

The Seventh Telling: The Kabbalah of Moshe Katan
by Mitchell Chefitz (St. Martin's Press, 2001 - ISBN 0-312-26645-6)
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Reading Group Guide

The Seventh Telling may be read for its narrative and romantic value alone, but if the reader so desires, this brief guide will assist him or her in unraveling some of the novel's secrets.

1. In Chapter 8 you find a table formulating the *Four Worlds*, some didactic teaching concerning them, and the story of *The Curse of Blessings*. Review the teaching concerning the *Four Worlds*, then, in pairs, read the story of *The Curse of Blessings*. Find the *Four Worlds* within the story.

The table is a formulation of the *Four Worlds* in the *World of Creation*, expressing the barest principles.

The didactic teaching is an extension into the *World of Action*, replete with detail.

The story is a teaching of the *Four Worlds* in the *World of Formation*, through interaction and relationship.

How does the experience differ -- looking at the formula in the table, reading the didactic teaching, and telling the story?

Can you tell the story without referring to the text? Can you tell the story to someone who has not yet read the book?

2. In Chapters 9 and 10 you find two recitations of The Partner story, one told as it might have been in a Hasidic community in Europe, the other in an American framework. The story speaks of an evolving relationship with God. From the *World of Action* we see God as Ruler. From the *World of Formation*, Parent. From the *World of Creation*, Partner. Consider how the story might apply to your life situation or that of your family or community. Can you rephrase it? The book speaks of a bartender and a lawyer. How else might the story be told? Can you tell it that way, to the group and outside the group?

3. The sages of Jewish tradition take care to consider the repetitive acts of nature as miracles, more so than the apparent anomalies. The sun standing still, water flowing upstream . . . such occurrences, they say, were written into nature just before God finished creation on the sixth day. The miracle is that we exist at all. In pairs retell the Elijah story found in Chapter 10. How does it resonate? Can you see the miraculous in the ordinary?

4. In Chapter 10, the story of the little girl who wanted to say the *Shema* is a meditation. One person in the group might tell it as a guided meditation, but note: tell it, don't read it. The person who guides a meditation has a responsibility to experience it as s/he guides it. Others will follow the experience of the leader. If you read it, it is just a story. Yes, a story can be miraculous, but a

meditation can be deeper.

Can you identify all seven immanent *sefirot* in the story?

5. Each of the sixteen chapters is introduced by a graphic. The sixteen graphics form a pattern. The pattern is a meditation. In pairs, analyze the sixteen squares. Note that they turn both clockwise and counter-clockwise simultaneously.

Can you construct the pattern as you meditate, illuminating one square at a time, ultimately holding all sixteen squares before you? This is an advanced exercise. You may need to build up to it slowly, first by learning the breathing exercise described in Chapter 6, inscribing the letters of the Divine Name on your body, and then proceeding through less complex visualizations.

6. *The Seventh Telling* is consciously written to yield in each of the worlds. In the *World of Action*, it is a narrative. In the *World of Formation*, a romance. In the *World of Creation*, an allegory.

Review the *sefirot* as described in Chapters 8, 10, and 12. Consider the nature of each of the developed characters. Which of the *sefirot* might each character represent?

In the *World of Emanation*, the book is a meditation. Considering the whole of it as a meditation may lead to the discovery of your own stories, and such a discovery may be transformative. This is not a risk to take lightly.

7. The framework of the Kabbalah expressed in *The Seventh Telling* is presented differently than it might be in an academic course. The term Kabbalah in academe generally applies to Jewish spiritual discipline from the time of the *Zohar* (13th century) on. *The Seventh Telling* refers to all of Jewish spiritual discipline as the Kabbalah, and divides it into two categories, *Ma-aseh Beraysheet* (the Work of Creation - speculation concerning the nature of existence) and *Ma-aseh Merkavah* (the Work of the Chariot - inner work concerning one's place in existence). This is an attempt to show the progression of Jewish spiritual discipline from the earliest times to the present day. It becomes clear that the voice of women has been missing from this progression, that the framework of the Kabbalah was developed by men for men. Now that women are taking an active role, can you make any predictions about the future direction and development of the Kabbalah?

The author's website, www.mitchellcheftz.com, contains additional programmatic material.

If you enjoyed *The Seventh Telling*, be sure to watch for the publication of the sequel, *The Thirty-third Hour*, expected from St. Martin's Press in January, 2002.