' Vav Hay* . . . *ליחדא שם י"ה ברה* . . .—"We recite (or do) the following with the intention of uniting the Holy One with the *Shekhina*, the name *Yod Hay* with the *Vav Hay* . . ." It is as if God's name was split apart and needs to be reunited. This implies a division within God, perhaps mirrored by our many splits, needing our help to be re-connected, or re-"member"-ed. The Ba'al Shem Tov taught us to pray not just for ourselves, but also to intentionally include in our prayer priorities the healing of the *Shekhina*. God needs our cooperation, our *Kavvana* (intentionality) and our *tikkun* (healing, repair) to be brought back together, to become more unified.

The Talmud (*Menachot* 29, b) teaches that each of the letters of the word *Yah* is revealing. "With the *Yod* was fashioned the world to come, with the *Hay* was created this world." Hassidic thought builds on this idea, stating that *Yah* is like a wave pulsating between this current world and the world to come (Likutei Torah, p. 10). The spiritual function of a name is to bind together body and soul. The function of a name of God is to bring different dimensions into harmony.

We can see this quality of *Yah* connecting opposites in the shape of the Hebrew letters that make up the *Yod Hay*. The *Yod* is the smallest letter and represents the most contracted state. The *Hay* has its arms in two dimensions and even a third, disconnected leg, signaling another dimension. The shapes of the Hebrew letters of *Yah* suggest both contraction and expansion.

לְשֵׁם יְחִיד קוֹדֵשׁא בְּרִיק הוּא וְיִשְׁכְּנֵתָהּ